

Fetishism, Curiosity, Power and Desire; what are the changing views of the female body in contemporary visual culture?

Notions of 'fetishism' often imply ambiguity and disavowal (the simultaneous belief in the truth and falsity of something), and are used in discourses that are either about power [...] or authority on to supposedly subordinate groups such as foreign objects, women, 'degenerates' and the insane. (Shelton, 1995, p.7)

The perception of fetishism within the realm of art could be misinterpreted as an obsessive affection towards a subject, forming a tense engagement for the viewer. By examining and confronting the changing concepts and understandings within the realm of sexual fetishism in art, this study will look for similar characteristics, behaviours and affects with particular reference to how the creation of a sexual fantasy, in the mind of the viewer, can evolve through curiosity into a sexual fetish in object making and art. This will be done using artworks by relevant artists who delve into the realm of fetish, manipulating the understanding by playing with the misinterpreted affection between the viewer and subject. The term fetishism has a range of paradoxical meanings; however the three primary understandings of fetish can be seen from the perspectives of anthropological, Marxist and Freudian theories, which all define the fetish in terms of a physical object rather than a representation of an occurrence in life (Stanton, 1995, p.7-9). Looking at the early theories of fetishism, generated by Western perceptions of African Kongo Beliefs, it becomes apparent that their sculptural art contained both powerful and aggressive features, drenched in superstition, used to scare away evil and produced to protect the Kongo people. It was this embodiment that the European idea of savage art combined with the Kongo

spiritual beliefs that the term fetishism was created (Shelton, 1995, p.7-9). Leading on to the modern psychiatric theory of Sigmund Freud (b. Czech Republic, 1856-1939) and Alfred Binet (b. France, 1857-1911) the term Fetishism came to be associated with the recognition and the deficiency of reality, alongside the loss and disavowal in life. In comparison to this the theories of Karl Marx (b. Germany, 1818-1883), Georges Bataille (b. France, 1897-1962) and Jean Baudrillard (b. France, 1929-2007), believed the signification of fetishism to be a depiction of deficiency and excess as described by Shelton (Shelton, 1995, p.7). However, this study will focus on the psychoanalytical theory of fetishism, not commodity fetishism.

With this in mind, this study will be exploring the aspects of sexual fetishism, carried out with the use of relevant theorists Sigmund Freud and Alfred Binet, alongside art critics Hal Foster (b. Canada, 1955-), Michael Harris (b. not available), Laura Mulvey (b. Oxford, 1941 -) and Annie Le Brun (b. Rennes, 1942-), alongside historical writers, Anthony Shelton (b. not available) and Wyatt Macgaffey (b. not available). With the use of these writers, this study will explore and create critical context in order to form an understanding of where a sexual fetish derives from. This study will establish a historical origin of a fetish and discuss the work of relevant artists, Renee Stout (b. Kansas, 1958-), Louise Bourgeois (b. Paris, 1911-2010) and Hans Bellmer (b. Katowice, 1902–1975) as all three artists place their choice of materials as an essential part of their ideas and their realization of fetishistic references, alongside representing the development of the term fetish within their work, over the last three centuries.

It remains critical that the understanding of the term 'fetishism' should be understood now as, "the physical arousal from an object or situation, transforming it

into something which is satisfying in itself” (Mulvey, 2003, p.49). In addition to this, the terminology of ‘curiosity’ should be understood as; “A desire to know, as a counter point to the blind spots of fetishism” (Mulvey, 1996, p. xi). The term sexual desire should be noted as, “... to overcome the inhibition and taboo... to transform perceptions and memories... to eroticise the world” (Mundy, 2001, p.41).

Chapter one will discuss the historical understandings and origins of where the term Fetish derives from. It will also examine how sexual fetishism has developed in terms of historical understanding from the nineteenth century sculptures of the African Kongo People, to the fetish related works of Rene Stout. This study will note the turning point of the female body becoming its own fetish, by delving into the development of cultural aspects apparent within African society during the nineteenth century. By examining the materials of choice and outcomes of fetish African power objects, a comparison of the development of fetishtic art works of the twentieth century will occur with the work of artist Rene Stout, who uses these power objects as inspiration to her own art work.

Chapter two will then take the fetish into the twentieth and the twenty first century, discussing the development of the term fetish and the idea of fetishism itself, from the fetish power objects to a sexual enactment that is created between consenting or non-consenting people of the present. Throughout this chapter the formation of a fetish will be compared with the use of two key artists, Louise Bourgeois and Hans Bellmer. By using both male and female artists who both signify relations to visual erotica, power and pleasure to the subject and the viewer, in the same time period, this study will gain understanding of how fetishism can be interpreted in multiple ways, with reference to a wide range of differing techniques, mediums and

materials.

