People, Things and Archaeological Knowledge: An Exploration of the Significance of Fetishism in Archaeology.

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Fetishism: here is the desire to hold, look, touch; captivation by the consecrated object. The antiquary's vase is past frozen, a fixed moment. The wholeness of the past is lost in the melancholic holding of the vase; the past, longed for, is missing. The vase fills the gap. Touching, viewing what once was there, part of what is desired. But the fixation on the vase, the antiquary's contact is the condition of the past being absent. The vase commemorates the past, which is missing, but denies this. The fetish object combines gratification and distress: being sometimes the presence and sometimes the absence of that which is desired. The archaeological suspicion is that antiquarian desire effaces the past. The object merely mirrors the antiquary's impoverished world in which knowledge ... is replaced by blind desire. There is morbidity about the antiquary too: images of skulls, dusty gloom, yellow parchment of decay. The antiquary is dead to all sensuality save the body of the past. The past is dead and gone; but here is a beautiful and fascinating vase. Perhaps though we should remember the sensuality present through its absence in the antiquary's desire to hold the past (Shanks, 1992: 99-100).

Fetishism... direct concern with surface appearances that conceal underlying meanings (Harvey, 1989: 77). The fetish quality of an object is the reverence or the fascination for it that arises out of its capacities but is expressed over and beyond its simple consumption. This fetish quality is attested through ritualistic
practices that celebrate or revere the object, a class of objects, items from a 'known' producer or even the brand name of a range of products (Dant, 1996: 511).

**Introduction.**

In this article I shall address the issue of fetishism and assess its value as a way of understanding attitudes to archaeology and some of its objects of study, the material traces of human action in the past. I shall try to show how the use of the concept of fetishism opens up the possibility of an internal critique of archaeological practice from positions other than those predicated on an assumption of the existence of privileged, objectivist or foundationalist perspectives. In doing this I will use two case studies to suggest that archaeological knowledge, as well as archaeological objects of the type described by Shanks (above), can be fetishised with particular consequences for the discipline as a cultural practice characterised by a degree of self-awareness and self-interrogation.

My starting point will be the definitions of fetishism proposed by Gamman and Makinen (1994: chapter 1) and set out by Dant;

> There are ... three fields in which the term fetishism is used ... proto-anthropology; the analysis of the commodity form; the analysis of sexual perversion. The term seems to originate in the first of these fields and is then employed analogously in the latter two (Dant, 1996: 498).

**Anthropological Fetishism.**

The historical background to anthropological fetishism has been discussed in detail by William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988) and summarised by Gamman and Makinen (1994: 16-18, with references), Ellen (1987) and Dant (1996) and can be treated relatively briefly here, although its implications are of some significance to the case study discussed below.

Early uses of the term fetishism, referring to West African ritual and religious practices, are deeply rooted in the anthropological dynamics of the encounter between European merchants and the people with whom they traded. The critical characteristic of the religious fetish is that it derives its power from its associations with a deity. It is distinguished from a totem, one member of a class of reverenced objects (such as an animal and other members of its
species) by its individuality. Such a notion, as developed by Gamman and Makinen, is of considerable interest for, as they note,

The concept of anthropological fetishism, the idea that the fetish object may derive power from a deity, is ... appropriate for understanding other behaviour in the contemporary West (Gamman & Makinen, 1994: 18).

Gamman and Makinen devote some space to a discussion of the actions and preoccupations of female fans of singers and other culturally iconic individuals (1994: 18-27) but from the point of view of archaeology it is the role of the fetish objects themselves which make the notion one of use in understanding attitudes to the past. Stripped of the sexual overtones inherent in (although distinguishable from) fan-atic behaviour, Gamman and Makinen's descriptions of the behaviour of fans have a considerable amount in common with descriptions of the type of antiquarianism and aestheticism sketched by Shanks in the quotation at the start of this article. Abstracting anthropological fetishism from the domain of religion in its strict sense liberates the concept for use in other reverential and quasi-reverential contexts; as Dant says,

A fetish is created through the veneration or worship of an object that is attributed some power or capacity, independently of its manifestation of that capacity. However through the very process of attribution the object may indeed manifest those powers; the specialness with which the object is treated makes it special (Dant, 1996: 499).

This then is one sense of the term fetishism that appears to have a direct relevance to certain archaeological and para-archaeological practices. The term has however a number of other senses which may also inform an archaeological consideration.

Karl Marx and the Fetishism of Commodities.

In his discussion of the nature of commodities, which occupies the first part of Das Kapital, Marx introduced 'the fetishism of the commodity and its secret',

A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties (Marx, 1976: 163).

This 'strangeness' is not a result of differing use values, but arises out of the fact that commodities reflect the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social ... The ... commodity form, and the value relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men
which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. ... I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities (Marx, 1976: 164-165).

Underlying Marx’s formulation is the essentially modernist or, to use Dant's term, realist, principle that the application of a set of analytical instruments can strip away 'false', 'ideological' or 'reified' accretions to unmask an underlying reality, an approach concisely set out by Brewster in his glossary to Althusser and Balibar's Reading Capital:

Fetishism (fétiichisme). Fetishism is the mechanism which conceals the real functioning ... of the dominant structure in the social formation, i.e., it is the constitutive dislocation between the ideological practice and the other practices. This is not a subjective mystification, but the mode of appearance of reality ... In the capitalist mode of production it takes the form of the fetishism of commodities i.e. the personification of certain things (money-capital) and the reification of certain relationships (labour). ... Fetishism is not absent from other modes of production, it is merely displaced onto whatever level is dominant in the social formation characterized by that mode of production (Brewster, 1970: 313).

