

PLAYING WITH ME: FEMININE PERSPECTIVES IN FETISHISM AND CONTEMPORARY ART

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Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Creative Industries
Queensland University of Technology

2017

Keywords

Agency in contemporary art
BDSM
Costuming
Female Practitioners
Feminism
Fetishism
Freudian Psychoanalysis
Goddess Culture
Mythology
Performance Art
Practice-led Research
Video

Abstract

While many female contemporary art practitioners have employed erotic fetishism in their work, the discourse surrounding fetishism is still largely conceived as an arena of masculine sexuality. Critical feminist theorists are revisiting the fetish in order to explore previously marginalised and undervalued considerations of female sexual agency. While these theorists hint at the fetish's strategic creative application and its ability to question hegemonic depictions of passive femininity, analyses have not been extended to articulate how sexual fetishism could be understood as a distinct creative stratagem. In response, this practice-led research project will renegotiate fetishism as both a critical feminist strategy and as a distinct creative paradigm in artistic practice. This PhD research project will explore the correlations between fetishism and artistic process, utilising their shared characteristics as tactical approaches. The outcome of my approach will be a renegotiation of fetishism as a critical and creative method that can question hegemonic representations of female passivity in contemporary visual art practice.

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: November 2017

Acknowledgements

This research was only made possible by the encouragement and support of my supervisors, family, friend and colleagues.

To my supervisors, Dr. Courtney Pedersen and Professor Andrew McNamara, your kindness, patience, encouragement and support have made this project possible. Thank you for your generosity of spirit and always making time for me, I cannot express my gratitude enough.

To my amazing friends and family who have had to share the burden of this project, I am truly grateful for all that you have done for me throughout this study. I would like to thank Jeffrey Mohr, Tina and Grant Parker, John Booth, Arian Booth, Tarran Booth, Nicole Mohr, Anita Holtsclaw, Maegan McKewen, Dr. Daniel McKewen, Michael Riddle, Joseph Breikers, Helen Gooch, Michelle Vincenzino, Louise Vincenzino, Gail Sorronda, Courtney Coombs, Caitlin Franzman and the lovely HDR staff. Your tireless efforts, kind words and generosity have made this all possible.

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Ethics and Limitations

This research does not involve the active participation of animals, genetically modified organisms or biosafety concerns. All data collection has been undertaken by me as the sole researcher and will not include any questionnaires, interviews or clinical trials. The human participants involved in the study have been placed under contract therefor avoiding any ethical concerns. As such this research project does not require ethical clearance.

Chapter 1: Introduction

My practice has been principally concerned with the complexity of issues that occur at the intersection between material objects, women's sexuality and different ways of considering agency. These fascinations are fundamental to my identity as an arts practitioner; they guide my artistic methods and animate my theoretical foundation. This constellation of interests draws from an autobiographic space, which pervades these experiential dialogues. Below, I detail personal motivations that initiated the inquiry, but I also outline the broader exploration of sexual desire that occurred in the course of this practice-led PhD inquiry. The early chronology details the circumstances that have moulded my critical revision of fetish discourse – explicitly, how I arrived at fetishism as a repertoire of material approaches and as a stratagem to complicate the codes that mediate female sexual agency. Initially, a fascination with contemporary iterations of sexual fetishism drove the study, its subcultural practice and where it intersects with BDSM¹. My investment in these divergent spaces informed key characteristics of the theoretical lenses. These discourses informed my recourse to experiential content as a mode to generate creative works, and emphasised the way deviance forged into an authoritative female speaking position. A self-reflexive tone will be adopted befitting the autobiographical fuel that ignites this fire of inquiry. Structured as a composite text, the writing interleaves diaristic accounts, exhibition texts, critical analysis and personal observation. By way of contextualising these autobiographic narratives in the parameters of the research, this introduction details first person accounts and the significant theoretical positions awakened by these experiences.

This PhD enquiry has grown from an earlier trajectory in my practice, which occurred during my undergraduate study. At this time, I was attentive to the constricted

¹ My reference to BDSM practices both here and later in this section is informed by my position as a participant. I identify BDSM practices as transgressive due to their position outside accepted sexual norms, evident in the conflation of pain and pleasure, and the complex ambiguities of agency engendered by women's consensual submission. My active participation in this subculture and my resulting identification as 'sexually deviant' correlates with the analysis of deviancy in the study and the insights this offers in regards to agency and fetish theory.

depiction of female sexuality in Western religious dialogues (i.e. Christianity). Of importance were the abundance of references to sexual prosecutions in theological texts and thus an apparent absence of positive female narratives. This lack of affirmative portrayals of female sexuality led me to explore character creation and ironically the development of narratives that foregrounded sex. These early works played with fictional accounts, detailing the history of a female rabbit cult and documented the artefacts that had been left behind after their rituals. Through studio-based investigations, I developed a series of ambiguous sexual aids, such as a range of chairs and insertion devices (Figure 1). Employed within a fictional narrative, these forms played with the idea of a divine copulation occurring between a rabbit and a woman. In these dialogues, the inclusion of bestial acts functioned as a strategy of transgression, actively using a sexual taboo to explore alternative modes of depicting sexuality and erotic agency². My particular approach came from contemplations of the Greek tale of Pasiphae and Daedalus. Daedalus was an artisan who created a hollow cow, which functioned as a sexual aid, one that when occupied by Pasiphae could actualise her bestial desire to be penetrated by a divine bull. I romanticised the position of Daedalus in this narrative; I was enamoured by the concept of an artificer who constructs objects in aid of realising female deviant desire. Pasiphae's timber sex cow intrigued me not only as a real object, but also for its mythic function as an interspecies sexual prosthetic. It influenced the sculpture *Cazzo Cazzo!* a humorous reconstruction of a horse's rear end with a luminous red glory hole (Figure 2).

² The analysis in this chapter considers BDSM culture in similar terms, where its position as taboo is exploited as one potential strategy to explore alternate depictions of erotic agency in contemporary artistic practice.



Figure 1: Anastasia Booth, *Run Rabbit Run*, 2010. Timber, leather, faux fur, mesh and rope.

Through successive installations, the material and formal aspects of these artworks exceeded the original narrative framework. I recognised that my use of fictional histories had been cloaking the autobiographical desire fuelling their creation. By acknowledging my sexual desire, an experiential mode began to shape the work more directly. As the trajectory in my practice started to shift, I began reviewing my earlier sculptural forms, the prosthetics, chairs and insertion devices. Looking over these previous sculptures, with their orifices, leather strappings, rope, fur and bondage undertones, I recognised how they gestured towards contemporary sexual aids and fetish objects. The practice progressed by highlighting these material aspects more explicitly by reconstructing contemporary forms, including whips, dildos, gags and other sexual apparatuses. At this time, my tentative fascination for BDSM subculture and my position in this sexual minority as a female practitioner greatly influenced the practice.



Figure 2: Anastasia Booth, *Cazzo Cazzo!*, 2010. Faux fur, steel mesh, horse hair, felt, timber.

... Anastasia Booth recounted a story about a fetish party. It took place at the house of a dominatrix, which she described as ‘a non-descript house in Brisbane’. I have never been to Brisbane, but I imagine a humid suburbia, cars in driveways, pavements where dogs are walked, school bus routes, and a house with a private dungeon downstairs.

The dungeon itself is described as having a rough-and-ready quality, as though hastily constructed with the materials at hand. Mismatched carpets on the floor; walls draped in black curtains. Arranged on the walls are racks of tools, ropes and other apparatus, their sheen of high quality and good craftsmanship unexpected within the literally homemade space. Amongst all the bizarre elements of this story, what stands out for Booth is its incongruous setting: a suburban home. Here, the domestic and the fantastic collide, jarringly. The fantasy setting is slick and grandiose. The reality is old carpets and curtains in a basement. (Dunhill 2013)

Anna Dunhill wrote this catalogue text for my exhibition *Crude Tools, Feeble Actions* hosted at Metro Arts, Brisbane (2013). Occurring after my Honours study, the exhibition highlighted how I was beginning to actively negotiate fetishism as a strategy for art making and using my own experiences as a catalyst for creative analysis. My experience of Andrea’s basement (as previously described) greatly influenced the works for this exhibition. I was enticed by the pretence of the homemade environment that juxtaposed domestic and erotic elements. Its artificiality reminded me of certain contemporary installation practitioners. Soft fabrics lined the walls, with the objects and tools acting as sculptural arrangements; a salon hang of instruments (whips, masks and gags), the curved steel tubing of glass tables and sleek minimal lines of medical instruments, a mound of cushions with a three metre protruding fabric tongue, reminiscent of an Annette Messager arrangement. Such material oddities enticed me, and my observations of the space generated new approaches in the practice. In particular, I gained an emerging interest in replicating the contrasting formal qualities found in Andrea’s dungeon, in which objects had obscure uses and often slipped into the absurd, seemingly unable to align with the fantasy that they tried to conjure. My

construction of inoperable sex objects in contradictory or tenuous materials became influenced by this tension; dildos constructed of ice that melted when in contact with the body, stages that sagged under their own weight, a stripper's pole fluted with holes that oozed grease, and leather harness prosthetics with obscure uses. These material investigations of the tenuous and contradictory reflected my interest in playing with the subtleties of function and dysfunction as an expanded avenue for the exploration of female desire. In studying this dynamic, I was interested in how an object's dysfunction could speak to problematic and humorous depictions of women's desire and sexual agency. My current mode of practice has evolved from these concerns.

Hushed laughter, a slight moan, bodies pressed together in a variety of poses, others drinking, watching in a companionable silence as bottles of red wine made their way around the room.

While these bodies observed, I could feel the warm textures of rope on skin as I shared the intimate bonds of a double rope suspension. The other participant was a new mother, body swollen with the evidence of her young son's passage. Her son had come from the seed of a cross-dressing man – distinct, warm, friendly and funny. The changes her pregnancy had wrought – the fullness of breast – brought on an avid curiosity in me, an interest in a kind of female ejaculatory spray. At my bequest her partner grasped her nipple firmly between his fingers, the assertion of pressure bringing forth a tepid geyser of milk, dowsing my face. This warm fall of fluid coincided with an acidic backflow of red wine. As the milk cooled on my skin I could feel the wine burning its way up my throat. In a Martin Creed-esque gesture, the darkened purple fluid erupted as rivulets down exposed breasts and straining stomach. What had been invited textures of rope gave way to an overwhelming constriction. Hastily cut bonds, a heated flush and the abrupt ringing of laughter bubbling up from my stained lips – at the absurdity of it all, at a fulfilment of eroticism gone askew, fascinations my body decided warranted an unforeseen end: its own sympathetic ejaculation.

It may seem problematic to proclaim my pleasure for BDSM cultures, and to continue this chapter through a retching interlude, but it is a fitting anecdote. To view a rope

suspension from the outside can seem coercive, even violent, for us it was joyous, hilarious even. We shared many things during that tie – fluids, arousal, laughter. Squirming against each other as we adjusted our bodies to the pressure of rope, hair getting caught, sneezing, being worried about the smell of bad breath as we pressed closer together, all things that gave a certain flavour, a beautiful awkwardness, light-hearted but deeply erotic. Addressing these unusual qualities in creative practice, this peculiar event is central to my conception of the body; it drives my humorous viewpoint towards fluids, absurd gestures and the female body. This moment marked how I would come to negotiate the interplay of desire and the geography of the body in performative practice, accentuating the humour when the body misbehaves. Instead of looking at this defect negatively, I viewed humour as a critical dialogue that could subversively flavour the discourse around female agency³. I continued to scrutinise this concept in performance works and sculptural pieces; these works characterised by the humour produced when the sexualised body moves into excess and parody. In this framework, humour is used as a strategy of subversion, that is, it is actively employed to create unexpected connections with the geography of the female body. Such reliance on a BDSM repertoire has continued throughout the study, in the costuming and gestures located in the performative works and the sculpture's material vernacular.

My move into BDSM culture was shadowed by other strange but joyous events. One such event was a reconstructed medieval fair held in the outer courtyard of a residential castle, which involved stepping over naked men lying at their mistresses' feet, their blissful smiles following me as I passed, and walking on a 7ft tall man affectionately known as Doormat. It was here I first met dominatrix Andrea, who walked out of her front door naked and embraced me like an old friend. Andrea was a constant presence in this subculture; when she moved through crowds, they parted. Her authority was such that she inspired certain submissiveness in others. I wondered if it was her stature, her overt strength and toned muscle that inspired this deference, but in hindsight the ten-inch black strap-on she was fond of wearing probably played a part. It is only now when I recount this story that I realise how much that protruding member left an

³ Humour as a strategy of feminist critique emerged in the later stages of this study. As a result, the potential for this mode of working in my practice is still being analysed. While some creative analysis is conducted through the digitally mediated performances and re-enactments, this use of humour as a subversive strategy will be critically assessed in future research and practice.

impression on me.

Andrea's performed androgyny opened up my own views on femininity; the oversized black phallus became a recurring theme in my artwork and continued to feed my obsession with the formality of the erect penis (as evident in the phallic chapter of this text). I became interested in the liberating and yet problematic associations conjured when the phallus is placed in relation to the female body. At this time, the artistic practice was characterised by hand-made and ready-made phallic forms, often in conjunction with a wearable prosthesis. Incongruously, the phallic became a reoccurring visual device in my practice, which I utilised to explore female positions of authority and agency. When reviewing my own sexuality and the liminal space I occupy as a bi-sexual woman, I realised that these fascinations not only come from a personal/erotic space, but also hold the key to possibilities I see in the divergent representation of femininity through objects that complicate gendered depiction. Through my encounter with Andrea, I became intrigued by the ways that genital ambiguity could be enacted through objects, and imagined how certain aspects of this ambiguity could be performed or co-opted in my visual language. Namely, how sculptural forms (like Andrea's member) that evoke an indeterminate space could be utilised for alternative performances of female agency⁴. I began to view the dildo harness as a prosthetic object – that is, a wearable and performative form – that connects to, and extends, the original capabilities of the female body.

A wall lined with the tools of her trade. Trailing fingers along the rack, the feel of surface; letting whip tails weave between fingers, soft silicone yielding to lips, the undulating ridges of glass, the sheen of leather strapping, rope fibres embedding. Textures wash over me and raise the gooseflesh on skin, imagining their use on interior and exterior. The soft weave of a whip handle resting against the silken sheen of a blindfold. A disfigured leather mask laying flaccid on the table, picking it up and

⁴ This observation later informs how I approach genital ambiguity as a strategy to move beyond the strict physical markers for female identification. While androgyny itself is not analysed in detail in this study, it is present in my artworks that aim to re-envision the phallic. In particular, genital ambiguity operates in the practice via sexual props, where the presence of, or removal of, both genital markers acts to confuse and subvert heteronormative demarcations of gender. The implications for this way of working will be further explored through future research.

breathing its heady mix of sweat, bees wax and tanner. As she watched me, she knew, could see my reverence, the gentle caress I visited on each object.

Materials, in the form of bindings, props and sexual aids play a key role in BDSM subculture as the conduits for the sexual scenario. My interest in them was inherently tactile; the sensations of touch become an erotic stimulus and an imaginative trigger. Caressing the array of surfaces, I envisaged their relationship to the body, their connection to the internal and external geographies of flesh. This tactility forms a large part of this study. The plethora of materials I use come from a space of pleasure, a bower bird-like attraction to certain surfaces and their caress on my skin as I form, mould and shape them. Reflecting on my methods in these terms, it recalls the dynamics of a media fetish. In this way, desire is core to the methods I employ. It seeps into the properties of the materials and into surfaces that seduce, encourage touch. This nexus of objects, sexual satisfaction and tactility that had invited me into BDSM subsequently ushered me into the theoretical space of sexual fetish discourse.

My earliest dialogue with Sigmund Freud's theories of fetishism was grounded in this relationship with BDSM. In its contemporary use, I heard fetishism evoked as a term for any number of practices in that subculture. Consequently, my initial use of it had been similarly hybrid, an umbrella term that I used to refer to (also) any number of practices. Such adultery of discourse spurred me to foster a clearer definition of sexual fetishism by looking out from the practice to a range of psychoanalytic and philosophical spaces. Freudian understandings of fetishism, including his placement of sexual satisfaction as the impetus for the fetishist's affiliation with objects resonated with me. I saw correlations between this and BDSM practice, where the object is front-and-centre, props acting as the vehicles for sexual satisfaction and necessary conduits for the erotic performance. Freud speaks incessantly of fetishism's aetiology and its psychoanalytic triggers, but my fascination came from the symptoms. While Freud identified the arousal of fetishist for object, he left a chasmal hole, the physical pleasure of fetishism. He blindsided fetishism's tactility, its performative nature, its pleasure, and the relationship material sensation has to the body. Reading his case studies, I felt this void, an omission of how fetishism was used. Consequently, I became interested in fetishism as an agentive strategy in artistic practice, if I identify

as an artist and someone with a media fetish then how do I construct art as a media fetishist?

While there were positions in Freud's text that I was sympathetic to, the indeterminate space that woman occupied in Freudian discourse became something to be in conversation with. Throughout the stages of my artistic practice, I have been interested in playfully probing the fixation on male centrality and the male desire that pervades Western visual language and symbolic discourse. As noted by Ann Rosalind Jones, "historically limited to being sexual objects for men ... [women] have been prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves" (1981, 248). This omission restricts the agentive depictions of women's pleasure, as diverse portrayals of sexuality by women remain marginalised or illustrated as something other. In defiance of such restraints, Jones goes on to assert that expansive erotic codes should begin with "women's bodies and women's sexual pleasure, precisely because they have been so absent or so misrepresented in male discourse" (1981, 250). Similarly, in Freudian dialogue the female voice is suspiciously absent. This motivated me to inscribe my own pleasure into fetish discourse by being in dialogue with Freud, and as a result building spaces from which I could speak with authority as a fetishist.

What I had witnessed in BDSM culture was a multiplicity of female desire that was at odds with the limited portrayals Jones had described. Reminiscing over these events, I remember how much they excited me – how much they still do – as well as the sheer breadth of sexual practice and female sexuality that I witnessed. I was aware of the contentious issues⁵ that consensual sadomasochism pose, especially in feminist discourse. My experiences solicited a more positive affect; in many ways it gave me the freedom⁶ to express my sexuality honestly and for what it is. In my mind, its position as deviant inspired this spectrum of manifestation, by being polemic to expected modes of sexual practice. I became fascinated by the ways in which women

⁵ It is important to note that I recognise sadomasochism, even when consensual, is a contentious issue in feminist discourse due to the absence of female voices and perspectives. The inclusion of personal anecdotes in this introduction is one of the ways that I seek to compensate for this lack of the female voice, and describes the agency I have found in BDSM practice.

⁶ My identification of BDSM as a zone of freedom does not negate the power structures and strict hierarchies that punctuate its practice, but rather is an expression of individual sexual freedom, within existing paradigms of power. With this acknowledgement, the principle that no desire is inherently taboo, allows a consensual space for freedom of sexual expression.

not only found volition in the BDSM scenario, but that they flourished. I wanted to align these observations with fetish theory. Namely, that erotic fetishism's marginal position as a sexual deviation could speak to the same space of opportunity.

The impetus for this practice-led research began amid these hopes for sexual fetishism and was driven by what I had identified as fetishism's potential application as a stratagem. This term signals a moving away from Freud's paradigm in its vernacular use; a key aspect of this articulation includes the ability for fetishism to be purposefully utilised. My observations call for a critical renegotiation of fetish, as both a methodological innovation in female artistic practice and as a stratagem⁷ to complicate existing erotic codes around female sexual agency. This proposition of fetish as a strategic discourse directed my investigations of fetishism's use as an agentic artistic method, composed of specific tactics. These tactics draw influence from my dialogue with Freud and his fetish paradigm, and address my personal BDSM repertoire.

While the preliminary enquiry for this study began with psychoanalytic and contemporary understandings of sexual fetishism, the trajectory has shifted in an anthropological direction. Following insights born from the creative practice, my fascination and investment in the subcultural practices of fetish has grown into a consideration of fetishism's early magical foundations. Namely, I began embracing the animistic and anthropological source narratives that informed Freudian studies in this area. Freud's position as a collector of ancient artefacts and his investment in fetish material having a power over the fetishist is indicative of these origins. In these terms, Freud's fetishism refers to animistic inscription and the mysticism of deified materials. This directed my research into Freud's collection of ancient objects. Due to the influence of Freud's collection, instead of investigating the participants of fetish subculture, I returned to my long-held captivation with specific mythological characters and theological texts⁸. Like my previous speculations on the narrative of Daedalus, I became enamoured by characters whose representation was framed by aspects of their sexuality. As I returned to these modes of research and creative

⁷ Stratagem is used here in the military sense, as an overall plan that can comprise several smaller tactics.

⁸ The connections between these earlier modes of research into mythological figures and their links to fetish theory are discussed in the later sections of this document.

analysis, I was drawn to female figures that depict a subversive femininity found in mysticism and ritual practice, those that suggest new models of authorship and agency. It was the subversive potential of these earlier erotic codes that became important. Not only do they provide a rich visual platform to build upon, but they also operate as a site to play with and to explore contemporary views of sexuality. I became interested in re-aligning this imagery with my previous investigations of sexual fetishism. In the process, I began to reflect upon how these dialogues could mutually enrich or potentially augment my assertion for fetishism as a methodology. In the spirit of such revisions, the artistic and contextual precedence for this practice-led research is established through a critical analysis of female contemporary practitioners: visual artists whose creative works are concerned with the vernacular of women's sexuality and agency, alongside how their aesthetics are shaped by a fetish methodology.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The research employs a practice-led methodology in which artistic practice is understood as the principal method of critical enquiry. It is grounded in the reciprocal relationship between praxis and theory, the “basis upon which visual arts practice is proposed as a form of inquiry that is sound in theory and robust in method and can generate important creative and critical outcomes” (Sullivan 2010, xxiii). In the framework of this project, “new knowledge [is] generated in the process of making and ... made manifest and shared through the verbal [and textual] reflection on that process” (Pakes 2004, 1). In achieving these ends, the research develops the creative practice and theoretical components concurrently, allowing their dialogical relationship to enrich, direct and inform each other. In particular, the specific theoretical and conceptual lenses employed in the project cultivate paradigms for creative practice through the revision of fetish discourse. It analyses how fetishism can be deployed as a repertoire of material approaches to complicate depictions of female sexual passivity. This interpretive framework functions as a dialogue between Freud and I, the dialogical nature of this approach being reflected in the interleaved conversation between fetish theory, Freud's life and my artistic practice.

Embodied knowledge is interrelated to notions of intuitive insight and knowledge creation through tactile artistic action. It is inextricably linked to physical and performative processes and, as such, is “a form of insight embodied in what we do in

the world” and is “underwritten by a logic that emerges in and through the activity itself or the reflection upon it” (Pakes quoted in Butterworth 2012, 159). This kind of tacit knowledge, founded in the dance discipline, is seen as integral to fetishistic processes and intuitive artistic methodologies where desire is considered a method of production and a type of unconscious ‘knowing’. As Ellen McCallum in her book *Object Lessons: How to do things with fetishism* (1999, 91) states:

...the most important aspect of the theory of fetishism: is that it models how knowledge – of our bodies, of our world – is shaped and directed by desire. We are libidinally invested in both our bodies and our objects, and this investment structures our experience of the world.

This paradigm of desire as knowledge creates a vernacular that “positively characterises [fetish] action as a rational [and generative] process” (Pakes 2004, 2), which becomes integral when articulating the often intuitive and unconscious strategies in artistic research.

The irony of an unconscious strategy – which is what is suggested by the very notion of fetishism as an epistemology – is intended to emphasize Freud’s most basic lesson: that our conscious actions contain unconscious wishes. Rationality can never shake itself free from desire; fetishism as an epistemological strategy may help us better employ reason and desire. (McCallum 1999, 5)

This relationship between desire and fetish, the embodied knowledge applied in the study, is strongly anchored in sculptural processes and a material attitude born of a fetishist lexicon. While I start with methods or acts drawn from fetishism, what I come away with is a distinct repertoire of materials and creative approaches. The subtexts for these engagements derive from BDSM subculture, evidenced by the tactile, visual and sensory properties of the works. While springing from this discourse, it is a transition point, as the productive or generative potential of this attitude emerges through its application in creative practice. As I examined in the *Creative Practice Final: Preaching to the Perverted*, the eroticising elements born of this ontology are articulated as a sensuous materiality, evident in both the methods of production and resolved artworks. In the sculptural works, *Andromeda* and *Teresa*, this sensuousness transpires due to the characteristics of the materials: in the gloss and lustre of metal surfaces, the reflective properties of glass and the tactility of textured surfaces. This

materiality is also performed through an interaction with the artist's body amid the intensive labours of the sculptural process.

