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ART AND THE FETISH: SEVENTY FIVE YEARS ON

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In 1936, Walter Benjamin laid down a challenge to art. In his ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,’ he writes ‘Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art’ (Benjamin 2003a). ‘Politicizing art’ suggests realizing the subversive possibility inherent in art, challenging the way that fascism (and, by extension, capitalism as well) has turned political life itself into a (faux) aesthetic. Such a view harkens to Benjamin’s broader critique of representation, and especially his understanding of the phantasmagoria, the miasmatic swirl of misrepresentation and idolatry that comes from commodity fetishism. For Benjamin, the object is both an idol, a perpetrator of the faux reality that we are all occupied with just as it is also potentially a source of resistance to that very same idolatry. The radical potential in art, in his view, lies in this double nature of the object and in our ability to respond to that split in ways that subvert rather than reproduce the commodity fetishism that we otherwise wholly subscribe to. In this essay, I will briefly describe this radical potential in Benjamin’s theory in order to think critically about contemporary art today. To what extent has the promise in Benjamin’s ‘Work of Art’ piece to ‘politicize art’ been realized? How can that potential be further enhanced and with what import for the practice of art and its relationship to contemporary politics? I

will be looking specifically at four well established contemporary artists, all of whom have had major shows in the US and Europe in the last few years: Bozidar Brazda, Charles LeDray, Kara Walker and Paul Chan. I will seek to engage with Benjamin’s seventy-five year old essay to evaluate and consider the radical potential of these artists’ work and to think further about what ‘politicizing art’ might mean in the contemporary moment.

Politicizing art

Benjamin’s view of art comes out of the wider context of his political philosophy and theology. Although the ‘Work of Art’ essay is not explicitly about fetishism, an understanding of Benjamin’s understanding of the subject helps to explain both the ‘Work of Art’ essay itself and the larger implications of Benjamin’s political agenda. For Benjamin, the phenomenon of fascism was a result of the ever-growing power of commodity fetishism, which might also be called political idolatry. Here, representation of the object, captured as it is by a capitalist logic, turns even the objective world into a projection of capitalist phantasm so that the most foundational elements of our reality become the basis for furthering capitalism. This process culminates, for Benjamin, in the way that fascism ‘aestheticizes politics’ i.e renders politics itself into a kind of aesthetic structure that is dictated by fetishism.

Whereas, from a more orthodox Marxist interpretation, commodity fetishism is largely associated with the industrial revolution and capitalist forms of production, for Benjamin, the roots of such fetishism are laid much earlier and are explained via his political theology, (although Benjamin would agree that the most virulent form of fetishism comes with the advent of the commodity). In the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin lays out a genealogy of the object beginning with the time before the fall wherein Adam exists in a non-representative relationship with the objects of the world. In paradise, Benjamin tells us, Adam doesn’t try to control or determine the objects before him. Instead he merely names them. Once the fall has occurred however, human beings are condemned to representation, an attempt, however fallible, to reproduce the

kind of truth and objectivity that was to be found in paradise itself.

Critically, for Benjamin in our postlapsarian world, we do not have the choice between representation and truth; we are forced to resort to representation. In his view, an anti-fetishist is distinguished from a fetishist not by her superior relationship to truth but rather by her recognition of its absence. Only the fetishist believes in the possibility of successful representation; the anti-fetishist recognizes representation as a ruin, a broken remnant of a truth that is no longer available to humanity.

Here once again, Benjamin is distinguished from more conventional Marxists. For them, the fetishization of commodities can be lifted off to reveal an objective reality. Benjamin, however, holds that reality itself reflects the loss of truth. Rather than seeking truth, we can only seek the disruption or subversion of fetishism.

For Benjamin we have a crucial ally in our attempt to avoid fetishism: the object itself. In his writings on Franz Kafka, for example, Benjamin appreciates the way that Kafka accurately portrays the failure of representation. He writes in a letter to Gershom Scholem that: 'To do justice to the figure of Kafka in its purity and its peculiar beauty one must never lose sight of one thing: it is the purity and beauty of a failure' (Benjamin, 1968a: 144-145). For Benjamin, Kafka resists the lure of the object, the seductions of representation, by expressly and legibly failing to communicate the 'truth' it would otherwise seem to convey (Benjamin also writes in an earlier essay on Kafka that 'No other writer has obeyed the commandment 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image' so faithfully' (1968a, 129)). For Benjamin, Kafka epitomizes the fact that even as the objects that constitute fetishism are busily forming the phantasmagoria, they are also undermining it. He writes to Scholem that Kafka's parables:

'do not modestly lie at the feet of the doctrine, as the Haggadah lies at the feet of the Halakah. Though apparently reduced to submission, they unexpectedly raise a mighty paw against it.' (Benjamin 1968a, 144)

Here we see that objects can and do rebel against the fetishism they convey. Whereas the Haggadah (the representation of the divine law) is ex-

pected to merely and meekly convey the truth of that law (Halakah), Kafka's parables rebel against this requirement in ways that are 'unexpected' even, perhaps to the author, Kafka himself. By putting himself in alignment with the way that objects distort or refuse the fetishism that we would put on them, Kafka has turned to art as a way to distort the fetishism that his own stories would otherwise produce.