Within a Marxist frame of reference then, fetishism is a naturalised form of concealment inherent in the social order, separating the producer from the object of his/her work and masking the actual relationships between human beings, transforming them into relations between objects and between people and objects (cf. Dant, 1996: 500; Ellen, 1987: 216-7; see also Apter & Pietz, 1993 and Spyer, 1998 for further examples and discussion).

One of the problems with the classical Marxist position is its failure to engage effectively with the sphere of consumption (Miller, 1987, 1995a; Gamman & Makinen, 1994: 29; Dant, 1996: 500-1). In Miller's terms the Marxist analysis allows for a critical analysis of the field of consumption, but one in which the whole sphere tends to be treated as merely a mode of false consciousness, consequent upon other spheres (Miller, 1987: 44).

Miller has been concerned to stress the falsity of assuming the possibility of a pre-cultural social subject and the significant part played in the maintenance of social relations by the objectification of subjects through the medium of material culture. His demonstration of the significance of commodities, and particularly of the modes of consuming, or using, such commodities is a valuable corrective to the unyielding modernistic scientism of Althusser on the one hand and the abdication from the responsibility to engage in socio-political critique manifested by certain strands of post-modernism on the other (cf. Miller, 1995b). A similar position has been taken by Dant who concludes his discussion with the observation that as an aspect of the work of human beings, an element of cultural production, a fetish is as real as anything can be, a point which has also been made by Cook and Crang in their discussion of
Sigmund Freud and Sexual Fetishism.

To Sigmund Freud sexual fetishism involved

the sexual overvaluation of a substitute object, that while related to the sex object is nonetheless unsuited to the normal sexual aim (Dant, 1996: 502).

While Freud's approach to fetishism appears to have changed during his career (Gamman & Makinen, 1994: 40-1; Thompson, 1994: 92-3), it seems that, at some stage, he saw a degree of addition or extension to the biological sexual act as common and even normal. Only in its extreme manifestations, or when the diversity of sexual objects was reduced to a single obsessive relationship did he see fetishism as becoming a pathological state. The sexual fetish, broadly defined,

is a symbolic substitute that has an analogous or metonymical association with the normal sex object (Dant, 1996: 502).

Subsequent work has extended and refined the Freudian concept (and in some branches of psychoanalysis subjected it to radical critique) to include accounts of female fetishism and the widely differing objects which can be incorporated into fetishistic behaviour (cf. Apter & Pietz, 1993; Gamman & Makinen, 1994; Steele, 1996).

Deprived of its phallocentrism the psychoanalytic account of fetishism focuses on the dynamics of human desire for objects that substitute or 'stand in' for something human. Freud, and Binet before him, both recognised that desire for objects is a normal part of human existence. Fetishism might be born of a frustration or confusion of normal desire, a sublimation or redirection of sexual needs, but this is almost characteristic of the human condition. It is neither pathological nor in itself destructive of human social being (Dant, 1996: 503-4).

The significance of the Freudian definition for the current discussion is twofold. Firstly it reinforces the point made in the context of Marxism, that fetishisation is a process of substitution, concealment and mystification through which objects are centrally involved within relationships between human beings. Secondly it draws attention to the aspect of fetishism described by Shanks at the beginning of this article where an object, decontextualised and subsequently recontextualised through individual or group agency, comes to stand for the presence of the something absent. In the case of archaeology this absent presence is, most notably, the past.
While in Dant's account Freudian approaches to fetishism appear relatively benign, other writers, drawing on the experiences of sexual radicals and those with sexual preferences pathologised by contemporary society, have found the Freudian framework an inherently repressive, and overwhelmingly phallicising, one. I am not sufficiently well versed in the literature of psychoanalysis, sexual radicalism or pathologised deviance to be able to judge the extent to which Freud himself saw fetishism as a pathological state requiring 'treatment', and this is, in any case, of secondary importance to the argument which I am developing here. Suffice it to say that certain strands of psycho-analytical thought have employed a pathologising approach to fetishism which has served to prompt a response from practitioners of radical sex who have sought to establish fetishism as a legitimate sexual preference alongside other sexualities. From these writers, notably Califa (1994) and Thompson (1994), a third element can be distinguished which is of importance to the present argument. This concerns the essential, but inevitably and inescapably subjective, reality of the fetish object, previously noted above in the discussion of commodity fetishism (see also Cook & Crang, 1996; Steele, 1996). This important point will be discussed again, and in greater detail, below.

Jean Baudrillard and Semiotic Fetishism.

Central to Dant's discussion of fetishism is the work of Jean Baudrillard and his concern with the relationship between the social subject and the object (1996: 504-9; see also Gamman & Makinen, 1994: 34-7). Baudrillard's work, and notably his more recent writings, are notoriously obscure, increasingly self-referential (cf. Poster, 1988) and, to many, politically suspect. Dant's discussion does not avoid these issues, but focuses on Baudrillard's early encounter with the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism and his later interest in the fetishisation of the human body.

Baudrillard's critique of Marx is of interest in that he attempts to move beyond the latter's discussion of commodity fetishism to argue that use-value is as much a fetishised category as exchange-value, a position which, as noted above, has been more clearly expressed by Miller (1987: 46-9). Moving beyond use value, Baudrillard notes that it appears that commodity fetishism (that is where social relations are disguised in the qualities and attributes of the commodity itself) is not a function of the commodity defined simultaneously as exchange value and use value but of exchange value alone. Use value, in this restrictive analysis of fetishism, appears neither as a social relation nor hence as the locus of fetishisation. Utility as such escapes the final determination of class
... It is here that Marxian idealism goes to work; it is here that we have to be more logical than Marx himself - and more radical in the true sense of the word. For use value - indeed, utility itself - is a fetishised social relation, just like the abstract equivalence of commodities. Use value is an abstraction. It is an abstraction of the system of needs cloaked in the false evidence of a concrete destination and purpose, an intrinsic finality of goods and products. It is just like the abstraction of social labour, which is the basis for the logic of equivalence (exchange value), hiding beneath the 'innate' value of commodities (Baudrillard, 1988: 64-5).