Chapter One

As it is believed that nineteenth century African power objects are considered the starting point of the evolution of sexual fetish or the fetishized female body, it is critical this chapter incorporates this idea within the discussion. By looking at the Western image of African 'fetishism', Shelton (1995, p.12) discusses the depictions of Central African sculptures created by the Kongo people, known as nkisi nkondi, as a combination of medieval Christianity and witchcraft beliefs with fifteenth and sixteenth century Portuguese, Dutch and French explorers own Christian beliefs and practices on the subject. In this context, the term fetish, which derives from the Portuguese 'feitico' meaning charm, can be understood as something which has the power of exercising an occult influence in order to protect the people from evil (Shelton, 1995, p.12). A fetish can contain a variety of empowering substances derived from animal carcass, dirt, rubbish and sharp objects, which can be moulded crudely into striking figurines and sculptures (fig. 1.). Looking at a power object found outside a dwelling, in Central Africa in the nineteenth century, it becomes apparent that there is no specific material that holds the power directly; it is the combination of opposing materials working together, such as earth, fire, and air and water elements. Power objects appear very mysterious, with their overlaying, draping and prominent individual textures, built up together to create a representation of the human form. It would appear the more ambiguous the materials used, the more powerful the fetish becomes in warding off evil spirits seeking opportunities to injure mankind (Shelton, 1995, p.12 - 14). Looking at the evolution of the African fetish, parallels between imagery and sculpture depicting bodily mutilation surfaced within European Christian art, where

depictions of torture and martyrdom were incorporated within religious art. It was this act which was used to attain a sense of power or authority over life, creating the fantasy of imitating the life of Christ through ritualised self-flagellation, which incorporates fetish materials such as ropes, chains and sharp objects with the act of self-punishment, religious rituals or sadomasochistic contexts. (Shelton, 1995, p. 22-23) Delving into African and Christian societies and their rituals, the suggestion that these communities, endowed with distinctive cultural differences, can be understood as personifications of resistance to power, an issue found in both African and European societies. By merging these practices and beliefs, “ [the formation] of a regressive or degenerate mentality allowed Europeans to attribute to African women an excessive and erotic sexuality” (Shelton, 1995, p. 11). With the combination of religious and sexual fetishism, the reinforcement of prejudices of the female mind and body began to be acknowledged by Westerners, generating new forms of sexual imagery and pleasures within European men, who showed unusual levels of perversion and curiosity towards that of African women. It was this fascination and focus on attaining power that began to be seen in imagery, such as Raymond Corby’s (b. not available), *Jeunes Feticheuses* (fig. 2.), whose black and white photograph captures three young poorly dressed semi-nude African women standing proud towards the camera, looking into the lens. It could be interrupted that the eroticised women becomes apparent within this photograph as the middle young woman is noticeably cupping her own breast, drawing attention to that part of her womanly body (Shelton, 1995, p. 26-27). There are many variations of these postcards, with young nude women being the focal point. However the women remain anonymous to the viewer by their name and location, but that doesn’t stop them from forming part of the

stereotypical idea of an eroticised African woman of the nineteenth century. It is critical to understand that this imagery was the turning point of the notion of fetish, it became translated into the obsession of the female body itself as a quality; the female body became a sexualised object for the male sex to receive pleasure physically and visually, while still incorporating the original fetish materials and props. During the early twentieth century the concept of fetish developed further with the evolution from the relationship between God and his people, to the relationship between material objects and the people. It was this advanced understanding of the interpretation of a fetish, leading to the development of opposing theories within a society itself, from Marxist to Freudian theories.