This relation between labour and materiality is most pronounced during the formative phases of the sculpture's construction. A material vernacular surfaces because of the demanding methods of production, in the moulding and polishing of the metal components. The labour involved with these repetitive actions is arduous, felt as the recurrent strain on the body while iterating these cyclic processes. For *Teresa*, the construction of the 1100 star spheres was done by hand using a jeweller's dapper. Instead of outsourcing the production, I felt it was important that I constructed these elements so that their handmade-ness reflected the presence of the artist in their imperfections and individual variances. With *Teresa*, various modes of mechanical and analogue polishing were used on the unsealed copper before each successive showing of the work. In the *Creative Practice Final: Preaching to the Perverted*, this mode of production is linked to erotic dialogues, specifically the notion of sustained sexual excitement through obsessive rubbing. In these terms, the moulding of the minute metal components for *Andromeda* and the reiterative polishing of *Teresa* enact a poetic dialogue between the ardours of their bodies and my own, indicative of how my analysis of these personas is in conversation with my fetish methods. Due to these poetic correlations, a faux re-enactment is instituted; by acting as a proxy, I enact the physical discomforts (or pleasure) experienced by those embodied in the sculptural objects. In the study, acting as a proxy functions to locate agentive positions in existing chronicles and mirrors how the appropriation of pre-existing objects and personas guide the theoretical and creative analysis.

This concept of the proxy is recurrent in the performed elements of the practice, as well as in the strategies implemented when forming the sculptural objects and in the digitally mediated performances. The performances look to strategies of embodiment and appropriation, in which I become a physical proxy for the mythical characters in Freud's and my own fetishist lexicon. These strategies of re-enactment are closely aligned to the ethos of "Strategic Essentialism", specifically the goddess performances that emerged during the 1970s, in the way they locate divergent and active articulations of female desire by looking back to primitive or archaic depictions of femininity, revived in a contemporary context.

The sculptural assemblages are interpreted as an embodiment of the characters that they analyse. In these terms, the agency located in the reconceptualising of the figures – by means of a BDSM repertoire – is situated in their multiplicity. No longer solely located in their passive depiction, their sculptural ambiguity grants a discursive mobility. Through a series of abstractions, the works alter the functionality and context of the adopted objects, considering how their visual formulas and material mechanics function in regards to the reading of desire, volition, power and femininity. Subsequently, this strategy of abstraction is based in a reduction or removal of certain formal qualities from the original object. This results in an austere but materially seductive visual language incorporating pinks, whites, flesh tones and the rich surfaces of copper and glass. The richness of these materials contrasts with the sparse display, where they sit in the bare, white gallery space. This deliberate move towards a light and austere exhibition aesthetic illustrates my interest in the sculptural and formal languages of contemporary artistic practice, and how these visual languages may intersect and alter the dialogues of the fetish vernacular.

BDSM is predicated on clearly negotiated roles and power play. I see correlates between these power structures and the positions of agency articulated in Freud's work on fetishism. While fetishism's power structures are traditionally cemented in passive femininity⁹, the dialogues evoked by BDSM practice incite a performed fluidity, with participants actively adopting or enacting certain positions based on the requirements of the scenario. Consequently, my investigations of female agency have been greatly informed by this fluidity, articulated in relation to the female characterisations analysed. Through sculptural translation and mediated performances, I change the parameters by which these characters are traditionally understood. Instead of relying on the conventional, passive portrayal of the sexualised body, I isolate particular facets of their mythology, which permits a blurring or an ambiguity. Hence, Andromeda, previously passive, becomes an active agent by overcoming her physical restraints

⁹ In this study the agentive spaces of fetishism are contrasted against passive femininity. Passive femininity in the study is identified as the absence of female volition and is evident in historical depictions of the docile female eroticised body. The interrogation of this dichotomy – passive versus active – is most clearly articulated through the creative outputs of my research in which Andromeda and Teresa's passive historical depictions are reconceptualised as active sculptural forms.

through her sculptural discursiveness: Teresa is no longer the restricted vehicle for the divine; she is the divine.

In both the theoretical and creative components, sexual fetish is revised as an alternative model to hegemonic representations of passive femininity. By highlighting positions of volition and exploring the nuances and complexities of female sexual desire, the research outcomes challenge “stereotypes of femininity and transgress [existing] gendered constructions” (McDonald 2001, 3). Integral to this method is the affirmation of an authoritative feminine voice in sexual fetish and the assertion of the Fetish Stratagem in female artistic practice. Fundamental to this articulation of sexual fetish as a resistant model is the critical revision of terminology inherent in Freudian psychoanalysis and Freud’s *Fetishism* essay¹⁰. Relevant literature on feminism, psychoanalysis and Freud’s personal life are investigated to facilitate this textual re-conceptualisation. Theorists, including Ellen McCallum and Louise Kaplan¹¹ have written extensively on the relationship between fetishism, feminine passivity and the way fetishism can be implemented as a strategic discourse. In light of these theorists, this project proposes a revised vernacular that affirms fetish as one potential model to resist passive conceptions of femininity, evidenced in its use as an artistic stratagem. Drawing from the language and characteristics present in the original Freudian texts and its early anthropological understandings, the exegetical component strategically analyses how this language is reconsidered or reconceptualised through a BDSM vernacular in the creative practice. The evidence of fetish as a strategy or action is established in the creative outputs, and is located in female-based contemporary artistic practice.

¹⁰ Freud’s *Fetishism* essay is central to the theoretical framework of this study, but I conduct only strategic analysis of Freud’s relevant psychoanalytic writing. The breadth of the literature cannot be addressed in the scope of this body of research. The focus has been determined by Freud’s role as an antiques collector and the relevance of this to my use of sculptural archetypes. While theorists have noted his passion for objects of antiquity, how this plays into a fetishist framework is under-theorised. As a consequence, my critical revision of fetishism hones in on the physical spaces of Freud’s practice (his study) and in the creative analysis of his objects and the texts by Janine Burke.

¹¹ While I contrast passivity against the active spaces of fetish practice in this study, it is not my intention to construct a false binary, but instead to critique the pervasive depiction of sexual woman as passive receptacles for patriarchal desires. While the study identifies fetishism as a strategy to mitigate against this passivity, it is not the only avenue by which this can occur, but here I am offering it for consideration as one possible tactic for rendering female agency more complex or even as a strategy of resistance.

Situated in a practice-led paradigm, my project develops the creative practice and exegetical components simultaneously over the course of the project. The artworks produced during this time formed the basis of my creative research, acting as a site for exploration and critical analysis. Playful, intuitive and experimental approaches to production in the studio are an integral aspect of the practice, especially when discovering new and unforeseen outcomes. Working from a post-medium position, a range of techniques and media are used to interrogate the research questions, including, but not limited to, sculpture, ready-mades, installation, performance and video. The approaches are complemented by a critical analysis of psychoanalytical, feminist and contemporary art theories. These sit in dialogue with contemporary artistic practices that address feminine sexuality, agency and appropriate fetish tropes. This provides the essential contextual framework and theoretical foundation for the creative outputs, in which the interplay of theory and practice provides a site for the creation of new knowledge. The critical analysis of relevant theories and creative practices are fostered through primary and secondary sources. Both historical and contemporary practices have been analysed, with a focus on contemporary female practitioners. Specific works by Sarah Contos, Maria Loboda, Claire Lambe, Tori Wraanes and Angelica Mesiti are read in relation to art historical, anthropological and theoretical contexts. As the project is situated in a practice-led framework, the production and exhibition of creative works forms a significant basis for the scholarly activities. These are used to test, experiment and question the validity of my research claims. The data collected from these creative products rely on critique, critical dialogue and feedback from my supervisors, peers, other practitioners and industry professionals. Archives of images and sketches are maintained during the project. Amassed both online and through a visual journal, these collections catalogue the idiosyncrasies of my research approach, which includes historical references, formative work ideas, other practitioner's works, and mapping the creative experiments and resulting artworks.

One method that remains crucial in the development of my epistemological framework is the critical revision of fetish terminology. The project strategically maps subsequent revisions of Freudian fetishism as it has evolved and shifted through various theoretical discourses. The research investigates the subsequent appropriation of fetish terminology, and considers its ability to be actively employed in questioning the complexities of female sexual passivity. Beginning with the Freud-Lacan framework,

the research charts the term's adoption through feminist, anthropological, philosophical and contemporary art lenses. Previous revisions by key theorists, including writings from feminist psychoanalysis, are formulated into a framework that structures my own critical and creative revisions. This approach, in turn, acts as a platform to articulate the theoretical shifts and practical renegotiations of the fetish, and its reimagining as a critically rich and creative stratagem. The evidence of this revised strategy is found in the visual products of female contemporary practitioners as well as in my own artistic research. I analyse and pinpoint how these women appropriate, re-contextualise and redisplay the tropes drawn from specific understandings of fetishism. This strategy of visual adoption and material appropriation is indicative of the strategic application of the fetish.

1.2 INTERPRETIVE PARADIGMS

PSYCHOANALYTIC FEMINISM

This practice-led research is located at the intersection of psychoanalysis, feminist theory and contemporary artistic practice. In the study, aspects of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic texts are examined through the parameters of feminist theory in order to critically ascertain how women may utilise fetishism as a positive praxis in the field of contemporary art. The necessity of this contextual frame has arisen from the gendered nature of Freud's psychoanalytic lens and the fragmented, or often absent, position of women's voices in his clinical scope. As a researcher and artistic practitioner concerned with the harnessing of fetish discourse as a feminist strategy, the principals of feminism and the reconstruction of psychoanalytic writings from a feminist perspective provide the primary theoretical context for my study and are employed in the spirit of "fruitful confrontation" (Apter 1991, ix).

The analysis undertaken has been informed by principles of psychoanalytic feminism¹². As a branch of feminist theory, psychoanalytic feminism takes the recognition and resistance of women's cultural and sexual oppression into the critique of psychoanalytic paradigm. Far from being a succinct movement, it can be considered

¹² Psychoanalytic Feminism, as defined by Emily Zakin, addresses the re-reading of psychoanalytic texts. It differs from Feminism Psychoanalysis in that it does "not address ideas about developing feminist principles in clinical practice" (Zakin, 2011)

a spectrum of evolving theories and practices. The “different traditions within the history of feminism [that have] frequently contained views which were incompatible”, as Evans observes, “[psychoanalytic] feminism is a broad-based movement containing women with very different ideas” (Evans quoted in Wright 1992, 73). While these revisions align in their deconstruction of seminal texts and the critique of psychoanalysis’ male centric ideologies, they vary on how to address and move beyond the gendered bias reflected in the construction and classification of female sexuality.

This idea of psychoanalytic writing as gendered is integral to my creative re-contextualisation of Sigmund Freud’s fetishism text. In *Freud on Women* (1990) Elizabeth Young-Bruehl elaborates on the gendered nature of Freud’s fetish framework and the insight it gives into his broader psychoanalytic epistemology:

Freud’s reconstruction of the aetiology of the fetishist’s aberrant object-choice is key to understanding not merely perversion as such, but, more to the point, Freud’s views on sexual difference, masculine sexual development, female anatomical inferiority, gender subjectivity and normative heterosexuality. (Young-Bruehl 1990, 5)

Following this trajectory, Ellen McCallum reinforces Young-Bruehl’s position when she states, “fetishism [like psychoanalysis] is not only [concerned with] sexual practice, but [...] also has epistemological consequences insofar as it frames knowledge and belief about sexual difference” (McCallum 1999, 1). Read in these terms, the analysis of the feminine in psychoanalysis, and subsequently fetishism, is of a cultural concern.

Central here is the feminist rejection of Freud’s focus on female anatomical inferiority in regards to the phallic and the subjection of women through a male model of psychic development. The distinction of female sexuality developing as a by-product of penis envy and through the perception of the vagina as a site of castration was framed as denigrating and essentialist. Young-Bruehl dubs this early period of feminist psychoanalytic revision (occurring from within psychoanalysis in the 1920s) as ‘Dissenting and Rejectionist’:

His work was said to be simplistically biologicistic – his famous use of the phrase “anatomy is destiny” was the proof – and simplistically prescriptive about what should constitute feminine [sexuality] ... in everything from type of orgasm to type of “normal female attitude” (Young-Bruehl 1998, 127–128).

In critiquing Freud, psychoanalysts Karen Horney and Margaret Mead spoke to a broader trepidation about Freud’s construction of gender and how the perception of female sexuality had been limited to essentialist in a hetero-normative context.

But as Emily Apter reminds us in *Feminizing the Fetish* (1991), it just isn’t that simple as “Freud’s formulation employs ... a language of undecideability” that typifies the “perpetually unstable nature of the fetish in theoretical discourse” (1991, 15) and subsequently, the feminine. Later revisions exploited the ambiguity of Freud’s language and took liberties with this essentialist categorisation as a position that can be negotiated and subversively harnessed. Theorist Luce Irigaray expands on this functionality of essentialism, in that to “think strategically about essentialism is to deploy the roles and characteristics traditionally assigned to women in ways that have not been employed before” (Irigaray quoted in Foust 2013, 198). Irigaray’s position builds on Joan Riviere’s psychoanalytic analysis of women “masquerading in a feminine guise” (2004, 135). In *Womanliness as a Masquerade* Riviere discusses instances where female patients acted out conforming notions of femininity as a strategic masquerade. Both theorists offer insight into how the biologically assigned roles Freud instituted in fetishism can be knowingly inhabited and subversively implemented to move beyond their limited demarcations.

While these historical critiques oscillate from polemic dissent to positive appropriation, it is these later constructive reconceptualisings of Freud’s formulas that my creative and theoretical revision speaks to. As a researcher, inscribing (re-finding) the feminine in fetish texts – by highlighting notions of strategy and authority – I align with the French psychoanalytic feminists of the mid 1970s like Julia Kristeva, who instead of rejecting Freud appropriated his ideals and highlighted the generative subtleties of his texts. A key concern of these women was “to produce discursive spaces, in and from which feminine difference and desire ... [could] be creatively articulated.” (Guild quoted in Wright 1992, 74) Their subversions of, and strategic playfulness with, masculine theories were:

...both substantive and methodological, [as] an analysis of the usefulness of psychoanalytical concepts and [became] an illustration of how feminists may read [these] texts against the grain, so that they may be actively worked upon and strategically harnessed for purposes which they were not intended. (Grosz 1997, 142).

In the study, I identify with this playful harnessing of psychoanalytic frameworks as I “extrapolate creatively a *bricolage* of applications from psychoanalytic theory” (Wright 1992, xii) and fetishism. Advocating for a strategically charged fetishism, my creative uses of the term highlights its usefulness in material and theoretical spaces.

FEMININIST THEOLOGY

Feminist theology takes the foundation of feminist analysis and revaluation of gender binaries into the territory of theology. Feminist theologians “question patterns of theology that justify male dominance and female subordination, such as exclusive male language for God, ... theologians also seek to reconstruct [and revise] the[se] basic theological symbols” (Parsons 2002, 4). As mythology and religious iconography were gradually adopted into the creative work of my research, this method of analysis and reconsideration of existing religious and associated mythological signs became significant. Susan Frank Parsons remarks that:

There needs to be a new stance towards knowledge that recognises that symbols, including theological symbols, are socially constructed, rather than eternally and unchangeably disclosed from beyond. (2002, 4)

The principle of symbology as a revisable and adoptable construct shaped my perceptions of my references to goddess art. My previous hesitations regarding genres of goddess art were due to their perceived essentialism, supposedly explaining ‘women’s power’ and femininity as innate and biologically determined. I consider these perceptions now to be ill-conceived and instead refer to the use of arcane imagery in feminist practice as described by Jennie Klein. Klein extolls the merits of the strategy, noting that it is “how [...] essentialism is deployed” to question existing codes that is important (Klein 2012, 592). She offers the example of artists like Mary Beth Edelson, whose perceived essentialism “was [actually] fabricated from the tools at

hand in order to challenge the social inequities that confronted them” (Klein 2012, 592). The feminist theologian's strategy of reframing and reinterpreting symbols of the divine has been instrumental in shaping this body of research. Klein's description of these practices as “a pastiche of various rituals, beliefs, and traditions” (Klein 2012, 592) has been useful in both my analysis of the work of other contemporary artists, and in my own adoption of mythical female characters and subjects. Rather than accepting the power of cultural forms as natural and immutable, feminist theology has enabled me to apply a critical artistic reinterpretation of the archetypal roles that women have been assigned historically.

In conclusion, this creative practice research has been carried out in the context of psychoanalytical theory and feminist theology; however, its contributions are to the field of feminist artistic practice and the strategic application of essentialism in creative enquiry. The research journey has been roughly divided into two phases: firstly, the direct reference to sexual fetishism, BDSM and critiques of masculine desire located in the phallic as the inescapable paradigm for these practices, followed by a second phase, which I refer to as 'Magical Fetishism', whereby the research shifted into the field of feminine archetypes and mythology, highlighting the contradictions in Freud's relationship to these figures as evidenced in his study. The creative outcomes of this research have exploited these contradictions in the conceptualisation and realisation of artworks depicting mythological figures of feminine power in order to develop more poetic and nuanced reconceptualisations of female agency and fetishism in creative practice.

Chapters 2 and 4 of this exegesis provide an explanation of these two research phases, using both theoretical sources and analysis of other practitioners' works as points of reference. These chapters provide the research context for this doctoral project and can be understood as a continued dialogue between Freud and I. While these phases are distinct, due to the creative outcomes they share continuing themes: fetish as a stratagem, subterfuge through appropriation and the complication of passive and agentive opposition. Chapter 3 is a transitional chapter that demonstrates how these continued themes have been developed through studio-based experimentation. Chapter 5 describes and analyses the key creative outcomes of the research, and the concluding chapter discusses the implications of these findings for creative practice in the future.

Chapter 2: Sexual Fetishism: from the Phallic to the Strategic

The initial impetus for this practice-led research project began in contemporary identifications of sexual fetishism, recognised through a Freudian lens as a masculine sexual deviation and limited to fetish subcultural practices. Chiefly, the research creatively and critically interrogated how women's desire was depicted throughout these visual erotics, and explored how these aesthetics could be redeployed as a method in artistic practice to reshape expectations of female desire. When I began working, I was heavily invested in the phallic binary, exploring how it had been utilised in female artistic practice as a method to overturn the purported passivity of female subjectivity. Evidence of this strategic use was also communicated through my creative outputs, in my use of dildos and other such devices. The first section of this contextual review (*Working Through the Phallus to the Other Side*) gives insight into these early approaches and seems an appropriate analogy for how this research has evolved (eventually I was so fed up with Freud's approach to contemporary fetishism that I just wanted to work my way to the other side). My hesitation in remaining restricted to Freud's paradigm and buried under contemporary iteration's of fetishism has led to a series of reconsiderations of my relationship to Freud and this study. Namely, branching out into other theoretical models, including more productive revisions of his theories and considering that fetish's magical heritage created significant shifts in the study, including a branching out into arcane imagery and women's ritual practice. This results in a less didactic engagement with fetishism, allowing more poetic and expansive dialogues around the portrayal of female desire and sexuality in contemporary visual arts practice.

2.1 FREUDIAN FETISHISM: WORKING THROUGH THE PHALLUS TO THE OTHER SIDE

In order to facilitate this revision and adoption of Freudian fetishism as a creative approach, the research began by considering how feminist, psychoanalytic and queer theorists had revised Sigmund Freud's 1927, *Fetishism* text. A significant part of this strategy had been opening up a place for women inside this discourse by working through the question of the phallus a method explored by Kareen Ror Malone in her

essay *Working Through the Question of the Phallus to the Other Side* (1997, 407-422). This method involved acknowledging the instabilities of Freud's terminology and the ambivalence he stated towards the penis, and its subsequent confusion with the phallus. What follows is an outline of the psychoanalytical positions and the views of contemporary artists that informed my initial inquiry, and the early creative outputs that have been integral to this investigation. These are discussed at length, as an introduction to my preliminary research and as an integral theoretical basis for the subsequent revisions undertaken, which will be outlined in the successive chapters of this thesis.

In his essay "Fetishism", Sigmund Freud argues that fetishism is a divergent state of both "disavowal and affirmation" (1977, 346). Freud's theoretical position derives from Richard von Krafft-Ebing's psychological "*Fetischismus*" (Krafft-Ebing 1998, 11), which Krafft-Ebing identified as an overly sentimental and sexualised attachment to a specific object. According to Freud's account, a boy observing his mother's genitalia for the first time perceives it as other, identifying with the vagina as a site of castration. Previously, the boy, the subject, knowing only himself, had endowed the mother with an imaginary penis, "the maternal phallus" (Fink 2004, 33). On witnessing his mother's anatomical distinction, the boy fears for his penis's imminent removal, and yet "refuse[s] to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis" (Freud 1977, 345). He both acknowledges his mother's lack and yet imagines her completeness. This psychological disavowal and preservation are "exalted ... into a ... fetishistic precondition" (Freud quoted in Krips 1999, 176), placed onto an object as a substitute for the sexual object. By favouring this "castration complex," (Bassin 1999, 380) Freud instituted an exclusionary narrative, establishing a fetishist viewing grounded in a phallogentric framework, which resulted in an "active masculine gaze and a passive feminine image" (Da Silva 2000, 32). The female body is an acquiescent surface, the vehicle (object) for the fetishistic viewing, but not the fetishist (subject). This conception of sexual fetishism was motivated and directed by Freud's search for its aetiology, his "goal [was] to bring to light the secret structure of the fetish" (Böhme 2014, 304) and to "pursue the question of what the fetish might be the substitute of" (Böhme 2014, 305). Stemming from a causative logic, he conceived that the trigger for any fetish interaction originated from this psychological trauma "the

fright of castration” (Freud 1977, 346). In so doing, he not only denaturalised the sight of the vagina but also placed undue significance on the penis.

Throughout Freud’s essay on fetishism (1927), the term penis and phallus are used interchangeably, one being the ersatz for the other. However, theorist Jacques Lacan contests this linguistic substitution and notes “one must not confound the phallus with the penis” (Lacan 1956, 25). In *The Signification of the Phallus* (1956), Lacan differentiates the two. He argues that Freud’s phallus is not a fantasy, a real object or an organ, but acts as a signifier “that is destined to designate meaning” (Lacan 2004, 275). Lacan speaks of the authority of the phallus/signifier as the “transcendental signifier” that enables the subject “entry into the symbolic order” (Matthis 2004, 108). When Freud privileged the penis as the archetype of the fetish, he made it analogous to the phallus. Thus, a physical claim for the penis becomes an authoritative act, allowing the individual bearer of that penis to register symbolically as the subject of the sexual scenario. As Marjorie Garber writes, acting as “the mark of desire” (Garber 1990, 47) the penis simulates the phallus, becoming a matter of not having or being the phallus, but seeming to have or be. Thus its presence in the fetish scenario allows men to enact an ownership of desire (1990, 47). Michael Kocela, in support of Garber, asserts that highlighting this “distinction between Freud and Lacan is important to affirming female fetishism because it provides the necessary leverage with which to pry apart the exclusive symbolic bonds between the penis and the phallus” (Kocela 2011, 10). This prying apart, as Elizabeth Grosz notes, “entails an attempt to detach the phallus from its metonymic connections with the penis, to detach the phallus from paternity and authority and thus to render it more mobile” (1997, 308), allowing its strategic adoption by women.

Ellen McCallum, in her book *Object Lessons: How to do Things with Fetishism* (1999), does not refute the predominance of the phallus or the connection between the penis and the fetish, but her interpretation emphasises the broad definition of the term, as Freud himself had not only attributed a “real, albeit little penis” to women but he had also envisioned a “phallic mother” (Freud quoted in McCallum 1999, 10). Through its attribution to both sexes, the phallus becomes “not a mark of sexual difference, but [a signifier] of sexuality [and desire], which either gender has, though to different effect” (McCallum 1999, 10). McCallum’s statement encourages us to consider the phallus

through broader definitions to contemplate that while it has previously functioned as a masculinised mark of desire, a female phallic possession can signal a departure from depictions of hegemonic feminine desire situated in the castration binary. This method of phallic adoption was predominant in my early creative and theoretical revisions of fetishism, utilised as an approach to problematise the male-centrality of Freud's paradigm. It became one of the core visual devices to assert a female authorial voice. Evidence of this is articulated through other contemporary female artistic practice, in the form of divergent subject positions that co-opted the phallic signifier.