As Dant, clarifying Baudrillard’s prose, says, the object of consumption does not exist in relation to pure, natural, asocial human needs but is produced as a sign in a system of relations of difference with other objects (Dant, 1996: 504).

The process of consumption is neither a simple servicing of basic human needs nor a purely economic transaction (both of which are positions which archaeology is increasingly demonstrating to be non-existent phantoms of abstract reason; a misapplication of enlightenment humanism, cf. Baudrillard, 1988: 35-6), but rather the complex exchange of signs and values situated within the matrix of human social action. It is the degree to which an object embodies sign value that turns it into a fetish, and this system of value and exchange is termed by Baudrillard consummativity, the counterpart of productivity (Dant, 1996: 505). Dant's point, following Baudrillard, is that Marx failed to engage with consumption as fetishistic in its own right. In the modern world this takes the form of the exchange of sign values with fetishism being

the 'fascination' felt by both individuals and by the culture as a whole with those signs that have been positively valorised (Dant, 1996: 506).

In Baudrillard’s later writing he shows increasing concern with the fetishisation of the human body and with the capacity of the object to seduce the subject (Dant, 1996: 508), and finally comes to focus on hyperdetermination and the power of the object to determine the subject. This concern with hyperdetermination is one of the four problems which Dant identifies in Baudrillard's recent work, the other three being his reduction of objects to two dimensions, function and ostentation, his failure to explore the relationship between sign value and practical use value and the extent to which all objects are fetishes and, if so, whether the fetish quality is the same in all cases. These more abstruse points are perhaps less relevant to the argument which will be presented below.

Tim Dant: Fetishism and the Consumption of Objects.
The uses of the term fetishism by Marx and Freud share one particular characteristic; both authors employ it in the framework of an essentially modernist discourse to reveal that which was hitherto hidden about their own particular culture. Modernism's catastrophic failure, whether in the realms of architecture, politics or even, indeed, the naive positivism of the New Archaeology, was its central self-delusion that there was (and is) a form of utopian reason, a foundation for a utopian practice knowable through some form of scientific rationalism, which overrides the contextual, situated nature of human reason, practice and action. In contrast, Dant's analysis of fetishism (in common with, and to some extent following, that of others) represents an attempt to discover a position from which fetishism can be seen to be a displacement of meaning rather than a mistake or misunderstanding about the real nature of objects (1996: 498-9). In this he follows Gamman and Makinen, citing with approval their comment that

Fetishism...is by definition a displacement of meaning through synecdoche, the displacement of the object of desire onto something else through the processes of disavowal (Gamman & Makinen, 1994: 45).

The fetish is seen as having powers of mediation, of transforming the ideas and beliefs of those who venerate it, but,

The power of the fetish is not reducible to its material form any more than the meaning of a word can be reduced to its material representation (Dant, 1996: 499).

Dant's project arises from Marx's recognition (in the Grundrisse) that need and consumption are produced and from Baudrillard's development of this position to incorporate Freud's notion of desire into the relationships between individuals and objects. These three thinkers have provided an approach to an understanding of the ways in which fetishes might work as objects in everyday life, but they have not explored the social practices through which objects are used, consumed and fetishised (Dant, 1996: 509-513; see also Miller, 1987). Attempting to remedy this, Dant has defined four features of consumption, each a mode of human relations with material objects:

- The physical aspects of the object, perceived by the subject (shape, colour, texture, strength, flexibility, and movement).
- The cultural practices which constrain the use of objects.
- The object as sign, locating it within cultural parameters.
- The object as a surface for the inscription of linguistic or visual text.

Through these modes of interaction the subjects are able to realise the capacities of material objects. Dant gives a preliminary list of six capacities possessed by objects which the human subject may exploit or deploy as an aspect of the consumption or use of the object:
- Function (an extension or enhancement of the physical capacity of the user).
- Ostentation (signification of membership of a social group).
- Sexuality (signification of the sexual orientation, identity and interests of the user).
- Knowledge (delivery of knowledge to the user as information or synthetic understanding).
- Aesthetics (a quality which moves the emotions of the user through the representation of pure values).
- Mediation (the enabling or facilitation of communication or understanding between consumers).

The capacities of objects are not a consequence of the object's material form, but emerge in the social and material milieu in which it is consumed ... the fetish quality of an object is the reverence or fascination for it which arises out of its capacities but is expressed over and beyond its simple consumption. This fetish quality is attested through ritualistic practices that celebrate or revere the object, [or] a class of objects ... Unlike sexual fetishism where the fantasy is usually personal, the fetishism of consumption involves the social negotiation and sharing of the value of the object so the ritualistic practices that fetishise objects will involve discursive action related to the object and its capacities ...

The cumulative effect of these practices amount to an overdetermination of the social value of the object that is not merely consumed (exchanged or used) but ... can be enjoyed at the level of the imagination (Dant, 1996: 511-512).

The concept of overdetermination refers to the excess of capacity through which consumption or use of an object confers those capacities on the subject who consumes or uses it. The identification of the fetish quality is not a matter of judging the true or real capacities of the object but of recognising the sources of positive valuation from which it derives its overdetermined character (Dant, 1996: 512).

The fetish quality ... is not an intrinsic or stable quality of the object. It is assigned through cultural mediation, the circulation of signs that include the objects themselves. It is realised through a worshipful consumption of the objects in which reverence is displayed through desire for and an enthusiastic use of the object's capacities (Dant, 1996: 514).