Delving into Freudian understandings of a fetish, Freud acknowledged the similarities between African religious and erotic fetishes with notions of sadism and masochism, which Freud states (1953, p.158), "...sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated..." whereas, "... masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned around upon the subject's own self, [taking] the place of the sexual object". Insinuating that sadism and masochism have " a special position among the perversions [...] between activity and passivity." (Freud, 1953, p. 158) proposing that there is a connection between sexual instinct and violence, as certain aspects of aggressive sexual instincts could be linked to that of cannibalistic desire (Freud, 1953, p.158-159). It was this implication of the supposed moral weaknesses of savages and sick people, which meant that they were labelled deviants. Alfred Binet, who was exploring the psychoanalytical interpretation of fetish in the same period as Freud, later adopted the psychiatric idea of fetishism. (Shelton, 1995, p.28-29) Binet was the

first to interpret a fetish as a pathological result of the association of an inanimate object, creating a stimulus for an individual, generating a sexual connection with the object of choice during childhood (Freud, date p.154). Looking in terms of Freudian theory on fetishism, it becomes apparent that the fetish itself is understood as the representation of a substitute for the child's misunderstood imagined penis of his mother. This theory is discussed within the *Oedipus Complex* (1890) by Freud, which discusses the anxiety of castration from the male during childhood. However, by applying this theory of fetishism to the female gender, it would suggest that women are incapable of fetishism, as a girl during childhood wouldn't experience elements of anxiety towards the mother's non-existent penis, suggesting that this partial theory is based only upon the male sex. (Malbert, 1995, p.89) Freud's reasons for excluding women within his theories suggest that;

...the factor of sexual overvaluation can be best studied in men, for their erotic life alone has become accessible to research. That of women – partly owing to their conventional secretiveness and insecurity – is still veiled in an impenetrable obscurity (Freud, 1953, p.151)

Indicating that due to the period these theories were being developed, the sexual appetites of females were not common within discussions of fetishism. Males were the dominant sex as they had the power, control and intelligence, whereas the female played the role of the mother and wife, with no notion of having a sexual appetite, desire or need. However this theory would change drastically within the turn of the century, through the understandings of psychology and the portrayal of the female body within art.

Discussing these theories in context with the artwork of African American artist

Renee Stout, it illustrates that the portrayal of the female body has shifted since that of the pre-colonial and colonial Africa fetish. Shelton states, "Fetishism is culture-specific, deriving its meaning from local, if not personal and secret codes", suggesting that many western artists play with psychosexual implications of fetish, involving ideas of displacement. Where-as African artists have differing connections, such as their heritage and historical understanding of fetish (Shelton, 1995, p.96). Stout's artwork reflects that of the Nsiki Minkisi power objects within Africa, visually and conceptually. Stout uses her own African heritage and knowledge of the Kongo people and their traditions, to inspire her own sculptures with understanding and respect, towards the spiritual beliefs within their sculptures. Stout felt drawn to African imagery from a young age, where she first began to investigate Nkisi Nkondi figures, making observations and notions of the mysterious and eerie presence of rusted, sharp and protruding nails, imbedded within these sculptures. (Harris, 1994, p. 15 - 16) Stout later revisited these works to inform her understanding of the Nkisi Nkondi and they're multi-visual elements within they're fetish, to help stimulate her own creative imagination (Harris, 1994, p. 15). Looking at Stouts fetish power objects, there are great similarities to that of the Kongo peoples work visually, however the general construction of Stout's work is made with objects from her own personal history and memories. Stouts sculpture titled, *Fetish No.2*, (1988) (fig. 3.), holds aspects of ritualistic and ceremonial concepts within it, with the use of, "...multi-sighted intersections [depicting the] past and present, art and spirit [and] power and protection" (Harris, 1994, p.131). Stout appears devoted to unveiling and portraying the historical materials associated with the Kongo People, which can be seen in her self-portrait sculpture *Fetish No.2* where Stout merges her own female

body with African tributes and beliefs, provoking a sense of unknown power and a tainted sexualized depiction for both male and female viewer. Stout is able to do this by participating in the American cultural exchange, with added depictions of an entirely different culture, creating a, “double consciousness” which allows her to create art that signifies transformation and evolution simultaneously (Shelton, 1995, p. 96). This interpretation acts as an awakening for our sense of curiosity about the ancestral art of Africa, in comparison to art of the twentieth century. (Harris, 1994, p. 16-17)

