National College of Art and Design

Fine art Painting

READING FOR THE FEMININE

IN THE WORK OF LAURIE SIMMONS AND CINDY SHERMAN,

THROUGH THE LENS OF FETISHISM

by

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Table of Contents

List of Plates

Introduction

My main hypothesis proposes that fetishism can provide a useful lens to examine contemporary art practice. Firstly however it is necessary to unpack the thesis title *reading for the feminine in the work of Laurie Simmons and Cindy Sherman, through the lens of fetishism*. The "feminine", traditionally has been defined as "other" to masculine. The feminine is positioned in society as irrational and non-intellectual and is in opposition to all that is intellectual and rational. The French writer Helène Cixous suggests, "that for sometime there have existed two distinct economies (masculine and feminine) and that such a situation is not essential[1] but rather subject to change". (Wright, 1992, p. 91).

The "feminine" is usually associated with "woman" who are other to the, "masculine" or men. However, my application of the term, "feminine" is in accordance to Cixous in that it is non-essentialist and is understood as meanings in society and in artworks, which have been marginalised. The feminine denotes taboo and repressed subjects, which are not normally addressed within the traditional arena of art; painting, sculpture and printmaking. Therefore artists, whose work can be read for the feminine, can also include male artists, who use alternative means of expression to explore alternative notions of gender, sexuality and power. Thus, such alternative art practices question preconceptions about art and society, which are perpetuated by the traditional ideologies of western patriarchal culture.

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[1] "The Term essentialism in feminist theory is taken on the one hand as biological or psychical determinism and on the other as denying the possibility of historical changes occurring in the structures of subjectivity", Feminism and Psychoanalysis, p. 77.

Patriarchy is a term "which refers to the hierarchical organization of the relations between the sexes". (Wright, 1992, p. 300). Thus it can refer to the domination of women by men and also to the setting up of oppositions; man as active and woman as passive. Many feminists have worked to challenge these oppositions set up by patriarchy.

"Feminine" art practices can be used to challenge historical definitions. Fetishism in this context is crucial to an understanding of "feminine" art. One way in which "fetish art" can resist tradition is through its focus on the exploration of everyday objects as fetish objects. Thus fetish art provides an alternative to patriarchal and traditional artistic processes.

By the term "fetishism", I refer to the umbrella term, which includes three types (as outlined in Chapter 1) Anthropological, Commodity and Sexual fetishism. My main theoretical source, in Chapter one, is *Female Fetishism – a new look*, 1994 by Lorraine Gammon and Merja Makinen. Within this book the authors make a case for female fetishism, as a challenge to the historically accepted view of women as mere fetish objects.

The book *Female Fetishism – a new look* was part of the fetish debate, which peaked around 1995. Fetishism was, and is mobilised to describe many areas of culture, including fashion, advertising and also many aspects of contemporary artistic practice. My particular understanding and use of the term is quite specifically formed upon anthropological fetishism, however.

Chapter two provides a background as it maps "feminine" art practices. As my focus is anthropological fetishism I shall also focus on the use of the everyday or common object in art contexts. Beginning with Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* of 1917, I will attempt to briefly trace the progression of Post-Modern and Feminist art that explored themes of power and control, from a gendered viewpoint through the use of the common object. The *Womanhouse* project of 1971 is used as a focus to describe feminist artistic and political strategy, which questioned boundaries within art and society in order to destabilise the binary opposition of masculine/feminine.

Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons both began their careers against this background and were influenced by these happenings. Therefore, both their careers are contextualised in terms of this artistic background, which questioned hierarchical notions of power, control and gender.

Chapter three will discuss Sherman's and Simmons' work in relation to their use of fetishism as a discourse[2] within their art practice. In order to focus and gain a more in-depth analysis, I have focused on two sets of images; the first set being Sherman's *Sex Pictures*, 1992 and Simmons' *Dolls House Series,* 1977-1979 and secondly Sherman's *Fashion Series,* 1983/1984 and Simmons' *Fashion Series,* 1984/1985. I will discuss the differences and similarities in their separate approaches to similar concerns, especially to the discourse of fetishism.

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[2] Discourse – "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about, a way of representing the knowledge about, a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language". (Hall, 1997, p. 44).

In the concluding section the difficulties and advantages of utilising the lens of fetishism to examine contemporary art practice will be evaluated.

Fetishism;

Behaviour and visual discourse

My use of the subject of "fetishism" within this thesis is as a lens to explore women's position in western society throughout history. This positionality is echoed by women's position within the history of fetishism i.e. woman as "fetish object" and therefore passive. I will use as my main source of information, *Female Fetishism - a new look* by Lorraine Gammon and Merja Makinen, 1994. In this book the writers, make a case for women as active practitioners of fetishism. This chapter will provide a brief history of the term "fetishism". It will then list the three different categories of fetishism, as defined by Gammon and Makinen, which are Anthropological Fetishism, Commodity Fetishism, Sexual Fetishism, and give definition of each.

My focus will be on Anthropological Fetishism and Commodity Fetishism and I will try to provide an argument for females as active fetishists within these categories. This argument, will include the subject of female fan behaviour and mothers' behaviour in relation to her child's belongings, which is proposed as anthropological fetishism by Gammon and Makinen. This anthropological fetishism can cross over into commodity fetishism, where commodities come to mean more than their original use value. I will also take into account, the sexual politics involved in the production of commodities and also how, through advertising in the media, these commodities can serve to reinforce gender stereotyping in western society. On this note, I will propose a connection between child's play and anthropological fetishism, and also connection between children's toys and commodity fetishism and how these toys/commodities help to teach children a gender identity. In conclusion, "Fetishism", will be proposed as a

new discourse within contemporary artistic practice. Thus serving to introduce and contextualise the chosen practitioners, Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons.

I propose that these artists use the discourse of "fetishism" within their art practice, to explore the subject of power and the domination of women in western society. As well as mapping women's history, they also posit women as active fetishists and thus active within society, thus challenging the traditional view within western history, of women as solely "passive" and women as "fetish objects". The term "fetish" first emerged with the colonisation of Africa by European powers,

> The western image of African 'fetishism' was constructed from a selective combination of medieval Christianity and witchcraft beliefs, with fifteenth and sixteenth century Portuguese, Dutch and French explorer's and trader's accounts of the beliefs and practices encountered an Africa's Guinea Coast. (Shelton, 1995, p. 11).

Gammon and Makinen provide further historical background:

> The word "fetish" derives from the Portuguese word "fetico", which originally came from the Latin, "faticum", which meant artificial, before it came to mean witchcraft. The word fetish did not enter the English language until the seventeenth century, when it was used to discuss "heathen" rituals of non-European peoples, which involved the use of inanimate "magical objects". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 15).

Thus the word in its original form, referred to feared practices i.e. witchcraft in medieval Europe and was then applied to feared and misunderstood religious practices and rituals of non-European peoples.

Since its initial introduction into the English language, the term "fetish" has been reinvented and redefined to cover various practices and behaviours. In *Female*

Fetishism - a new look, Gammon and Makinen list three distinct categories. These categories are Anthropological Fetishism, Commodity Fetishism and Sexual Fetishism. I will provide a brief history of the definitions of each category.

Anthropological Fetishism was the definition, which initially included practices of non-European peoples, such as totemism and deification. Distinctions were later made between fetishism and totemism. In 1915, J. G. Frazer argued that "The fetish is often an isolated individual object, whereas the totem is always a class of objects, generally a species of animal, totemism is both a religious and social system". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 15). However, while the fetish and the totem did have different functions, they shared a common social purpose, "and are believed to allay anxieties of the individual and group, and to promote social cohesion through joint rituals and common beliefs". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 15). Thus, the anthropological fetish has been defined as an isolated object, which is used to allay fears and anxieties. Alfred Binet, a French philosopher made a further distinction between deification and anthropological fetishism, in 1888. " Binet started to make distinctions within fetishism that directly addressed the issue of sexuality. He was the first to divide fetishism into 'religious' and 'sexual' categories". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 17). For Binet "deification" took place in "religious fetishism" in "the idea that a fetish object may derive a power from a deity". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 18). Binet applied this idea to Catholic sacraments rather than the usual application of this notion to "primitive" rituals.

Thus, the term "anthropological fetishism", initially encompassed many different practices, and gradually distinctions such as the latter surrounding Catholicism were

made. Anthropological Fetishism is now seen to involve disavowal of fears or anxieties through projection of them onto an object i.e. the fetish. So allowing the fetishist to believe in the loss, fear or grief and to disbelieve it, simultaneously.

The choice of the object that is fetishised can be culturally specific, as different objects have different meanings in certain cultures. Thus "anthropological fetishism" can cross over into "commodity fetishism". The first significant mention of "commodity fetishism" is in Karl Marx *Capital - Volume 1*, 1859. Marx initially explained that objects become separated from the labour that produces them and "thus in the commodity (i.e. the social relations of production and exchange) assumes the fantastic form of a relation between things". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 28). The social relations of production and consumption are displaced onto the commodities by creating relations between these objects. For Marx "the term commodity fetishism involved both an analogy with anthropological fetishism and an element of disavowal". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 29). Thus "commodity fetishism" for Marx involved, the disavowal of the production process of commodities, by projection of a meaning, other than its original use value, onto a commodity.

Commodity fetishism was further theorised in terms of "conspicuous consumption". "In 1899, Thorstein Veblen examined the meaning of fetishized commodities for the individuals who consume them". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 29). He examined the way the upper classes used their leisure activities to consume commodities to portray their social status. Commodities had come to "signify meanings unrelated to utility but also became part of this 'conspicuous consumption'". (Gammon and

Makinen, 1994, p. 300). This brings the Marxist theory of production as the root cause of fetishism, further to see the consumption of commodities as fetishised.