**Fetishism and Archaeology.**

At both an abstract and the concrete level archaeology is, above all else, a discipline which is centrally concerned with material culture (defined in its widest sense to include the material world as encountered by human beings) and with the relationships which human beings establish with each other and
manipulate through the medium of material culture. Given the nature of the archaeological project and the methodological responses which this has generated, it is scarcely surprising that the practice of archaeology has developed its own range of fetishised and reified concepts and objects (cf. Adams & Brooke, 1995) for a discussion which deals implicitly with some of these issues). As Dant has noted (1996: 495), other branches of the social sciences have hitherto shown remarkably little interest in the subject of human interactions with material culture, and it is only the recent growth in critical attitudes to consumption which have led to a greater awareness of the issues involved. Given this background, I would suggest that there are four senses in which the concept of fetishism might be of use in archaeology:

- As a means of understanding the consumption and use of goods and commodities in the past.
- As a way of understanding how conceptual categories devised in the present have been projected onto past societies.
- As a way of explaining the variety of ways in which objects or categories of object from the past are integrated into, and deployed within, the present.
- As a means of subjecting the practices of archaeology, and the material culture generated by these practices (site archives, artefact collections and archaeological knowledge itself), to rigorous auto-critique.

The first of these categories is a worthy object of study in its own right, but will not be pursued in detail here, largely through a lack of space. Suffice it to say that the overdetermination of value ascribed to some object or class of objects appears, from ethnographic and historical sources, to be a crucial element in many, if not all, human societies. Numerous case studies, both anthropological and archaeological, exist which document the role of exotic commodities, 'primitive valuables' or prestige goods in the articulation of social relations within human society. I have discussed some of these, notably those concerned with the European Iron Age, elsewhere and have demonstrated them to be inadequate (Cumberpatch, 1991, unpublished). This inadequacy can, however, be shown to be a result of specific approaches to particular datasets or the application of untheorised prior assumptions in inappropriate situations, rather than because of fundamental problems with the concepts involved. Such issues require consideration from the perspective of a radical economics that breaks away both from the modernistic fallacies of Neo-Classicism and from over-simplified notions of the relationship between material culture and ethnicity (cf. Cumberpatch, 1997). A more specific example, which might benefit from re-examination from a fetishist perspective, is Harrison's attempt to draw parallels
between Roman imperial cults and the cult-like trappings surrounding the figure of Elvis Presley (Harrison, 1996; cf. Gamman & Makkinen, 1994).

The second, third and fourth points relate to archaeology as a social and political practice in the present, to the particular forms that knowledge of the past may take and the ways in which this can be deployed in present day socio-political practice. It is these that I wish to discuss from the perspective of fetishisation and consumption, outlined above.

At the outset it should be clearly understood that I am not seeking to set up my own particular view of the past as in any sense superior to, distanced from, or more objective than, any of the alternatives to be subjected to critique in what follows. This article is not an attempt to demonstrate that fetishised knowledges of the past exist which are, in some sense, 'false consciousnesses' to be judged opposed to and inferior to that derived from my own white, liberal, heterosexual, male, post-imperial, lower-middle class, university educated, Anglocentric world view. As Cook and Crang (1996: 147) and Dant (1996: 514) have pointed out (echoing many marginalised sexual fetishists and radicals), a fetish is as real as anything can be. This reality, in the sense used by these authors, is defined as that which has an existence for the social actors concerned and which materially affects their actions, reactions and positioning within the social world. Our task, as critical and self-aware social actors, is to use the concept in our attempts at interpretation and understanding. In my view this does not absolve the individual from the duty of critique. To attempt to situate oneself in relation to other attitudes should not be understood as a surrendering of the right to observe, comment and, where appropriate, provide informed critiques of, alternative perspectives, particularly where these do not recognise situatedness, fetishism, contextuality and other modified relativisms or where they attempt to promote absolute, foundationalist or fundamentalist values at the expense of alternatives. The problem is simultaneously to promote a pluralistic view of the past (accepting the possibility, indeed the philosophical and methodological necessity, of multiple readings of the material culture 'text') while at the same time providing a non-foundationalist critique of what appear to be philosophically or pragmatically illegitimate interpretations.

The significance of the concept of fetishism for a critical archaeology lies in its recognition of the possibility that a perceived past has a reality, but that this is a fetishised reality and, consequently, one susceptible to critique from perspectives which need not be objectivist or foundationalist in their inspiration. The nature of the past-as-presented may be subjected to critique on the grounds that elements of it have been, or are, fetishised and consequently possess a reality, and a fetish quality, which represents them in a particular way
to the fetishist, while they simultaneously possess quite different qualities (equally 'real') for other participants in their interpretation and transmission.

As grounds for the critique of authoritarian views of the past, this may seem flimsy (particularly in view of the examples to be discussed below) but it does offer a method of effective critique that avoids charges of intellectual imperialism, foundationalism, objectivism or positivism. Equally it avoids the charge, frequently levelled at post-processual archaeology, that it is a mere relativism, effectively crippled by its acknowledgement that knowledge of the past is inherently contingent upon, (although not determined by) the situation of the observer in the present. In this regard the concept of fetishism as discussed by Dant and Baudrillard may be seen as more appropriate in a post-modern world than the essentially modernist concept of reification, which, as Giddens has pointed out, may be used to support naturalising sociologies which, while purporting to offer explanations for phenomena, actually require critique in their own right (Giddens, 1979: 195-6, 1984: 179-80).

The Fetishisation of Objectivism: A Case Study.

The second of the categories of fetishisation set out above relates to the conception of the archaeological project conceived of in broad terms. Paradoxically perhaps (and certainly ironically), the best example of the fetishisation of a contemporary paradigm comes from the application of naive scientistic positivism, New Archaeology, an approach whose genealogy can be traced back to the very same approach as that employed by Marx and Freud.