Looking at the visual and conceptual aspects of *Fetish No2*, Stout's life size self-portrait sculpture incorporates fetish materials found within African power objects. Stout has integrated herself as a power object in a bid to heal and protect her from evil with the use of medicine filled bundles hanging around her neck, depicting a mysterious substance of power. Stout states, “ I was using my own figure to empower myself, to give myself the strength to deal with the things you have to deal with every day” (Stout cited in, Harris, 1990, p.132), suggesting Stout is confronting issues relating to the female body by depicting herself as a nude power female, challenging notions of voyeurism in relation to the female body. Stout is portraying ritual aspects of the nude and not the Westernised ideas of the female nude, issues that have become apparent during the past decade in art history. (Harris, 1994, p.131) Looking closer at Stout's sculpture, the location of the navel shows a glass box containing an old photograph of a baby, an image we are met with continually throughout Stout's sculptural work, alongside that of dried flowers and a postage stamp from Niger, which corresponds with the photograph, which could imply Stout is giving the viewer an insight into her depicted future, Motherhood (Harris, 1994, 131-132). By comparing the works of the Kongo People to Renee Stout it becomes apparent that the crucial

aspect that Stout is inspired by in her own personal artwork is the use of fetish materials and the meanings they hold within them, rather than the fetish being interpreted with the idea of the female body. Stout is not sexualising the fetish; it is still remaining spiritual, a characteristic that will be discussed within chapter two.

Chapter Two

Keeping in mind the historical contexts and representations of what fetish means and depicts within its origins of Central Africa, it is crucial for chapter two to discuss the development of what the term fetish has come to mean and the ways it has come to be used in contemporary art. Taking a look at the Oxford English Dictionary's (2012), definition of a fetish, there are two interpretations:

1. a form of sexual desire in which gratification is linked to an abnormal degree to a particular object, item of clothing, part of the body, etc.
2. an inanimate object worshipped for its supposed magical powers or because it is considered to be inhabited by a spirit.

Suggesting a shift in the idea of fetish from a spiritual perception of power and protection, to that of sexual curiosity and desire within Western societies had occurred. It could be deduced that as the world has developed and evolved, so has the knowledge and academic understandings available, leading to the definitions of words and their conceptual meanings to change over time amongst different cultural contexts.

Discussing the artworks within chapter one in context with contemporary female artist Louise Bourgeois, it becomes apparent that themes of sexuality and power are a significant aspect within her work. Bourgeois plays with the ideas of sexual fragility and insecurity with the use of fetish shapes and materials, which represent specific sections of the male and female body, a powerful combination visible in modern society, an aspect seen in Bourgeois' sculpture, *Avenza 1968-9* (fig. 4.), which merges both phallic overtones and references to the female breast with the use of latex and plaster. By maintaining distance from that of their anatomical references, this

sculpture reinforces the contradicting interpretations as to whether these aspects are female or male identifications (Le Brun, 2001, p.313). Bourgeois' link between her childhood memories and her father's dominating role and control and power, came to be represented within her sculptures, (Le Brun, 2001, p.312-313) something which can also be identified within the work of Hans Bellmer. Bellmer's work often depicts representations of life size pre-pubescent female dolls that exude explicit notions of perverted and voyeuristic sexual fetishism, where Bourgeois' oversized representations of the male and female genitalia, exude a sense of sexual fetish from the need for power and control over her peers.

Looking particularly at Bourgeois' sculpture titled, *Fillette* (1960) (fig. 5.), the viewer is subjected to depictions of the male sexual organ, hanging bluntly from a hook. This suggests an ambiguous response to vulnerability and male power that Bourgeois experienced throughout her childhood (Le Brun, 2001, pp.312-313). It could be argued that Bourgeois' choice of title for her work, "symbolizes the castration threat by her real lack of penis and secondly thereby raises [a] child into the symbolic." as *Fillette* translates into 'Little Girl' (Mulvey, 2003, p. 44). Bourgeois early work delved into the world of female sexuality, but by the 1960's she began combining the idea of masculinity within her sculpture, generating an androgynous choice of subject. The two foot long phallus created of plaster and coated in latex, gives the impression of the texture of the human skin; the detail captured is precise in its replication of the male sexual organ. The exaggerated size of the phallus suggests a sense of comical effect, Bourgeois is relinquishing the phallus' power by rendering it as an absurd subject, mocking its physical attributes, rather than depicting the phallus as a commanding and assertive sculpture. Relating back to the idea of fetish, Bourgeois is homing in on a

specific body part that she herself does not possess, it could be interpreted through Freudian theory that this piece is a representation of her father, “who promised her so much, but delivered so little” (Le Brun, 2001, p.312-313). Bourgeois’ sculptures appear visually graphical; they “maintain a distance from their anatomical reference, their morphological fluidity enabling multiple allusions to occur, reinforcing or contradicting female or male identifications” (Le Brun, 2001, pp.312-313). This could suggest that Bourgeois is fluid with the subject matter, in terms of creating symbolic male or female representations. Indicating that Bourgeois is not creating these works to gain a sexual pleasure, or to fulfil sexual desires, but that these works hold personal narratives from her memories and her life. Bourgeois is fetishizing these sexual memories through organs by means of significant materials and presentation. With the use of recognisable materials and realistic shapes, the depiction of a phallus becomes apparent to the viewer.