In London in 1995, the First Drag King contest was held in the UK where artist Hans Scheirl took to the stage:

Hans shuffled onstage in a mouse-brown suit, carrying a book under one arm, an orange in his hand, and a coil of rope drooping from a pocket. Ignoring the audience, he stood on the book, arranged the noose around his neck, and put the orange in his mouth. As he pulled the rope taut, he went limp, his pants dropping to the floor. Underneath was a pair of flesh-coloured pantyhose looped at the crotch into the world's tiniest penis. (Brooks 2006, vii)¹³

When Hans Scheirl did this performance in 1995, he was a transgender man. The member created by his knotted pantyhose rested against the crotch of his 'real' vagina, the sheer fabric acting as a translucent veil. In his moment of exposure Hans' inhabits a border-space of subjectivity, the adopted phallus never completely erasing the presence of the vagina, both emerging. Existing outside what Griselda Pollock has labelled "the single prism of castration" (2004, 6) Hans' simulation of hermaphroditism "repudiates the absoluteness of a phallic presence versus castrated absence" (Malone 1997, 408). In *Matrixial Borderspace*, artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger not only "queries the degree to which the psychical amplification of the phallus remains blindly tied to ... a masculine incarnation" (Ettinger quoted in Malone 1997, 407) but also proposes an alternative perspective, a paradigm of subjectivity not restricted to the castrative model. Ettinger's Matrixial is a paradigm of subject development not reliant on the cuts and severances, the phallic and the non-phallic, instead it is a transsubjective theory of encounter where "aspects of subjectivity

¹³ A description of the performance has been added due to the lack of photographic documentation.

... [occur] ... at shared borderspaces between several co-affecting partial-subjectivities that are never entirely fused or totally lost” (Pollock 2006, 2). It is Ettinger’s vernacular of the trans/partial that is significant when considering Hans’ dual genitalia and his co-opted tiny phallus. Here the phallus does not erase femininity but exists alongside, co-inhabiting, problematising the castrative binary.

2.2 EARLY CREATIVE PRACTICE: REVISIONS OF THE PHALLUS IN THE STUDIO

This method of phallic adoption was predominant in my earlier creative outputs, as I was heavily penis orientated at that time, in my use of dildos and contemporary sex toys. This fascination with contemporary erotic fetishism directed the studio experiments and exhibition outputs, occurring between the end of my honours project and the first year of my PhD research. Below, I will isolate and discuss this time frame as a single thematic chapter in my research journey. This stage of the artistic practice was marked by the appropriation of ready-made objects, a referral to BDSM ritual and the reoccurrence of phallic forms, often in conjunction with a wearable prosthesis. What follows is an analysis of three artworks that were created during this phallic stage of the practice: the sculptural object *As Long as it Takes* (2011), a video of the same name made in (2013), and the kinetic sculpture *Red* (2014), featured in the exhibition *Means are the Ends: The Command Issue* (2014). These works characterise my preliminary engagements with fetish theory and my early attempts at revising this discourse as a methodological approach in female artistic practice. Specifically, I was interested in the potential of female phallic possession as an expansive dialogue, in contest to the limited depictions of hegemonic feminine desire situated in the castrative binary. It became a reoccurring visual device utilised to explore agentive and authoritative female positions, and as a method to problematise the male-centrality and phallicism of Freud’s paradigm.



Figure 3: Anastasia Booth, *As Long as it Takes*, 2013. Featured in Richard Bell's *The Dinner Party*. Image courtesy of Carl Warner

Following the discussions above, the materiality of Monica Bonvicini's glass sculpture, *Tears* (2011) (Figure 4), influenced a range of distinct material iterations of the phallic form in my practice. I came to use a range of materials that were unstable, ephemeral and tenuous in an exploration of the complexities and contradictions of this signifier. A trait of this strategy was not only to explore its adoption by women but to also to re-align the form with the humorous contradictions of its biological counterpart, its flaccidity and its fluid sputtering nature. In *As Long as it Takes* (2011) (Figure 3) a sculpted shaft of ice hangs from a leather harness inside a refrigerated glass case. The sculpture referenced the leatherwear from BDSM subcultures, examining the position of the strap-on in regards to the female body as an eroticised form and as a prosthetic. Though separate from the body, the harness device hints at the sexual aid's ability to extend and alter the capabilities of the feminine subject. Yet by evoking the visceral nature of ice, it is rendered impotent by its loss of form. In this way the apparatuses' implied purpose is undermined by its exposure to time and thawing. This accent on the tenuous relationship between material and function reflected how I was creatively working through the tensions and complexities of representing female divergent desire and authority in the context of the phallic binary.



Figure 4: Monica Bonvicini, *Tears*, 2011. Murano glass, rubber, wooden pedestal. milk glass, light.



Figure 5: Anastasia Booth, *As Long as it Takes*, 2013. Digital Still.

As Long as it Takes (2013) (Figure 5) revised the ice phallus as a prop for a recorded performance that reimaged the act of fellatio through materiality and time. In the video, the performance is visceral and obsessive, silhouetted lips surround and embrace a shaft of ice. Sandwiched between mouth and architecture, the penis melts into falls of fluid that are simultaneously arousing and uncomfortable. This watery emission dictates the sound, the emanation of sighs, gasps, spits and falling drops rhythmically pattering the floor. Considered here, the act of fellatio becomes one of endurance, and ultimate destruction as, solid yet ephemeral, the penis is slowly reduced to cascades of melting water. *As Long As It Takes* recalls a desire that is both erotic and yet impotent, a gesture of longing that disappears even as it is pinned to the wall. Overlaid with graininess, the video recalls the hastily captured moments of intimacy that appear in amateur porn videos.



Figure 6: Anastasia Booth, *Red*, 2014. Digital Still.

Drawing from these creative approaches, I began this practice-led research project with an exhibition at LEVEL artist-run initiative. *Means are the Ends: The Command Issue* appropriated and repurposed objects from fetish subcultural practices, including a red vibrating dildo. Accompanied by a glass tabletop and black trestle legs, the sculptural assemblage titled *Red* (Figure 6) playfully paraphrased the kinetic sculpture *My Red Homeland* (2003) by Anish Kapoor. Acting as a faux drawing machine, the red

vibrating dildo is placed on the glass tabletop next to a mound of Vaseline. Propped up by the simulated testicles, the intensity of the dildo's vibrations makes the form spin. With its continual circling, the phallus drags the Vaseline over the table, performing a drawing and redrawing of a smeared circle. Overriding the object's original utility, the vibrations that are usually used for pleasure are repurposed as a performative, gestural action. By subverting the intended penetrative function, the work is both humorous and feeble, as 'the mark of desire' and its authority is reduced to an animated red jelly, pathetically smearing (what could be) its own fluids around.

These three works explored the dichotomy of the penis vs. the phallus, the substitute vs. the real, and the symbolic vs. the anatomical, and the contradictions that arise from representing the feminine in these confounding opposites. In Freud's text, the woman, while passively endowed with the "maternal phallus" – the imagined member grafted to her acquiescent body – is still lacking, never the subject of the sexual scenario. The artworks presented here refute this dynamic, interpreting the phallus through broader definitions. By highlighting notions of female agency, choice and the deliberate adoption of phallic objects as an artistic strategy, the phallus is de-centred, removed from its dominion as the psychoanalytic trigger for all fetish interaction. Instead, the appropriative phallus is conceived as a single strategic approach in the broad spectrum of fetish characteristics. Specifically, the phallus re-realised as a physical product, a sexual-aid, a prosthetic, which connects to and extends the capabilities of the female body, can function as a revised tactic to overturn the purported passivity and marginalised agency of female subjectivity. Re-evaluating the phallus in this way, scrutinised not as the core of psychosexual development but as a single adoptive device in fetish interaction, is indicative of how I began to understand fetishism as series of strategic tactics that could be actively employed. In line with these reflections, I began to explore certain theoretical revisions that advocated an active fetish.

2.3 FASHIONING AN ACTIVE FETISH: STRATAGEM AND MATERIAL TACTICS

This section provides the theoretical premise for my understanding of Freudian fetishism as a creative stratagem. It is a limited reflection on what is an evolving body of theory still being refined through the creative practice, an emerging practice that is itself still in evolution. Below, I will outline the principal theoretical lenses that are informing how I am negotiating fetishism as a usable discourse in artistic practice. One

aspect of this articulation is the ability of fetishism to be purposefully utilised in fashioning active subjectivities, meaningful when considered as a method to assert authorial and expansive female dialogues. Theorists Ellen McCallum and Romana Byrne implicate the agency of fetishism in their texts, both as an adopted practice that can be used to develop an agentive sexual subjectivity and as a critical stratagem to broaden existing erotic codes¹⁴. I will then detail how theorists Louise Kaplan and Ellen McCallum have informed my construction of the Fetish Stratagem. Due to the nature of this study being soundly situated in a methodological framework – that is, how can fetishism be used? – the chapter will progress from theoretical revisions of Freudian fetishism to the strategy’s creative application in female practice.

Ellen McCallum has contributed to the discourse by defining fetish as “an instrumental strategy for understanding sexual differences and the connections between desire and knowledge” (1999, 5). McCallum’s focus on active terms like ‘strategy’ and ‘instrumental’ removes fetishism from the unconscious and creates a vernacular of use, “rationalizing it by relating it to notions of agency, consciousness and choice” (1999, 5). This insight invests in Freud’s erotic configuration as a rational structure, where the perceptions of the fetishist denote a positive paradigm of relating through desire. In working through Freud’s *Fetishism* text, McCallum claims that the fetishist’s erotic interaction with the object is a tactic to fashion an autonomous subjectivity. The object–subject relationship is a paradigm that gives control back to the individual, as the fetish object becomes a vehicle to negate the anxiety and inferiority created by the perceived castration. As stated by Louise Kaplan, the “fetish is designed to reassure the boy that he has control” in the face of the castrative horror by functioning as “a combination of pragmatic and creative responses to the demands of [that] situation” (Kaplan quoted in McCallum 1999, 4). Though I am moving away from the castrative binary, these statements about fetishism’s use-value are significant. I find her emphasis on use, and particularly the enunciation of fetish as an agent for fashioning subjectivity, as a fitting vernacular for the research. Her “reading emphasizes that

¹⁴ Here, ‘existing erotic codes’ are interpreted as the normative codes and visual formulas established in heteronormative Western art historical discourse, where the feminine body is depicted as a vessel for desire instead of being an agent of desire. This passive framework is reinforced by a complex web of signifiers, symbols and codes, which mediates how we read woman and the erotic.

fetishism, far from being a marginal or extreme perversion, in fact is a central route to constructing sexual subjectivity” (McCallum 1999, 11).

These traits articulated by McCallum support Michel Foucault’s claims for the construction of counter-discourses through stigmatised identities. Michel Foucault’s concept of genealogy is “the position that discourse can only be understood by studying the institutional context of its production” (Kelly 2013, 6), this includes understanding the mechanisms of power that underlie its creation. In this paradigm, sexuality is understood as an artificial construct fashioned by the play of power upon our bodies and desires. A genealogical analysis will aim to not only uncover these power dynamics by uncovering “who [has been] speaking, [and] the positions and viewpoints from which they speak...” (Foucault 1980, 11) but also how these dominant voices have then shaped sexual identification. While these structures may appear oppressive in form they also offer a generative and subversive tool in constructing identity. As Sarah Mills has noted:

...it is in negation and play that identities are formed. Foucault suggests that it is possible to construct what he calls counter-discourses and counter identification, that is, individuals can take on board the stigmatised individualities, that they have been assigned, such as that of ‘perverse sexuality’ and revel in them rather than seeing them in negative terms. (Mills 2003, 91)

In this way, the revision and appropriation of certain fetish identifications can function as a site to assert one’s own subjectivity and agency. This active engagement with existing discourse is front and centre to my implementation of a Foucauldian lens, where the adoption of fetish tropes is illustrated with critical intent and acts to broaden the existing erotic codes instead of negating current ones.

In *Aesthetic Sexuality: A Literary History of Sodomasochism* (2013), Romana Byrne draws directly from Foucault’s assertions; she emphasises the “self-fashioning” potential of sexual practice as a strategy of choice, and she notes that “pleasure has [a] utility in its capacity to serve as a form of social communication and self-creation” (Byrne 2013, 4). Positioned between the nexus of aesthetic philosophy and sexual subjectivity, Byrne’s *Aesthetic Sexuality* is defined by the aesthetic value of sexual practice, the visual characteristics of its enactment and the pleasure this creates (2013,

4). In this dynamic, the individual is given precedence for their ability to choose and fashion their own evolving sexual subjectivity. This aesthetic agency, which forms the foundation of Byrne's philosophy, allows new ontological possibilities – the potential for women to be agents and create expanded erotic codes in the face of oppressive historical dialogues. In articulating the strategic dimensions of Aesthetic Sexuality and its relationship to fetish tropes, this research reorientates it as a site to expand the visual codes around women's pleasure in visual practice. The resulting method draws from my reflection on Rosemary Betterton's assertions for women's practice: women practitioners should be concerned with "ways of 'speaking' differently about women's [desire]" (1996, 7) by instigating "more [diverse] representations for women" (1996, 10).

These theorists function as the hinge for my critical revisions, as this study revises the vernacular around fetishism into an active paradigm: articulating fetishism in terms of a broader strategy that can then be constituted into a stratagem of specific characteristics – tactics. Working through these theorists' proposition for an agentive and rational fetishism directed my revision of Freud's psychoanalytic framework as a stratagem in creative practice. The writings of Louise Kaplan have informed how I developed my Fetish Stratagem via the isolation of characteristics in Freud's fetishism text.

In *Cultures of Fetishism* (2006), theorist Louise Kaplan proposes that fetishism can function as a strategy composed of five base principles. Kaplan foregrounds this analytic frame with an opening statement detailing one major principle, which is "the need to transform something unfamiliar and intangible into something familiar and tangible" (2006, 1). This guiding ethos mirrors Freud's disavowal and foregrounds the idea of trauma as the impetus for the fetish reaction, i.e., the unfamiliar trauma of castration transforms into the more familiar phallus, the memorial to itself. The transformation to familiar is never complete as the perceptions of have and have not co-exist, one never completely erasing the other, as, in Freud's terms, a compromise has been reached (Kaplan 2006, 1). This compromise creates an ambiguity not present in Kaplan's work. In the text, Kaplan categorises these principals based on characteristics identified in Freud's fetishism text. Kaplan is significant because of the way she has deconstructed it; her fetishism strategy can be understood as an analytical

tool, its guiding characteristics and mechanisms are re-evaluated as lenses through which certain cultural products can be analysed. Her discussion of the fetish strategy encompasses theories drawn both from fetishism as it is understood in primitive cultures and in her selection of fetish principles, as she states “[i]t applies to the religious fetish as well as to the sexual fetish” (Kaplan 2006, 5). The investigation of my tactics as outlined in the Magical Fetish chapter of this thesis details how I have implemented fetishism in the sexual and arcane phases of the research. Subsequently, Kaplan is significant as a theorist that creates a strategic vernacular in fetish discourse.

My use of the term stratagem as opposed to strategy signals a departure from Kaplan’s framework. This parting is necessary for three reasons: firstly, this study isolates the use of the Fetish Stratagem in contemporary female visual practice as opposed to Kaplan’s broader cultural usage of the term. Secondly, the tone of Kaplan’s strategy is inherently negative – her principles contain deadening, threatening, aggressive, controlling and destructive tendencies – much like the fetishists that she identifies. Thirdly, while Kaplan’s reading mirrors the characteristics of sexual fetishism, she continually states that the Fetish Strategy is outside the conventional sexual reading of fetishism, whereas my Fetish Stratagem is embedded in it. While both are of a military origin – denoting the effective use of tactics to achieve certain ends – there is a subtle distinction between these terms that has to be highlighted. The more common strategy (as used by Kaplan) functions as a plan devised to achieve a desired outcome, whereas a stratagem signals the use of unconventional tactics or subterfuge to achieve said outcome. It derives from the ancient Greek *strategema*. Wheeler, in *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery* (1988), defines this core difference by referring to early Greek literature by Frontinus. Wheeler notes the tone of Frontinus’ *strategemata* as “denot[ing] offensive and defensive trickery”, and that its use “repeatedly designate[s] acts of military” subterfuge in a way that strategy (*strategika*) does not (Wheeler 1988, 3).

The tone of this difference underscores my Fetish Stratagem and shapes the nature of the tactics I employ in its frame. In this study, the Fetish Stratagem is marked by vitality, humour and productive trickery – employing strategies of subversive re-enactment and appropriation. This focus on subterfuge through appropriation is pertinent when discussing the intersections of feminist thought and psychoanalysis. As

indicated in previous sections, the Fetish Stratagem emerges from a fruitful dialogue with Freud's theories and the subversive application of Freudian thought by female practitioners. It is both an analytical tool and a creative provocation.

Chapter 3: Creative Practice: Transition in the Studio

The artworks discussed previously were heavily reliant on the visual codes established in BDSM practice and fetish subcultures, utilising these visual languages as a means to problematise the phallic in Freudian discourse. Speaking to a spectrum of female sexual agency, the work looked at how women's desire was located in this phallic framework oscillating between passive and active positions. This line of enquiry was evident in my appropriation of penis imagery from BDSM culture and the dialogues created when these visual codes were located at the site of the female body, i.e. through costuming and the prosthetic use of the dildo harness. The phallus functioned as an analytical tool or strategy to inflate the contradictions and problematics of locating female agency in the existing bank of erotic codes established via fetishism. This focus on female agency guided my implementation of female fetishism as a method to critically and creatively subvert existing erotic codes and spoke of trepidation regarding broader cultural cues that direct passive articulations of female sexuality.

Through a series of reflections on the nature of the artworks being produced in this context, the isolation of fetishism to subcultural forms and a purely sexual lens became unproductively reiterative in that the mimicking of these visual formulas while done with critical intent was just reinscribing the phallic framework and not necessarily moving beyond it. At this point I appeared to be trapped in the same cyclical logic as Freud's fetishism – phallus as fetish, fetish as phallus – and this recurrence became reductive to the aims of the study, in that I could no longer see the potential of these visual codes to act as subversive tools in the inscription of feminine desire in the fetish framework. Ultimately, I had to 'drop that donger in the dirt' and acknowledge that the significance of my analysis of the phallic was in the insights it gave me in order to move beyond it. In these terms, the use of the phallic in this project has functioned as a transitional tool, and thinking through the phallus was a necessary subsidiary in constructing my Fetish Stratagem. As a result, the research project opened up to other points of reference, as I looked for evidence of the Fetish Stratagem in other cultural forms – in dialogue with, but removed from, the phallic and BDSM culture.

The observations outlined in this section focus on the creative outcomes that emerged after the phallic stage of practice and charts the early emergence of the Fetish Stratagem via the creative outcomes. Framed as a journey through the works, the section offers an analysis of the methods and materials used in a studio installation in 2014. This test installation titled *Studio Experiments* is discussed as a key moment of transition in the study. Accordingly, rather than reviewing completed works this section observes the creative and theoretical insights that emerged from playing with arrangement, material and formal elements as the subsidiary to the sculptures and mediated performances exhibited in *Sepulchre* (2015) and *Preaching to the Perverted* (2016) analysed in the later stages of this document.

3.1 STUDIO EXPERIMENTS

In my studio experiments I was exploring how a uniquely female fetishistic desire could be evoked through sculptural form, the work influenced by the absence of the female voice in Freud's *Fetishism* text. At this point in the research, I was investigating and contesting this lack through feminist critiques of Freud, the different methods fetishism could be implemented materially and the dichotomy of passive and active depictions. The creative analysis was informed by Claire Lambe's exhibition *LazyBoy* at Sarah Scout Projects, particularly her use of sculptural appropriation, simulation, materials that evoke the erotic body and her referral to sexual subcultures as evident in the work *Ladies Evening* (2012) (Figure 7). In these early experiments I was investigating the reclining female figure in different configurations, thinking through how these bodily cues inform representations of female sexual agency.



Figure 7: Claire Lambe, *Ladies Evening*, 2012. Plaster cast and gold tights

Informed by these fascinations, *Install H* comprised four sculptural arrangements made from ready-made and hand-crafted materials, two of which will be discussed at length. In *Object A (Andromeda Prototype)* (Figure 8) multiple material elements are brought together in a provisional arrangement. A length of copper tubing in the shape of a T is wedged between two rocks, the radiating angle of the tube braced by the stones' weight using balance and pressure. A suspension of white leather and brass buckling drapes over the horizontal bar, which in turn is affixed by brass rivets. The leather form appears garment-like, creating an allusion to wearability in the placement of the strapping and the contrived arrangement of holes in the lower belt threaded through the buckle. Initially, the object had been envisioned as a prop for a durational performance; the harness when strapped to the performer's body would allow the assemblage of copper and stone to be dragged through the space, the weight and texture of the stone etching into the surface of the floor creating a map of the performer's movements. This configuration was directed by two lines of theoretical enquiry, one being an investigation of performative gestures that explored the dichotomy of passive and active forms of feminine desire (here likening the passive desire to a real physical weight that restricts movement) and the second, an interest in material surrogates or simulations for the female body.



Figure 8: Anastasia Booth, *Object A (Andromeda Prototype)*, 2014. Leather, copper, stone, brass fittings.

Developed via the same ideas and material enquiry, *Object B (Andromeda Prototype)* (Figure 9) utilised a similar material logic; again the body is inferred by signifiers in its absence, conjured through the two plaster discs attached to a gold chain that suspends from a copper rail. This copper support emerges horizontally from the wall in a simple U shape. Draped over the copper bar, the gold chain is balanced by the weight of plaster elements suspended below. Created from an impression taken of my breast tips, these plaster circles are meticulous casts of the nipple and areola surface, minute detail is retained through the casting process – the valley and grooves of the nipple skin and the small shapely goose bumps encircling the areola. Imbedded into the nipple tips are brass rings; these rings act as both nipple piercing and anchor point for the gold chain. Both works relied on the copper as the anchoring point to support the precariousness of the suspension, the recurrent elements of white and gold in the

suspended elements – the gold of the chain and white of the plaster alongside the white leather strapping with the golden tone brass rivets and buckling – spoke to the body I was envisioning in these apparatus, i.e. the idealised white, female body. Playing with the erotic codes around white skin and golden hair, the idealised archetype of femininity iterated throughout Western art history.



Figure 9: Anastasia Booth, *Object B (Andromeda Prototype)*, 2014. Plaster, brass rings, 18ct gold.

My other material choices reflected a similar aniconic and sculptural language; the use of rocks was indicative of passivity and stasis reflected in their physical weight, their immovability. In their use, I was interpreting passive desire as a form of waiting, playing with this (in)action's textual similarity to the term weight. Conflating the resemblance of the two words, I considered how they were in dialogue; wait as a moment where you wait for another's action in order to act and weight as in a physical or restrictive presence that stops the ability to act. My use of leather, as an imitation of real mammalian skin, simulates human skin after the process of tanning and its use as strapping refers back to BDSM culture, thinking of the strapping as the form that

restricts, or is used to tie, the body, but also as a kind of body in its own right. Thinking through the use of plaster in similar terms, as a casting agent used in sculpture to cast the human figure, its surface is read as both skin and rock surface. Copper was used because of its relationship to touch; it tarnishes over time, especially when in contact with the skin. This suggests touch as both potentially damaging but also as offering the potential for renewal in the act of polishing. The sculptural logic reflected in these material cues reflected how I started to think of my sculptural practice in terms of a seductive materiality and as an embodiment of certain female personas.

While these material cues were in symbiosis with the particular constellation of theoretical and creative spaces I was exploring, the actions involved with the formal and compositional elements emerged from intuitive and performative processes. Instead of thinking of intuition as a guiding principle based on what I know to be true, I think of intuition as a kind of awareness of the object, in that being cognisant of its material truths you allow the forms a certain agency. This is guided by an inherent knowledge – learnt through practice – of what a materials' idiosyncrasies are and letting them drive the work. In this instance, being aware of the different textures, surfaces, weights and forms of the object dictated how they are placed in dialogue with each other. Allowing the slipping of the copper's smoothness against the texture of the rock to add to the precariousness of the angle, the inherent heaviness of the rocks acting as the plinth support, the placement of the nipple rings as both hook and piercing. These material elements function in the work as a performance, often the objects only emerging through a reiterative ritual of actions, adding and taking things away, moving forms, polishing and cleaning the surfaces, etc. The artist body is in constant performative dialogue with the objects being shaped; in this instance, the performance I had envisioned for *Object A* had already emerged through the making in the way I was arranging the forms, the weight of the rocks I had to drag around on the floor and my desire to get them into the right position.

The quality of the materials selected for these works reflected how I was exploring desire through materiality and experimenting with a range of sculptural simulations or fragments that stood in for the female body. The materials used to investigate these concerns – leather, metal, stone and glass – were selected due to their formal, material and textural qualities. Invested in the affective quality of these materials, I

experimented with how certain characteristics and textures form a relationship with the desiring body and erotic narrative. This seductive materiality mirrors how I draw from the visual codes in BDSM and other sexual practices in which objects, in the form of bindings, props and sexual aids, are in relationship with the body and play a key role as the conduits for the sexual scenario. My interest in these materials was inherently tactile; working with these arrays of surfaces I envisage their relationship to the body, their connection to the internal and external geographies of flesh. This tactility informed how I was intuitively working through my appropriation of certain BDSM discourses and the expressions of female desire that I was speaking to.