The application of modernist conceptual categories such as functionalism, maximisation, utility and optimisation which have been derived from scientism, scientistic economism and reductionism have been discussed extensively over the last ten years or so (see Gibbon, 1989; Barrett, 1990 for fuller discussions with references and Outhwaite, 1987 for a broader perspective, also with references). These discussions have effectively exposed the fallacious elements in either the presuppositions with which they start or which they deploy in the course of the arguments advanced to support them. Their legacy dies hard however, with periodic attempts to revive concepts such as neo-positivism or to seek 'scientific' explanations (such as evolutionary psychology, neo-Darwinian theories of culture change or genetic determinism) many of which claim to explain the past in a totalising sense rather than offering interpretations for the surviving traces of it. Seeking to expose 'the reality' of the past they actually create categories which are unexamined and conceal their origins, political
dimensions and theoretical foundations beneath the mendacious mask of objective reality. In the USA, where the practice of archaeology became more completely dominated by the principles of the New Archaeology than was the case in England, the legitimatory term 'science' appears to have served to enshrine a set of approaches and attitudes which, by monopolising a conception of reality, effectively prevented a range of alternative approaches to archaeological data being deployed (Trigger, unpublished). The flaws in this conception of archaeology have been fully developed elsewhere and need not be set out again here. The point to be made is that here the conception (or, more accurately, a misconception) of 'the scientific method' which legitimised the New Archaeological project can be seen as fetishistic in terms which Marx might well have recognised; a mystificatory device portraying the relationship between people and objects as other than it is, obscuring the interpretative nature of the encounter with the traces of past human action beneath the facade of objective rationality.

Fetishism and Civil War: The Curious Case of Lebanese Archaeology.

The third and fourth aspects of the fetishisation of the past, the integration of the past into contemporary discourse and the requirement which this imposes on archaeologists to be rigorously self-critical, are considerably more complex than the case of the New Archaeology. In many senses the stakes are far higher than those which were fought for between the protagonists of processualism and post-processualism. Overtly political and ideological representations of the past have been, and continue to be, active and potent weapons in a number of struggles to subordinate one group of people to another through a manipulation of the past, actions which I hope to show may be legitimised by both reification and fetishisation. In this particular case we might define fetishism as a technology of dominance, with reification (as defined by Giddens, 1984: 180) as its primary mode of discourse. This is most certainly not intended to be understood as a general characteristic of fetishism, but rather as one contingent upon the role played by historical discourses in the practical comprehension of present realities and the legitimisation of socio-political attitudes.

To tackle this aspect of fetishism we must conceptualise the past, and specifically knowledge of the past (where knowledge is defined as contextually situated information), as a commodity in its own right and explore the ways in which this commodity is fetishised, overvalued and overdetermined in contemporary societies.
The example to be discussed here is the fetishisation of certain aspects of the past by political, ethnic and religious groups in Lebanon, particularly as related to archaeological excavations recently carried out in the Beirut Central District (hereafter BCD). It is entirely possible that what follows will offend some of the protagonists in the heated debates over the future of Beirut and the archaeology of the city. Given the recent history of Lebanon, and the ways in which the author has observed archaeological research being both carried out and manipulated, such a risk seems insignificant and, consequently, no apologies are offered for any of the personal opinions expressed in what follows.

A great deal has been written about the recent developments in the archaeology of Beirut both on the Internet and in conventional journals and magazines (see for example Curvers, 1995; Seeden et al., 1995; Naccache, 1996, 1998; Raschka, 1996; Williams et al. in prep.). Space precludes a full treatment of the many problems, conflicts and arguments that have surrounded the attempt to salvage evidence of the city's long history in advance of redevelopment. A full account of the archaeological catastrophe that has been enacted in Beirut may be possible one day, but perhaps not for several years. Although I was employed by the American University in Beirut/ Leverhulme team on the excavation of two sites (BEY 006 and BEY 045), what follows is a personal interpretation of attitudes to the past which I observed in Lebanon and should not be taken to represent the official position of any organisation or individual working in the city. Nor is this the place to discuss in detail the widely varying styles of excavation and recording used by the archaeological teams from Europe and elsewhere. These reflect many idiosyncratic and regional traditions of archaeological research and methods and standards of excavation, recording and treatment of the material recovered. Equally this discussion should not detract from the considerable contribution made by a number Lebanese archaeologists to our knowledge of the prehistory and history of the eastern Mediterranean; examples of crucial pieces of work can be found in the pages of the local journals and in monographs. Nor should the use of the term catastrophe be seen as condemning the work carried out by many of the archaeologists working in the city. In conditions which were often hazardous, bold attempts were made to salvage something of the archaeology of the city; the catastrophe lies in the failure of national and international institutions to exert effective influence on the various financial and political operators whose interest in the redevelopment of the city only occasionally took full account of its importance as an immense archaeological site. In this regard UNESCO's failure must be seen as particularly significant. In a recent paper (Cumberpatch, 1996) I used the term 'fetishisation' in a flippant manner to describe the
practice, promoted by the Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) and vigorously supported by UNESCO, of retaining archaeological sites in a semi-excavated state with architectural features exposed and parts of buildings supported by unexcavated archaeological strata (a practice known locally as 'preservation in situ'). In the context of Middle Eastern archaeology it is not hard to see how this practice (virtually incomprehensible to archaeologists trained in the British tradition of detailed stratigraphic excavation and recording) has developed. The spectacular physical remains of civilisations dating back thousands of years pose immense logistical as well as ethical problems and the vast size of many tells and other sites seem not to have compelled the excavators to excavate beneath the monumental structures in the way that prehistorians were able to on the smaller and less imposing sites in Europe. Considerable sections of palaces and other buildings were of course looted and removed to the Louvre, the Pergamum Museum in Berlin and the British Museum, the legitimisation for these acts of cultural imperialism being protection or scientific study. This is not the place to rehearse the debate over the return of looted cultural property or the continuing failure by the international community to suppress this supremely colonialist practice, although the valuing of artefacts out of context is, in itself, an archetype of fetishistic practice (specifically anthropologically fetishistic in the terms defined above), described with typical flamboyance by Michael Shanks in the quotation at the start of this paper. For my purpose I want to concentrate on the practice of preservation in situ and the conception of the past which underlies it as exemplifying one particular aspect of the fetishisation of certain periods of the past.