Looking at a third sculpture by Bourgeois entitled, *Janus Fleuri*, (1968) (fig. 6.), the viewer is confronted with the opposite of *Fillette*, 1960, a large female sexual organ, hanging from a single point at eye level, allowing the viewer to see the entire sculpture from multiple angles. *Janus Fleuri* meaning Flowered Janus, “Janus was the god with two faces, one turned towards the past and the other towards the future,” (Centre Pompidou, 2008) suggests that *Janus Fleuri* is a personification of Bourgeois’ double facial mask, or perhaps a self-portrait expressing her resistance to male power. In addition, the term flowered could be a metaphorical reference to the female genitalia as a blossom (Centre Pompidou, 2008). Although graphically inviting, *Janus Fleuri* can be interpreted in many ways. It depicts a female organ split open and exploded down the middle, creating a formless mass, with two adjoining knees/ breasts /penis’

either side, inviting the viewer to explore the inside anatomy, an aspect evident within the sculptural creations of Hans Bellmer's pre-pubescent dolls. Taking into consideration the materials used to create *Janus Fleuri*, the finished sculpture is cast with bronze, a very solid, cold and emotionless material, traditionally understood to be a masculine sculptural material. This implies that due to the choice of subject and material, *Janus Fleuri* unites the masculine and feminine aspects of humanity by subsequently shifting the aesthetics of the penis into a breast (Centre Pompidou, 2008). However, it was originally created with plaster, a material that is able to mimic the flexibility and supple attributes that the human form holds, allowing more detail to be held when ready to recast.

In contrast Bellmer's work focuses on constructing staged scenes that reflect his erotic, voyeuristic and fetishtic sexual fantasies, whereas Bourgeois manipulates fetishtic forms, generating new sexes. It could be interpreted that Bellmer is depicting his need for power and control through his mutilated and distorted dolls, by recreating events in his personal life, exposing his obsessive, aggressive and emotional attitude to the female sex. Looking at a sculpture depicted within a hand-coloured gelatin silver print titled, *The Doll*, (1936) (fig.7.), there are depictions of a partially anatomically correct female doll, bound with rope, at the bottom of a cropped stair case scene. The black and white aspects of the print capture the dismantled portions of the female body, put together in a way that suggests the artist's sadistic and voyeuristic approach to the female sex. It becomes apparent that Bellmer creates these female sculptures, and reuses them within different scenes, altering their initial form, then re-photographing and printing them, making it important when viewing to acknowledge the print and sculpture both as artworks. There is a definite eerie and sinister feel to

this print; the placement of the doll's body against a decrepit banister appears mismatched according to what we know of the female body. These manipulated depictions of the doll imply Bellmer's obsessive sexual desires are being projected through the use of power and control, with him playing the role of the master and the doll as the masterful (Foster, 2001, p.206-207). The Dolls' frightened and particularized stance suggests to the viewer that Bellmer becomes the voyeur; a term understood as the pleasure in looking while not being seen. It holds negative connotations of a powerful, if not sadistic position (Mulvey, 2003, p.46-49). This is due to Bellmer going beyond the sexualisation of the female sex; he manipulates the female form, degrading it by depicting it in a violating and vulnerable position, forcing the viewer to look down upon the doll. There is a notion of tension between the fear of the woman as potentially castrative and the woman as fetish, an object of fear and desire. This is an idea that Freud discusses where many fetishistic artworks acknowledge fear of castration, even when they appear to disavow it, by cropping and reshaping the female form to suit individual needs (Foster, 2001, p. 206-207). This is something that can be seen in *The Doll*, (1936) in which Bellmer depicts the female anatomy as an unresolved fetishistic form, by attaching non-conforming limbs to each other, contrasting the correct visual aspects of the female form. Here then the viewer, female, male or both is provoked into anxiety caused by the depiction of the female sex as flaunted yet contained, controlled by the artist through a highly polished/finished surface, making the piece all the more unsettling for the viewer (Foster 2001, p. 206-207). Art critic Hal Foster suggests Bellmer violates the dolls to expose their fears and emotions, he then exercises his need for power by using raw material such as, wood, metal, paper and plaster, to create their naked frame, a similar