Georg Lukacs, a Hungarian Marxist intellectual, further discussed the commodity form. He believed that the commodity form "invisibly entered human lives, so that individuals could not begin to imagine or fully comprehend non-fetishized social relations, outside of capitalist logic. Lukacs defines this process as 'reification'". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 30). This concept of reification does not separate the experience of life or capitalism and commodity fetishism. By "reification" Lukacs suggests that we fetishise these commodities unknowingly and cannot consider an existence without them. However, commodities can be knowingly used by consumers and used as signs of social status, as in Veblen's theory and as signs of belonging to a particular social group e.g. the use of fashion within subcultures and fans.

Cultural critic Judith Williamson takes on this view. Williamson employs semiotics[3] in advertising in relation to commodity fetishism. "She is able to explore how advertising moves commodity fetishism beyond the realm of metaphor, to become a discreet fetishism which is capable of transforming the language of objects to that of the people". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 33). For Williamsson, in advertising, "the goods being represented disavow, not only production, but use value and some levels of literal meaning". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 34). The commodity fetish can be formed through metonymic or metaphoric association. Through the saturation of the media by advertising in twentieth century consumer culture, commodities function as

[3] Semiotics is the science of signs. Each sign is made up for the signifier (object) and that which is signified (concept). The theorist accredited with semiotics is the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure.

signs in themselves. Commodity fetishism is used to sell, not only commodities but also ideals.

The Post-Modernist writer, Jean Baudrillard, describes commodity fetishism as involving more than disavowal of production. Baudrillard believed that "the logic of capitalism is the logic of meaning". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 34). Baudrillard construed a notion of "Hyperreality" where "the generation of meaning by models of the real without origin or reality, takes place". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 25). As Williamson, argued, commodities become signs within advertising, Baudrillard brings this further to say that those signs only refer to more signs and in turn produce more signs, which have no single referent, based in reality. This is what he describes as "Hyperreal".

Commodity fetishism can be used to sell, a promise of an experience, which can be achieved through the purchasing of the commodities. Often commodities are eroticised in order to sell and this eroticisation of the commodity fetish has been confused with sexual fetishism. In the eroticising of the commodity, the object, which is fetishised, is not what is sexually required by the fetishist. It is a compensation for a lack of availability of the original experience or desire. This is in contrast to "sexual fetishism", which we shall examine and is the third classification utilised by Gammon and Makinen.

The first discussion, which described fetishism in the sexual sense appeared in 1886. Kraft Ebbing, in *Psychopathesis Sexualis,* 1886 "used the term in 'fetishism' in a criminal sexual sense of obsession". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p.15). Ebbing

looked at "fetishism in pathologlical terms by emphasizing 'how it may become the cause of crime:' he cited, many cases of 'criminal fetishism', including those involving hair despoiling and robbery or theft of female linen, handkerchiefs, shoes, silks etc.". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 39). Ebbing grouped "criminal" and "sexual" fetishism together. This may reflect the moralistic rulings of the Victorian era on sexual practice, which viewed any sexual deviations as perversion or pathological.

> The emergence of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, modern medicine and biological sociology defined and restricted "normal" legitimate sexual practice to the conjugal family. Sex was given an entirely functional pro-creative role; from which ever the most minor deviations were mapped, described and classified… At the heart of the analysis of sexual deviations was fetishism,… (Shelton, 1995, p. 26).

The next to mention the term "fetishism", with a sexual connotation was Alfred Binet in 1888, who described it in terms of "religious" or "sexual" categories. (as aforementioned in p. 11). Binet argued that "in the sexual category, it becomes 'fetishism', as opposed to 'normal love', when 'love, instead of being excited by the whole person, is now excited only by a part'. Here the part substitutes for the whole; the attribute becomes the quality". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 39).

Continuing on from the work of Binet and Ebbing, Sigmund Freud first defined sexual fetishism as:

> When the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually takes the place of the normal aim, and further when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the sole sexual object. (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 37).

Freud spoke of degrees of sexual fetishism but once it passed a certain point, he defined it as "pathological". This happens when the fetish object becomes the sole sexual object. Freud's definition was based on a concept of "normal love", which like Ebbing, may have been due to the definitions provided on this matter at the time. Freud's definition of "pathological fetishism" has also been named "orthodox sexual fetishism" by Gammon and Makinen. This "orthodox" sexual fetishism differs from anthropological and commodity fetishism, in that the object, which is fetishised within "orthodox fetishism", can completely take the place of a previous desire and thus satisfy, whereas in the other categories the fetishised objects only serve to displace a desire or fear onto the object and do not provide the originally desired experience.

In 1927, Freud gave sexual fetishism a psychoanalytical reading. He related the origins of fetishism to his "Oedipus" theory. Freud wrote, "the fetish stands in for the lost phallus of the mother". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 42). Within Freud's theory of the "Oedipus Phase", the (male) child realises his mother does not possess a penis, and sees this as castration by the father which thus causes castration anxiety:

> The little boy's entry into normal sexuality is thus the shock at the woman's lack of a penis. A fetishist's development is arrested at this stage, and he tries to deny sexual difference by reasserting a penis substitute onto the woman. (The fetish) The fetish object stands in for mother's phallus. (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 40).

By defining fetishism in relation to castration anxiety, Freud implied that only males fetishise. He did however attribute to women, in 1909, "Clothes Fetishism". He put this in the context of "the drive to look, the scopic drive. His clothes fetishist (male), repressing the sight of his mother's 'castration', idealizes the clothes that prevent him from seeing this awful truth". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 41). Thus Freud,

describes the anxiety of castration in the young boy as the origin of fetishism, which allows the child to deal with the anxiety by displacing it onto the fetish object e.g. clothes.

Freud brings women into this analysis of "clothes fetishists", "…all women are clothes fetishists …it is a question again of the repression of the same drive, this time however in the passive form of allowing oneself to be seen, which is repressed by the clothes, and on account of which, the clothes are raised to a fetish". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 41). While Freud does mention women in his discussion of fetishism, it is in a passive sense, he does not propose that women are active fetishists. He proposes here that women are subjected to the male gaze and these clothes fetishists repress their desire to be seen, by idealising the clothes that prevent this.

In 1937, Freud made it clear that "the choice of fetish can be either metonymic (continuous to the revelation of female genitals) or metaphoric (stand as symbolic representation of a penis)". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 42). By metonymic association, I mean where a substitution is made for the name of something, by the name of an attribute of that something or the name of something closely related to it. By metaphoric association, I mean, where the name of the object, is transferred to something different from but analgous to that to which it originally applied.

Freud's exclusion of women from his writings on fetishism has been addressed by many writers, one being the psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein. Klein moves away from the importance of the phallus in Freud's theory by emphasising the first year of a baby's life where "feelings of love and aggression are fantasised onto parts of the mothers

body, primarily the breast". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 99). Klein posited a "feminine phase" for both sexes, which she placed prior to the Oedipal Stage. However Klein still "reverts to concurring with the castration complex in boys and penis envy in girls". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 90). By concentrating on "orality" and "individuation", which is the point at which the baby makes a distinction between itself and the object-world, Klein makes a case for "girls as well as boys to become fetishists". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 100).

Many psychoanalytic writers to follow, Jaques Laçan, and contemporary feminist theorists also, Julia Kristeva, Lucie Irigary and Helène Cixous, followed Freud's psychoanalytic thinking, and furthered it. Thus many feminist writers attempt to write women into psychoanalytic accounts of fetishism, as active practitioners. But, because psychoanalysis has constructed a view of women as passive and in terms of "lack of phallus", it presents complexities and problems in conceptualising the female as active. However, it is possible to make an argument for women as active anthropological and commodity fetishists. These two categories will be my main focus.

To re-cap on the earlier definition of anthropological fetishism (as in p. 11) it involves the disavowal of fears, anxieties or desires, through the projection of these feelings onto an object, so that the practice allows contradictory emotions to co-exist. It is a method of believing something and disbelieving at the same time.

As part of their argument for "female fetishism", Gammon and Makinen draw an analogy between anthropological fetishism and the behaviour of female fans. They say that, "fan worship often mimics religious behaviour, but not always". (Gammon and

Makinen, 1994, p. 18). The manner in which fans construct shrines to their idols is visual evidence of anthropological fetishism. This behaviour involves a need for recognition from other fans. "It may help to cement a shared obsession, a sense of belonging". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 19). Thus fetishism in this context can serve us a method of constructing their identity and making bonds with others to form group identities. Fans keep objects related to the star and fetishise them. One fan was quoted "It feels like I have a piece of them in my possession". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 20). The authors argue that "This metonymic substitution of the part (a lock of hair or other objects distantly removed but nevertheless associated with the star) standing in for the whole constitutes anthropological fetishism rather than sexual fetishism". (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p.21).

A distinction is made between deification (where object is believed to derive its power from a deity) or erotic fixation, (which describes the behaviour of some fans toward their idols) and sexual fetishism. While fetishism offers a "coping strategy", the "deification" or erotic fixation only offers a compensation, not complete substitution, for the original desire. The behaviour of female fans can only be explained in part by the concept of anthropological fetishism, as it crosses over into commodity fetishism. (Gammon and Makinen, 1994, p. 25)

The notion that consumers passively consume commodities has been questioned by Angela McRobbie and Terry Garbar, in their writings on female fan behaviour. They see female fan behaviour as the active use of products in an obsessive manner to deal with their fantasies and wishes, which cannot be realised. They hold that, obsessive hoarding of memorabilia of a loved one, e.g. by a mother in relation to her child or by a

widow in relation to her lost partner, may be explained by anthropological fetishism. It is a method of coping with their loss, by keeping a connection to the absent person. It involves a disavowal of loss, by keeping a connection to the person by way of the fetish, while at the same time letting go.

This behaviour could also be said to have an element of commodity fetishism, in that commodities come to mean more than their originally intended use and exchange value, and so by association are loaded with significance of meaning.