The civil war fought in Lebanon between 1975 and 1991 left large parts of the centre of Beirut devastated. Following the establishment of peace and of (relatively) stable government the clearance of damaged buildings, renovation and reconstruction began. In many cases this has involved the demolition of ruined buildings and the planning of new domestic and business premises (see Gavin & Maluf, 1996 for examples of specific projects and as an example of the discursive context within which the rebuilt city has been conceived by its planners). The Lebanese obsession with the motorcar (itself in need of critical analysis) has dictated the construction of large underground car parks, which have, in many cases, been cut through archaeological deposits and deep into the bedrock. During the rebuilding of the BCD the conflicts which developed between the development company, Solidere, and the DGA, the latter supported by UNESCO, became focused on Roman, Byzantine and Phoenician architectural remains with the question of excavation and preservation by record or preservation in situ as the flash point between the various parties.
In my earlier article (Cumberpatch, 1996: 160), I noted that three historical periods appear to have been defined as of pre-eminent importance in the Lebanese context: Phoenician, Hellenistic and Roman/Byzantine. It is architectural fragments from these three periods which are deemed worthy of preservation in situ, while that which lies beneath them is sacrificed (or simply ignored), as is much of what lies above them. Thus, as one crawls through the congested streets of the Beirut in one’s taxi, odd Classical columns and fragments of monumental masonry protrude from overgrown walls, sprouting from what at first sight appear to be small municipal rubbish heaps, but which, on a second inspection, prove to be semi-excavated archaeological sites. Clearly one cannot expect a city emerging from civil war, foreign invasion and blockade to expend its first energies on the maintenance of historic buildings or the restoration of sites of historic significance, but closer inspection does not indicate that these sites were ever presented as parts of a city with an immensely long and complex history. Nor, more depressingly, does the DGA appear to have any plan to interpret and explain this history in any integrated way in the future (Cumberpatch, 1998). Rather it appears that the fact of these object's existence is sufficient to denote them as significant; the more so because they are, almost iconically, Classical in origin.

That this attitude exists on a much wider scale has been demonstrated by Helga Seeden:

Neglecting whole periods of the country's past while 'highlighting' others into legendary importance is a well attested course of making use of a 'dead past' for enforcing or upholding the privileges of a specific group. In the context of archaeology, the considerable Arab and Islamic part of the country's past has often been ignored or largely underrated (Seeden, 1986: 10).

One particular example of this has been highlighted by Seeden; the site of Ba'albek in the Bekaa Valley where German archaeologists, working between 1898 and 1905, recorded the classical Roman temples, the Byzantine remains and the medieval castle village or qal'a. Subsequent work removed practically all post-Roman remains from the site to free the monumental buildings from later remnants considered comparatively unimportant. Thus today, there exist only bits and pieces from an important period in the town's history: the Ba'albek of the Middle Ages, often praised and described by travellers and historians, and particularly relevant to modern inhabitants of the region (Seeden, 1993: 123).

While the attentive visitor to Ba'albek can distinguish the remains of the medieval fortifications overlying and reusing sections of the Roman buildings, the presentation of the site is predominantly of the Roman cult centre and, as
Seeden points out, little reference is made to the later history of the town or its region.

The political dimension is brought out even more clearly with specific reference to the Maronite Christian community, politically dominant in Lebanon since the days of the French mandate, who have sought, and still seek, historical links with the Phoenicians, seen as an ancestral group upon whom political legitimacy can be founded (Seeden, 1990: 146; cf. Fisk, 1992) and with the Hellenistic and Roman periods of the region's history. The position of Hellenistic and Roman civilisation, supported by western scholarship (Seeden, 1994: 102) and popularly propagated by the pervasive French colonial-style education system (which, at the time of writing, still exists in Lebanon), is accorded primary significance in that it represents a link with Europe and, ironically perhaps (given the inglorious role of the European powers in the creation of Lebanon's problematic geo-political position), European culture. In Sir Mortimer Wheeler's opinion,

Balbeck remains one of the very great monuments of European architecture; a position for which geographically it only just qualifies, for beyond the hills of Anti-Lebanon which rise above it to the east begin the sands of Asia and an essentially alien mind (Wheeler, quoted by Seeden, 1994: 102).

By associating the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine with the European, those who wish to do so can construct a Lebanon which was fully a part of the significant European past as opposed to a marginal Other (non-European and, in later periods, specifically Islamic) past (see van Dommeln, 1997 for a discussion of further examples). Thus the Greek and Roman past has been judged significant in comparison to the Islamic past, seen as the product of a nomadic, uncivilised, non-European culture. Seeden has cited an interesting example of the effect of this attitude in which overtones of Fascist rhetoric of the 1930's concerning the threat posed to European culture by forces from the east can surely be detected.

During the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982,

the Israeli army posed as the liberator of Lebanon's National Museum from 'barbarians or terrorists who understood little of art and civilisation'. Judged incapable of comprehending archaeological objects, they were termed 'ignorant forever' evoking the stereotypes of 'the steppe which does not appreciate culture' (Seeden, 1990: 146, quotations from Revue du Liban 1186, 1982).