characteristic of Bourgeois' sculptures, where materials reflect the use of control and power – just like that of the African Kongo people's power objects. However Bellmer absurdly connects his dolls body parts together with use of ball joints, as they add a notion of life and movement to his dolls, thus giving them the illusion of pre-pubescent girls. This could be interpreted as Bellmer mixing a sense of sadistic, voyeuristic and erotic pleasures for his own visual desire, incorporating a sense of power and control, making it clear who the masterful one is and what the mastered object is (Foster, 2001, p. 206-207). Another critical notion within Bellmer's work is that he, the tormentor is absent, the viewer is thus left on their own to be implicated in, or as a witness to the aftermath of abuse applied to these dolls. This differs to Bourgeois' anatomical sculptures, as they are not pre-pubescent representations, therefore they lack the need for protection from the viewer, these sculptures suggest adulthood, where Bellmer's suggest pre-pubescent childhood, a forbidden desire. This aspect could imply that Bellmer is playing a game of hide and seek; he is leaving a trail of devastation for the viewer to follow, suggesting the doll is a, "willing participant in its own victimization" (Taylor, 2002, p.77). As with Bourgeois, the presence of the parent could represent the devastation Bellmer's Nazi father left him to live with, revealing underneath the broken surface is a domineering, strong minded individual. (Taylor, 2002, p.77)

Taking both of these works into consideration, the materials used are an essential part of the artist's ideas and their realization as fetishistic representations. Using found, raw or life like materials to depict erotic or sadistic sexual works this study is able to connect them to indigenous African fetishistic practices, materials and processes, to claim that they are fetishistic in intention. Bourgeois and Bellmer both evoke a sense of

power within their work, but Bourgeois does so by taking away the masculine properties of power and control and uniting them with female attributes, empowering the female sex not sexualizing it. In difference to this, Bellmer takes away the power from the female sex; he dehumanizes the female form, in a bid to generate his own sexual pleasure and needs in a sadist manner. Both artists are able to hold the fetishistic desires within the structure that object fixation can be translated into many viewpoints and mediums within art (Mulvey, 1996, p.6). This is specifically seen within Bourgeois' use of public presentation, where she dehumanises the male figure and Bellmer's' use of photography and print to capture the sinister effects of his obsessive pre-pubescent dolls. This suggests that, power and control are the two main attributes that are still heavily incorporated within modern and contemporary fetish art works, a similarity that can be linked back to the power objects of the Central African Kongo people sculptures of the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

Throughout this study the notion of fetish has been discussed in depth. It has delved into its changing context from its nineteenth century origins of Africa to the present understandings of Western societies. This study has included cultural, religious and historical aspects of the fetish, and discussed these differing interpretations alongside comparative artists and their work, an aspect that is critical to apply as a fetish itself holds paradoxical meanings. By incorporating the origin of fetish, this study was able to link Africa's religious beliefs of fetish to the work of contemporary artist Renee Stout, who allows the viewer to look past the fetish in terms of being sexual, even in Western cultural art. The viewer becomes immersed into the materials used and the symbolic meanings that they hold, rather than the aesthetically pleasing depictions of the female body itself. However, as the study moves through time into the twentieth century, notions of psychoanalytical theories on fetish gain more importance than spiritual and religious beliefs. It becomes apparent that a fetish in African terms becomes transformed into the Western idea of fetishism, where aspects of sexual displacement are incorporated.

This study has discussed the complex attributes of fetish from both ends of the spectrum, and can conclude that; historical, cultural and religious and contemporary understandings of fetish all incorporate aspects of curiosity, desire, and power, although these all have differing levels of intensity within the interpretation. This allows a link to be attached within fetish from the past to the present, even though the initial context has shifted, an aspect which should be expected over the turn of three centuries, with the evolution of the human mind.

Lastly, this study has given evidence into the changing concepts of the female body, though the understanding of fetishism. Corby's photograph of the nude African women captures how the African woman came to be seen as a sexual object by Western men, who later adapted this idea to Western cultures, along with the misrepresented idea of fetish.

This can be seen within the work of Hans Bellmer, who objectifies the female form for his own fear and pleasure, applying his controlling nature and relinquishing the female sexes power. However, this notion differs with female artist Louise Bourgeois; she doesn't ask for power, she demands it from both female and male viewers. Bourgeois casts the idea of fetish onto the male form, mocking the idea of the male being the stronger and more intelligent sex; her fetishization of the male and female sexual forms empowers the female sex, rather than sexualizing it for male pleasure.