The focus on a suspended element in both works spoke to a range of representations that I was exploring at that time. The motif of the suspended female figure is recurrent in BDSM – in the rope suspension of Kinbaku, in the restrictive elements in bondage play and the wrack apparatuses that the body is strapped to. I was interested in how this estrangement of the body through the act of suspension reflected a range of problematic signifiers. On the one hand, my knowledge of these practices was from a space of agentive discourse, an agency found in agreeing to participate in these scenarios, and on the other, how the act of suspension functioned in regards to me, the participant (arousal in the act of confinement and, ultimately, sexual release). Yet, such dialogues are at odds to the representation of these acts in broader cultural discourse and how we interpret these acts when they are depicted in other visual languages (i.e. portrayals of chained women in historic paintings). A victim dialogue is evoked by the use of chains, with the restriction of form equating to a loss of freedom, and the literal inability to act becomes a metaphor for a woman's loss of agency in her environment. While thinking through these positions, I had begun to think about figures that were depicted in these terms in classical painting and how certain mythological archetypes informed them.

Alongside these emergent interests, I had begun to reflect on the broader issue that I was facing in the practice: that the visual codes I was appropriating from fetishism were read in particular and often problematic ways. While I understood that these acts derived from a sense of pleasure and agency that cannot necessarily be reconciled with the aggressive and dehumanising elements that the bound female body conjures, the two instead exist in conflict. While my stance is not necessarily unique, it is a

subjective one that draws from the position I hold in a sexual minority. Accordingly, the way I decode or read these visual languages – through a feminist lens and from a position of action – is not necessarily how they are commonly understood. By being aware of this conflict I was able to explore it as sculptural tension in my forms, evident in the types of arrangements I was recreating materially. Such conflict is pronounced in the nipple plates; the allusion to having a female body suspended by nipple piercings conjures a violent image at odds with the material delicacy of the sparse arrangement and the lustre of the metals used. Instead of depicting the nipple being pulled down by the weight of an assumed bodily mass, the nipples are pert, their erectness and the gooseflesh on the skin suggesting an arousal in the act. Similarly, the leather harnessing suspended from the radiating copper pole implies a usage, but perched between the rocks it is perilously unsteady and prone to slipping. Aware of these material divergences, I accentuated the pole's precariousness through the hanging of the leather harness, creating the appearance that a body dangling in space, suspended off the edge of the rocks. Playing with these visual dialogues signals how I had begun to work through the contentious visual languages in fetishism.

Ultimately, while these works greatly informed how I was reading materials in terms of embodiment and seductive material dialogues, I was fast becoming disillusioned by the work's propensity to be read primarily through a didactic Freudian theory as well as their identification solely within a subcultural frame. My previous reliance on the phallic as an analytical tool through which to view the sculptures started to function in contention with the dialogues I wanted to critique. This constellation of hesitations acted as the catalyst for self-reflection and the rearing of latent negative emotions that I had been feeling towards the practice. As a young female practitioner producing erotic works, I was implicated in the meaning of the work; the content frequently interpreted as a direct translation of my sexual interests. While not an inherent issue, this line of interpretation often led to invasive questions about my sexuality and inappropriate comments from potential buyers. I became concerned that the overt erotic content would always function as a limiting factor in the works' reception and would continue to be indexical for my erotic body. This phallic frustration and emotional upheaval came to a head as an emotional breakdown, resulting in a feeling of apathy towards the study. A timely intervention from my principal supervisor made me realise that my exploration of contemporary sexual fetishism was a self-imposed

limitation and that fetish discourse was a broad topic: its forms could be felt across different theoretical spaces. She proposed that I use the materials I had been working with in the studio as a platform for my new theoretical and material reconsiderations. This mediation started a period of self-reflexive contemplation and a reinvestment in alternative fetish frameworks.

Chapter 4: Magical Fetishism: Animism and Ritual

This chapter discusses a shift in the research scope, triggered by both the critical feedback to the artworks I was producing as well as the experience of field research carried out in the Freud Museum in London and in archaeological sites in Greece. The impetus for this shift in trajectory was fueled by my growing hesitation around the depiction of the feminine in fetishist subcultural practice and a desire for the work not to be solely located in these spaces. While still implementing a BDSM repertoire, these new investigations open up the Fetish Stratagem to a range of cultural discourse. This section discusses the theoretical lenses, critical analyses and research data that emerged via field research opportunities. These provide the primary context for the way in which my new understanding of Freudian fetishism is grounded in mythological motifs and certain female archetypes. It provides an analysis of data collected during the fieldwork conducted in January 2016 and focuses primarily on the dialogue between this new data and the existing theoretical foundation that had been informing my creative implementation of Freudian fetishism as a stratagem.

While Freud's phallic configuration is still significant to the later stages of this study, as it "brings together questions of knowledge, [sexuality] ... and desire" (McCallum 2010, xviii), its influence is limited due to Freud's fixation on fetishism's 'dark history'. This preoccupation is articulated by Freud's investment in the penis-come-phallus as the catalyst for all fetish interaction and his "psychoanalytical efforts ... to reveal precisely this past" (Böhme 2014, 314). As evidenced in this statement by Freud:

In every instance, the meaning and the purpose of the fetish turned out, in analysis, to be the same. It revealed itself so naturally and seemed to me so compelling that I am prepared to expect the same solution in all cases of fetishism. When now I announce that the fetish is a substitute for the penis... (Freud 1977, 346).

This search for its aetiology stemmed from a causative logic, a logic that saw the individual objects and mechanisms of fetishism as secondary to this phallic source narrative. This aetiological method has restricted the potential of fetishistic

mechanisms to be explored as a range of productive and generative cultural and artistic strategies, as McCallum notes, the “dominance of the penis-substitution definition gives fetishism a negative connotation that eclipses the potentially productive aspect of fetishism” (McCallum 1999, 4). This section of the study, while maintaining the tone of fetishism and a BDSM repertoire, breaks from this aetiological framework and its negative connotations, instead it looks to fetish characteristics as two generative tactical arrangements that sit in dialogue with ancient articulations of female agency. It considers how Freud’s psychoanalytic position has been directed by this referral to ancient narrative and previous ethnographic articulations, evidence for which becomes apparent in Freud’s study and the anecdotal narratives around his position as a collector. Additionally, this chapter discusses the work of Sarah Contos, Maria Loboda, Mary Beth Edelson, Betsy Damon, Tori Wraanes and Angelica Mesiti, whose works make apparent the productive intersections between fetishism, the tactical and the mythological.

The observations progress from Freud’s study in the Freud Museum (London) to the source of many of Freud’s artefacts: archaeological sites in Athens and Delphi. These observations no longer draw solely from Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical symptoms, but start to unpack the influence of object-fetishism’s earlier magical history on my thinking. This focus has been elicited not only by the growing inadequacy of Freud’s paradigm but also by deliberations on how I implement fetishism materially in the practice. Consequently, Freud’s psychoanalytical discourse alone could no longer account for the shifts taking place in the creative practice, including this branching out into arcane imagery and women’s ritual practice. While this has resulted in a less didactic engagement with fetishism – allowing more poetic and expansive interrogations of passive female desire – it has also spurred the revision of other theoretical parameters. These deviations reflect how the research is refined through critical approaches to masculinist and hegemonic portrayals of female desire located in practice. What follows is a revision of the research trajectory, incorporating a broader awareness of mythology’s influence on Freud’s thinking and fetishism’s ethnographic history.

4.1 FREUD'S STUDY: GREECE, GODDESSES AND MAGIC

In this section, my investigation of the key mythological figures will be discussed in regards to Freud's study – as a key space of dialogue between Freud and I – and the mythological frameworks that informed his fetish theory. These observations will detail a research trip undertaken to Freud's studio and the key female mythological figures that I found there. At the Freud Museum (London), I had personal access to private documents and the objects in Freud's study, while under the supervision of curator Bryony Davis. Significant outcomes emerged from this research. I had been previously aware of the influence that Greek mythic figures had on Freud's work on psychosexual development, (Oedipus complex) it was only upon reflection at his work space that the significance of these narrative archetypes became apparent.

The nature of the enquiry then took two distinct paths: I analysed if the referral to mythic narrative structures had any grounding in how Freud structured his Fetishism text or whether any of these mythological tropes were evident in the range of fetish's characteristics. If fetishism lacked female agency, then were there other theoretical and physical spaces associated with Freud where a sense of female agency articulated itself? Whereas an agentive female figure had been absent from Freud's fetishism text, his study space had an abundance of strong mythic women. The presence of these women in Freud's workroom – a space of contemplation for Freud – stood in stark contrast to the absence of women in his psychoanalytical analysis. Observing the abundance of female figures in Freud's collection of archaeological artefacts and objets d'art revealed this dissonance between the presence and absence of women's voices in his texts.

This realisation refined and further developed the application of Freudian theory in regards to strategic reenactment and the passive dialogues being interrogated via the creative practice. The visit contributed to the development of new creative analysis enriched by Freud's anthropological objects and their spatial arrangement in the room. My discussions with Bryony Davis revealed unexplored bodies of theory and created a dialogue between feminist theorist Janine Burke and the research. Burke had previously curated an exhibition at the museum. This exhibition and her book *The Gods of Freud* became highly relevant to the later stages of the research. Burke

articulates the contradiction inherent in Freud's study, where the abundance of female depiction evident in his archaeological objects is at odds with the masculine scope of his writing. She states:

The collection highlights this contradictory attitude towards women. Freud was surrounded by women in his home, his practice and his professional life, as well as in the collection with its images of Isis, Athena, Artemis and Venus. But in Freud's version of the origins of religion and the development of civilisation, women's power was erased: males dominated and their battles for supremacy brought society into being. His treasured goddesses were unable to influence his opinion (Burke 2016, 7).

In his study there is abundant evidence of the significance that these 'treasured goddesses' held for Freud. One anecdotal account that Davis detailed was the moment when Freud moved from Vienna to London. He had already procured many of the archaeological objects in the collection at that time. Preparing to move the collection, Freud initially smuggled out only three favourite objects, among them a small Roman bronze figure of Athena in a pose reminiscent of classical Greek sculpture (Figure 10). She is depicted holding a spear, and her breastplate features the decapitated head of the Gorgon Medusa (an apotropaic symbol). This figure was so significant to Freud that his intention in moving it first was to safeguard it before all others and to pave the way for his future journey to London. When installing the collection – which did arrive safely in London – Athena took pride of place on his desk amongst his pantheon of gods. As Davis took pains to point out, "he didn't care if the rest of the collection was lost as long as the figure of Athena made it" (Personal interview, January 21, 2016).



Figure 10: Athena on Freud's Writing Desk, Roman bronze, 1st century AD, The Freud Museum, London, 2016.

This first visit to the Freud Museum lead to a consideration of how Freud's personal compulsion to collect was evidence of his own fetishistic tendencies, by Freud's own admission, "I must always have an object to love" (Freud quoted in Burke 2016, 2). In addition to this small figure of Athena (Figure 10), featured in the centre of the image), the other object that stood out for me was a small terracotta figure of Baubo reclining with legs spread (Figure 11) and displaying exposed genitalia, her right hand playfully gesturing towards her folds. Freud's discussion of Baubo, the feminine trickster of Greek myth, featured in his essay, *A Mythological Parallel to a Visual Obsession* (1916). He discusses the significance of Baubo and the ancient power evident in the display of female genitals. The humour he locates in these narratives is at odds with

the derogatory tone he uses in his *Fetishism* essay (Bonfante 2008, 2-9). The exposure of the genitals as erotic jest or apotropaic ritual influenced the shift that took place in the practice and in my considerations of castration as a performed gesture that can subsequently make a mockery of this much feared condition. As my discussion of the creative practice in Chapter 5 will describe, this performative aspect of Baubo is central to performative re-enactments of female Goddess personas. My return visit to the museum provided me with access to documentation that considered how Freud's relationship to the space and the objects had influenced his theories, including the furniture and how he orientated himself in the space. What became apparent on this visit was the centrality of Freud's tableau of gods and goddesses to his own processes of analysis through their positioning in the space (Figure 10). As he conducted consultations with patients, the fetishistic figures were literally his paradigm of thought.



Figure 11: Baubo on a shelf in Freud's study, Egyptian (Hellenistic) terracotta, 332 - 30 BC, The Freud Museum, London, 2016.

At the British Museum I documented classical objects from Greece, including a Greek vase with a narrative depiction of Andromeda (Figure 12). Done in the black and red figure style of classical Greek pottery, the vase depicts Andromeda in preparation to be tied to the cliff face; two attendants support her under her arms. The figure of Andromeda appears despondent and is surrounded by bridal gifts of small toiletries, an indication of her status and wealth. I had been drawn to Andromeda through her association with Medusa, and Freud's extensive writings on the connections between Medusa, phallic envy and the *vagina dentata*. Andromeda alludes to bondage narratives through her position as the chained woman, her restriction mirroring the passivity I had been in dialogue with in Freud's fetishism text. The materials collected while at the museum – notes, sketches, photographic documentation and sound recordings – contributed valuable visual material to the creative analysis. This preliminary documentation augmented the material experimentation in the practice by providing mythological motifs, goddess imagery and historical objects as formal and conceptual anchors.



Figure 12: Andromeda, Red-figure hydria, Athens, Clay, 440 BC, The British Museum, London, 2016.

My fieldwork in Athens, including my site visits to temples, archaeological digs, museums and historical buildings, deepened my understanding of the mythological material I work with and its relationship to contemporary concerns regarding femininity. This was most pronounced at Delphi, and the temple of Apollo, where I began to explore the historical narratives surrounding the oracles of Delphi and their subsequent abuse. Scholars have stated that the practices around their divinations could be interpreted as abusive and were influenced by the male control of religious practice and the monetary gains through votive offerings. Here I was fascinated by the contradiction of popular interpretations of the Delphi Oracle in contrast to their actual position in the temple. Whereas in popular imagination the oracles are portrayed as empowered feminine mystics, evidence suggests that they were drugged and enslaved (Flower 2008, 136). This contradiction mirrored in many ways the narratives of restraint that had bedeviled my earlier research regarding fetishism, and as a consequence provided me with a rich seam of visual and poetic stimuli. How could my work escape the captivity of the Delphic oracle while maintaining its insights? My audio and textual reflections on the experience primed my considerations on the positioning of women in religious and mythological narratives and how sexuality framed or limited these positions.

These observations, the influence of anthropological notions of fetishism on Freud and the significance of the deific female personas present in his study, greatly altered the tone of my *Fetish Stratagem* and the nature of the tactics I employ in its frame. Below I will detail the two tactics that emerged through this dialogue with Freudian fetishism and anthropology; these tactical engagements are not limited by one term but instead are detailed as a grouping of reciprocal and interleaved creative processes, fetish attributes (symptoms) and theoretical lenses. The outcome of this tactical approach is clearly evidenced in the practices of contemporary female practitioners and my artworks *Teresa*, *Andromeda*, *Portrait of Baubo*, *Portrait of Scylla* and *Portrait of Artemis*, which will be discussed at length in the *Creative Practice Final: Preaching to the Perverted* section.

4.2 TACTIC: MATERIAL, EMBODIMENT AND ANIMISTIC INSCRIPTION

This tactical arrangement *Material, Embodiment and Animistic Inscription* is grounded in fetish's animistic model where the attribution of deific life and personhood onto an object imparts agency and autonomy through desire. Fetishism's evocation as a sexual perversion occurred in 1880, late in the discourse's history (McCallum 1999, 1). Previously, it had already been evoked in anthropological circles as "the worship of mere earthly, material objects to which supernatural powers had been superstitiously attributed" (Pels 2000, 57). In *Cultures of Fetishism* Kaplan lists the diverse irrational devotions that have been attributed to the term:

1. The belief and use of magical fetishes – natural objects such as feathers, or artificial objects such as wooden carvings believed to have the power to protect its owner because of animation of the spirit embodied in the object.
2. The displacement of erotic interest onto an object, such as a shoe or a part of the body, such as a foot.
3. A devotion to a religion or to religious and cultural practices marked by the use of magical fetishes (Kaplan 2006, 1).

Drawing from this intertwined magical and sexual etymology, fetishism is grounded in the animistic inscription of power projected onto objects. Freud's psychoanalytical position drew on anthropological studies of totemic and religious object practices. Hartmut Böhme, in *Fetishism and Culture: A Different Theory of Modernity*, notes Freud's familiarity with ethnography, and sees evidence of this influence in the symptomatic "spectrum of [fetish's] sexual behaviour ... [including] the worship of sacred objects" (2014, 296). This relationship is best articulated in Böhme's quotation of Freud,

...fetishism is an erotic and semiotic "aberrance" from the proper sexual object. This is "substituted" by and "attached" to "some part of the body [...] which is in general inappropriate for sexual purposes [...] or some inanimate object", so that the fetish "becomes detached itself from a particular individual" (SE VII, 153-154) and becomes the sole authority (the tyrannical in Binet). Freud evaluates this as a sign of "weakness in judgement", which may remind one of Africa: "Such substitutes are with some justice likened to the fetishes in which savages believe their gods are embodied." (2014, 317)

This final comment by Freud affirms the link between the fetish apparatus and processes of embodiment evident in early religion. It also provokes an inherent contradiction: the object of arousal attains autonomy, yet is still subsumed by the influencing power of that subject. In gaining an agentive autonomy, the object is never truly isolated from the rituals, iconography and divine bodies that gave birth to it. Instead of a direct departure, this process of material translation from divine association to material autonomy is cyclic in nature, the material functioning as an autonomous embodiment because it is indexical to the original.

Chris Clarke, in his essay *Animism*, “looks at how we imbue inert objects with lifelike attributes or meanings, while at the same time allowing those items to affect and alter our own existences” (2010, 34). From his perspective, animism denotes an agency of things, the same sentience denoted to “deified material objects” (Pietz 2000, 54). Historically, a range of materials comprised sacred objects – small tokens, figures, natural forms and wearable objects – which were rarefied to specific cultural, subjective and religious contexts. In *Art, Agency and Living Presence from the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* Caroline van Eck quotes from *Du culte des dieux fétiche* by Charles De Brosses in which he introduces the term *fétiche* to denote this attribution of agency onto plants, animals and objects, which were particular to many forms of early worship (Eck 2015, 107). In this discussion, Eck foregrounds De Brosses analysis of primitive Greek religious sculpture as significant; instead of artistic likeness fuelling the attribution of divine life he posits that it was the worshipper’s desire and fear that imparted agency. This animistic desire occurs as a result of the materials embodying the power of that persona (Eck 2015, 108). With desire acting as the impetus for this engagement, De Brosses “uses the terms ‘*metaphore*’ and ‘*figurer*’ [for this attribution of volition], which is interesting because it suggests that we should think of this process as akin to creative process...” (Eck 2015, 107).

De Brosses linking of desire and creativity is integral to my understanding of how animism operates through seductive materiality in Freudian discourse, arousal acting as the conduit for the fetishist’s animistic inscription. This is evident in Freud’s vernacular: in his mention of fixation, sexual excitation and in his investment in the fetish object as having an innate power over the fetishist (Freud 1977, 345–358). When recounting acts of fetishism, Freud notes the material and surface qualities that are key

to the fetishist's arousal; of note is the partial nature of this desiring lens, the object of the fetish when viewed is abstracted or isolated from the whole, yet it remains indexical to it (like the phallus to the mother). This isolation creates a fixation on the material peculiarities and formal attributes of the isolated object/surface; like the luminous shine of the *Glanz auf der Nase* or the textured pubic mound in Freud's text (Freud 1977, 345-358). Originating in a paradigm of anthropological fetishism, this vernacular echoes the embodying traits of primitive worship where aniconic objects are materials animated by divine spirit. Here the term aniconic is significant as it breaks with the representational properties of votive figures, instead the natural formations or inherent material properties are vehicles for agency and deific embodiment (Krishan 1996, 1). Of import to my sculptural investigations is the representational dynamic that this establishes, materials 'embody without bodies'. This process of deific embodiment is examined through sculptural process and sits in conversation with the sensuous qualities of my BDSM repertoire.

While Freud foregrounds sight and the gaze as key to the fetish interaction, there is a persistent allusion to the sensual and tactile in his *Fetishism* text, articulated via the engagement between object and desiring body. This, the ritualised labour of fetishism, is actualised by repeated physical gestures and erotic process, like *frottage*, which is the incessant rubbing at surfaces to attain sexual gratification. In the studio the use of repetitious action in constructing the sculptures is mimetic to these gestures. In these terms, the modes of production – hammering of metal sheet and the repeated polishing of surfaces – builds a relationship to erotic process. Due to this material and erotic rendering, the sculptures go through the same fetishising translation as the fetish object. Such processual interactions are motivated by a desire to attribute autonomy; as the fetishist-artist I ascribe agency to the form. This relation between labour and materiality is in dialogue with the 'deities' that the sculptures embody, *Andromeda* and *Teresa*. Likened to the ritual attribution of personhood through deific embodiment, these processes inscribe the sculpture with an aspect of the persona by gesturing towards the actions and erotic dialogues located in their narratives. In this interaction, a relationship is built between the figure of enquiry and the artist as proxy. This enquiry into the artist as proxy is made apparent through both the creative analysis and resulting studio experiments detailed in the later sections of this thesis.

This tactical arrangement is based in an interleaved conversation between animistic modes of production and interpretation. Through sculptural practice, I explore how this animistic model manifests in terms of embodiment and agency. In the following two analyses of works by contemporary women artists I discuss how these embodied modes are deployed strategically as vehicles for female perspectives and desire that complicate the codes iterating passive feminine dialectics. The following case studies of Maria Loboda and Sarah Contos evidence how the tactical arrangement *Material, Embodiment and Animistic Inscription* functions in regards to seductive materiality and the translation of desire through materials, both strategies interpreted as agentive rituals of animistic translation. In *Creative Practice Final: Preaching to the Perverted* this paradigm is investigated via a dialogue with the mythological motifs in Freud's study and through a material framework of embodiment without bodies.

4.2.1 CASE STUDY: MARIA LOBODA

Maria Loboda's sculptural practice mines ancient narrative and witchcraft sensibilities to create sculptural objects. Likened to the fetish object or artefact, her forms are indexical fragments of a greater whole – whether a historical event, mythological narrative or subject. The way she uses these objects as poetic material quotations for the cultural dialogues and personas that she analyses is influential to my tactical aniconic approach. While not always erotic or directly speaking to female sexuality, Loboda actively questions the nature of power and through a vast array of interpretations and symbols, the tension between opposing views and desires (Viscont 2015, para 2). The materials Laboda uses are rich and evocative, with inherent surface qualities being indexical to the cultural discourses being appropriated. This investigation of power and occult themes, as well as Laboda's treatment of the object as an embodied vehicle for these narratives, speak for the tactical implications of her work.

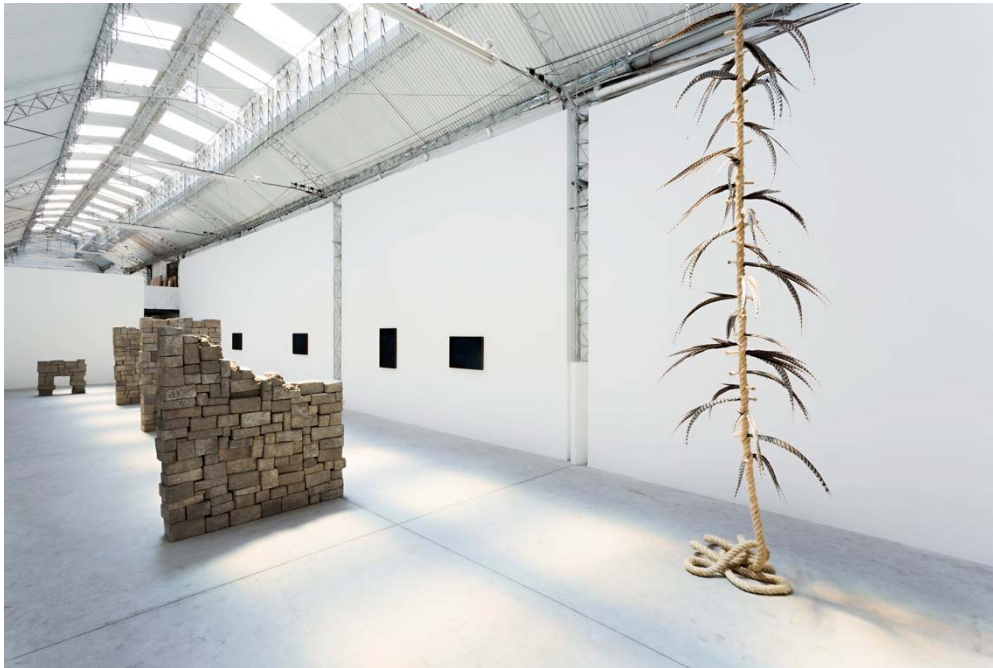


Figure 13: Maria Loboda, *Witch's Ladder*, 2015. Rope and feathers.