In what sense is this a fetishisation as opposed to a simple manipulation of the past for political ends? The answer lies in the relationship between political manipulation and the practical knowledges of the past which form the historical component of the world views held by individuals and deployed by self-referential groups in their self-definitive discourses.
The Roman Empire, and its supposed ancestor 'Greek Civilisation', exerts a particular fascination over the European mind. Known from both literary and archaeological sources, the Classical World has been claimed as an ancestor by European nations for hundreds of years. Leaving aside the complexity of its supposed successor, the Holy Roman Empire, and the fascination exerted over both Christian and Muslim writers by the city of Byzantium (El-Cheikh, 1996), Rome served as a legitimatory device for the glorification of military achievement and imperial expansion throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Examples of the identification with Rome amongst the imperial European powers abound (Champion nd.; Hingley, 1994, 1996, both with references). A good case can be, and has been, made for the view that 19th and 20th century histories of the Roman Empire were written in terms of the British in India and the French in North Africa. Such constructions have been extensively discussed and criticised in recent years from a number of perspectives, to the extent that new hegemonic discourses concerning Rome can be said to have emerged which start from a self-consciously post-colonialist perspective and proceed along their own discursive paths.

The broad outlines of a view of the Roman Empire as an object of study rather than an implicitly accepted category or unexamined construct are now well established, but we need to go beyond these essentially descriptive and historically investigative accounts to determine the ways in which this knowledge was and is used; the mechanisms through which it has come to structure the political practices in which it is centrally implicated. Historical knowledge is not the past-as-it-existed, an intransitive object of objective knowledge, and nor, most emphatically, is it a fiction. Rather, it is a potent commodity in its own right, rich in capacities all of which may be deployed, manipulated and used by human subjects. Overtly political uses of the past must draw on a subjectively 'real' past, one that is widely known and positively valorised. It is in this sense that an aspect of the past may become a fetish object, venerated, revered, celebrated and ritualised, precisely as Dant has described (1996: 511-2). Once it has been so constructed, the fetish object may then be deployed in a variety of ways.

In this context an anthropological fetishism can be seen working; Classical columns, capitols and other architectural fragments are, overtly, iconically and undeniably, part of the past, but present today, testifying to the presence of the past. Given an ideological framework which ascribes pre-eminence to the Classical past these objects come to represent that past and in such a situation are ascribed a particular value which far outweighs traces of other periods of the past, let alone other readings of the past. Their iconic, fetishised character
thus legitimises the destruction and selective excavation of other material traces of past human actions.

Clearly there is nothing new in the manipulation of the past for political ends. The past is a resource of great potency, available to politicians, demagogues and bureaucrats as a legitimatory device to be deployed for their own purposes. Equally however, few such individuals generate their own, original, pasts. Rather, appeals are made to pasts that already exist, enshrined within the popular imagination (cf. Chapman, 1994: 125). Historical and archaeological knowledge is far from being the sole preserve of professional historians and archaeologists (however much we may like to pretend otherwise); the past may be a foreign country, but it is one with open borders, freely visited by virtually all human beings. As Raphael Samuel has recently pointed out (1994: 8) history is a social form of knowledge, inscribed by many hands and active in perceptions of the present. Thus the astute politician, demagogue developer or warlord can draw upon a reserve of practical knowledge of the past as the basis for his/her views and projects. Such knowledge is already a commodity, used and consumed in historically and contextually situated ways by the population. Thus the politician neither patronises his/her audience with a parade of arcane knowledge, but rather takes popular wisdom and confers upon it the lustre of truth, derived from the power of rhetoric (and the rhetoric of power) and the detail of scholarship. In such a situation the very potency of the past carries the audience along; this is the truth, this is how it happened, these remains are important, these are decadent/primitive, these must be preserved, these can be obliterated.

Such a past is, inherently, a fetishised commodity at once both real (in its effects and potency for those participating in it) and, at the same time, quite fantastic to those uncaptivated by its potentiality. The fetish can thus be conceived of as occupying the experiential 'space' which lies between the subject and the object and within which they interact (Dant, 1996: 510; Levin, 1984: 43 - 4). In this regard Rome as a fetish object lies between the material reality of Roman remains as excavated and the concept of 'Rome' as an ancestor, progenitor and exemplar. A similar case can be constructed for the case of Classical Greece. As the perceived founders and progenitors of European Culture and Civilisation, Greece and Rome loom over contemporary and subsequent historical periods. It is no accident that in Britain, the Roman Empire is seen to be followed by 'The Dark Ages', a term bearing a greater burden of meaning than simply a lack of archaeological sites. Culture, as Bourdieu has pointed out, is the supreme fetish (1984: 250), and it is Culture together with its socio-political manifestation, Civilisation, which are the key
legitimatory and fetishistic terms here. Historically linked with (and indeed dependent upon) French colonial policies and practices, it is unsurprising that Lebanese Maronite consciousness sees legitimisation as the guardians of the material traces of these European cultural progenitors.

The case of the Phoenicians, a group who have suffered a degree of systematic denigration in European scholarship (cf. Champion nd.) offers an example of a parallel fetishisation, equivalent in some respects to the case of the Celts in England and France. Here an indigenous ancestry is sought which does not conflict with (or, in the case of the Celts, offers complementary attributes to) the centrality of Rome. Both rely on an appeal to blood and country rather than to culture and heritage (see Hill & Cumberpatch, 1993; and Collis, 1997 with references, for discussions of the case of the Celts and Naccache, 1998: 147 - 8 for the Phoenicians). In practical terms, and to emphasise that in Lebanon such theoretical considerations have significant, material consequences, Seeden has noted that the emphasis given to the supposed links between the Maronites and the Phoenicians at the expense of more than a millennium of the Muslim past, has exacerbated sectarian antagonisms and politicised archaeology (cf. Naccache, 1998: 146). One of the results has been a dismissive attitude towards archaeology by a number of Islamic groups (Seeden, 1990: 146).

