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Symposium



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Recurrences

Fetish, Magic, and the Gift

Concepts such as fetish, magic, and the gift have often been attributed to 'kinship communities', and taken to be 'out of place' if not 'overcome' in modernity. But is Hegel's notion of the magic fetish in Africa so different from Marx's and Freud's descriptions of the crucial role of fetishes in modern societies? Freeing ourselves from evolutionist and structuralist conceptions allows us to take the fetish not merely as the object of an irrational and arbitrary choice of people in primitive cultures but a potentially universal mechanism of deception, fantasy or desire. Art and art history likewise attest to the continuing legacy of terms originally devised for the description of other, non-Western cultures and has most recently focused not only on fetishism and magic but the materiality and mediality of their objects. We are all fetishists; and if we tend to see the fetish through the optics of fixation, it is precisely because of its unsettling nature and composite fabrication; its capacity to produce and/or reproduce originary acts and events and to destabilize the boundaries between faith and law, icons and idols, object and referent, the natural and the artificial.

With
Joshua Barker
Wyatt MacGaffey
Rosalind C. Morris
Roger Sansi-Roca
et. al.

Keynote by
James T. Siegel

Reading matter
by Filipa César

Organized by
Maria José de Abreu,
Preciosa de Joya, and
Ursula Helg

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