I have already given a description of "commodity fetishism". As defined by Marx, commodity fetishism involved the disavowal of the production process of commodities, by projection of a meaning other than its original use value into a commodity. Veblen then theorised the fetishisation of consumption of commodities; how commodities come to signify social status, among other things; the effect of the commodity form on our lives. How the commodity has come to be a sign in itself and thus enters into the language of "semiotics" used in advertising. "Commodity fetishism" has now been theorised by Baudrillard, as commodities being signs, which refer to more signs, with no longer any original referent, thus commodities signify a "Hyperreality" which does not really exist at all.

The language of signs in advertising in the media is used to sell not only products, but also ideas. Commodity fetishism in the media can serve to reinforce ideas and perceptions e.g. of what gender appropriate behaviour is.

The advertisement of a specific product is aimed at a specific audience. Because, throughout the history of modernity, women have been predominantly in the home or private sphere, they have become the main consumers of products of sustenance for the family. This social structure involving the stereotyping of gender roles is reflected in commodities and their packaging and advertising. Commodities came to signify the "ideal" of stereotypical "femininity". This system of signification is put to use, to enter peoples lives, so that they fetishise these commodities to experience this "ideal" which cannot be experienced because it is not based in everyday material existence.

On the subject of commodity fetishism being used to reinforce gender stereotypes, I will make a connection with children's toys and play. The practice of giving young girls dolls to play with rather than to boys may be seen as a method of teaching gender to children. These toys, e.g. the "Barbie" doll are representations or perhaps fetishisations of the "feminine ideal".

I would also see a connection with play and anthropological fetishism, in that for children playing can be a useful way to deal with situations by creating relations between toys (or any objects) and manipulating and controlling them. This shares a common element, of using objects to deal with situations at a distance, with anthropological fetishism. This could also cross into commodity fetishism, as regards what type of toys children use.

Later in this thesis I will make a connection between play and the art practice of Laurie Simmons and Cindy Sherman. Both these artists work within a post-modernist

framework. My focus on their work will be in relation to their entry into the discourse of "fetishism" within their artistic practices.

"Fetishism" is used by many contemporary artists, as a discourse, to explore issues of power, subordination and control. Commodity Fetishism, in particular has been connected with post-modernist thinking and practice, e.g. in the work of Sylvie Fleury.

Baudrillards theory of "Hyperreality" has been discussed in relation to the work of contemporary artists including Laurie Simmons, Haim Steinbach and Jeff Koons. Referencing them in this section is an effort to illustrate how the discourse of fetishism has become a useful and diverse reference point for many contemporary artists.

In particular, the discourse of fetishism can be useful to explore and challenge the historical experience of women in society, of domination and control; and to challenge the view of woman as fetish object and prove women to be active fetishists and therefore prove women to be active within society.

However, "fetishism" has been used to describe a broad range of activities and products, "from fashion to abject art, from television to religious rituals, from cigarette ads to sexual practice, the term 'fetishism' has become a carrier bag packed so heavily with explanations, it's bursting at the seams". (Gammon, 1995, p. 6).

The feminine in art-practices 1960's to today

This chapter will provide an introduction to alternative art practices, beginning with a reference to Marcel Duchamps', *Fountain*, 1917. This legacy has continued to influence artists, especially from the 1960's onwards. The 1960's are a crucial time when considering contemporary art as it was; artists began to negotiate modernist ideals and values through exploring alternative art forms. This involved a multiple of strategies offered by various groups and movements, which meant to question boundaries set up by modernism. Such avant-garde practices were mobilised in order to enrich considerations of control, power and gender within art practices. The 1970's saw the development of a "feminist" art practice, which sought to de-construct accepted notions of the "feminine" an to re-construct alternative definitions of the "feminine", coming from a woman's actual lived experience, as opposed to "that which is opposite to man". Both artists, Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons, whom are the main focus of my thesis, began their artistic careers, in the late 1970's, amidst the happenings of the feminist art practices. Therefore, they were both influenced by the move toward conceptual art and alternative practices and the influence of feminist art practice can be seen in their work. Thus within this chapter, I will give a brief overview of their careers and will focus on particular works in more detail in Chapter three.

The 1960's saw a rejection of modernism, "which privileged vision and the two dimensional picture plane" (Jones, 1993, p. 34). There is a questioning of the restrictions and definitions set up by modernism. One artist who pre-empted the concerns and key-issued for what is often termed as "Post-modernism" was Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). Marcel Duchamp had achieved recognition in the art world in

France before he moved to America in 1915, where he became a celebrated figure in art circles. His work was dominated by the concept or idea and involved a range of techniques and materials. His most notorious work, *Fountain*, appeared in 1917, in the exhibition of the "American Society of Independent Artists".

Fountain consisted of a lavatory urinal in its original state, which was placed into an art context. This work caused great controversy at the time, because Duchamp did not transform the art object, the artists hand was not evident on the work (except for the signature, "R. Mutt", which was an ironic gesture due to the mass-produced nature of the object). Therefore Duchamp was challenging the notions of "skill" being necessary for "art"; the myth of the genius creating "individual" works of art and traditional "transformative" aesthetics of beauty.

Duchamp introduced the notion of using the common object into "fine-art" contexts; so challenging traditional boundaries between high and low culture. Duchamp's work gained a re-surge of interest in the early 1960's. This is the time that it really made an impact, influencing artists in the U.S.A., such as Bruce Nauman, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol and Hanna Wilkes. All placed the idea behind the artwork as more important to the aesthetic aspect. These artists in turn have been cited as influencing Cindy Sherman. Thus from the 1960's awards, radical changes took place in the perception of what "art" could be. Not only were everyday objects presented in an art context but also everyday practices and activities were introduced through performance art.

Both male and female artists began to explore diverse, new materials and different concepts in their art practices. In 1966, the "Eccentric Abstraction" exhibition, curated by Lucy Lippard, "brought together artists allied to the non-formal tradition devoted to opening up new areas of materials, shapes, colour and sensuous experience". (Jones, 1993, p. 42).

In 1968, the traditions of modernist art were further questioned when Robert Morris published *Anti-Form*, "an influential essay that defined the radical practice of process-oriented art in opposition to the idealizing notions of art based on form, or art for arts' sake". (Jones, 1993, p. 42). Within his art-practice, Morris chose "to explore 'feminine spaces', to 'indulge his femininity', as a transgressive means to counter modernism". (Jones, 1993, p. 43).

Female artists also explored these "feminine" spaces, e.g. Lynda Benglis and Lousie Bourgeois. However, when these women produced such works, they were received by critics as working from "natural" inclinations and not from any intellectual strategy. This was due to the prescribed definition of the "feminine", within a patriarchal system. Traditionally the "feminine" "connotes the body, nature, passivity, amorphousness, versus men's mind, culture, activity, form". (Jones, 1993, p. 34). Therefore, when women were perceived in terms of "the feminine", they were perceived as passive and non-intellectual. Although men and women worked from a position of the feminine, it became a political strategy in the 1960's and 1970's. Women artists began to challenge prescribed gender roles and identities. This took place, amidst the political and social upheaval at the time due to the Civil Rights Movement.

Women were demanding equal rights in the workplace, political sphere and in the private sphere of the home. Thus the personal became political. The changes, which were taking place due to such political activism, provided an opportunity for women-artists to approach their work by exploring their specific and collective experiences as women. Feminist-artists frequently used alternative vehicles of expression to those of the "tradition", i.e. painting and sculpture. Women artists, not only used everyday objects and actions within their art-practices, but also focused upon traditionally female actions and objects, such as washing clothes, cooking meals and the ultimate expression of femininity, waiting. One historical moment which I would see as significant in the development of "feminist" art occurred in the formation of the *Womanhouse* Project, 1971.

The *Womanhouse* Project, was a multi-media event, organised by the Feminist Art Program, at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, which was initiated by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. Together with female students, including Faith Wilding, Mira Schor, Sandra Orgel, Nancy Youdelman, Karen LeCoque and Chris Rush, (Jones, 1993, p. 40). Chicago and Schapiro worked in an abandoned house in Hollywood. By choosing to work in a location outside of the usual gallery and education system, these women were able to work, relatively free of the constraints of a male-dominated art-institution. The environment consisted of installations and performances created by the individual artists. Everyday objects and practices were used in an exploration of and a challenge to, the traditional female experience of restrictive stereotyping within a male-dominated society.

One example of an installation at *Womanhouse* was Judy Chicago's, *Menstruation Bathroom*, (Fig. 1). A room was coloured completely white and contained used hygiene products that are intended to hide the reality of the menstruation process of the female body. "Chicago installed a trash can overflowing with bloodied tampons and pads under a counter displaying a selection of all the 'liberating' and 'refreshing' accoutrements marketed for female consumption during that time of the month". (Jones, 1993, p. 36). This work, by Chicago addresses the sense of shame and secrecy imposed on women about their bodily functions and could be viewed as a critique on the advertising industry, which presents these products to women. For my purposes it is interesting that *Womanhouse* tackled some taboos and gave a "voice" to the unspoken language of the female body.

An example of a performance at *Womanhouse*, is *Scrubbing* performed by Chris Rush. The artist scrubbed the floor on her hands and knees, and so exposed the usually invisible, tedious work of women's daily lives, to the audience. These are just two examples of the many individual pieces that took place at *Womanhouse*. By using domestic interior spaces, the artists brought this sphere into the public domain, so making the personal political. They "exteriorized the 'feminine' spaces that were hidden and repressed by the patriarchal order as a means to revalorize the abjected position forced upon them, and ultimately, to reclaim the rights to their own existence". (Jones, 1993, p. 36).

Fig. 1. *Menstruation Bathroom* – Judy Chicago, 1971 from *Womanhouse*

By questioning the binary opposites of interior/exterior, these "feminist" artists question the basis upon which many distinctions were made. Boundaries were blurred between the personal/political, reality/artificiality and life/art. Performance in particular, questioned boundaries between life and art. Performance has a relatively young history, as an art form within art-history. The first history of performance begins in 1909 with the work of the Italian Futurists, which was used by the Dadaists and the Surrealists, and the Bauhaus. From 1940 on, in America, performance was generally accepted by artists as a medium in its own right, those involved included Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine. (Goldberg, 1979, p. 7).