**Getting With the Fetish.**

The Lebanese case study is one with a particular relevance to a number of locations around the world, most notably in the Balkans, Ireland, Tibet and in the former Soviet Union and it was partly for this topicality and relevance that it was selected. To take only one example, it is not impossible that, in the near future, foreign archaeological teams will find themselves involved in the reconstruction of the ruined cities in the Balkans (if indeed this is not already happening). In such circumstances local discourses concerning the past, replete with fetishised notions concerning the roles of different ethnic groups in that past will, no doubt, play a significant part in structuring archaeological practice (Chapman, 1994). Indeed I know from my own experience what kind of effect fetishised assumptions concerning the relationship between material culture and ethnicity can have on archaeological research in central Europe (Cumberpatch, 1991, 1995: 197 - 198). In such a situation some explicit theory is required if the reaction to an ethically problematic local situation is to be a positive one, rather than simply condemnatory.
It might appear that the purpose of this article has been to demonise fetishism. Nothing could be further from the truth. The case study developed above is a depressing one, and the implications, when considered in relation to other situations of intercommunal conflict, are not pleasant to contemplate. In spite of this it is neither my intention, nor my philosophical inclination, to end with a ringing denunciation of fetishised pasts and a call for an intellectual purging in the name of either objectivism or a naive, judgmental, relativism. Rather the case study represents a situation in which a fetishised past has been used to support a particular political and ethnic group and their world view, itself a product of a moribund (but not yet dead) imperialism. Such pasts have a reality far more effective in practical terms than most of those created by archaeologists and historians. From an ethical perspective such fetishised pasts demand analysis and critique. From my personal perspective it appears that certain attitudes to the past in Lebanon follow from a pathological fetishism which has been deployed to protect certain claims to political legitimacy, and that philosophically and methodologically questionable forms of archaeological practice (selective excavation, restoration, conservation and preservation in situ) has been centrally implicated in this process. To point out that the process is a fetishising one, and hence owes little to the-past-(pasts)-as-it-(they)-existed (or was-(were)-experienced) is to point out one of the mechanisms involved in the construction and representation of this past. In itself such an acknowledgement is neither positive nor negative, but it carries with it the possibility of a constructive engagement with a view of the past which may be repugnant (or at least inexplicable) to the foreign specialist participant. To acknowledge the fetishised nature of the past is to assert the possibility of writing historical and archaeological accounts that are sufficiently self-conscious and self-critical to permit the existence of a variety of ways of knowing the past. Furthermore such a position allows participants to evaluate these in terms which explicitly avoid unsustainable truth claims.

One can condemn particular fetishised pasts. Indeed as archaeologists we have a duty to condemn racist, sexist and colonialist pasts. This does not however imply a condemnation of fetishism as a human trait. As many writers on, and even more practitioners of, radical sex have pointed out, sexual fetishism is not a pathology (not even a harmless one), rather it is an aspect of humanity, albeit perhaps a culturally specific one (a point I must leave others to determine). As Cook and Crang have pointed out in relationship to food, in attempting to understand particular cultural forms and practices (particularly in a postmodern context) it may be more useful to work with surface fetishisms of commodities than to attempt to reach behind them to reveal some underlying truth (1996: 148-9). This eminently liberal and pluralistic objective must not be
allowed to set the fetish beyond critique. While the sexual fetish (for example) is essentially personal, something to be enjoyed and celebrated individually or amongst groups of consenting equals, the fetishised past has a dimension which possesses the capacity to reach beyond the personal and to engage the emotions of the wider social group, and it is at this point that we have a responsibility to point out that while the fetish has an undeniable subjective reality, this subjectivity inevitably involves the existence of other subjectivities and, from a pluralist perspective, demands that they be respected (insofar as they are willing to grant respect in their own right).

In their consideration of food Cook and Crang present two possible responses to the globalisation of diet. One is to lay bare the relations of oppression and exploitation which surround the production and marketing of (for example) tropical products, while the other is to disrupt the smooth presentations of the marketers by emphasising the existence of multiple realities surrounding the food in question. Such realities include the often hidden aspects of food production and the histories of colonialism and oppression that lie behind them. Some similar form of intellectual opposition is necessary if the kind of pathological fetishisms of the past described in this article are to be effectively opposed. Rather than emphasising a set of 'correct' (politically or otherwise) interpretations of the past, a response to local, sectional fetishisms might be to analyse established interpretations as a counterpart to undertaking conventional forms of fieldwork. This would have the effect of acknowledging the sociological dimensions of the archaeological project and would be liberating in the sense of establishing the conditions for a radical, positive, self-critical and anarchistic archaeology. As Helga Seeden has pointed out in the context of Lebanon

Throughout Lebanon's history institutions and practices in the various communities have deeply influenced one another or even fused ... A valid archaeology would reflect the varied historical traditions of all sections of Lebanese society (1990: 146-7).

This article is not intended as a plea for a bland, homogenising liberalism. The acknowledgement of aspects of the past as fetishised does not destroy their significance or importance, rather it focuses our attention on the nature of that fetishism, the means by which pasts became fetishised and through which they came to have a greater than average significance. The past, always with us in the present, has a double or treble significance in that it is at once itself (and as such, unrecoverable) but also recurs in that it is continually used, reworked and used again as an active force in the present. Again, as noted above, this article is not intended as an attempt to demonise fetishism - indeed the contrary is true. A good case can be made for many of the apparently 'straight' discourses concerning the past (notably culture-history) as involving the most hideous of
perversions in their bigoted intolerance of alternatives, rather in the way that Cornelius Holtorf has described the unacceptability of post-processualism to a fascistic world view (1996: 25-7). In contrast, those who acknowledge the power of the fetish and its essential role as a mediator between the subject and object are in fact dealing with it and, in some cases, living it, in the most creative and vital of ways.

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