It becomes apparent that power, desire and curiosity are key aspects that work together to create a fetish, within African Belief and Western Interpretations.

Suggesting that as the human mind continues to develop and evolve; generating new ideas and understandings, historical theories and beliefs will continue to play apart in the world of today.

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Fig.1

Power object outside a dwelling
nineteenth century

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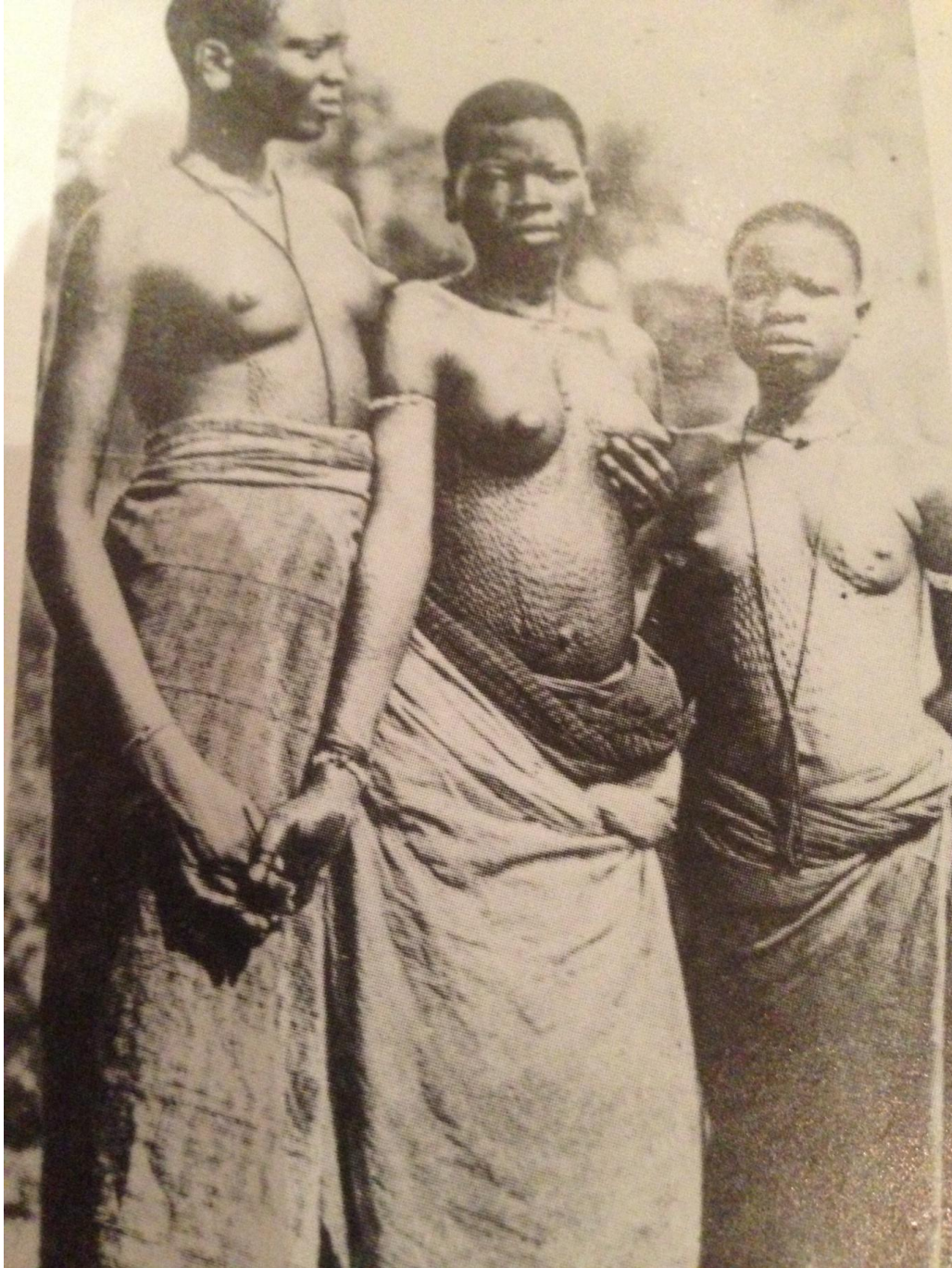


Fig. 2
Jeunes Feticheuses, (nineteenth century postcard), Raymond Corby.