Feminist artists used performance as a way for women to explore and reclaim experiences as their own. It was particularly appropriate for an expression of women's experience; "Performance played on the conventional association of women with artifice and masquerading". (Broude and Garrard, 1994, p. 160). Performance privileged the use of the artists' own body. Carolee Schneemann was one of the first women to introduce her own body into her work. She was involved in Performance in the 1960's, at a time when the discourse was not available. Her piece in 1975, *Interior Scroll*, however is considered very much part of the feminist canon. It involved Schneemann reciting a text entitled, "*C`ezanne, she was a Great Painter*, recounting the ways in which women were erased from history". (Broude and Garrard, 1994, p. 192), from a scroll, which was gradually unwound from where it was positioned in her vagina. Schneemann has been accused by both the left and the right wing, of being self-exploitative and self-indulgent, but she sought, as did other female performance artists such as Linda Benglis and Adrian Piper; to "give the female body a mind, to reformulate visual pleasure by destroying it". (Broude and Garrard, 1994, p. 192).

However, problems were perceived by critics of female body art, as to whether these performance artists only re-inforced conventional attitudes to the female body i.e. as sex object; Lucy Lippard says, a woman using her own face and body has a right to do what she will with them, but it is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult. (Lippard, 1995, p. 102).

The work of many feminist artists of the 1970's has in retrospect been considered naïve and essentialist. However, they did "pave the way for further deconstructions of womanhood e.g. Hannah Wilke's poses/performances for the camera and/or live audiences are one road to Cindy Sherman's work". (Broude and Garrard, 1994, p. 190).

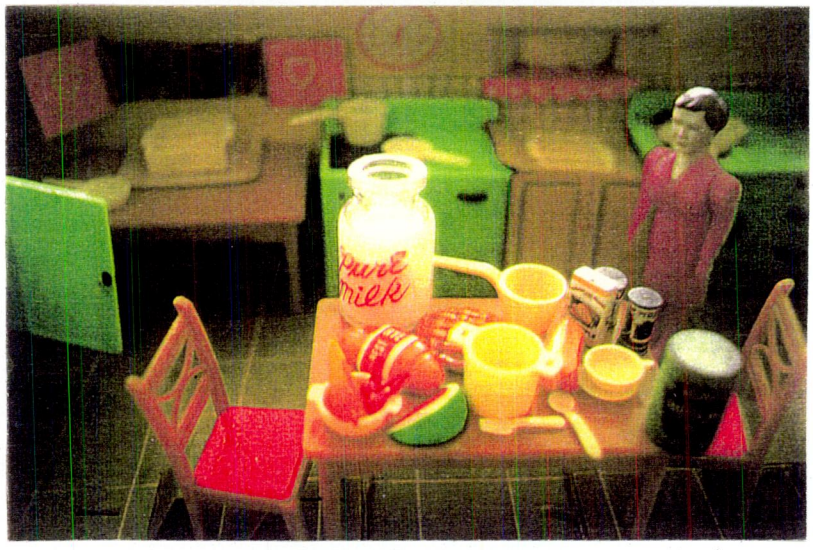
Both Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons began their careers in New York in the late 1970's. They met each other at Simmons' first show in "Artists Space" in 1979. Both artists became at the time aware of other feminist artists; as Simmons says, "working in a way I could relate to, like Louise Lawler, Barbara Kruger etc.". (Bartman and Sappington, 1992, p. 12). Simmons goes on to say that when she first arrived in New York, she became interested in "Process Art", where the method of working is an important part of the finished piece. Simmons cites as influences; the Conceptual art that was happening around her in the 1970's, also fashion photography e.g. "Deborah Tubervilles work" (Bartman and Sappington, 1992, p. 5) and she also makes reference to films and clumsy special effects in "The work of Ray Haryhausen, in films like *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*" (Bartman and Sappington, 1992, p. 10) and the fake scenery in Hitchcock films of the 1950's. Simmons chose to use photography because she says she felt as a student "to find a voice as a woman artist, I had to reject painting and

sculpture" (Bartman and Sappingtion, 1992, p. 5). Simmons continued to use photography as her medium throughout her career. Thus Simmons' strategies are very much informed by the avant-garde work that had occurred over the sixties, in terms of everyday popular culture and the dematerialization of the art object.

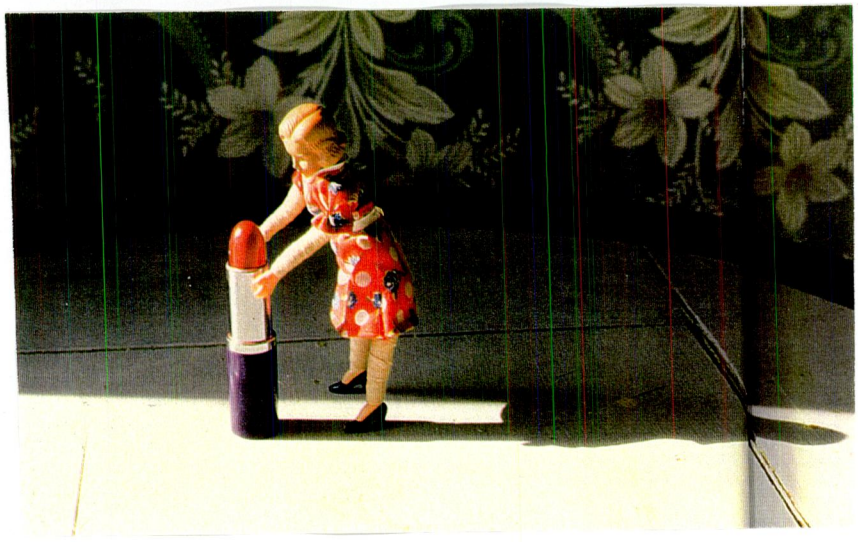
Simmons' first photography series was made in 1977-1979, *Dolls House Series*, (Fig 2). She used miniature 1950's style toys and dolls furniture, to create set-ups of a domestic interior, containing a suburban housewife doll, which was either trapped or safe within her home. Simmons plays with the scale between the objects, resulting in a feeling that this idealised setting is not so wonderful after all.

In 1980, Simmons made her, *Under Water Series*, where she photographed her friends swimming under water. However, she returned to using dolls once more, because she found it difficult to keep a critical edge with the *Under Water Series*, which was becoming more about the aesthetics of the photographs than any concept behind it. Also, it may have helped the artist to escape the objectification of the body.

1983 saw the beginning of Simmons' *Tourism Series*. Simmons used back-projections of slides of famous tourist spots around the world. She used small plastic dolls, in garish colours, which she moved through the landscape of "these great sites that were built by men for the enjoyment of men" (Bartman and Sappington, 1992, p. 17). Simmons says the *Tourism Series* was about the "idealised" notion of what these places are like, when in reality they are quite disappointing. This can be linked to Baudrillard's "Hyperreal", which states that commodity fetishisation invokes unachievable state of being. (Stearns, 1992, p. 168).



New Kitchen / New View, 1978



Pushing Lipstick # 1, 1978

Fig. 2 *Dolls House Series* – Laurie Simmons, 1977-1979

The "ideal" can never be achieved, because it does not really exist at all. Simmons *Fake Fashion Series* carries on from these concerns and can be linked to the unachievable ideal of women's gender roles.

The *Fake Fashion Series* was made in 1984-1985, using live models (rather than dolls) Simmons, set up fake fashion shoots, with back-projections. She made the model look mechanical and plastic, to place emphasis on the artificiality of "fashion" which sells us the "ideal" of "feminine beauty".

In 1987, Simmons began to combine "live" models with objects, in her *Walking/Talking Objects.* This began with *Jimmy the Camera* (Fig. 3) and she continued on to make, *Walking Hourglass* and *Walking Houses* (Fig. 4), *Walking Cakes* (Fig. 5), among others. Simmons speaks of a childhood wish to make objects your friends and relates this to an adults desire to consume. (Many readings of the work are possible depending on the viewer's background and the artist's intent is not necessarily the definitive reading. However, in this context, I am merely mobilising them in order to map her concerns). Within this series, Simmons is blurring the distinctions between people and their possessions, within our consumer culture. Her last series, *The Clothes Make the Man*, involves the use of ventriloquist dummies. At first, the artist used these dummies to make "Girl Vent" photographs with female ventriloquists speaking through the male dummy. In *Clothes Makes the Man*, each dummy is almost identical, only distinguishable by details of his clothing. This addresses the way in which people use commodities and clothes to construct an identity for themselves and to comform to society.