In her work *Witch's Ladder* (2015) (Figure 13) Loboda reconceptualises the witch's ladder as an embodiment of Persephone's journey to the underworld. The witch's ladder is a ritual object used in pagan spell casting, in its traditional usage the noosed rope hangs from the ceiling and a range of natural materials – bones, branches and fur – are threaded throughout. The amount of ascending objects correlates to the number

of spells woven into the object. In Loboda's case the threaded components are limited to bird feathers bound in string stabbed through the fibres of the suspended rope, their alternating descent mirrors the rungs of a ladder. While the term ladder implicates the functionality of the feathered steps their material delicacy undermines this purpose, instead the notion of ascent and descent is related to the liminal space between the world of the living and the world of the dead (Viscont 2015, para 1). Loboda relates this passage between worlds to the narrative of Persephone and her cyclic movement between the world of the living and the underworld, in the Greek myth. Feathers and their associative links to birds speak to Persephone's iconography, as birds and talking parrots are interpreted as her symbols. These material narratives, which weave between the vernacular of the witch's ladder and Persephone's symbolic associations, direct the work as a reconsideration of women's ritual practice and the dialogues of sexual limitation that punctuate women's alterity.

Subterfuge animates Loboda's aniconic sculptures, particularly her object *Curious And Cold Epicurean Young Ladies* (2011) (Figure 14). A platinum coated flask hangs from a chain attached to the ceiling, the ornamental flask recalling a pocket watch or ladies compact. This flask contains helium, a volatile compound that explodes when in contact with oxygen and the catalyst platinum. What is assumed to be a discrete decorative object is actually a mini bomb. This bomb is an embodiment of the character Anna from *Fathers and Children* (1862) by Ivan Turgenev. In the book, Anna rejects the protagonist; this action functions as the catalyst that triggers the accelerating events in the narrative. Loboda's unassuming bomb mimes the explosive results of Anna's actions (Neves 2011, para 2). Epicureanism is a system of philosophy based on the Greek scholar Epicurus; it is concerned with the nature of living, and pleasure as the ultimate good. The attainment of this pleasure was found through living modestly and limiting one's desires. The juxtaposition of the luminous material of the flask, its chemical compounds constituting its explosive potential and the body of philosophy recalled by the title speaks to the problems of female desire, and yet subversively resists notions of restriction and restraint.



Figure 14: Maria Loboda, *Curious and Cold Epicurean Young Ladies*, 2011. Hydrogen, oxygen, platinum.

In these two sculptures the use of embodiment and delicate materials is punctuated by the underhanded or subversive nature of the dialogues they depict. Their “aesthetic appeal: [is] like the Siren song, beauty in these pieces has the objective of luring observers into the potentially lethal realms where they actually take place, functioning, in the artists’ words, “as a vessel for more sinister objectives” (Viscont 2015, para 4). Similarly, these material links between the aesthetic allure of the object vs. its position as a vehicle for subversive reconceptualising is pertinent when considering how seductive materiality functions in the fetish tactic. The surface qualities that seduce through their lustre and texture also function as a poetic vernacular, which as an embodiment of *Andromeda* and *Teresa* complicate and diversify the codes that iterate their limited sexuality. Loboda’s works have influenced my approach to historic narrative, alongside how appropriative and embodying methods function to attribute agency to the object. Loboda’s austere arrangement is echoed in the installation of my works, the sparseness of the exhibition, the white wall encompassing the objects, allows the delicate material richness to stand front and centre.

4.2.2 CASE STUDY: SARAH CONTOS



Figure 15: Sarah Contos, *Future Primitive*, 2013. Various materials.

Sarah Contos’ sculptural assemblages employ embodiment and sensual inscription to investigate personal desire and its disenchantments. For the exhibition *Future Primitive* (2013) (Figure 15) Contos assembled a tableau of sculptural objects. Disfigured plaster masks sit atop bodies of engorged material forms and cinder block totem poles. Bulbous teardrops of fabric hang in a suggestive parody of breast and genitalia. Fusing craft approaches with a primitive sensibility, her assembly of idols are reminiscent of small Neolithic goddess tokens – androgynous bodies made up of over-accentuated genitals and barely rendered faces. Through personal imprinting, these idols take on the form of individual figureheads, becoming a vehicle to convey an agentive position as Contos explores her “interest in the sensual, the erotic, the sexual fetish ... and heartbreak” (Contos 2015, 22).

Wendy Steiner, in her book *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an Age of Fundamentalism*, discusses how benign and seemingly innocent objects recall the erotic body, enacting “pleasure through symbolism and substitution” (Steiner 1995, 92). This is inherent to Contos’ forms; while not overtly explicit there is eroticism to her objects through “the incongruities of materials” (Klein 2007, 101) and an

ambiguity that has suggestive potency. Contos' background in theatre influences her approaches to her practice, as "embellishment, trickery and illusion so essential to the creation of the façade in theatre" (Project Space 2013) become integral to her material animisms. The "installation is presented as a kind of theatrical tableaux" (Project Space 2013) moving between the abstract and the figurative, recognition and misrecognition, familiarity and alienation the ambiguities in the objects take on the "status of simulacra [that are] polymorphous with perverse possibilities" (Cashell 2009, 8).

Contos describes her material strategy as a "mono-no-aware approach" (Alaska Projects 2013), a Japanese term that invests in the inherent "pathos of things" and our "sympathetic identification" (Saito quoted in Higgins 2008, 115) with those things. Investing in the object's awareness Contos imbues her sculptural idols with an inherent sentience and resulting power. It is through this inscription that we access the fetishistic method that underpins her approach, her animistic mono-no-aware(ness). In an interview with *Das Platforms Contemporary Art*, Contos states that this tactic is built around individual and intimate dialogues, as she infuses power by giving the "object a part of myself" (2013). This personal rhetoric animates all her objects, as they become vehicles for autobiographical narratives where even the phallic becomes an idol to "heartbreak and relationship issues" (Contos 2015, 22). By marrying this animism with eroticism and the personal, Contos works in a style reminiscent of the Goddess art being produced in the 1970s. Jennie Klein in her essay *Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s*, notes that specific Neolithic imagery was adopted by female visual artists to broaden and disrupt the limited images of women's desire created through male-centred ideological structures (2009, 593). The subversive potential of this imagery was tied to Goddess worship, a theology that emphasised specific female deities as personifications of women's culture and women's power, which were evoked in contestation to the limited portrayals of femininity in prevalent patriarchal doctrines (i.e. Christianity). In these practices, anthropological artefacts, including "small, anthropomorphic sculptures ... [gave] artists an already existing bank of nonpatriarchal images to tap into" (Klein 2012, 17). Frequently, this imagery was employed in visual practice alongside authorial dialogues as a method for self-assertion and to question the fluctuating discourses that compose [female] identity (Cottingham 2002, 2). This animism is at the core of Freud's fetishism text, as objects

become embodied, the partial indexical to the whole being. In the case of Contos, this game of animism and ambiguity becomes an erotically charged material strategy. The inclusion of this case study at the end of tactic one signals how I was reading Contos' work as a transitional space between the sculptural objects and performative videos. The influence of Contos' aesthetic is located in her alignment of BDSM imagery and ancient symbology; the aesthetic of her materials informing the formation of the costuming used in my performances.

These case studies evidence how the tactical arrangement *Material, Embodiment and Animistic Inscription* functions in regards to seductive materiality and the translation of desire through materials. The above text explores how this tactic functions as an agentive processes of animistic translation, which imparts agency to the original subject by constructing aniconic embodiments. These are indexical to the codes that punctuate their cultural portrayals. Such methods are conceptualised through modes of fetishistic translation and labour, and are utilised to complicate the depiction of female sexual passivity.

4.3 TACTIC: RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE, CASTRATION AND APPENDAGES

This tactical arrangement *Ritual and Performance, Castration and Appendages* explores the agentive potential of ritual acts in creative practice, in conversation with Freudian notions of castration and genital fright. Female practitioners in the 1970s embraced ritual as a performative medium in order to diversify representations of femininity. Ritualistic methods are marked by a referral to ancient imagery and practices as well as to a past matriarchal culture, in which “nostalgia and primitivism are deployed strategically ... to challenge patriarchal limitations placed on women’s bodies” (Klein 2009, 593). This challenge was framed as a diversification of codes, as “women’s lives, psyches and sexualities were positively multiple, and that the release of this multiplicity [through ritual] was a political act” (Lippard in Edelson 1980, 6).

Stanley J. Tambiah notes the implications of ritual and performative action in fetish discourse. Drawing from anthropological terms, Tambiah aligns ritual with its magical invocation but “argued that magic acts should be interpreted as performative acts rather than judged on the basis of scientific verification” (Tambiah 1973, 199). As performative acts Tambiah “interprets magic ritual as engaging with objectives of ‘persuasion’, ‘conceptualisation’ and ‘expansion of meaning’” (1973, 219). Christopher Braddock explains Tambiah’s approach:

Tambiah develops an understanding of so-called primitive thinking in ritual as underpinned by a theory of *performatives* in an understanding of the *agency* of magic. In other words, it becomes a question of what the ‘performativity’, which is the practice of magic, *does*. This, therefore, allows an application of the theories of magic to coincide with theories that privilege the artwork as a process (2013).

Drawing from this agency of ritual, this way of framing ritual as a theory of performatives, aligned with the processes of making art, greatly informed the performance outcomes. In the following sections I discuss how ritual and performance function in the practice with a detour through Freudian principles of castration and their consequences for women. The adoption of performative castration as a ritual of amelioration is located in the practices of contemporary practitioners. Through ritualised gestures and performances we are offered extended visual languages for the depiction of passive female sexuality. As discussed in Chapter 5, in the *Creative*

Practice Final: Preaching to the Perverted, these vocabularies have been central to the development of the study's video and performative outcomes.

4.3.1 CASTRATION AND GENITAL MOBILITY

By highlighting Freud's relationship to anthropology we can alter our understanding of fetish characteristics. The questioning of Freud's castration complex has taken many forms across psychoanalysis, feminism and philosophy. This chapter will firstly offer a textual analysis of Freud's castration complex drawing on his fetishism study. The discussion will next outline a range of revisions of this study produced by feminist theory. While these revisions often come from a position of dissent, this project playfully subverts this framework. Instead this section refutes castration as the linchpin of psychoanalytic trauma and questions how, as a humorous gesture located in creative practice, can some use come from the castration complex? Through this strategic framing, can it offer positive paradigms or alternative strategies around representations of female agency in contemporary artistic practice? I will assert how new understandings or applications of the castration complex in fetishism can be developed by being in dialogue with Freud's account through his relationship to anthropology. This is achieved through a consideration of his studio – and the ancient objects and symbols that he collected and discussed. This section will explore a series of theoretical positions, setting out the ambiguities, complexities and contradictions in attempting to untangle the position of femininity in regards to castration.

In *Fetishism*, Freud suggested that the trigger for any (and all) fetish interaction originated from a psychical trauma “the fright of castration” (Freud 1977, 348). As previously described in my overview of Freud's fetish ontology, the female genitals are denaturalised, functioning as a site of horror. In the text, this fright of castration occurs for multiple interconnecting reasons. Firstly, in the boy's terms, he and his mother are physically alike and prior to the vulvic glance he had endowed her with an imagined phallic member. As Freud elaborates, in the boy's “mind the woman *has* got a penis” (Freud 1977, 348) and when “the longed-for sight of the female member” is not realised, it has psychical consequences. Secondly, there is the assumption in Freud's text that the fetishist (boy) cannot perceive the vulva as anatomically distinct. Instead the glance at the pubic mound – with its missing member – rebounds as a

castrative threat against his penis. While, one can follow Freud's reasoning up to a certain point and assume that yes, a fright may occur if the boy confused the absence of a penis as a physical deformity (castration), it still does not account for the impression that Freud creates "that there is something innately and essentially horrifying about the female genitals" (Kaplan 1991, 46). As a result, this fright influences the tone in Freud's writing, with its denigrate language of horror and disgust in reference to female genitals. Reviewing the text, recurrent descriptions of unwelcome perception, uncanny, traumatic, horror and fright are all used in reference to female genitalia (Freud 1977, 345–350). Instead of reading this aversion on a case-by-case basis, Freud goes a step further and institutes the fright of the pubic mound as an (almost) universal principle, in saying there is "an aversion, which is never absent in any fetishist, to the real female genitals" (1977, 346). It takes on the power of a "*stigma indelebile*" – an ineffaceable shame. In these terms, the castration is not only universal, it is obstinate, a spectre haunting the geography of the vulva wherever it is witnessed.

The binary of phallic as against castrated is complicated when Freud introduces genital ambiguity through his analysis of the case of a man "whose fetish was an athletic support-belt ... this piece of clothing covered up the genitals entirely and concealed the distinction between them" (Freud 1977, 347). This occurrence of the athletic sports belt as genital covering mirrors the structure and formal arrangement of the leather dildo harness. Whereas in my practice, previous investigations of the harness focused on its position as a dildo support, shifted to the notion of the dildo harness as a genital obstruction, which creates ambiguity¹⁵. Concurrently, this observation of the dildo opened up the form to a range of interpretations; these included a consideration of the discursive mobility of the genitals through concealment and how sexual appendages are inferred through materials on other sites of the body. Instead of redefining the phallic in the creative practice, I scrutinised the other visual narratives occurring in regards to the genitals: one, the fright of the pubic mound; and, two, the sexual heightening and potential genital ambiguity created through the covering of the genitals – an example indicated by Freud's case study involving the athletic sports belt.

¹⁵ As first observed with my interaction with Andrea.

The value of these observations suggested more complex models and led me to explore the characters I observed in Freud's studio. Like my analysis of Teresa and Andromeda, I drew out narrative aspects that were in dialogue with my developing analysis of fetish characteristics. For example, the narrative of Baubo is explored due to the overt use of vulvic fright. As a celebratory and demon repelling act, the characters Scylla and Artemis are important for the authority located in their monstrous appendages, which either transform or multiply the genitals to humorous and aggressively willful effect.

The tactical use of these characters in my artistic practice is orchestrated through BDSM costuming and re-enactment used as a strategy of resistance and as a mode to deconstruct and then to reconceptualise depictions of sexual agency. This is achieved through the parody of BDSM practice utilised as a humorous distortion of the existing codes that punctuate their ancient depictions. In the spirit of Jayne Wark, these performances use "the power of humour to be both defiant and offensively subversive" (2006, 160). This narrative of comic performance is grounded in multiple anthropological dialogues, especially in key Greek mythological figures and their associated rituals: where a genital form – like a large Priapus – is central to the gestures located in the myth, or the ritualised display of genitals is utilised to achieve a desired effect. As seen in a figure like Baubo, the subversiveness of Baubo is her "reduction to an obscene spectacle" (Olender 1990, 90) because she uses her genitals to evoke laughter. My previous interest in Freud's discussions of the inherent humour of these ancient representations helped to complicate castration and to bolster my exploration of this tactical arrangement through video and performance. I became fascinated by the dialogue around the vulvic fright, the humorous depiction of the genitals in fetishism, and how both could be reimagined as an agentive ritual through recourse to strategic essentialism.

4.3.2 STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM: RITUAL GESTURES AND AGENCY

Both of these lines of enquiry have been influenced by the ethos of female performance practice in the 1970s that appropriated the tropes and gestures of ancient ritual. Situated between body art, performance, feminism and women's spirituality, the aim of these practitioners was to disrupt the ideological limitations placed on the female body by means of an appropriation of female spiritual practice. In employing ritualistic

methods, these artists sought to reference mysticism, ancient goddess iconography, pagan practices, witchcraft and Palaeolithic sensibilities in the hope of evoking a matriarchal lineage. While critical feminist theorists addressed this aspect of performative practice at the time, they dismissed such portrayals as essentialist and reductive. In the 1980s, theorist Diana Fuss returned to these arguments, disputing these negative readings and asserting instead the critical potential of a strategically employed essentialism. Following Fuss's re-evaluation, this section considers how ritualised strategic essentialism is being revived and deployed in contemporary artistic practice as a humorous or poetic gesture denoting subversive agency.

To explain this strategic essentialism, I will chart the lineage of this practice, starting with a brief analysis of two earlier performance works: the *Grapceva Neolithic Cave Series: See for Yourself* by Mary Beth Edelson (Figure 16) and *The 700 Year Old Woman* by Betsy Damon (Figure 17). I will then locate this ethos of practice in works by contemporary practitioners Tori Wraanes and Angelic Mesiti, and, in my later discussions in Chapter 5, on my video performance piece *The Portrait of Baubo, The Portrait of Scylla and The Portrait of Artemis*.



Figure 16: Mary Beth Edelson, *Grapceva Neolithic cave series: See for Yourself*, 1977, Silver gelatin print

In 1977, Mary Beth Edelson visited the Neolithic Goddess Cave at Grapceva on Hvar Island in Yugoslavia. There she performed a series of small ritual performances collectively titled *Grapceva Neolithic Cave Series: See for Yourself* (Figure 16). In the Great Goddess Issue of *Heresies Magazine* (1978), documentation of the performance shows a seated Edelson in a vaulted cave, the womb-like structure framing the artist within the textures of stone. Illuminated by a ring of candles, Edelson's naked body radiates light, while exposures from the camera create ghostly apparitions that shadow the artist. Accompanying this documentation is a text detailing Edelson's impressions of the space, which while limited in its description of the gestures that comprised the rituals gives us a glimpse into the tone of the performance and Edelson's motivations for her presence there at that particular site.

Quoting Edelson's words, "the cave created a feeling of reverence and awe". The ritual came from a longing "to trace our archaeological herstory" and to connect her body with "the earliest Goddess worship and its art forms" (Edelson 1978, 96)¹⁶. In an essay printed alongside Edelson's 1978 exhibition *Your 5,000 Years Are Up! (Rituals & Works to Celebrate the New Time)*, Arlene Raven defines the criticality of Edelson's ritual as it:

...does not represent a retreat to an idyllic prehistory but rather a projection of a post-patriarchal spiritual consciousness and an understanding of the past which accounts for the present and the future. Her ritual forms of communication utilize female erotic and divine energies, images, movement and sound to explore the glorification of women... (Raven 1977, para 3)

That same year (1977), artist Betsy Damon performed *The 7000 Year Old Woman* (Figure 17). Documentation of the performance shows the artist on the streets of New York - with hair and body painted white, lips blackened - adorned in a cascade of pendulous forms. Composed of flour and fabric, the 400 overlapping bags drape the artist's body. Appearing both breast-and-testicle-like, they evoke the statues of Artemis of Ephesus and her distinct many-breasted iconography. Walking in a circular perimeter of sand, the performance takes on a ritualistic air as the artist repeatedly slashes open, tears away and deposits these sacks. Drawn on the ground, this circle not only delineates the performance space from the public realm in which it occurs, it also frames the gestural mark-making created by Damon's flour deposits. The diminishing forms function as a parody of striptease, revealing the artist's body beneath.

¹⁶ Due to the methodological approach of this research, the discussion of goddess imagery in this chapter and its strategic application in art is analysed through the work of creative practitioners. It will focus on the methods, processes and materials that punctuate its adoption in visual works. It is envisaged that a more comprehensive discussion of feminist engagement with the Goddess will be addressed in future research.



Figure 17: Betsy Damon, *The 7000 Year Old Woman*, 1977. Performance #2

In her book *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*, Jayne Wark notes the political air of the performance due to Damon's desire to claim a female space in the public realm. Wark argues that the performance illustrates Damon's concerns with "history, fecundity and nurturance as embodied by this ancient matriarchal archetype" (2006, 64). Jennie Klein, in *Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s*, comments that, for artists like Damon and Edelson, women's spirituality had the appeal of locating "an already existing bank of nonpatriarchal images to tap into" evident in the adoption "of small, anthropomorphic sculptures, ephemeral cave paintings, and monumental stone structures [of goddesses] from the prehistoric era". The perceived potency of these primitive and nostalgic images was their ability to resist the political control over the movement and representation of women's bodies in a contemporary context. By channeling "a sacred body that was exuberantly sexual," (Klein 2009, 594) they manifested a diversified representation of the female body in which "nostalgia and primitivism are deployed strategically ... to challenge patriarchal limitations placed on women's bodies" (Klein 2009, 593). This challenge was framed as a diversification of codes, as "women's lives, psyches and sexualities were positively multiple, and that the release of this multiplicity [through ritual] was a political act" (Lippard in Edelson 1980, 6).

While critical feminist theorists addressed this aspect of performative practice at the time, they dismissed such portrayals as essentialist. Providing an exhaustive study of what constitutes essentialism is beyond the scope of this section, yet I do concentrate my conceptual focus on the creative practices and the critiques that were occurring at this time. Theorist Elizabeth Grosz describes essentialism as "the attribution of a fixed essence to women" (1994, 84). Virpi Lehtinen in her book *Luce Irigaray Phenomenology of Feminine Being* (2014) asserts that the essentialist rhetoric is "motivated by the tradition of feminist thought which celebrates woman's specificity. This feminist approach holds that a woman's nature consists of sharing certain biological, psychological, or metaphysical traits." (2014, 7) Read in these terms, the detractors of essentialism regard it as producing reductive representations of women's sexuality because it determines female subjectivity as overly biological.

During the 1980s, theorists Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Diana Fuss revisited these negative evaluations and instead acclaimed the critical potential of a strategically

employed essentialism. In 1987, Spivak proposed “a strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 1987, 205). Its critical use is outlined as a context-specific strategy for affirming political identities (Morton 2003, 75). ¹⁷In her book *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (1989) Fuss explores what she dubs ‘the risk of essence’ and questions the political motivations for its use. Reading these texts, we see the rhetoric is very different. In using such terms as ‘deployment’, ‘tactical’ and ‘strategic,’ their tone conveys a military ethos and connotes the effective use of bodies, thoughts, strategies and objects. Fuss asserts, “essentialism may not be without a certain tactical or interventionary value, especially in ... political struggles and debates.” (1989, xii). She posits that the question we should be asking is not “is this ...essentialist (and therefore ‘bad’)?” but, rather, “if [something] ... is essentialist, *what motivates its deployment?*” (Fuss 1989, xi); “Where, how and why is it invoked? What are its political and textual effects?” (Fuss 1989, xi). Rebecca Schneider, in *The Explicit Body in Performance*, locates Fuss’ essentialism, in a middle ground between the constructivist-essentialist polemic, as a “‘double gesture’, paradoxically essentialist and constructivist at once this ‘both/and’ situation makes room for critical enquiry, political agency and discursive mobility” (Schneider 1997, 36).

Taking up Fuss’ declaration for a strategically deployed essentialism, I focus on how this essentialist attitude is being tactically implemented through the lens of humour and re-enactment in contemporary female practice. These artist case studies make apparent the intersection between the theoretical framework and creative enquiry, illustrative of the ways the fetish tactic *Ritual and Performance, Castration and Appendages* operates in female contemporary practice. Tori Wraanes’ practice uses costuming and humour to subversively reconstruct ancient identifications, while Angelica Mesiti appropriates the visual formulas of the *Prefiche* in order to interrogate the history of silencing around Italian female ritual practices.

¹⁷ The inclusion of strategic essentialism here is as a signpost for its use in female contemporary artistic practice, where the methods and specific contexts of its implementation are analysed through the lens of the Fetish Stratagem. As such, this is a brief introduction to strategic essentialism and is not inclusive of all the feminist debates that took place around its deployment. An analysis of these debates will take place in future research.

4.3.3 CASE STUDY: TORI WRAANES



Figure 18: Tori Wraanes, *Pattedyr*, 2009. Still from recording of live performance.

Tori Wraanes' performative practice employs the transformative nature of prosthetics to extend her body – long protruding tongues, multiple breasts and small penis tails. These bodily extensions alter the artist's form and recall the monstrous bodies of female deities from mythology – Kali with her long protruding tongue, sexual organ like, and the multiple breasted Artemis. The fluidity with which Wraanes adopts these characters and then moves onto the next iteration reveals her strategy in the ever-shifting vernacular of her mythology:

For in strategic essentialism one adopts specific female identities and political positions for the purposes of challenging the status quo. But one does not claim the identity as a fixed or biological one across time. In another action, one may adopt a different identity because the purposes are different. (Kaplan 2000, para 5)

Instead of pinning down an essentialist essence, Wraanes' practice acts as "a pastiche of various rituals, beliefs, and traditions." (Klein 2012, 592) By actively deploying a range of critical artistic and cultural forms, she creates ferocious and monstrous bodies that disrupt our perception of the female body – it becomes alien, the sexualised image full of absurdity and menace. These physical disruptions also introduce the nuances of humour, perhaps not the explosive utterance of a hearty laugh but a slight discomforted laughter, as Simon Critchley puts it in *Thinking In Action: On Humour*, when he states that humour exists on a sliding scale of bodily responses: "humour is essentially a bodily affair. That is, the joke invites a corporeal response, from a chuckle, through a giggle to a guffaw" (Critchley 2002, 7). The widening gap between what we expect and the reality of what we receive – what Critchley calls the incongruity of humour – is at play in Wraanes' enactments, in which we find a female body that is decadent in its excesses, an "over-conflation of the body", as Jennie Klein puts it (2009, 594), the vulva no longer the only sex organ, but with sex organs popping up all over the place. In Wraanes' performances, the use of costuming and prosthetic appendages simulates and mimics different identities in order to deconstruct and reconstruct matriarchal identifications.

