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Amanda Fernbach, *Fantasies of Fetishism: From Decadence to the Post-Human*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002. ISBN 0 7486 1616 0

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Fantasies of Fetishism is a compelling, demanding and often entertaining discussion of the extensive cultural implications of “fetishism.” Engaging with a diverse range of cultural texts, Amanda Fernbach endeavours to unsettle and reconfigure the discursive models through which fetishism has traditionally been understood. Fernbach presents a compelling argument for reading fetishistic fantasies outside the strict paradigm of “sexual perversion,” and attempts to demonstrate the relevance of fetishism in rethinking and redefining social norms and identities.

Fernbach’s central point of critique is the model she labels “classical fetishism.” This concept of fetishism is derived largely from Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of fetishism, which holds the fetish to be a mask for the mother’s sexual difference, ultimately functioning to obscure the truth of her absent phallus. Fernbach argues that this model of “lack” is ultimately simplistic and unable to comprehensively explicate the full cultural reality of fetishism. Using such broadly situated cultural texts as Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* and James Cameron’s *Terminator 2*, Fernbach endeavours to systematically display the inadequacy of the classical concept of fetishism whilst simultaneously demonstrating the prevalence of fetishism in mainstream, contemporary culture.

Fantasies of Fetishism describes fetishism as being expressed in a variety of different forms, demonstrative of a multiplicity of cultural drives, beliefs and wants. Broadly located beneath the banner of what Fernbach terms “decadent fetishism,” this book argues that various forms of fetishism have much to offer postmodern culture in counteracting the debilitating effects of “exhaustion” and undermining oppressive, socially constructed identity roles. It is proposed that various modes of fetishism can be used as tools in discovering progressive and liberating post-human identities, Fernbach’s argument ultimately expressing a utopian vision in which difference and plurality might be freely expressed and readily endorsed.

This book manages to sustain an intelligent and dynamic discussion in support of its generally radical and provocative position. Effectively engaging with a variety of discourses, Fernbach manages to draw together a coherent overview of fetishism in contemporary Western culture. Her argument is largely compelling, her writing style is accessible, and her research is extremely comprehensive. If any significant criticism were to be made of this work, it would be that its discussion is at times overly biased in its endorsement of fetishistic cultural practices; overly-eager in advocating the positive aspects of what are sometimes disturbing and physically harmful activities. This being said, however, the lively and energetic thrust of Fernbach’s argument goes a long way in convincing the reader that much is to be discovered in understanding fetishism beyond the confines of a marginal, sexual sub-culture.

Bound in glossy pages and littered with fascinating photographic imagery (entirely unsuitable for the weak of heart), this book deceptively presents itself as a scandalous item of coffee table reading. *Fantasies of Fetishism* is, however, an important contribution to contemporary cultural theory and, more specifically, to the ever growing field of post-human thought. Whether one is entirely comfortable with Fernbach’s argument or not, this work provides fascinating insights into an oft-ignored aspect of human behaviour and culture.

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