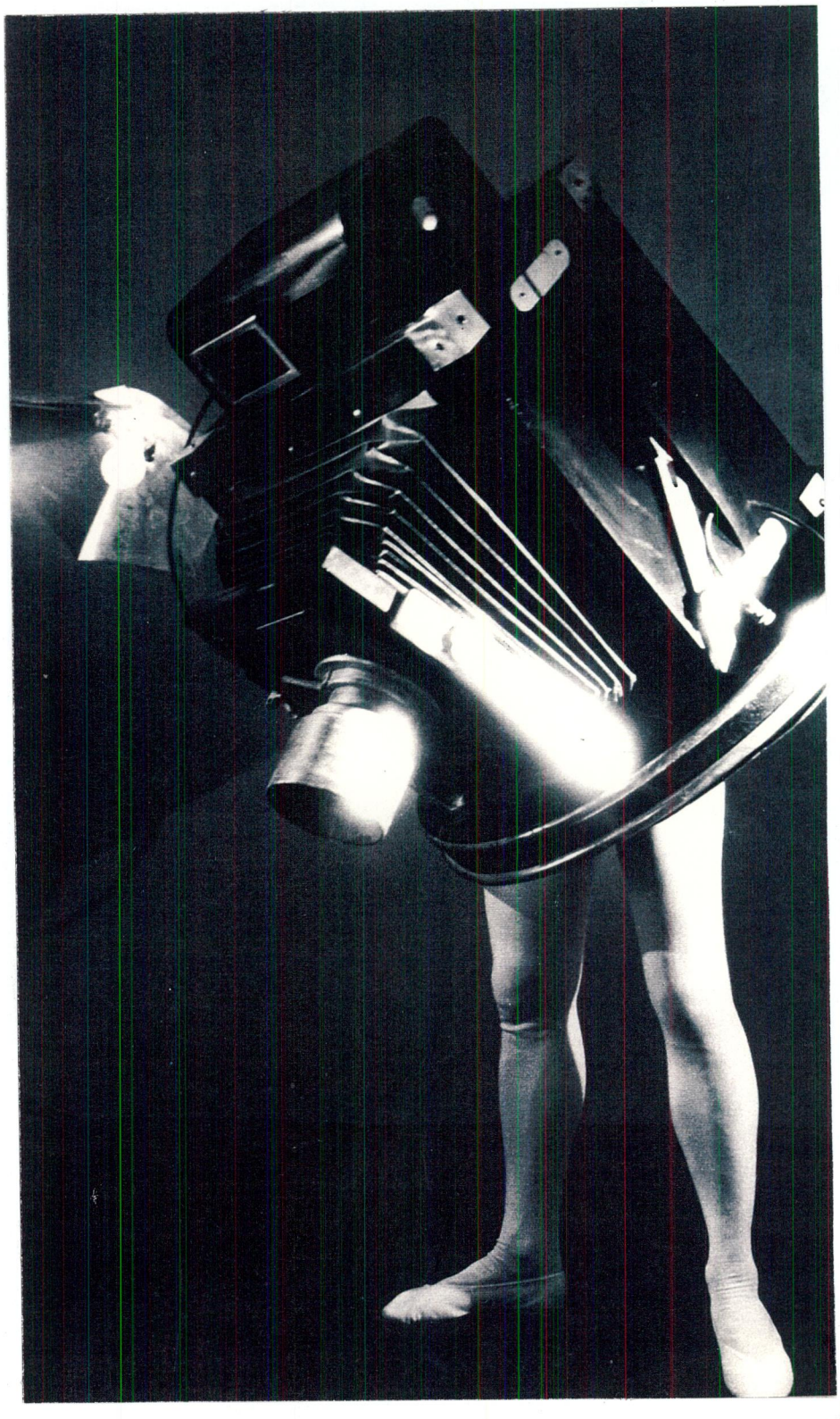


Fig. 3 *Jimmy the Camera* – Laurie Simmons, 1987

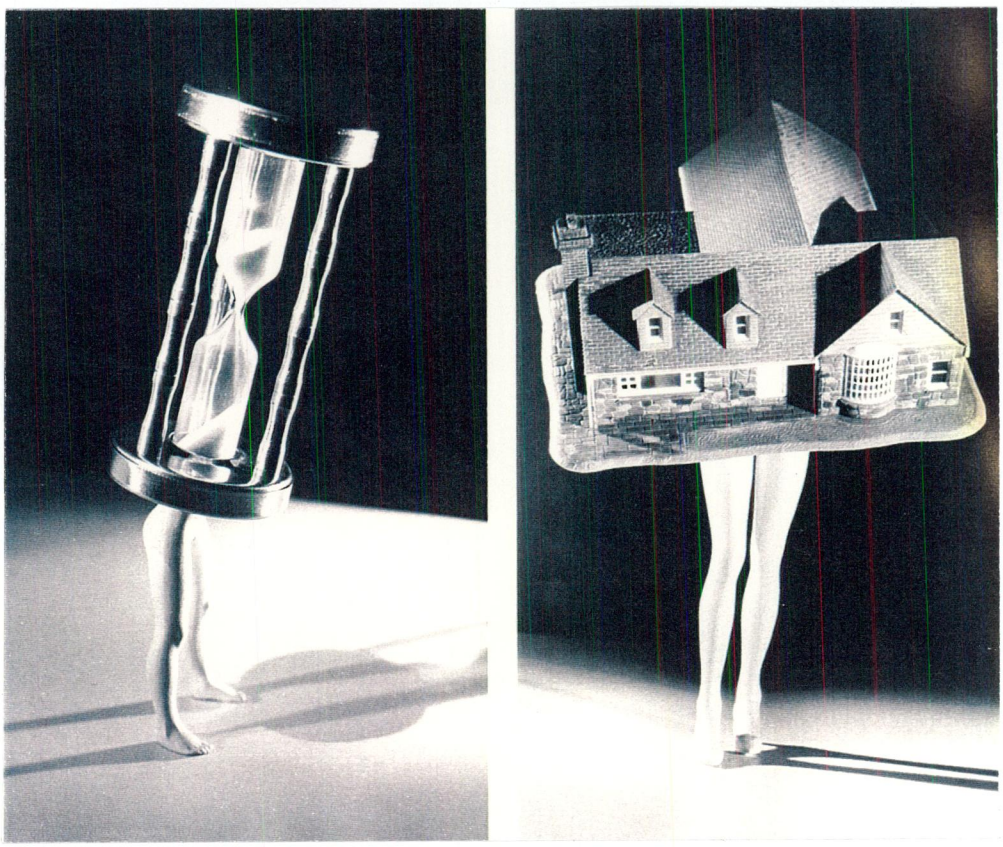


Fig. 4 *Walking Hourglass* and *Walking House* – Laurie Simmons, 1989

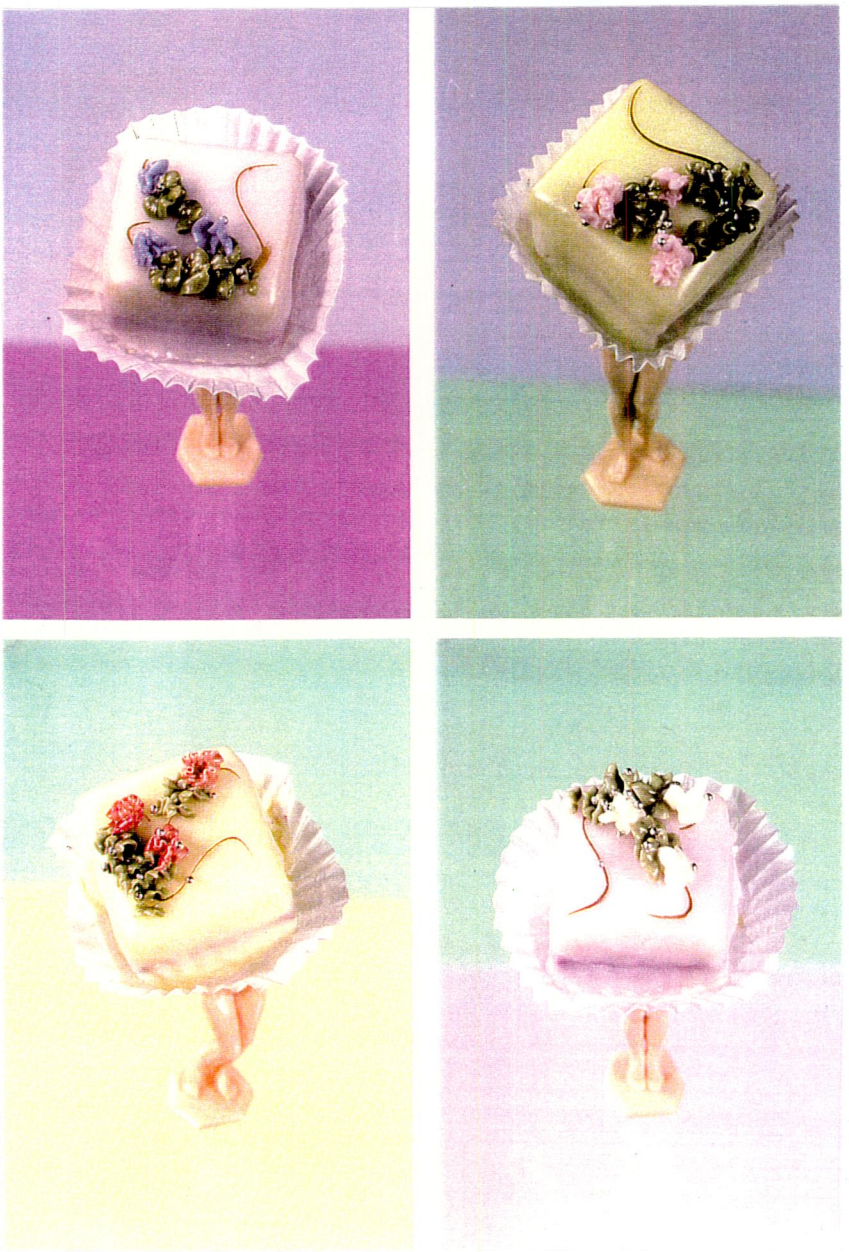


Fig. 5 *Walking Cakes* – Laurie Simmons, 1989

For the most of her career, Simmons has concentrated on the exterior aspect of artifice, and can be read as having gender concerns in that she uses dolls representing stereotypes of women. Her concern with control and power may echoe a concern with lack of control in women's lives historically in a male-dominated society. Though the artist does not label herself a feminist, this does not mean she has not been influenced by the feminist legacy. Simmons says she works from her experience as a woman, and the generalised experience of previous generations of women.

Throughout her work, Simmons destabilises opposites; reality/artificiality, control/powerlessness, people/possessions, high/low culture and personal/political. Simmons work is open-ended, because she does not attatch any theoretical explanation to her work except for her stories of personal experience and there seems to be a deliberate strategy of ambiguity. Simmons' questioning of boundaries can be linked to the political strategy taken by feminist artists, as aforementioned, to destabilise binary opposites as binary logic is supposedly the hallmark of patriarchy.