Her humour is located in a sense of play, mischief and erotic jest. In locating these types of representation it is useful to consider Marina Warner's conception of the sacred fool outlined in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1995). The fool is marked by sexual excess, a playful eroticism, by employing a "comic obscenity ... [the] fool can thumb their noses (show their bottoms) at convention and authority: tomfoolery includes iconoclasm, disrespect, subversions." (1995, 196) Located in this subversive position, "the mockery of the fool, can be the expression of freedom, the gesture that abolishes hierarchy, that [imbues] authority and faces down fear" (1995, 153). Wraanes strategic use of appendages as a humorous distortion of the codes around the erotic female body is indicative of this approach.

My analysis of her tactical implementation of costuming and fetish tropes centres on Wraanes' performance *Pattedyr* (Figure 18), here the artist uses prosthetic breasts to multiply her mammary glands into a cascade of peaked flesh. Alongside these chest protrusions the artist wears cream, tailored cotton pants and a pair of cream shades.

Wraanes stands in a pool of darkness, starkly lit by the spotlight above; the lighting illuminates the alien-ness of her appendages and gives the appearance that she is emerging out of the darkness. The gestures of the performance are in dialogue with the auditory elements; a soundtrack in the background plays the atmospheric sounds of a thunderstorm, the space punctuated by cracks of thunder. These auditory cues sit in dialogue with the artist's operatic singing; the undulating tone of the pitch and its relation to the audio gives the performance a ritualistic air. Imparting a sense of reciprocity between the performer and the natural elements of the audio, which are timed in such a way that they appear to be conjured by Wraanes' cyclic singing. The nature of this documentation, with the figure isolated in space and its portrait orientation, influenced the visual formulas of my portrait video series, with their focus on simple ritual gestures enacted by a sole performer. This notion of a dialogue between audio and performative gesture informed how I approached the auditory elements in the video works, with the bells and whip cracking timed to the gestures of the performer. The alien quality of her costuming and the eroticism of her genital multiplication has greatly influenced how I implement costuming and re-enactment in the performative outcomes to create subversive reconceptualisations of my mythic figures.

4.3.4 CASE STUDY: ANGELICA MESITI



Figure 19: Angelica Mesiti, *In the Ear of the Tyrant*, 2014, Digital Still.

In *In the Ear of the Tyrant* (2014) (Figure 19) Angelica Mesiti interleaves two narratives, one a mythological dialogue about the cave *Ear of Dionysius* and the other the ritual practice of the *Prefiche*. In the three-screen video installation vocalist Enza Pagliara is shown in a vaulted cave, the backlit figure framed by the texture of earth. Pagliara lifts her hands in veneration or entreaty, their rise and fall following her operatic vocal qualities. In-keeping with Klein's observations, Mesiti's video installation is marked by a sense of resistance and the revision of feminine discourse through her referral to a line of ancient women's ritual.

In her article *The Music of Language*, Rebecca Coates writes that Angelica Mesiti's *In the Ear of the Tyrant* is "inspired by ... and re-interprets the grieving ritual" (2014, 57) of the *Prefiche*, hired mourners in southern Italy, women garbed in black that attend funerary rites as paid mourners leading harrowing cries in reverence to the deceased. These performances are characterised by "thrusting their hands in their hair and pulling their hair, scratching their faces, pounding their breasts, and tearing at their

clothes” (Carney 2012, 10). These rituals had ties to gendered behaviour, as the lamentation custom was a cultural practice observed by female participants. Historically, such behaviour by woman was deemed polemic against Christian doctrine, it was “argued that women should be restricted from engaging in excessive outpouring of grief” (Carney 2012, 11). The incitement created by such acts is noted by Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum in *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion, and Politics in Italy*, “The sight of women with loosened hair screaming words considered provocative and ‘*all’ingiuria dell’onnipotente Iddio*’ (to the injury of omnipotent god) disturbed clerical authorities” (2000, 52). In Birnbaum’s observations, it can be understood that the actions themselves are not provocative but it is their relationship to the sight of women’s bodies – the tearing of clothes, grabbing at the breast, and excessive wailing – that is. As indicated by the statements of John Chrysostom in the fourth century, women in their mourning make “a great show ... [of their] ... wantonness; [as] they bare their arms ... in the sight of men ... [and] strip thyself in [an] unseemly sort” (Chrysostom in Carney 2012, 11).

In *In the Ear of the Tyrant* rhythmic wailing of *Prefiche* is replaced by the harmonies of operatic sound. Yet her gesture towards these female figures is found in the raised arms, miming the act of face scratching, in the black garments and the unbound hair. While, Mesiti’s reenactment loses the audacious element of the clothes ripping, her performance is still marked by a sense of resistance, the referral to a line of women’s practice recalled by specific traditions. The subversive potential of these performances was in their opposition to the “major symbols sustaining patriarchy” (Birnbaum 1994, 3) at that time, symbolisations upheld by the white Madonna of Christian faith, whose mourning is marked by a quiet, contemplative sorrow grounded in passivity. Chiefly, her depiction personified the ideological control of the erotic codes around women’s behaviour and the masculine rhetoric that pervaded women’s representation. A vernacular anchored in “the suppression of woman’s body, desire and difference” (Dallery 1990, 65), limiting the expression of women’s autonomy and subjectivity. Birnbaum relates the semantics and origins of these women to the ancient practices of the worshippers of “Ibla of the Siculi” (2000, 52) who “symbolized the goddess as an old woman” (2000, 52), reminiscent of the crone. Like the crone, their persecution was tied to an otherness and a dangerous eroticism. Marina Warner’s conception of these figures through literature and history accentuates this sexualisation. She speaks of the

crone in terms of a personage who has “insiders’ erotic knowledge” (1995, 147), is “adept at erotic arts” (1995, 148) and conspires at seduction. Yet the crone also represents a narrative tradition like that of Baubo, a position of agency that “women could ... assume when they wanted to find a mode of self expression” (Warner 1995, 148), an autonomy enacted by their position as the authorial subject. Baubo is a figure where fetish ideologies intersect with this mapping of the cultural and ancient personages signifying the *Prefiche*. Her aural tradition is grounded in sexual obscenity and “the laughter that arises from the unexpected display of sexual body parts” (Rosen 2007, 49).

My interest in this particular work is predicated on this articulation of its cultural and mythological contexts, and the personages that inform Mesiti’s aesthetics. Though poetically rendered, Mesiti’s work is indexical of these figures and can be viewed as an exploration of women’s ritual practice and the subsequent subversive recodification of their bodies. By re-presenting this ritual, Mesiti’s appropriation diversifies the depictions of women’s bodies in contemporary artistic practice.

The tactical arrangements outlined in this chapter *Material, Embodiment and Animistic Inscription* and *Ritual and Performance, Castration and Appendages* are located in a constellation of fetish lexicon; my dialogue with Freud; a BDSM repertoire; and the strategic essentialist epistemology shaping the study. The creative implications for this way of working are elaborated in the *Creative Practice Final: Preaching to the Perverted* section, where I detail the processes, studio experimentation and artworks that resulted from implementing the Fetish Stratagem. Departing from the theoretical basis of the earlier creative works, this final discussion of the creative practice is situated in the tactical and theoretical premise established in *Magical Fetishism* but implements the fetish lexicon developed through studio experiments and a fetishist’s material approach.

Chapter 5: Creative Practice Final: Preaching to the Perverted

In light of these dialogues, the search for alternative fetish frameworks in the creative analysis was greatly influenced by a return to my earlier investment in Greek narrative, i.e. the referral to Daedalus in *Cazzo Cazzo!* and an interest in how Greek mythology depicted women and the erotic. My familiarity with Greek narrative came from my childhood experiences, growing up in a secular household with a father that recreated ancient Greek pottery through traditional techniques. Dad detailed the elements of these myths so often that the theology became a part of my formative years and shaped the kinds of narratives and theories I then became drawn to. I remember being enamoured with the fantastical content of these myths and the variety of women present in them. I observed how narrative elements in the myths were acting, in allegorical terms, with objects, landscapes and types of clothing being iconographic for, and which came to embody representations of female desire.

There were multiple narrative sources where my materials and my interest in Greece formed a constellation of links. Monuments like Mount Sipylus (featuring a rough-hewn woman's face carved into limestone) became prominent, where the materiality of the terrain (limestone that leaks water) was innate to the mythicising narrative of that area. It was thought that the rocks continual leaking of water was tied to a weeping female figure and as such was envisioned as Niobe encased in stone. This occurrence of weeping rocks in nature is often marked by a relationship to lithified women, women transformed to stone. I was fascinated by these narratives' moral preoccupation with women's sexuality and subsequent passivity and a notable absence of female volition. The resulting lithification seems emblematic of these characters' stasis, as passively desiring figures suspended without agentic cause. Bothered by such limited accounts of women's sexuality, I created a series of mind maps (Figure 20) that marked out visual and theoretical constellations of commonality between specific narrative figures that shared links to Freud's studio through volition and depictions of sexuality, and spoke to women's bodies in the landscape. What started as the identification of mythological archetypes evolved into conceptual research about the etymology of their

names, the terrains they inhabit, and their mythological depiction. Informed by this evolution, the maps became a form of data visualisation, or geography of ideas (the lay of the land for my research), as I incorporated contemporary and historical artists and theorists who were located in these discourses. These material maps formed the contextual foundation for my new research trajectory.

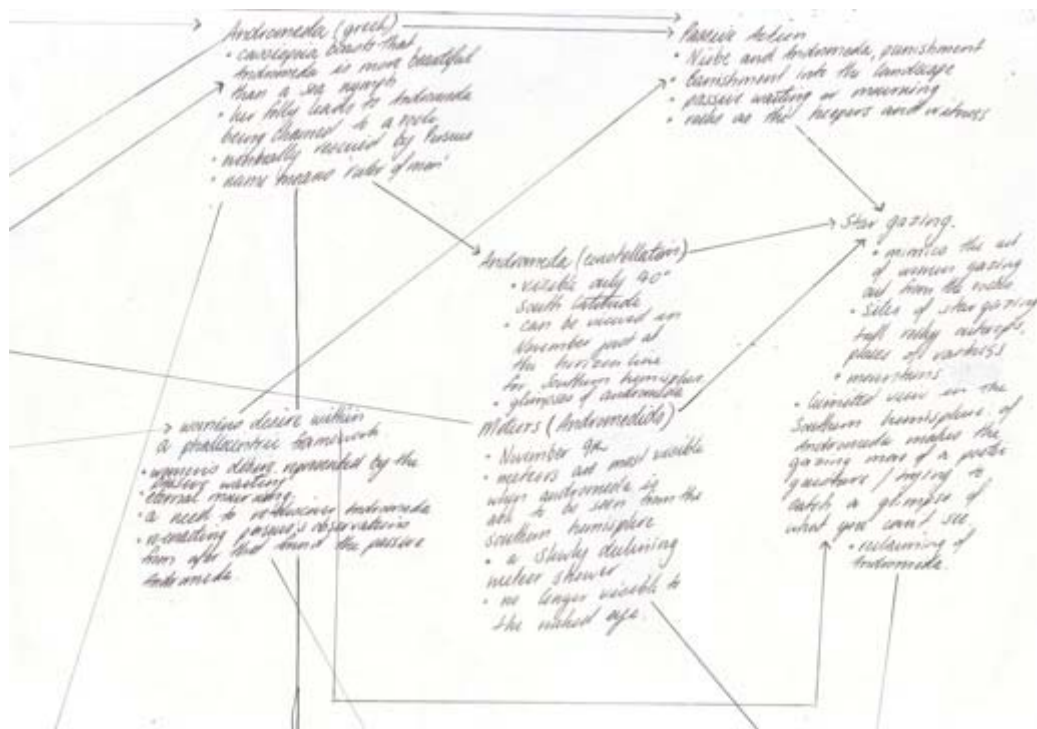


Figure 20: Research mind map, 2016.

This referral to the arcane and female bodies in Greek theology became a catalyst for weighty changes in my artistic practice, including a branching out into mythological imagery and women's ritual practice, the objects in Freud's study bolstering this emergent line of enquiry. The focal point for this new awareness was three female characters: Andromeda and Baubo from Greek mythology and Saint Teresa of Avila, particularly her depiction by the Baroque sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini. In placing these women together, they reflected a persistent narrative archetype, seen in their shared characteristics: repetitious narrative components, mutual landscapes and recurrent visual formulas. The creative outputs acted as a dialogue between these women, Freud and me by making apparent this commonality. This research into the visual languages and codes surrounding their depiction either highlighted these characters' volition or realigned them with agentic dialogues, if a position of agency

was absent. This method of enquiry was conversant with my re-evaluation of fetish theory and the development of alternative and expanded narratives around women's passive sexual depictions.

Below, I will analyse the initial planning, method and resulting form of three creative works. These were produced for my artist residency and resulting exhibition *Sepulchre* at Boxcopy Contemporary Artspace (2015), later revised and re-exhibited in the final exhibition *Preaching to the Perverted* at Metro Arts (2016). The three creative outcomes will be discussed individually, charting their development from the initial planning stages to the final installation at Metro Arts.

5.1 SCULPTURE: ANDROMEDA AND TERESA

5.1.1 ANDROMEDA

Exhibitions in which work is explored *Sepulchre*, Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space (2015) and *Preaching to the Perverted*, Metro Arts, Brisbane (2016).



Figure 21: Edward Poynter, *Andromeda*, 1869. Oil on canvas.

Andromeda (2015/2016) (Figure 24 and 25) is a sculptural assemblage made from etched glass, plaster, copper and silver. It sits in dialogue with the Greek mythological figure Andromeda and the erotic power play inherent to her successive iterations in art history. The object results from a series of stargazing performances conducted over the past two years, where I re-enacted performative gestures located in the narrative.

Via these re-enactments, I was examining the complexities and contradictions of Andromeda's sexual volition through the subversion and reconstruction of the codes surrounding her cultural articulations. Employing the logic of the star map, the work is a material allegory for the inert aspects of the Andromeda myth and an embodiment of her, the materials in dialogue with sensuality of her historical representation evident in Sir Edward John Poynter's *Andromeda* (1869) (Figure 21).

My particular approach to Andromeda¹⁸ is characterised by processes of re-enactment, animistic inscription, sensuous material labour and embodiment. While the investigations of Andromeda began prior to the research conducted in Freud's studio in London, certain artefacts there bolstered my creative investigations and solidified the links to Freudian theory that I had begun to tease out. In my contemplations of Andromeda, I noticed how the original narrative is depicted in erotic terms, as evident in Sir Edward John Poynter's *Andromeda* (1869). Here, the nude figure – while in mortal peril – still gestures towards a palpable pleasure with mouth slightly open, eyes downcast, the glimpse of chained hands grasped behind her back, arched neck, craned, looking at the lapping waves below. The red rope binding her hands anchors her body to the rock while the blue cape writhes around her, bearing a resemblance to the sea monster Cetus. In this depiction of Andromeda, Poynter portrays her at her most vulnerable, when the hero Perseus has yet to arrive. The initial attraction to Andromeda came from her allusion to fetish practice through her position as an eroticised and pacified chained woman, alongside how her name is recurrent in a range of discourses. The etymology of her title made apparent in this multiplicity; her depiction ranging from a constellation, a type of craggy coastal landscape and a narrative archetype chronic in Western art history. This multiplicity of interpretation is marked by the passivity of the initial mythological dialogue; in all her forms her sexuality is iterated by the limitations of the chained woman. In evaluating these aspects of the Andromeda myth I referred to analysis made by Adrienne Munich. Munich notes that Andromeda embodies the codification of gender roles through

¹⁸ Andromeda is the daughter of Queen Cassiopeia. In the myth, Cassiopeia compares her daughter's beauty to that of Poseidon's offspring, the sea nymphs. Poseidon punished Cassiopeia by sending a sea monster to attack their city. To quell the god's fury, Andromeda is tied to a rock on the cliff face as an offering, to be later rescued by Perseus using Medusa's head. (Monaghan 2014, 226) Her passivity in the myth is at odds with the Greek origins of her name: ruler of men.

symbolism and in the erotics of dominance and submission (1989, 13). Quoting from Munich's text, the Andromeda myth,

position[s] a female with no power, seemingly with no volition, opposite a male with supernatural powers. In addition, the story serves heroic ambition. Perseus saves Andromeda, then keeps her for sexual and dynastic purposes; obliged to her rescuer, she can neither rescue herself nor refuse his offer of marriage.

Drawing out these facets of her mythology as a range of material surrogates, I made links between the inert elements of the narrative and the sculptural mediums I had previously employed. Thinking through how materials and textures could function as a hermeneutic re-interpretation of the visual codes that iterate her limited agency, I was also reflecting on the structure of the myth and its mirroring of the heteronormative gender roles in Freud's fetishism.

The Andromeda constellation, viewable through stargazing, and the saving glimpse of Perseus in the narrative, set forth my initial creative interpretations. In November, the Andromeda constellation is partially visible from the southern hemisphere, positioned in the sky above the horizon line. In observing this astrological event I was arrested by the poetic correlations between the terms of my stargazing and the relationship between Andromeda and Perseus in the myth, as we both glimpsed her on the edge of the horizon. I considered that this saving glimpse could be a performative gesture, a re-enactment where the artist can act as a proxy for Perseus. I approached the logic of this action as an agentive figure – likened to Perseus – my glimpse of Andromeda functioning as a transformative ritual reendowing her with agency.

While the performance itself never eventuated into an exhibited work it laid the groundwork for my sculptural assemblage in the interaction between my body and the materiality of the object used in the act of stargazing. The site chosen for the performance was Lake Moogerah, just outside Brisbane. The topology of the site was significant for two reasons: it has the lowest light density in the area (making more stars viewable) and it has a large body of water surrounded by a cliff range (mirroring the topological elements in the myth). I used a paper star chart to locate the Andromeda constellation in the sky and was attentive to the formality of the star map, the intersection of lines in the curved space, the varying dot sizes and the small composition of stars that constituted Andromeda. I considered how this paper was

acting as a vehicle or ritual object that activated the dialogue between Andromeda and me through the action of stargazing. Resulting from these material observations, I appropriated the formal logic of the star chart as an aniconic embodiment of Andromeda to poetically reinterpret her passive depiction.



Figure 22: Studio documentation of the tools used to create *Andromeda*, 2016.

Materials used in the sculpture were reflective of these observations and developed a relationship with the inert elements identified in the original narrative. The copper spheres were created using a jewellery making process; small circles were cut from sheets of copper and then placed in a jeweller's dapping block, the hammering of the dapper moulding the metal disc into the spherical mould. From this process, the metal discs formed small hollow half spheres that were adhered to the glass with an epoxy adhesive. The intensive labour involved in creating the spheres took on a performative element. With over a thousand produced (Figure 23), it was a physically demanding task. Consequently, this process left its mark on my hands: bruising when the hammer slipped, small cuts from the metal sheet, and aching wrists from the constant strain. The pain and traces (bruises) (Figure 22) that this process left on the skin were a poetic

re-enactment of Andromeda's captivity, as the evidence of her confinement is reliant on the imagery of bound hands. Interpreted through the lens of a mythic chronicle, this labour constituted a physical correlation between my hands and Andromeda's tethering to the landscape, equating my pain with the painful reality of her shackled wrists.



Figure 23: Studio documentation of the dapped metal components used to create *Andromeda*, 2016.

Post construction, the arrangement of the copper spheres on the glass acted as another material allegory for Andromeda, the dimpling on the glass surface echoing the raised flesh of the naked Andromeda. On the star map, Andromeda is illustrated in silver to differentiate her from the other constellations. The lustre of silver a correlate to her translucent pale skin, a feature often toted as evidence for the divine beauty that caught Perseus' eye. The white stone plinths are made from casting plaster using a silicone moulding process. The choice to use plaster instead of a more refined sculpting

medium came from the textural quality of the plaster surface and the plaster's crumbling and porous nature resembles the limestone cliffs anchoring Andromeda's confinement. Similarly, the original stone selected for casting was picked for its likeness to a sheer rock face, recalling the craggy stone backdrop of Poynter's painting. The transparency of the glass creates an illusion of suspension, with the polished spheres of copper appearing to float on the translucent surface. By using glass to appropriate the star chart I was drawing correlations between Andromeda's suspension on the rocks and her constellation hovering in space. The visual translucency of the star chart's surface also gestured towards the primacy of vision in my interpretations and re-enactment of the myth. Unlike the original star map, the lines between the stars in the constellations were absent, only the universe line and the line indicating the trajectory of the moon were engraved. In this way, the object, while appropriating the logic of the star chart, was also ambiguous, allowing for poetic and associative meanings between the materials.



Figure 24: Anastasia Booth, *Andromeda*, 2015. Installation view Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space. Etched glass, copper, silver, plaster.

While the theoretical parameters that framed this object reflected my new approach to practice it still spoke to my existing fetish logic and BDSM repertoire, a material methodology born from my recreation of fetish practice, evident in the appropriation of sex objects and rituals. As a result, the formal configuration employed a material seduction established through this dialogue with contemporary fetishism – the seduction of highly polished metal on leather harnesses, the soft dimpled surfaces of ribbed dildos, the texture of bumps and ridges left on skin after a flogging, the casting of body parts to make moulds for ice dildos and the glass that had originally functioned as stages, stands and plinths. Though poetically rendered, these eroticising elements found their way into the object; in the white cliff stands formed through the same casting process that I used to use for small sex toys; in the geography of the various sized erect nubs of highly polished copper, adhered to the glass surface like goose flesh; in the tactility of the tracks of etching, like marks in skin; the glass surface with its many inscriptions – like the geography of the body.

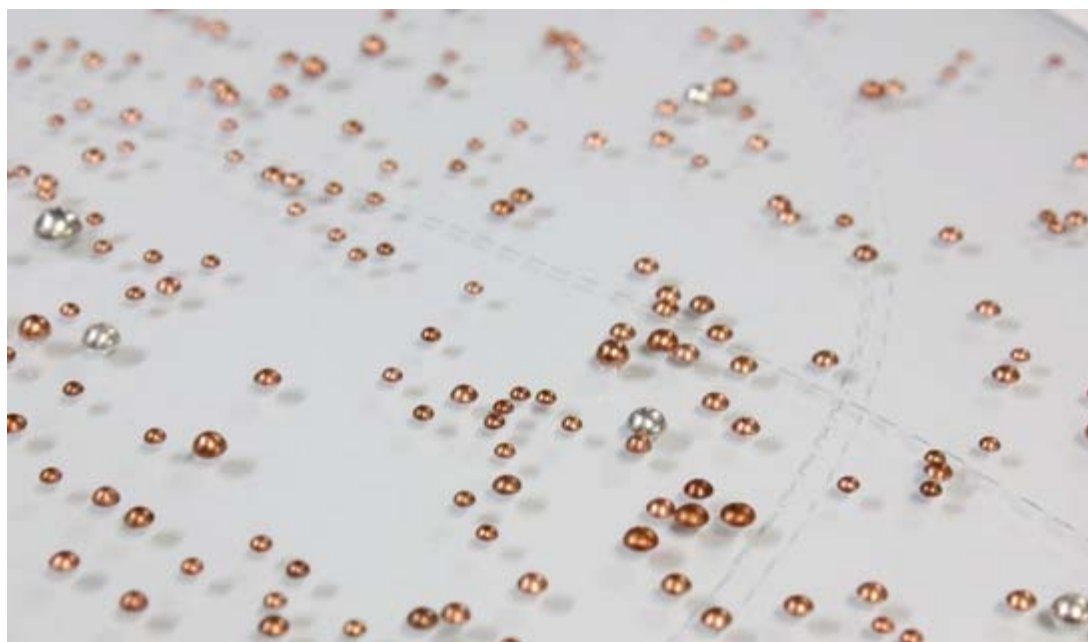


Figure 25: Anastasia Booth, *Andromeda*, 2015. Installation view Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space, Etched glass, copper, silver, plaster.