Fig.3

Fetish no.2 (1988), Renee Stout

Mixed media sculpture, 64in H



Fig. 4

Avenza (1968-9), cast (1992) Louise Bourgeois,

Latex and plaster, 520 x 1050 x 965 mm



Fig. 5
Fillette (1960), Louise Bourgeois.
latex over plaster, 59.5 x 26.5 x 19.5 cm.



Fig. 6

Janus Fleuri, (1968), Louise Bourgeois,
Bronze, gold patina, 25.7 x 31.8 x 21.3 cm.

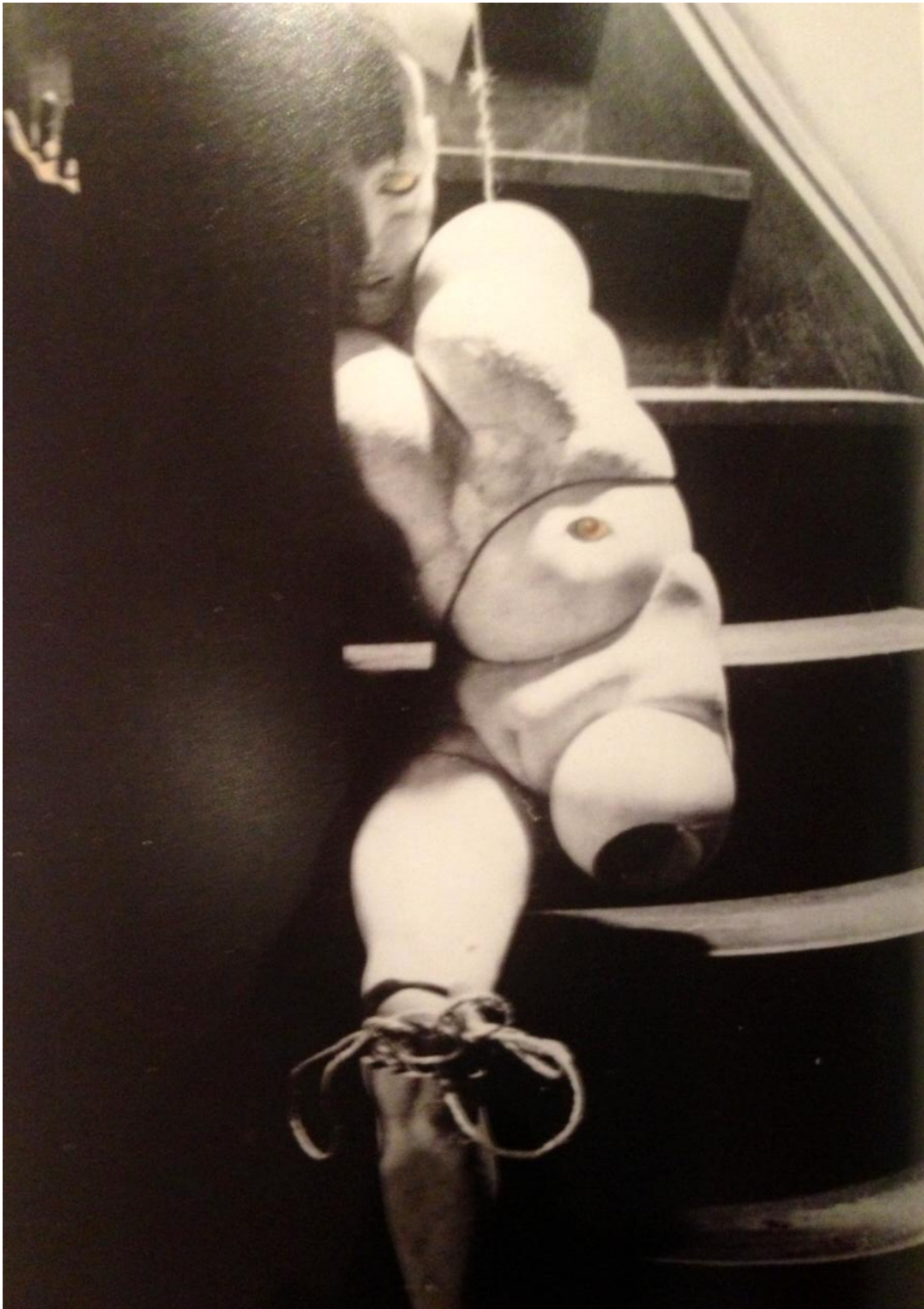


Fig. 7

The Doll, (1936), Hans Bellmer,

Hand coloured, gelatin silver print, 73.7 x 50.8 cm.