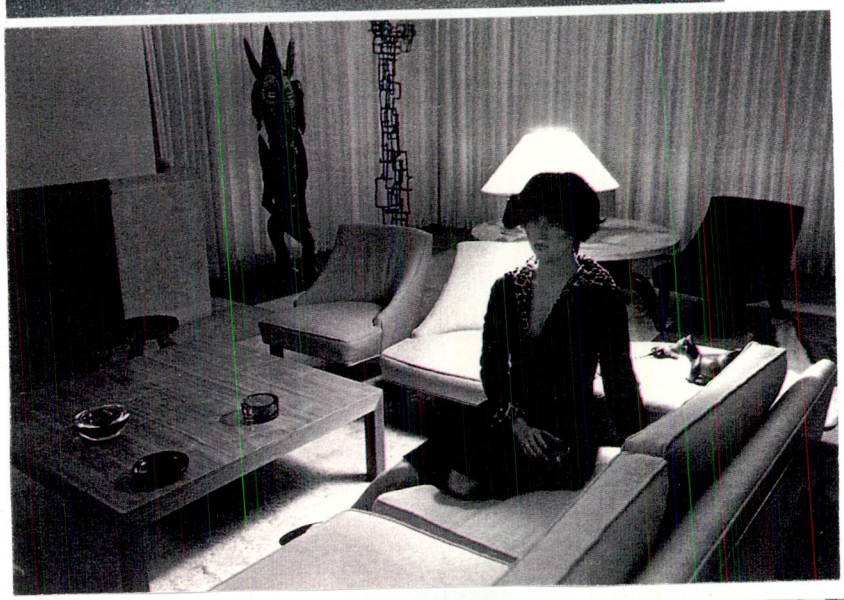
Cindy Sherman's work contains a similar element of ambiguity. Sherman also questions boundaries of interiority/exteriority. At the beginning of her career Sherman seemed concerned with the exterior facade of "ideal" femininity. Her *Film Stills* of 1977-1980 offer the viewer a series of 69 black and white, 10 x 8 inches, photographs (Fig. 6). In her *Film Stills* Sherman uses herself as model in various disguises. She takes on the role of many different stereotypes of women; the housewife, moviestar, sex object, career woman etc. Sherman re-presents representations of women. These have been interpreted as a critique on the original representations of moviestars etc. However, Sherman retains an ambiguity about her work, which relates to a love/hate

feeling toward those periods (the idealised 1950's) and clothes and make-up. "I was torn between an infatuation with those periods and feeling I should hate them, because of those kind of role models, and those structures that women were expected to fit themselves into". (Brittain, 1991, p. 36). Sherman's use of her own body could be seen to be working from the performative legacy especially as described within feminist art.

As Sherman's career progressed, she became more concerned with interiority, beginning in 1981 with the photographic series of horizontal colour photographs, which began as a centre-page for *Art-forum*. These featured Sherman, again, in various guises, in interior spaces, seemingly unaware of the viewer's gaze, thus inviting voyeurism. Laura Mulvey discusses these works, "This series suggests an interiority to the figures exterior appearance. These photographs initiate her (Sherman's) exploration inside the masquerade of femininity's interior/exterior binary opposition". (Mulvey, 1996, p. 69).

This concern with interiority continues through Sherman's *Fashion Series*. This series was a commission, in which she was requested to photograph a series by Commes des Garçons, the designer label clothes. The designers of these clothes "produced a series of designs in the 1980's which undid the clichès about the female body and which were predicated as an idea of the wearer's autonomous and subjectively defined sexuality" (Wright, 1992, p. 90). Sherman completed a photo series for them and made a further *Fashion Series* for French *Vouge*. This series was aggressively rebellious against the French fashion scene. Sherman, (as model) goes completely against the traditions of fashion photography, using clumsy poses, cropped photographs and suggesting characters, sometimes "deviant" characters, behind the facade.

Untitled # 48, 1979



Untitled # 50, 1979

Untitled # 10, 1978

Fig. *6 Film Stills* – Cindy Sherman, 1977-1979

So, Sherman too is concerned with gender stereotyping, e.g. in the world of fashion, and as portrayed in movies. She provides the exterior facade of ideal "femininity" with an interior dark, deviant side. Between 1984 and 1989 Sherman's work broadened its concerns. In her *Grotesque Series* of 1984, Sherman is questioning distinctions between animals and humans. This series feature distorted animal/human figures, which begin to disintegrate into the background. In 1989, Sherman addressed the subject of the hierarchy of Fine Arts in history, in her *History Portraits*. She represents Old Masters, with herself as model using prosthetic attachments like false breasts, skulls and noses. Sherman exaggerates which works to emphasise and ridicule the manner in which the original portraits were held in such high esteem within art-history.

In 1987, in her *Disgust Series,* the figure disappears completely, only the traces are left behind. There is no subject around which to build a narrative, the size of the work has increased considerably, now 72 x 47 inches, which does not allow the viewer to take the whole image in at once. "Physical fragmentation is echoed by photographic fragmentation …there is no formal resistance against the narrative of disintegration and horror …these pictures serve as a reminder that the female psyche may well identify with misogynist revulsion against the female body and attempt to erase signs that mark her as physically feminine" (Mulvey, 1996, p. 72).

Thus, the ambiguous and disturbing reference by Sherman to the abject realities of female physicality is different to the more celebratory approach taken by many women artists in the 1970's who were concerned with celebrating the female body as a site of resistance e.g. Susan Schwalb. Sherman is forcing the viewer to ask questions regarding our own attitudes and response (revulsion) to this subject. Sherman continues to pose

questions (or force the viewers to question themselves) in her next series, *Sex Pictures*, 1992. (Fig. 7).

The 1992 series consist of large colour photographs of anatomically "correct", plastic mannequins, acquired from a medical supplies house, The mannequins are engaged in very "incorrect" activities. Sherman has constructed bizarre figures from fragments of mannequins to suggest images of various forms of sexual activity. The figures are de-individualised by the blatant mechanical construction of the limbs, which do not quite fit. By using dislocated limbs of mannequins Sherman is placing emphasis on themes of power, control and manipulation. Within this series Sherman is posing the questions "what is perverse" and "what is pleasure", "public and private"?

Some critics have interpreted these works as critiques on pornographic representation of the female nude, or of violence against women. Sherman's work remains open-ended; the artist does not supply detailed explanation of her work. However, some feminists have read her work as masochistic and as dehabiliting as images of women. They read the work as proscriptive and not descriptive, thus they missed the irony within these representations. "(re-inforcing) the eroticized fetish - Her images are successful partly because they do not threaten phallocracy, they re-iterate and confirm it". (Krauss, 1993, p. 207).

There is further ambiguity in Sherman's most recent work, *Horror Pictures*, 1994-1996. This is a series of close-ups, it is not clear if it is the artist's face or a mannequin's. The faces are disfigured and slashed in some cases. In 1997, Sherman took part in the making of a film, *Office Killer*. The film, which has a murder plot, lies

somewhere between a horror film and a comedy. Sherman likes to combine these two opposites in her work. Sherman admits that the work is influenced by horror movies, e.g. when speaking about her *Sex Pictures*, 1992. "It's like horror movies, There's something you laugh at in them, maybe knowing it's all artificial. You feel safe knowing that the head that's been chopped off is a piece of plastic, so you can laugh at it". (Fuku, 1997, p. 80).

Thus Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons both cite influences from "low" culture i.e. horror movies or "B" movies. They both are concerned with gender stereotyping, not from any political feminist stance, but from personal and generalised experience of women in patriarchal western society. Because, these artists do not apply any theoretical explanation to their work, it remains open-ended. It poses questions and blurs boundaries between personal/political, artificiality/reality, high/low culture, pleasure/perversion, control/powerlessness and interior/exterior.

The 1980's saw many artists examining popular or low culture and how everyday objects and possessions have become fetishised within western consumer culture.

Haim Steinbach and Jeff Koons both deal with the commodification of objects. Steinbach addresses the notion of "good taste" and the manner in which people surround themselves with "tasteful" objects to define their reality. Jeff Koons, is another artist, who deals with consumer products. He exposes these fetishised commodities for what the are; that is fetishised ideals that are unachievable; by taking banal domestic objects and representing them on a larger scale and in a different material. He speaks of his work "as a means of invoking 'unachievable states of being',

he also reveals the false promise of the consumer products he manipulates or recasts". (Cotter, 1988, p. 154).

This again can be linked to Baudrillard's theory of "Hyperreal", where these commodities provide us with the promise of an experience, which is unachievable, because it is not based in our material existence. Koons, however, has been criticised, for using misogynist representations of women and furthering the view of women as "objects" within our culture.

A link has been made earlier between Baudrillard's theory of "Hyperreal" and Laurie Simmons' work. A similar link can be made to Sherman's, *Film Stills*, which explores the notion of an unachievable ideal of "femininity". In my view, both Simmons and Sherman explore the fetishisation of experiences and commodities and the ideal of femininity from a gendered viewpoint. These artists' concerns of power and gender are firmly rooted notions in women's experience within western society. Because fetishism is by nature about power and control, it can be used to examine the work of these artists.

The next chapter explores women's experience of domination and their potent resistance through utilising the discourse of fetishism in order to occupy an active subject position in society. Therefore, Simmons' and Sherman's work will be proposed as not only exploring women's role as fetish objects but also as exploring their position as active cultural fetishists.

Interpreting the work of Laurie Simmons and Cindy Sherman through the lens of fetishism

Chapter three contains a more focused approach to the hypothesis through providing a detailed description and thematic analysis of two series within Sherman's and Simmons' work. To do this, I will focus on firstly Simmons' *Dolls House Series* (1979) and Sherman's *Sex Pictures* (1992) and secondly Simmons' and Sherman's *Fashion Series*, 1984 and 1983. Common elements in their work will be discussed, for example their use of photography and its inherent play between reality and fakeness, their appropriation of gender stereotypes. Their work will also be connected in its commenting on Baudrillard's theory of "Hyperreality" and the exploration of Commodity Fetishism as well as Anthropological fetishism. I will make a connection between both artists' use of dolls/mannequins and child's play. A further link can be made to play and photography in relation to their work.