This erotic inscription became an interesting subtext for how I was exploring the narrative of Andromeda and the dichotomy of submission and dominance evident via the eroticising elements in the myth. Instead of the didactic eroticism that had been

illustrated in the work previously – evident in the use of phallic forms – this subtle interplay of materials signalled a departure from depicting fragments of the sexualised body. Instead, it spoke to orchestrating erotic codes based in the absence of the body and a hesitation to reclaim the female body through the iteration of the sexualised images chronic in art history. I considered the objects and symbols that punctuate cultural articulations of her passive sexuality in reclamation of these visual cues and gestures. In their reimaged state, they are removed from gendered, heterosexist narratives, reinvested with sensuous qualities directly relating to their materiality. In this way, the exploration of the complexity and subversive potential of the erotic codes framing Andromeda's sexuality could be delivered as a subtle interplay of poetic and material associations, an aniconic embodiment that is indexical to Andromeda through the interplay and dialogue established between materials.

In *Sepulchre* at Boxcopy Contemporary Artspace the star map (Figure 24 and 25) was installed as a small floor-based arrangement, the glass chart laid flat on the top of the three plaster stones. The initial size (40 x 40 x 30cm), while reflective of the original star map, created some complications for the viewing of the work, especially when positioned on the floor. Initially, I thought this type of engagement – forcing the viewer to bend down to observe the work – created an element of intimacy. The intention being that the viewer would sit with the sculpture on the floor, observing its minute details – the arrangement of the spheres, the texture of the stone and the lustre of the materials. I was hesitant to place the object on another riser or platform as the cliffs already functioned in these terms. By being aware of these limitations, successive iterations of the work improved on this arrangement and the size of the work was revised. After *Sepulchre* I began working on a second larger scale star chart (1m x 1m) (Figure 26), produced through the same methods as the first chart. The increase in size to 1m diameter signalled my departure from replicating the materiality of the paper star chart.



Figure 26: Anastasia Booth, *Andromeda*, 2016. Test installation for *Preaching to the Perverted* in the Frank Moran Memorial Gallery. Etched glass, copper, silver, plaster.

A focus on time became significant with the successive development of the work. As discussed previously, the original performance occurred during November, based on the visibility of the Andromeda constellation. This focus on time influenced my choice to make these star charts into an edition or series, with each one based on this annual timeframe. Two star charts were produced during the study, for the years of 2015 and 2016, and included a larger silver disc placed along the axis line to mirror the moon's position in the sky at the time of the performance for each year. This created the only point of variance between the editions of the star charts as the constellations and axis lines remained the same. Constructing the moon and Andromeda both in silver created the visual cue to accessing the chronological dialogue in the work by building a correlation between the moon's positioning and Andromeda.

In *Preaching to the Perverted* (Figures 27 and 28) the works were developed further via a relationship to the architectural features of the gallery site. Breaking with the original display of the smaller chart, I wanted to further articulate the sculpture as an embodiment of Andromeda. When installing *Andromeda* (2015) in the site, I was aware of the astrological events occurring at that time, the opening falling on the night

of the full moon. Consequently, I placed the star chart near one of the large windows in the space. Placed on the ground, I centred the star chart in the frame of the window, developing a relationship to the night sky and with the angle of the chart radiating towards the view outside. Reflecting on Poynter's figuration of Andromeda's body and how her body angled back against the rock with the rope as her only anchoring point to the sheer surface resulted in a choice to remove three of the plinths and have the glass pan tilted against a single plaster stone (Figure 27). Due to time restraints *Andromeda* (2016) mirrored the arrangement of the Boxcopy installation, but its larger size made the work easier to engage with, evident in viewers sitting around the object, observing the nubs at eye level and running their fingers over the surface of the glass.



Figure 27: Anastasia Booth, *Andromeda*, 2016. Installation view Metro Arts, Etched glass, copper, silver, plaster.

My investigations of Andromeda signalled how I had started to work through mythological frameworks in dialogue with Freudian theory, by locating and then analysing passive iterations of female sexuality reflected in mythic female personas. The Fetish Stratagem in this instance articulated itself in both my creative and theoretical approach to materials and the fetishised labour that took place in the creation of the sculptural form, in relationship to the modes of desire I employed via its fabrication. In working with a history of masculine translations of the myth I sought to subversively reinvest in these codes in a way that removed an immediate association with the docile female erotic body. In these terms, my sculptural embodiment of Andromeda followed how I was implementing aniconic methods and animistic inscription as a tactical arrangement to complicate the reading of passive desire located in the myth.



Figure 28: Anastasia Booth, *Andromeda*, 2016. Installation view Metro Arts. Etched glass, copper, silver, plaster.

5.1.2 TERESA

Exhibitions in which work is explored are *Sepulchre*, Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space, 2015 and *Preaching to the Perverted*, installed in two sites, The Frank Moran Gallery and Metro Arts, Brisbane, 2016.



Figure 29: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1647-1652. Marble.

While my initial interest in *Teresa* drew from her visual similarities with Andromeda and her allusion to erotic literature and spoken word practices through her religious texts, these fascinations shifted and matured through successive installations of the work. My research and subsequent creative investment in Teresa of Avila had been guided by intuition. Due to my disillusionment with my previous works and my

hesitation to remain solely in Freudian discourse I started to draw content from other cultural products and frameworks. At this time, I trusted in the practice-led nature of the study, letting the creative explorations guide the theoretical enquiry. During this time, I didn't censor the fascinations that came to the fore but allowed my attraction to discourses outside fetishism guide the investigation. Through this period of intuitive exploration, it was difficult to articulate why my creative investment in *Teresa* was significant or how the methods, processes and materials used in the work were in dialogue with fetishism. Subsequently, when I made the three panels of *Teresa* during my residency at Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space (Figure 30), the work and theoretical contexts were incomplete, the two still emerging through the practice. This uncertainty related to the time at which *Teresa* emerged during the project, being the first large-scale work I had committed to in many years, and as the first object to be produced after the shift in my research trajectory. In this section I will discuss the evolution of *Teresa* from her initial showing at Boxcopy – detailing the early fascinations that produced the work – progressing to the final installation of *Preaching to the Perverted*.

The aesthetic qualities of Andromeda's chronicle led me to the reclining figure in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Baroque sculpture *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (Figure 29). Teresa's religious habit drapes around her figure, the swathes of fabric erotically charge the form in its concealment, the soft silhouette created by the gathering and drapes of the habit framing the limbs that emerge from the cascades. The muted tones of the garment blend with the rock surface below, anchoring Teresa visually to the cloud that supports her. The languid pose of Teresa – head thrown back in pleasure, fingers slackened as her hand rests against the rock surface and toes slightly curled in space – is nothing less than post orgasmic, where the stiffening of the body gives way to a languid slackness. The hand of the putto supports this post-rapture body, functioning in two ways: the tips of his fingers gather the fabric at Teresa's chest, seemingly to separate the garment in preparation for the arrow's penetration; and with her back arched and her torso elevated off the rock this hand also gives the appearance that the putto is drawing Teresa towards him in her levitating rapture. The winged putto's scrutiny of Teresa is dualistic, menacing and comforting to Teresa's plight, his soft smile belying the promise of the rapture that the arrow will bring. The scene is framed by the spears of the nimbus radiating from the sky above, the composition of the brass

rods haphazard with evidence of the supports beneath. I drew visual similarities between Bernini's composition and the visual characteristics I had observed in the renaissance paintings of Andromeda, in this anchoring of the female body to a rock like surface and the framing elements that not only menace the figure but iterate passive readings of sexuality.

In observing Bernini's sculpture, I was interested in the framing devices he used as abstract and formal compositions of materials in isolation from the body. Bernini uses the raw materiality of burnished brass and the rough-hewn surface of stone to frame Teresa's pleasure – the radiating lines of the aureole descending from the ceiling simulate God's light, and the pedestal form is both cloud and rock like. By being perceptive to these material renderings, I considered how these symbols and codes operate in relation to Teresa's desire, how the beams of light appear menacing to her in their sharpened points and haphazard arrangement, likened to the spear held by the putto. Addressing this formality, I avoided the outright depiction of the figure, instead adopting the materiality of these visual cues. This approach guided the early material experiments as I digitally manipulated images of Bernini's sculpture, isolating specific formal qualities of the rock and light rays. Initially, the rock was the focus of my investigation, directed by the narrative of Andromeda and my use of rocks as visual anchors for my previous sculptural suspensions in H Block. Never having witnessed *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* in the flesh, my analysis was built on digital archives I had amassed of photographs of the sculptural alcove. As the sculpture is presented within a recess of granite, the perspective of these images is often only front on, obscuring aspects of the sculptural composition, making my visual interpretations reliant on fragmented observations. I started to build maquettes of the rock based on these obstructed perspectives, attempting to visualise the aspects of the rock surface that were obscured. The maquettes produced never eventuated into a finished form due to an inability to depict the rock sufficiently and the time and money required to build a life-size replica of the stone cloud. Subsequently, I looked to the rays of light as a form that could be isolated and reconstructed. My previous use of metal surfaces, i.e. the copper tubing, also informed the decision; while previously it had functioned as supports and rails for other sculptural assemblages I had yet to focus solely on the materiality and eccentricities of copper as a material.



Figure 30: Anastasia Booth, *Teresa*, 2015. Copper. Installation view Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space.

The construction of the three panels exhibited at Boxcopy was shaped by my observations of the formal and compositional elements of Bernini's rays (Figure 29). I noticed how the rays function in illusionistic terms as a simulation of divine light, yet this illusion is undermined by its sculptural qualities; the viewer can see the back bracing supporting the brass bars. I was attentive to the dynamic and haphazard arrangement of the bars, radiating out at all angles. Subsequently, the methods of construction were influenced by these material characteristics and the leftover copper tube I had in the studio. Using a reference image of Bernini's rays, I constructed the three panels, rebuilding the rays in a burnished metal but substituting the yellow tones of brass for the rich rose surface of copper. The initial focus on three panels was due to time restraints for the exhibition and also my observations of Bernini's rays as being bunched together into three segments. The panels evolved from looking at the image of Bernini's work while creating arrangements of copper bar on a table. The segments were arranged organically as initially I was using off-cuts and leftover segments, so

instead of an exact copy of the work I was creating a material translation of it. Due to my use of copper plumbing pipe, the three arrangements, while visually resembling Bernini's, lacked the radiating menace created through the sharp angular points of the rods. In response, I shaved the ends of each rod into a 45-degree angle, the sharpened points evoking this underlying menace. Once I had finalised the arrangement, the copper tubes were screwed to a support backing of copper flat bar. In line with Bernini's object, I ensured that segments of the bar could be seen through the screening of the copper rods, as a material gesture towards his work, signaling how the two were in dialogue. In installing the work, I wanted the sculptural form – like Bernini's – to operate spatially and not be affixed flush against the wall. As a result, I developed a type of angled bracket that forced the copper to angle out from the gallery wall, the ends of the pipe radiating from the wall. This bracketing system permitted flexibility in the hanging arrangement, with the three panels working as movable sections with greater compositional possibilities. Working with the copper created an awareness of its individual surface qualities, its material vernacular; it could be polished to a high mirror sheen reflecting the qualities of light and shadow upon its surface, but with contact to the air and the oil of skin, oxidation dims the metal to a dirty brown. In accentuating these specific surface characteristics, I was cognisant of how my investigations of Teresa could be driven by this material logic. The installation of the work in *Sepulchre* at Boxcopy further refined these material observations. Centred on a large white wall, the three sections were placed in a cross-like formation, and due to the angled bracketing, the bars radiate out from the wall to allow a play of shadow and light behind it. The sparseness of the configuration departed from Bernini's tightly bunched rays. A key reflection came from the copper's distinct material peculiarities; while I had previously hailed the coppers oxidation as an interesting quality of the work, I had not realised how much effort was involved in getting the copper to a high shine finish. Once this finish was achieved, the ease with which the surface could be ruined by contact with skin was incredibly frustrating. This began my long and ongoing relationship with polishing.

Alongside my observations of this materiality I started to investigate the life of Teresa and the extensive body of writing produced via her religious experience. In the accounts of Teresa her invocations of God are spoken of in intimate terms, a plethora of heady erotic expressions and sensual qualities. I was attentive to the context and

resulting contradictions of this pleasure, the confusion of religious rapture through transverberation and its resemblance to erotic release. Exploiting erotic literature as a framework to stress this duality I rendered the visual scape of Bernini's sculpture into an erotic sound work:

Incanting, uttering moans of spiritual ecstasy. A mouth agape dissolves into swathes of fabric while a rapturous head tips back, bowing towards a cavernous arch of hunger. Built under radiating beams, light, simulated in the warming tones of polished ore, which imbues her with sweet luster. A foot languid in caressing air alongside toes that curl into rock's textured surface, finding purchase on shelves of sediment, sharp, puncturing, with skin inflamed, reflecting the heat burning in radiance and flesh, a pallid complexion soaked in the sheen of dream's moisture (Booth 2014).

My accentuation on erotic literature was used to extend Bernini's portrayal of Teresa into a wider exploration of women's desire through the spoken word and to realign his representation with the agentive vernacular that she had used to describe her own pleasure.

Such investment in erotic literature and the exploration of the intimacy of spoken text has been an enduring undertone for my practice. Playing with different modes of presentation, including live performance and spoken word, I became interested in the broader implications for this way of working. How can the artist's body be addressed as an agentive voice? How does spoken word play with implicit and explicit depictions of sexual identification? How is pleasure and desire expressed through writing and performance? Often, these performances are accompanied by hesitation, occasionally a few mistakes and a general nervousness that affects the overall delivery. By being sensitive to these traces, the failing of tone, the discomfort in the body, the choking hesitation, I noticed that such faults in the delivery spoke to a different type of desire, no less agentive but one that is small, cowardly and dysfunctional. Addressing these qualities, this interest in sound and the erotic performance became located in other sites of the practice, i.e. the digitally mediated performances and the material and methodological approaches that emerged through the object became indicative of how I would further develop the *Teresa* work.

While the erotic nature of Teresa's referral to God had functioned as the impetus for my investigation of her, it was the restrictive dialogues around her writing that became particularly important. Alison Weber, in dialogue with Teresa's autobiographical text, frames the problematic position that Teresa was in during the 1600s. Looking at Teresa's autobiographical text, Weber notes, "... hers is a document produced in response to an order from her confessors to describe her suspect practice of mental prayer and defend the authenticity of the spiritual favors received through it" (1998, 43). This time frame was marked by a suspicion of female religious practice and "the fame of holy miracle-working females" (Franciscan in Weber, 1998, 44). The erotic nature of these suspicions is evident in the rhetoric employed by the Inquisition to undermine female spiritual practice as a "diabolical seduction, seen as a sexual possession by the devil [it emerged] as the Inquisition's preferred explanation of ecstatic trances and other extraordinary phenomena" (1998, 45) experienced by women. Such accusations eroded the credibility of these practices. By building a relationship to the sexualised female body "the Inquisition was moving to reaffirm the traditional ecclesiastical association between women's power and women's fallen sexuality" (1998, 45). Weber uses the term double bind to explain how Teresa was impelled to justify her spiritual practice through her *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila* text. I started to draw parallels between her use of this term and my interest in restrictive dialogues around female agency and the visual representation of the bound female. I was arrested by the semantics of the term as being placed between two impossible choices and the literal act of binding something or to see a body bound. When looking at Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* I became attentive to how this restrictive dialogue is manifested in the visual elements in the work. In the Cornaro Chapel, the central figure of Teresa is recessed in her sepulchral alcove, looking down on her from a loge set in the right-hand section of the wall are three male figures. The figures are complicit in the scene, gesturing and leaning over the banister in eager engagement with the scene occurring below. Here, the dialogues of the inquisition are evoked by the scopophilic observation of these men. Bernini turns the intimate act of Teresa's transverberation into a theatrical spectacle. Penned in by the material excess of the setting, the scopophilic observation from the sides, the putto's grip on her clothing and shadowed by the brass rays peeking bellow the mantel of the arch above create the impression of Teresa's religious stricture.

During the making of *Teresa*, I was closely studying the representation of female religious figures, the postures and disposition of the martyred body, the religious garments that engender an erotic gaze in how they obscure and reveal skin, and the facial contortions caught between pleasure and pain. One can draw parallels between the figural disposition of Bernini's reclining Teresa in her religious rapture and the depiction of Greek mythic archetypes like Andromeda in Poytner's painting. Comparatively, they share certain gestural and compositional similarities – the fabric that frames the body, the gaze turned away from the viewer in mid action. As Genevieve Warwick notes in *Bernini: Art as Theatre*, “Bernini drew on a common vocabulary of bodily figuration derived from the canons of classical art and [mythology], which were themselves fused and rested on ancient conventions of signifying gesture in ritual.” (Warwick 2012, 72). The reading of female desire in religious dialogues emerged as significant to the kind of depictions I was researching. While divorced from the contemporary BDSM visual languages previously analysed, these depictions of religious and mythic conventions of femininity function as archetypes influencing the antecedent visual formulas of castrate and bound passive female bodies.

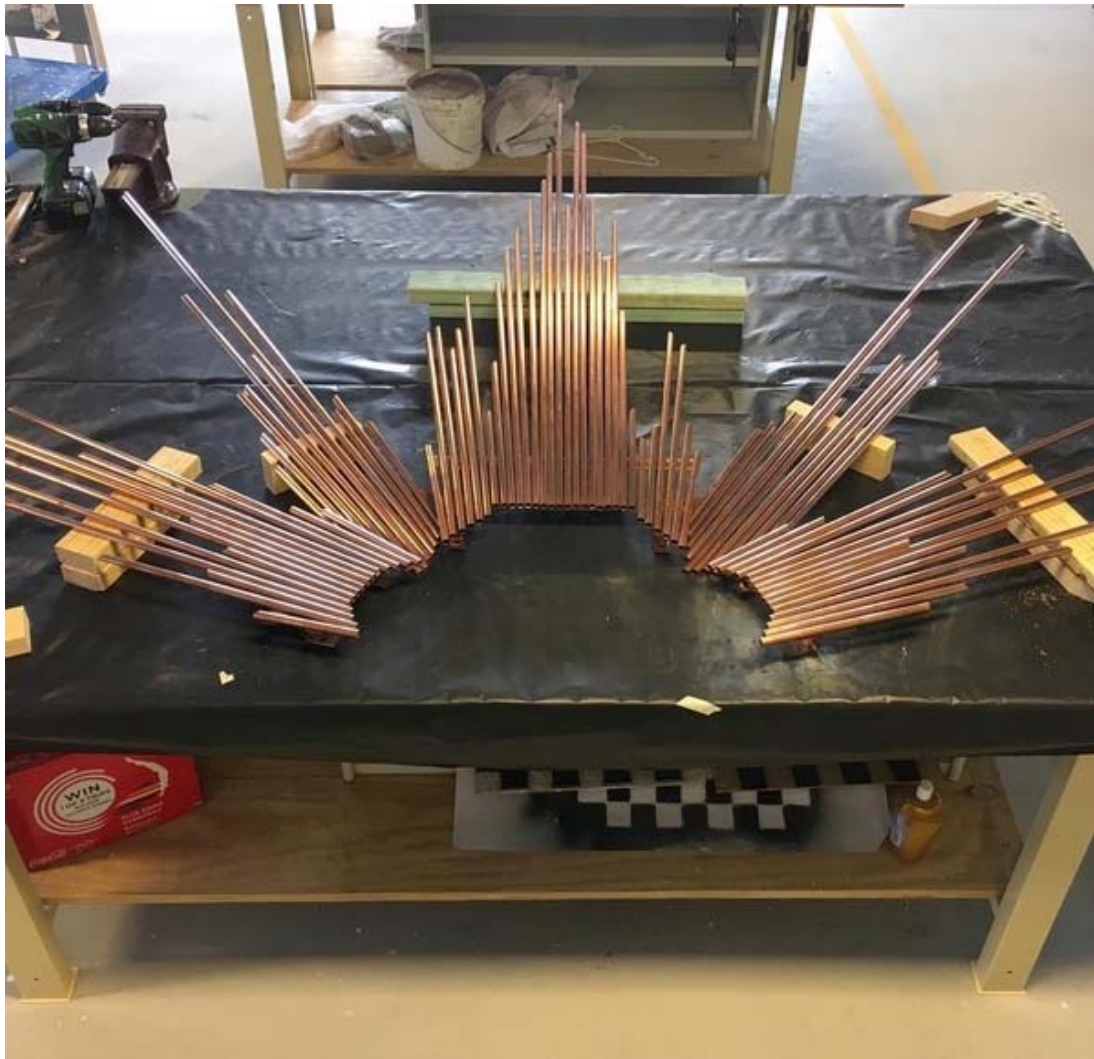


Figure 31: Studio documentation of the arrangement and construction of *Teresa*, 2016.

With these dialogues in observance, I continued to further develop the material and compositional elements of *Teresa* (Figure 31). While the original three panels gestured towards Bernini's sculpture in their radiating composition and the metal's surface quality, the sparse configuration lacked the material grandeur that typified Bernini's nimbus and the material excess that contributed to its visual impact. To heighten the grandeur of *Teresa* I increased the scale of the work by adding more panels; these panels, like the earlier sections, were manufactured in an intuitive manner, cutting and then laying out a range of different lengths in a splayed configuration. Via this spontaneous approach to construction, I was exploring how these arrangements could evoke a Baroque sense of naturalism and the qualities of light – namely, divine light. I started to contrive this sense of naturalism by alternating the cut angles at the bottom of the poles, slightly twisting each section before they were affixed to the backing

plate. I was attentive to how this peccadillo mimicked the radiance of light and created a sense of movement. At the top of each panel an arc was constructed through a stepped arrangement of tubing; these arcs were packed densely together, the concentration of the poles at the top then splaying out into the sparse radiating poles at the bottom. This mimics Bernini's nimbus in the impression that the sculpture radiates from a central light source then diffuses into space. When replicating the visual formulas of Bernini's light, I was investigating other Western iconographic depictions that featured a nimbus, particularly when used as a mark of regal authority, a crown. The halo "in the West [...] is regarded as an attribute of holiness; a king, according to our ideas should be adorned with a crown, a nimbus marks the saint" (Didron 1856, 89). By isolating and appropriating Teresa's crown, the sculpture embodies her via the mark of her authority.

The construction of the work in interlocking panels permitted flexibility in the installation and allowed a range of configurations. The arrangement of the panels was tested during a preliminary installation at the Frank Moran Memorial Gallery, preceding the final PhD exhibition in September (2016). When affixing the panels to the wall I broke with the sparseness of the original configuration, removing the spacing between the sections and opting for a compacted, interleaved arrangement with the alternating panels overlapping to give the impression of a unified whole. Unlike the first arrangement, I started to experiment with two layers of paneling via a central piece. This central piece rested above the arc of the other panels, aligned with the two highest points of the curve. Once installed and lit with spot lighting, I noticed how the arrangement of the panels not only referenced divine light but started to allude to figural depiction, pronounced by the panel rising head-like from the center of the arc, the tips of the bow spread-eagled (Figure 32) with the copper tubing radiating out like arms or wings.



Figure 32: Anastasia Booth, *Teresa*, 2016. Test installation for *Preaching to the Perverted* in the Frank Moran Memorial Gallery. Etched glass, copper, silver, plaster.

Looking at this arrangement with its bodily resemblance, it evoked other religious iconography – a silhouette of an angel with outstretched wings, saints ascending to heaven with billowing robes, and martyred bodies affixed to crosses. In previous suspension works I played with similar evocations of suspended bodies through materials – bodies with limbs stretched and affixed to apparatuses, rope bound bodies and the spread-eagle position (almost flayed-like) of bodies affixed to a saltire cross. In configuring the panels in this way, I was investigating the figuration of the castrate Teresa and the power dynamics between her and the putto. I was thinking of the putto's presence not as a metaphor for God and/or an agent of God but as a manifestation of Teresa's sexual desire. This led to a conflation of the angel and Teresa in my thinking, where the gestures of the putto acted as an analogy for Teresa's constricted eroticism.

I was also considering how sensuous richness, as a characteristic of Baroque art, is evident in the nimbus even when divorced from the figure, and how my methods of material engagement gestured towards this sensuality. A gesture that emerged through successive installations of the work was polishing, likened to obsessive rubbing. Because I wanted to maintain the natural oxidation of the copper as a material dialogue, the installation of the piece was preceded by a ritual of hand, mechanical and

chemical polishing (Figure 33). While in action with this process, I started to relate the gestures to erotic dialogues – the smearing of the liquid polish on the copper’s surface with a cloth; the fluid dripping and running in between cracks, building up on the surface like a lubricant; the tactility of the hand movements as the friction and repetitive gesture of rubbing removed the patina and then the final application of a soft wool pad to give the surface its final radiance. By being aware of this fetishised labour, I related this action to paraphilic practice, in particular the French term *frottage*, the sexual act of touching or rubbing against the clothed body of another person in a crowd as a means of obtaining sexual gratification.