Sherman's and Simmons' different approaches to these concerns will also be explained. It will be hypothesised that Simmons concentrates on the exterior, artificiality while Sherman's work however will be posited as progressively becoming more concerned with the interior.

Laurie Simmons used small-scale dolls and doll's furniture to create set-ups of domestic interiors, in her *Dolls House Series*, 1977-1979. (Fig. 2) The miniatures were in the style and colours of the 1950's. Simmons places the figure of a doll symbolising a suburban housewife standing alone in different situations in the house. The artist has played with scale; the figure is too small in relation to the furniture, wallpaper etc.

Simmons says of the work "I was trying to recreate a feeling of a mood from the time that I was growing up: a sense of the fifties that I knew was both beautiful and lethal at the same time". (Bartman and Sappington, 1992, p. 9). So therefore these photographs represent, the idealised American suburban experience which was portrayed within 50's advertising and on television. (The artist's words are not presented as the definitive reading the work may be interpreted differently).

This "beautiful" idealisation could be "lethal" at the same time, in that the suburban experience referred to can be a trap where people are confined through the dominant stereotypes, through trying to become these stereotypes. In his essay, *Reversing Bathos*, Ronald Jones speaks of Simmons' *Dolls House Series*, "...(Simmons') art was a preserve of social critique held against the swarming Hyperreality Jean Baudrillard would write about, Simmons' early photographs measured off new facets of social realism" (Jones, 1989, p. 9). Jones relates Simmons' *Dolls House* photographs to Jean Baudrillard's "Hyperreality", (as discussed in Chapter 1). Baudrillard's theory of "Hyperreality" proposes that through the fetishisation of commodities, commodities became signs, which refer to and create more signs. These signs no longer have any original referent and so the commodities signify a "Hyperreality" which does not really exist in the material world.

In this series of photographs, Simmons explores commodity fetishism and the way it can enter our lives. This fetishisation of commodities and of ideal family life and stereotypes helped to reinforce the restrictive gender stereotyping during 1950's. Simmons used the experience of one generation, that of her "mothers', aunts' and grandmothers'". (Bartman and Sappington, 1992, p. 9) to comment on the situation of

another. Central to the structure of commodity fetishism, is power and control, which can be related to woman's experience, in that they have a lack of power and control over their lives, due to living in a patriarchal society. Therefore, oppressive regimes supplying gender stereotypes are intertwined with anxieties of commodity fetishism, as they were mobilised to sell a variety of products in the 1950's.

Simmons' work can also be viewed as commenting on anthropological fetishism; which is understood as; the projection of fears or desires onto objects so that they are manageable and can be experienced at a safe distance. The size of the miniatures that Simmons use, "are about control on a psychological level and a technical level. It is about making a large world manageable". (Bartman and Sappington, 1992, p. 11). The way, in which she moves the figures through the setting, across various images, emphasises themes of power and manipulation.

This manner of dealing with fears or desires through objects and toys can be related to child's play. Children deal with situations surrounding them through acting out their concerns by creating relations between objects and toys. Play is thus an important learning device for children as they can re-enact social relations and thus it is used by adults as a teaching method. By providing children with gender specific toys e.g. giving dolls to girls and war toys to boys, adults are beginning the process of gender appropriate behaviour. Dolls, like the "Barbie" doll, are an example of commodity fetishisation, where it is a representation of an "ideal" of femininity which is not based in women's physical bodies. In fact, "Barbie" doll could be used as an example of Baudrillard's "Hyperreal". It signifies a fetishised ideal of women, which has no

referent based in material existence. Thus through Simmons' use of dolls, commodity and anthropological fetishism could be said to meet.

So, in summary, Simmons' *Dolls House Series* is concerned with power and control, and a conflation between reality and artificiality, in relation to women's experience of societal control through stereotyping. These concerns are central to Cindy Sherman's work also. Both artists are discussed in relation to play and photography, by Nanda van den Berg in an article about *Photography and Post-Modernism*, 1991. The author states that the "difference between games and work or art is that nothing is produced at the end of a game". (Berg van den, 1991, p. 24). Also "a game can create a separate space with its own laws, (and) this applies equally to photography. It is possible for the two spaces, that of the game and that of the photograph to overlay one another at a given instant, producing a layered effect". (Berg van den, 1991, p. 25).

Laurie Simmons' work is discussed in this article in relation to "Mimicry", which is a type of game defined as "games which involve the player shedding his/her own personality and taking on another"..."Mimicry, is easily recognised in photography. Any artificiality in the recorded reality stands at immediately". (Berg van den, 1991, p. 26). The latter refers to the artists' works as both Simmons and Sherman deliberately allow the false props. used in their work to be seen. This element of fakeness could be intended as they both cite Hitchcock's films and his use of fake scenery as an influence. They construct the photograph to be almost convincing but obviously fake; as Sherman says to Simmons "you're counting on something giving away the fact that it's all fake". (Gyoh, 1987, p. 11). Sherman's work may also be discussed in the context of

"Mimicry" and photography. Van den Berg says that Sherman uses mimicry of adult problems and pre-occupations as a theme in photography.

Both artists emphasise their concern with artifice by their use of photography as a medium. Van den Berg stipulates that "artists who use photography and mimicry are far more concerned with content than they admit – there is a visualisation of values and thoughts; the contents of many photographs relate to the superficiality that Mimicry at first suggests". (Berg van den, 1991, p.27)

Photography was originally perceived as proof of reality. This was commented upon by Roland Barthes; "The photograph is that literal or even figurative (in the case of a photograph not taken) entity that grounds the interpretative narrative and links fiction with reality". (Shawcross, 1997, p. 117). Barthes held that there was an element in photography that can provide proof of a past reality, and can create a conflation between reality and fiction.

Simmons and Sherman use these elements of photography, in order to explore concerns with artificiality and reality and the conflation between the two, particularly in relation to gender identity. So thus they play with and expose the artificiality of the medium itself as well as exposing the artificiality of the photographs' content i.e. social stereotypes. In addition to blurring the distinctions between real/fake, Sherman asks further questions regarding definitions of pleasure and perversity, what is familiar and unfamiliar and what behaviour is acceptable or condemnable on the basis of gender identity, in her *Sex Pictures* of 1992.

In *Untitled # 255*, 1992 (Fig. 7), a "female" dummy; constructed from dislocated limbs of medical supply mannequins; is pictured propped up on her knees and elbows, photographed from behind. The figure's feet are cropped off the edge of the photograph. The compositional arrangement of the picture draws the viewers gaze to the genitals of the dummy. Close to the dummy, on the floor, is a child's doll dressed in a frilly dress.

The presence of the child's doll can be interpreted as a reference to how dolls are used to teach gender behaviour to girls, through play. This is also a common thread within Simmons' work. The juxtaposition of the child's doll with another "idealised" version of the female body, the sex-doll may be a comment on the different roles imposed on women in society.

A further link with Simmons' *Dolls House Series* can be made through examining the manner in which Sherman manipulates and controls the mannequins, like Simmons does her miniatures. This echoes with Simmons' themes of power and control. In turn this element of manipulation can be linked to the diverse nature of fetishism, which is centred on power and control. Sherman's *Sex Pictures*, address the fetishisation of women's body. On one hand the exterior of women's body is fetishised into an "idealised" fetish object e.g. Barbie doll. On the other this fetishisation of the exterior is constructed to disavow the fear of the other definition of the "feminine", as terrifying, monstrous, improper, unclean. (Jones, 1993, p.33). The structure of fetishism thus allows a fetishist to believe in two contradictory things simultaneously.

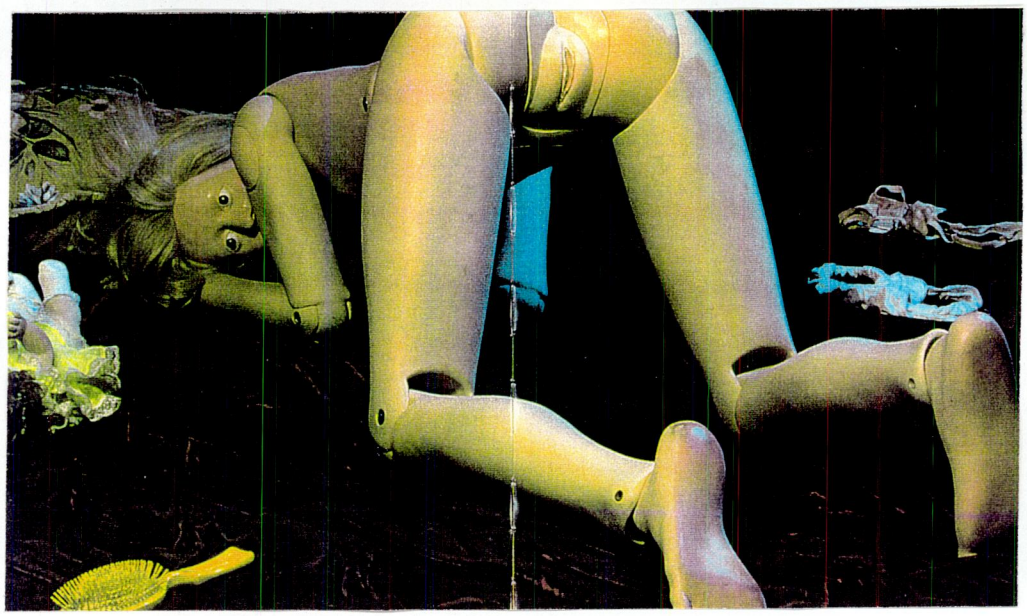


Fig. 7 *Untitled # 255* - Cindy Sherman, 1992

By addressing the fetishisation of women and playing with meanings and definitions of what is acceptable or not; Sherman questions the definitions on which the fetishisation of the female body is based. Laura Mulvey writes "where meanings shift and change their reference …this dices with the credibility of the fetish, Sherman pushes post-modern play to its limits in the contested terrain of the female body". (Mulvey, 1996, p. 72). Thus Mulvey is implying that Sherman is not really reproducing woman as fetish object but re-negotiating the terms of fetishism.