Figure 33: Video documentation of the polishing of *Teresa*, 2016.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BIJk6xGA2aO/?taken-by=anastabooth>

The erotic charge that motivated my material approaches and the appropriative adoption of the light rays denote how I was approaching this sculpture as an embodiment of Saint Teresa of Avila, the material and gestural actions that compose the work functioning in animistic terms, the visual formulas that mediate Teresa's erotic depiction amalgamated into an agentive deific embodiment. No longer constrained to the rock as a passive sacrificial oracle for the divine, Teresa's Baroque material sensuality elevates her into the divine. Translated through a BDSM repertoire, her agency is acquired via this discursive aniconic depiction. No longer tied to the restrictive elements of Bernini's depiction, she is embodied through the desiring processes of her fetishistic reconceptualisation and the authoritative iconography of her position as a Christian deific being.



Figure 34: Anastasia Booth, *Teresa*, 2016, Copper. Installation view Metro Arts.

The sculptural approaches used in the creation of both works are illustrative of the tactical arrangement *Material, Embodiment and Animistic Inscription*. Intertwined

processes of labour and materiality act as the subtexts for the work's sensuality; at the core of their creation is fetish logic born of a BDSM repertoire. Their volition attributed through the artist as fetishist being in desiring dialogue with the materials, which are imbued with the agency of the fetish object, likened to an aniconic embodiment. By appropriating and isolating visual cues indexical to the figures, the sculptures create a cyclic dialogue with the narratives that punctuate the female archetype's range of passive depictions. These conversations, in turn, animistically inscribe the sculptures, elevating them to deific personhood. The performative approaches evident in the relationship between labour and materiality and my consideration of these in terms of being a proxy, or equating myself with the character, signalled how I had begun to inscribe my own body as a material to appropriate and re-enact personas through ritual actions.

5.2 PERFORMANCE AND VIDEO: BAUBO, SCYLLA AND ARTEMIS

5.2.1 PORTRAIT OF BAUBO

Exhibitions in which work is explored are *Sepulchre*, Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space, 2015 and *Preaching to the Perverted*, Metro Arts, Brisbane, 2016.



Figure 35: Anastasia Booth, *Portrait of Baubo*, 2015, Digital still.

Portrait of Baubo (Figure 35) utilises the alienating and transformative potential of costuming and the agency of the artist body as an expanded exploration of this Baubo characterisation. Shot on site at the gallery during my residency at Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space (Brisbane), the video features a central figure dressed in a

torn black shift, long black wig and a mask of leather and bells. Caught in an infinite loop, the character stands in a stationary pose and then spontaneously lifts her skirt, performing a comedic vulvic mooning. The anticipated view of the genitals is obstructed by a codpiece arrangement of bells, which leap in response to the figure's vigorous thrusting action. Done in the spirit of *anásyрма* (an apotropaic gesture) the skirt lift is a ritual action with “exorcistic or demon dispelling ... properties” (Bumbacher 2012, 114). While *anásyрма* as a gesture is spontaneous and unexpected, the repetitious looping of the video adds a ritualistic, arcane element. The video was exhibited on a small television screen (32”) (Figure 36), making the figure appear as a small totem character, likened to the small terracotta figures of Baubo or Sheela-nagig. The work explores how I use humour affiliated with ritual imagery to play with codes surrounding female representation – in particular, the agency that can be found in the re-enactment of bawdy and obscene bodily gestures, tied specifically to the geography of women's bodies. In adopting the fool “through play, or laughter ... enjoyment, pleasure, sexual pleasure or pleasure derived from the body... [the video uses] play as linguistic excess, the joy of disrupting or going beyond established, or fixed [representation] ... into the realm of non-sense.” (Isaak 1996, 2-3)



Figure 36: Anastasia Booth, *Portrait of Baubo*, 2015. Test installation for *Preaching to the Perverted* in the Frank Moran Memorial Hall Gallery. Digital Video.

In my practice the exploration of erotic jest is located in this appropriation of Baubo, a narrative figure from the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Demeter is inconsolable at the loss of her daughter to Hades. To stop her grief, Baubo offers Demeter wine, which she refuses. In frustration, Baubo flashes the goddess her vulva, bringing forth laughter and breaking Demeter's tormenting grief. (Olender 1990, 85). For me, the subversiveness of Baubo is her "reduction to an obscene spectacle" (Olender 1990, 90) as she uses her genitals to evoke laughter. When exploring the different portrayals and representations of Baubo I was fascinated by the confusion between her face and her genitals. In small totemic figures, the two are indistinguishable, as her vulva becomes her chin. Through material associations, I replicated this visual dynamic through masking and a twin set of harnesses. Such masking was to enhance my mimicry of the figure and to also render me unrecognisable. The use of a dildo-like harness harks back to my previous wearable forms, the overlapping leather structure creates a codpiece-like effect. Previously, these harness forms have gestured towards performativity through their relationship to the body, found in the array of buckles and binding, holes and straps. Unlike previous works, the harnesses in the video are given function as a kinetic and musical concealment for the face and genitals. This camouflage of the genitals was done as a strategy to avoid contemporary codes around flashing as an aspect of exhibitionism, these codes existing as a subtext reinforcing the humour of the Baubo gesture instead of replacing it. Since I wanted to draw out more nuanced and malleable dialectics than just that of exhibitionism, I obscured the full site of the genitals by the positioning of the bell harness, and reinforced this confusion between genital and face by obscuring the face in the same way.

In the rituals of apotropaic gestures, aural traditions are prominent, composed of the voice, bells and instruments. In the spirit of Mesiti's work, I was interested in incorporating a musical element as a gesture towards these practices. When researching these actions, I noticed that small bells accompany sculptural apotropaic figures like that of Baubo. These bells often had a relationship to the genitals, with one figure sporting a small bell hanging from the end of a large penis. Responding to this occurrence I fitted out my harness forms with layers of brass bells, similar in aesthetic to the historical objects that I had witnessed. I envisioned the bells as a musical accompaniment to my thrusting. The tiny notes, ranging from soft tinkles to a medley of sound accentuating the moments of stillness and then hip jiggling fury, added to the

obscene spectacle of the vaginal mooning and linked back to aural traditions.

These gestures were implemented in dialogue with Freudian notions of castration – instead of placing focus on the phallus. I played with comic appropriation and Baubo's ritual gestures in order to complicate the gaze associated with the vaginal fright. This tactic of humorous appropriative re-enactment, informed by the ethos of strategic essentialism, influenced the two other videos from this series of portraits, *Scylla* and *Artemis*.

5.2.2 PORTRAIT OF SCYLLA AND ARTEMIS

Exhibition in which the work is explored is *Preaching to the Perverted*, Metro Arts, Brisbane, 2016.

Through this ritual action and adopted costuming, my focus on humour and the obscene reflected my move toward ritual and performance as a strategy to unpick passive erotic convention. Addressing these qualities through performance, I became interested in the broader implications for this way of working in the rest of my practice. Resulting from this awareness, I began to look at other female identities who had monstrous bodies and whose volition was located in this divergence. During my research trip, I visited the British Museum after my visit to Freud's studio. In the museum I looked to small terracotta votive offerings, similar in shape and composition to the objects in Freud's studio. Of interest were those personages with extra appendages or animal hybrid bodies. These protrusions often had erotic charge, with the heads of animals emerging from the crotch or, like Baubo, the genitals multiplied or located on different sites of the body. I identified two figures where these visual formulas intersected (Scylla and Artemis), drawing out the communal elements of their portrayal into digitally mediated performances.

Scylla (Figure 37), a character from Greek mythology is a female Homeric monster whose body is composed of a female torso, multiple dog heads and a serpent tail. In the mythic narrative, Scylla occupies a narrow sea passage in Messina, Italy, opposite her equally menacing sister, Charybdis. The two were used as an analogy for the impassable strait; on the one side Scylla, the treacherous rocks that took sailor's ships

and on the other, Charybdis, a whirlpool. This impossible situation of being stuck between Scylla and Charybdis is the Greek equivalent to the English adage ‘between a rock and a hard place’ denoting the difficulty of a situation when you are stuck between two impossible and potentially threatening choices. Homer describes Scylla as “having 12 legs and six heads sitting on six long necks from which issues the barking of a dog; she uses her three rows of teeth to devour passing sea creatures and sailors.” (Homer quoted in Roman 2010, 433) While certain classical depictions of Scylla break with Homer’s description of her, the canine theme is recurrent, evident in terracotta sculptures like the Roman depiction of her in the British Museum. Here, the terracotta figure from Rome has three protruding dog heads, the allusion to large protruding penises evident in the angling snout of the dogs and their position on her lower torso. The cheeky gesturing with the hand towards to the top of her crotch and the way her fingers are curled in a fist appearing to hold some kind of weapon, the gesture building a relationship to the etymology of her name in Greek *Scyllo* to rend.



Figure 37: Scylla, Southern Italy, Terracotta 250 – 200 BC, The British Museum, London, 2016.

Likened to the *Portrait of Baubo*, I constructed a digitally mediated portrait of Scylla, speaking to the erotic codes framing her representation via a focus on these menacing characteristics. I drew this depiction out in regards to the costuming I had seen in the fetish scene and how I had used leather costuming to investigate Baubo. The pleasure I had located in handcrafted leather and the spaces it spoke to through its materiality was re-located to the costuming of this performance. While the objects *Teresa* and *Andromeda* contained a material sensuality, the performances became sites where I returned to the tropes of BDSM wear. Outside of just the phallic adoption present in the dildo harness, I began to reflect on how leather fetishwear specifically is used in other ways to conceal or encase the body; the body transformed via the restriction of

leather corsetry, moulded leather gimp masks, capes, gloves, etc., the alienating and menacing elements of the leather costuming intrinsic to the power dynamics at play. Interestingly, since leather's emergence in the 1930s, its use has been located solely on the female body in depictions of the dominatrix. Observations made by Edward Shorter in *Written in the Flesh: A History of Desire* makes apparent these connections between leather, power and the performance of the total eroticised female body (2005, 225). Considering the alienating and menacing qualities of the leather-clad female body, I placed these in dialogue with the threatening and monstrous body of Scylla (Figure 38).

I began by constructing segmented pieces of leather in resemblance to my previous harnessing and fetishwear. The canine narratives of the myth influenced how these pieces were formed, in the central headpiece ending in a snout-like shape and the bells attached. Playing with the erotics of concealment I left sections of the female body naked behind the interlocking plates of the leather, the hair an evocative veil revealing and concealing the body during the gestures of the performance. Leaving it in long hanging locks around the crotch and body spoke to how I had started to think of Scylla as a canine-esque furred monster. The long trailing locks of pubis gesturing to her monstrous anamorphic form and as an innate power – the power of defying the heteronormative conventions of the clean-shaven pale body as evident in depictions of Andromeda. The breasts hang down amongst the plates, the pressure of the leather harness above distorting their shape into pendulous, dog-like, hanging teats. An aggressive element is present in the original narrative in the menacing heads of the dogs that rend and devour, acting as both the appendages of her body and the weapons she uses. Initially I had intended to produce three attachments in resemblance to the small votive offerings I had seen, but the single appendage formed from a curled piece of sewn leather was enough to evoke this dialogue and was visually stronger when used in the performance. Instead of locating the dog head in the site of the crotch, I shifted it up to the breastplate; this was for practical reasons as the gesture of the performance was then activated in the ability of the appendage to be raised like a pistol, vigorously shaking the bells at the tip. The actions in the performance formed a constellation of links to the original narrative, envisioned as not only a menacing apotropaic action to scare away but also building a relationship to her sister on the other side of the strait. The gesture takes on an enquiring air – the bells raised and

initially rung gently, the head of Scylla seeking Charybdis on the other bank. With successive lifts the appendage is rung more vigorously, the action taking on an aggressive air as Scylla pauses and sits down, the length of the shaft appearing to aim at an unidentified enemy.



Figure 38: Anastasia Booth, *Portrait of Scylla*, 2016. Digital still.

The *Portrait of Artemis* (Figure 39) is located in similar concerns; the development of the two portraits together reflected how the performative works were functioning in dialogue. My investigations of Artemis centred on her depictions from Ephesus, the Ephesian Artemis distinct in her multi-breasted geography, her torso covered in layers of pendulous flesh orbs. Unlike Betsy Damon's exploration of Artemis, I looked to her mythic position as a virginal hunter, thinking of the harness no longer in terms of a dildo harness but as a kind of chastity belt, the covering of the genitals also a form of genital ambiguity. Mirroring the interlocking leather plates and hanging hair of Scylla, I located Artemis's action in her identification as a hunter, the bow instead replaced

by a dominatrix's white handmade whip.



Figure 39: Anastasia Booth, *Portrait of Artemis*, 2016, Digital still.

The installation of the Baubo, Scylla and Artemis videos in *Preaching to the Perverted* punctuated how the three were in dialogue. The three 32" screens – the original size of the Baubo video – were arranged across the space from each other, each one inhabiting its own corner. Working with the three videos together, I stopped thinking about the invisible enemies that my characters were gesturing to and instead considered what the implications were of them gesturing at each other, their apotropaic gestures and audio acting out across the space reciprocated by the other characters. Accordingly, I took note of the gaze of each character, considering the stance of their bodies and at what point they were looking at the camera. I based the positioning of the videos on these bodily figurations, using the character's site and position to imply

an awareness of the other characters in the space. Resulting from this arrangement, the videos were conversing across the space, their subsequent apotropaic gestures acting in medley. As the performances play out, the acoustics of the bells and the resounding whip cracks fill the space, creating a ritual soundscape that then sits in dialogue with the other works.

The space of the performance acted as a site to reconceptualise existing agentive narratives in Freud's studio, using BDSM as a repertoire to bolster the subversiveness of these votive depictions via a sense of humour and play. As indicated in my discussions of strategic essentialism and the subversive potential of being in dialogue with goddess depictions, my re-enactment of Baubo demonstrated how humour as a tactic can be implemented to subversively reconceptualise the fright of castration in Freud's text, and it informed how I implement BDSM materials and fetish ritual as a means to activate the personas in his study, via performed gestures and costuming. Referring to Janine Burke's observations of Freud's study as a site of female abundance has informed these appropriations. I have adopted agentive female characters that sit in contention to the passive narratives of female desire recurrent in Freud's text and in my previous sculptural depictions. The sculptural and ritual outcomes sit in dialogue with the tactical arrangements detailed in earlier chapters of this study. The implications for this way of working and how it constitutes a new paradigm for creative practice is detailed in the conclusion of this document.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This practice-led project has investigated the ways that passive depictions of female sexual agency can be reconceptualised through the visual languages located in fetishism and BDSM practice; and how this constitutes a new paradigm for creative practice. It has explored how the codes that iterate passive conceptions of female sexuality located in fetishism and broader cultural discourse can be agentively re-inscribed by employing methods of fetish labour, aniconic inscription, embodiment, appropriation, ritual gestures, goddess performance and costuming.

In the early stages of this practice-led research, I started with the premise that Freudian sexual fetishism as articulated in BDSM subculture could be implemented as a methodology to problematise depictions of female sexuality in art. Eventually, I developed a new position as a result of my studies that fetishism informed by its ethnographic history can be utilised as a specific stratagem of tactics to explore the complexities of female agency in art practice. Therefore, my contribution to knowledge is to develop new ways of considering female agency in art through the use of fetishism as a stratagem. While this study does not offer an exhaustive account of the ways in which fetishism can be used, it does elaborate on specific tactical applications of fetish characteristics in creative practice. The study defines how this reconceptualisation of certain fetish tropes constitutes a positive methodological praxis that acknowledges and makes allowance for the complexity of female desire.

In the introduction (Chapter 1) I detail how my revision of fetish discourse is drawn from personal modes of desire and my subjectivity as a female practitioner in BDSM subculture. This insight drove the critical and creative explorations of agency in the project, it modeled the implementation of fetishism as a repertoire of material approaches drawn from BDSM, and informed how sexual taboo functions as an alternate mode in artistic practice to depict agency. As a result, my earliest dialogue with Freudian fetishism is grounded in this interrelationship with BDSM practice, articulated through mutual characteristics; objects agentively inscribed with desire and materials operating as conduits for the erotic performance. The sculptural and

performative works created in this framework employ humour and a phallic lexicon to complicate gendered depiction. These works defied the muted voices of women in Freudian fetishism by inextricably linking female desire to authoritative discourses and looking at sexual deviation as a space of opportunity. The impetus for this practice-led research emerged from these early dialogues with fetishism and was spurred by what I had identified as fetish's potential application as a stratagem. The stratagem operates in contemporary artistic practice as an agentive model of creative methods; implemented as a tactical arrangement of material and theoretical approaches. Crucial to this methodological approach is the philosophies established in psychoanalytic feminism and feminist theology, significant for their methods of critique, resistance to hetero-normative discourse and how they develop new paradigms for reevaluating female desire in these frameworks. The contributions to knowledge emerging from this fetish/BDSM framework are situated in creative practice, where the Fetish Stratagem is used to interrogate passive depictions of female sexuality and operates as a distinct paradigmatic scaffold for alternate representations of female sexual agency. The structure of the study mirrors the dialogical exchange between Freud and I, the contributions to knowledge emerging from this conversation are made apparent in both the creative outcomes and theoretical foundation. New knowledge is generated by dint of the fetishistic labour and lenses that constitute my processes of making artworks. Core to this labour is the desiring modes and agentive positions that shape the engagements between the materials and the body.

Chapter 2 detailed my early approaches in the study. As I have mentioned, at that time I was concerned with how female practitioners could adopt the phallus to problematize perceptions of the female body in Freudian discourse. My theoretical anchors included theorist, Ellen McCallum, who questions the instability of the phallus when aligned with its biological counterpart; and Elizabeth Grosz's texts, which bolstered my perception of the phallic as an adoptable construct. I focused on female practitioners that utilised the phallic alongside performative dialogues to enact different interpretations of female sexuality. At that time the creative practice focused on the formal qualities of BDSM leather and harness wear, and investigated unstable materials as an exploration of the complexities and contradictions in locating the phallic in a feminine framework. These iterations of the phallic as an analytical tool influenced my subsequent reconceptualisations of fetishism as a tactical stratagem.

This focus on adoption and agency framed my reconsideration of fetishism as an active epistemology, reimagining its psychoanalytic interpretation – an unconscious compulsion – into an agentive strategy that can be actively employed. Theorist Louise Kaplan informed how I composed my Fetish Stratagem. By comparing and contrasting her strategy with my stratagem, I identified how the term stratagem is fitting for the study as it highlights notions of subversion and subterfuge. This focus on subterfuge is pertinent when discussing the intersections of feminist thought and psychoanalysis. As indicated in previous sections, my fetish paradigm is located in fruitful confrontation with Freud's theories and the subversive application of Freudian thought by female practitioners. Removed from the restricted aetiological position of Freud's phallic ontology, I began to explore fetish mechanisms as a range of productive and generative artistic tactics.

Chapter 3 as a transitional chapter, explains the shift that occurred in the research trajectory; informed by the studio-based experimentation transpiring at that time. While the artworks discussed previous to this chapter relied heavily on the phallic as a theoretical scaffold, these studio experiments signaled a departure from this frame. Instead, the formal and material compositions employed in these formative works focused on surfaces and textures that are indexical to depictions of the female passive body. These in turn were subversively re-scribed by their placement in my fetish lexicon and the material repertoire shaping their production. Theoretically, I began to look to alternate articulations of the fetish and considered how the materials I had been forming sat in dialogue with certain female archetypes. Chapter 4 builds on this shift in the research scope, contextualised by observations made during a research trip to Freud's study in January 2016. While this new phase in the research is distinct due to the creative outcomes and the analysis of mythological motifs, it still shares the material characteristics of my BDSM vernacular. The observations in this chapter highlight the significance of the ancient objects located in Freud's study and the ethnographical presence of mythology in his psychoanalytic analysis.

Freud's workroom sat in dissonance to the passive dialogues established in his fetishism text with its abundance of strong mythic women. Theorist Janine Burke articulates this contradiction and notes how the presence of these women sit at odds to

the masculine scope of Freud's writing. Primed by Burke's assertions the study honed in on key female archetypes that were located in Freud's study. This referral to deific personas was contextualised by anthropological notions of fetishism and made apparent the links between Freud's sexual ontology and the characteristics of early fetish worship. The significance of these dialogues to the implementation of the Fetish Stratagem in creative practice was established in the Tactical Arrangements: *Material, Embodiment and Animistic Inscription* and *Ritual and Performance, Castration and Appendages*. In the first tactic, I detailed how the use of aniconic inscription and deific embodiment can be reconceptualised as a distinct fetish method, which imparts agency and autonomy to the object. It draws from the mutual characteristics of ethnographic and sexual understandings of the fetish. In the creative practice this aniconic model was attributed by the fetish labour integral to the creation of the sculptural works *Teresa* and *Andromeda*, created as embodiments without bodies. The works constitute an original contribution to knowledge through their methods of appropriative reconceptualization, with these personas passivity redefined by the subversive use of codes that iterate their cultural depictions. The agentive application of this tactical arrangement in the broader context of contemporary art was located in the analysis of contemporary artworks by practitioners Maria Laboda and Sarah Contos.

The tactical arrangement *Ritual and Performance, Castration and Harnessing* built on the agency of ritual acts when aligned with processes of reenactment and the appropriation of goddess imagery. The volitive use of these codes in contemporary art is contextualised by recourse to strategic essentialism and the subversive humour located in performing goddess personifications. Drawing from Stanley J. Tambiah's agency of magic, ritual is framed as a theory of performatives aligned with the processes of art. Placed in relation to ethnographic dialogues, my ritual actions are gestural and aural portraits of female personas; Baubo is meaningful as a character that reframes Freudian castration through humorous apotropaic gestures. The humour located in her performance is in the overt use of vulvic fright as a celebratory and demon-repelling act. The use of humour as a strategy of feminist critique in these works offers room for further critical analysis and creative research. In this study the emergent potential for this way of working is found in the digital portraits of Scylla and Artemis. Their authority is located in their monstrous appendages, which either transform or multiply the genitals to humorous and aggressively volitive effect. These

characters' use is in dialogue with the constellation of passive and agentic positions identified in Freud's text. In representing these figures, the creative works questioned how the agentic codes located in ritual and ancient depictions can subversively realign feminine positions in Freud's text. The implication for this way of working is evidenced in the works of contemporary practitioners Tori Wraanes and Angelica Mesiti, who both use costuming and ritual acts to speak differently to the limited portrayals of female sexual agency.

Chapter 5 examined how the theoretical contexts and methodological frames were implemented, the final creative outcomes that emerged from this dialogue were explored through the exhibitions *Sepulchre* at Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space (2015) and the final PhD exhibition *Preaching to the Perverted* at Metro Arts (2016). These exhibition components exemplified how the Fetish Stratagem is utilised in the context of the studio practice. By implementing the tactical arrangements detailed in the document; the sculptural works operated as embodiments composed of the material and poetic reinterpretations of their cultural representations; and the digitally mediated performances utilised agentic ritual methods to reinterpret the female figures that sat in contest to the heteronormative framework of Freud's text. The contributions to knowledge that evolved from my approach are situated in the field of contemporary art; the study contributes distinct paradigms to creative practice through the reframing of fetish discourse as an agentic tactical approach. This is executed through the methodological approaches and the alignment of artistic process with the tactical nature of the Fetish Stratagem. The theoretical analysis has contributed to the scholarship on feminist thought and psychoanalytical theory through the lens of artistic practice; and offered original analysis of creative practitioners and their works by reading them through the Fetish Stratagem. The exhibition of the creative works informed by my theoretical and scholarly foundation contributes new scholarship to fetishism theory through its renegotiation as an artistic method.

In conclusion this project proposes a new analytical frame and creative paradigm for female practice. It addresses one potential avenue by which female practitioners can (instead of being fetishists subconsciously) be aware of and actively employ fetishism as a range of tactical arrangements in their artworks. Due to the evolving nature of this practice-led research, further outcomes from this approach can be expected. For

example, while the abstract sculptural works were crafted in dialogue with the Fetish Stratagem, their potential as forms of feminist critique is still being refined. As such, the creative practice will continue to serve as a site of critical and creative analysis. Future exhibitions will serve as a platform for further revision and the refinement of fetishism as a methodology of feminist critique. As an artist and feminist I am still solidifying my approach to the creative and theoretical developments I have explored and developed in the course of this study. While this PhD exegesis has focused on discussions of female desire, I understand that to even attempt to articulate what feminine desire may look like is a controversial topic and to look at all the positions in which female desire articulates itself is far too ambitious an undertaking for any single PhD study. What I have done instead is concentrate on the Fetish Stratagem as a distinct strategic arrangement that diversifies and reclaims the cultural articulations of female passivity established in heteronormative contexts. My lens has been shaped by a focus on female agency and a critique of the limitations of female representation when situated in passive narratives. The contribution to knowledge identified through this research project is the identification and application of fetishism as a strategy of feminist critique to question these dialogues but also as a distinct creative *stratagem* located in contemporary feminist art practice, which acknowledges and allows for the complexity of female desire.

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