Simmons and Sherman, explore this fetishisation of women, in their *Fashion Series*. (Fig. 8 and 9) and also the commodity fetishism at work in the fashion industry.

Both Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons made their *Fashion Series* between 1983 and 1985. During the 1980's designer Rei Kawakubo created Commes des Garçons clothes (as described in chapter 2) and Cindy Sherman's *Fashion Series* began with a commission to photograph these clothes. Sherman got a further commission to photograph clothes for French Vogue. I will focus on one of this series, *Untitled # 138* (Fig. 8) 1984, in order to discuss Sherman's approach to her *Fashion Series* in detail.

The photograph is vertical in format, 180,3 x 123,2 cm. The model (Sherman) is seated on a chair, side-lit by a greenish light and fills up most of the frame. Sherman is wearing a big, short grey/fair wig, which is a wild looking mess. She has got a half-twisted smile on her face, which suggests a crazy or deviant character to the model. Sherman is dressed in a long, clinging, black and white vertically striped dress combined with a huge black and white horizontal striped tie around her bare neck. She poses in a slouched sitting position in the chair, completely lacking in the social graces

that your stereotypical fashion model, or even any woman has to acquire to be socially accepted. The figure is cropped, just above the ankles, which makes her look even more weighty and clumsy.

This depiction of fashion photography is in direct contrast to traditionally accepted notions of what is "beautiful" and "feminine". The surface of the photograph with its glossy, slick professional finish, is in contrast with, and places emphasis on the lack of the conventional finish to the clothes and the make-up on the model. The attractive surface of the work draws the viewer into the content unwittingly. This exposes the superficiality of the conventional fashion photograph.

Sherman suggests an interior behind the fetishised façade of "feminine beauty" which is a fetishisation of an ideal that does not exist. Jean Baudrillard writes in *The Precession of Simulacra*; "it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them". (Wallis, 1984, p. 255). Thus, this quote might explain why the image has been read by many as unnerving.

By suggesting a narrative and a character to the model, in *Untitled # 138*, Sherman explores the interior of the being, the feelings and frustrations of trying to deal with restrictions of gender identity. This contrasts to Laurie Simmons' approach to her *Fashion Series*. Laura Mulvey writes, "The presence of a woman is an indespensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation". (Mulvey, 1989, p. 19).

I will focus on *Aztec Crevice*, 1984 (Fig. 9) where Simmons used a back-projection of what looks like, the site of same historical old ruins. The figure is cut off at the knee, by the edge of the photograph. The lighting makes the model's face look sculpted and her pose is very stiff, with a fixed "pleasant" expression on her face. The model is dressed in a 1980's conventional dress; blouse with half a large-fan shape frill on the collar and a pleated skirt. The colours of the clothes blend in with the background, like the dolls in Simmons' *Tourist Se*ries.

By making the model look mechanical and plastic, Simmons explores the issues of artificiality and pretence in the fashion industry and also the wider cultural imposition of stereotypical images on women. There is an element of control and power over the model/doll, she is easily manipulated and images are imposed on her as you please, which can reflect the way people can be controlled by fashion and the social insistence on women to wear "femininity". By concentrating on exteriority Simmons' portrays the way people get seduced into stereotyped roles.

Simmons' approach is a subtle one. She portrays the models as plastic and doll-like. They also have the tall, slim features of the conventional ideals of beauty. However, it could be hypothesised that the end images are as resistive as Sherman's because of the emphasis on artifice by the artificial poses of the model.

Fig. 8 *Untitled # 138* – Cindy Sherman, 1984

Fig. 9 *Aztec Crevice* – Laurie Simmons, 1984

Although, fashion is linked to the fetishisation of women's bodies, the commodity fetishism, which is present in the fashion industry could be viewed in a more positive light. People can use fashion to create an exterior identity and a series of masquerades and it can perhaps provide a form of escapism and pleasure. Fashion can also be used to forge connections with a particular group or cultures. This links the way in which fans use fetishism to this end (as described in Chapter 1). This relates to Thorstein Veblen's theory (1899), of how commodities are consumed to portray social status.

Thus, commodity fetishism can be used by women to construct an exterior identity for themselves. However, fetishistic consumption of (commodities) fashion is inextricably linked to the fetishisation of the female body, which serves to construct the binary opposition of femininity against masculinity. This binary opposition perceives "femininity" in a negative view, in terms of lack in relation to the phallus. By destabilising the distinction between exteriority and interiority, both Simmons and Sherman question the basis on which the negative definition of "femininity", which posits woman as "fetish object" is formed.

"Fashion is the guided tour of feminine 'difference', a text not simply of a finished femininity but of the formation of that femininity". (Wright, 1992, p. 89). Therefore, fashion reflects how a "feminine" identity is constructed within western culture. Traditional understanding of women's identity is based on a psychoanalytic reading of identity, formation in childhood, and the concept of "lack" and "castration complex", theorised by psychoanalysts, originating in Freud's work, then Jaques Laçan, Helène Cixous, Lucie Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. These theories place women in a passive,

negative role within the "symbolic order". Thus, feminine identity is traditionally understood in terms of lack in relation to the phallus.

The fetishisation of "femininity" in relation to the phallus can be seen in fashion.

> The degree to which phallicism enters into fashion, is (also) apparent in the female power-dressing of the 1980's, the adaption of masculine tailoring to signify control, restraint and sobriety which sets up femininity against the other of masculinity. Yet if fashion is the field in which such binary oppositions are constructed, it is also on area in which they may be contested. (Wright, 1992, p. 90).

Therefore, within the discourse of fashion and sexual fetishism woman is perceived as lacking.

Both artists take different approaches to this subject, both positing women as active fetishists, in the anthropological and commodity categories of the term and therefore refute the traditional notion of women as purely passive and merely the fetish object.

Conclusion

The main focus in this thesis has been on women's experience of control, power and gender identity within western patriarchal society and specifically within modes of representation. Both Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons explore these issues in their work. Both artists' approach to these themes has been mapped through the lens of fetishism; i.e. in terms of the subject matter and on artistic processes. Their work has been specifically discussed in relation to anthropological and commodity fetishism.

Chapter one provided definitions of the three categories of fetishism as offered by Gammon and Makinen, 1994. Chapter two briefly traces, the introduction of the common object into an art context beginning with Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* in 1917 and the development of what I identified as, "feminine" art practices in Post-Modern and feminist art of the 1960's and 1970's. It was argued that such alternative art strategies frequently questioned boundaries within art and society, such as the public/private divide as a strategy to destabilise conventional notions of power, control and gender. Both Cindy Sherman's and Laurie Simmons' careers are contextualised in chapter two, in relation to the outlined "feminine" art practices.

Chapter three provides a more in-depth and specific analysis of both artists' work: through focusing on two sets of images and discussing them in relation to their use of the discourse of fetishism. My reading of Sherman's and Simmons' work is in terms of anthropological and commodity fetishism. Both artists' work is concerned with power and control, which is reflected in their manipulation of materials i.e. dolls/mannequins. Their work has thus been linked with anthropological fetishism, which is essentially

about power and control. Their separate *Fashion Series*, 1983-1985, explores the commodity fetishism at work in the construction of ideal identity or the masquerade of femininity. Simmons deals with the exterior aspect of the masquerade while Sherman suggests a character and interiority to the subject. Many different approaches are possible, as it is a very rich and complex area.

It could be postulated that the discourse of fetishism has been tapped into by various contemporary artists, and has proved to be effective in exploring notions of power and control. I say this because ultimately fetishism is about power and control, in that it allows a person to displace anxieties or concerns onto an object, and therefore fetishism helps the subject to gain control over these concerns. For example Mary Kelly's work comments on the mother's fetishism over the child's departure through collecting his Remanants in Post Partum Document, 1974-1978.

Fetishism can prove useful as a discourse when used in relation to the experience of those who are marginalised in society, because power is an issue for marginalised groups. It has been used in this context, by many female artists addressing the subordination and aiding an understanding of images of women as fetishised objects. Fetishism can also help to explore women as active subject i.e. Fetishist. However, this attempt by women artist to neutralise the former negative aspects of women being defined as "fetish-object" is in danger of playing back into the hands of convention and re-inforcing the old, negative definitions. One artist who has been criticised on this score is Sylvie Fleury, who took part in a touring show named *Fetishism*. Her video piece, *Twinkle*, shows the artist obsessively trying hundreds of high-heeled shoes. "However, again the representation of desire rests on the axis of absence, the high heels

of the shoes she tries on in Twinkle are simply strap on phalluses". (Murdoch, 1995, p. 19). Thus, the use of fetishism in this case can re-inforce Freud's interpretation of fetishism, which defines it in terms of castration anxiety and the negative view of women in terms of lack. Thus art practices, however well intended may not be read as positioning women as the active subject of commodity fetishism and may be misread as placing her as passive subject in relation to sexual fetishism. It has proven difficult to debunk this generally accepted and perhaps dominant notion of sexual fetishism within artistic practice. Therefore, I have avoided the discourse of sexual fetishism as it is too problematic to position women as active subjects within it and have analysed the work of Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons in relation to anthropological and commodity fetishism. There is a danger of applying fetishism in contexts that are too broad and thus fetishism can lose its meaning; "any account that attempts to apply the term 'fetishism' in this broadest sense becomes virtually meaningless". (Gammon, 1995, p. 6). However it can be successful when looking at specific works and their very particular dynamics. In this context, I propose that it is possible to use fetishism as a lens for feminine art-practises, to help position women as active fetishists and therefore as active and desiring subjects within society.

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