This is where the possibility for art more generally comes into the picture. For Benjamin, Kafka models a relationship to the object wherein the object's own inherent resistance to fetishism is evoked and turned into a weapon, a 'mighty paw' of resistance.

Herein lies yet another difference with Benjamin, not only with orthodox Marxists but even with key figures from the Frankfurt School such as Adorno. Whereas for Adorno theory, and in particular dialectical theory, alone has the ability to realize the radical potential in art, for Benjamin, by contrast, the radical potential in the object can only be realized by and through the object itself.¹

If we return briefly to the 'Work of Art' essay, Benjamin tells us that the audience or viewer of art (and, by extension, of everything else as well) is 'distracted' (2003a: 268). Distraction – the effect of living in the phantasmagoria where our attention is always diverted and preoccupied – is the basic stance of our time. Benjamin's strategy here is to use the art object's own seductive qualities to fight one kind of distraction with another. He goes on to say: 'The sort of distraction that is provided by art represents a covert measure of the extent to which it has become possible to perform new tasks of apperception' (Idem.). These 'new tasks of apperception' are the training ground (especially in film, he states) for distracting the distracted more generally, engaging with the objects (i.e. the commodities) of the world to overcome the commodity fetishism they evoke in us.

Here, we are left with a set of ideas that can be applied to an analysis of contemporary art.² First and foremost, we see that for Benjamin representation cannot be avoided. We must be as suspicious of claims to be able to throw off idolatry and fetishism as we are of the fetish itself. Any claim to

be ‘true’ or ‘real’ or ‘post-fetish’ are instantly suspect (as I will argue further, even an ‘ironic’ or ‘savvy’ stance in which we know the fetish for what it is, is not sufficient to disrupt the power that the fetish has over us). At the same time we see that the purpose of representation (in keeping with Benjamin’s analysis of Kafka) is not to succeed in conveying the significance of the object to the viewer but rather to distort, subvert or undermine that conveyance (in coordination with the object’s own inherent tendency to interfere with the representational process). Thus the challenge of ‘politicizing art’ involves enhancing the power of the object to interfere with representation, to visibly fail to represent (and, in that way, avoid becoming just another fetish). Finally, Benjamin teaches us to be more suspicious of theory and the intention of the intellectual than other theorists (Adorno very much included) would allow. It is not for the artist to ‘free’ us from fetishism but rather that the artist should strive, like Kafka, to enable the object to demonstrate its own freedom from the fetishism that we project onto it.

Applying Benjamin’s ideas about fetishism to modern artwork comes up against several problems. First of all, virtually all art is, in some form or other, a commodity. How can a commodity itself be the source of resistance to commodification? For Benjamin the fact that someone or something is compromised by capitalism does not instantly condemn them in his eyes. In fact, for Benjamin, the more someone or thing is ensconced in the phantasmagoria the more it is able to do maximal damage to the phantasm from within. His appreciation, for example, of Charles Baudelaire arose in part because Baudelaire was so much a creature of his time, a stooge as much a resistor of the development of the phantasmagoria. Like all other commodities, the commodities that are works of art have the capacity to rebel against the fetishism we project onto them (perhaps they are especially suited for this possibility, in fact).

Another question we might raise is how could an essay on art that is seventy-five years old (and which, in some ways, can seem quite dated) have anything to say about an art scene that Benjamin could not possibly have imagined? Here too, however, the apparent problem turns out to be an asset; for Benjamin juxtaposing two eras in time breaks both moments out of their own self-regard, their own sense of reality and conviction.

A final caveat is in order before proceeding to an examination of contemporary artwork. All the artwork being examined in what follows – whether it has realized a radical potential or not – has already come and gone and yet still we live under conditions of commodity fetishism. We must be careful not to ask too much of the artwork, to lay the entire burden of politics on this one sphere of human life. But in learning from Benjamin how to discern revolutionary potential in the object through the study of art, we can see how to enhance resistance more generally, to see in the art object a model for how to resist and upend the faux reality of the phantasmagoria more generally. So, we should not condemn a work of art just because it has not led us to revolution, just as we should not refrain from praising or admiring a work of art just because it seems so obviously redolent of the phantasm that art is meant to upset.

Contemporary art: Can you eat the fetish?

Let me begin to look at contemporary art proper by noting that even a piece of art that seems to point to its own fetishization does not necessarily serve an anti-fetishistic agenda, (to be fair it doesn’t necessarily serve a fetishist agenda either). As Wendy Brown points out in ‘Politics out of History’ we can recognize that something is a fetish and still engage in fetishism (she cites Freud’s patient who says ‘I know, [it’s just a fetish] but still...’) (Brown 2001: 4). A large category of artwork could fall into this category of art that points to, but does not necessarily overcome, its own fetishism. For example, Bozidar Brazda makes artwork wherein ordinary objects are highlighted as such, often by putting them into strange and sometimes literally fetishistic context. One of his pieces, entitled ‘Eat Fetish’, features a table that is hung from the ceiling by chains.³

The table is trussed up like something from a leather scene, somewhat literalizing the question of fetishism (and, of course, the title ‘Eat Fetish’ leaves no mystery that fetishism is part of the question being put to this object). The table is completely ordinary and unremarkable, but hung as it is upside down, suspended by chains, the viewer is drawn to it in a way that denies or subverts its ordinariness.

On one level, this art may succeed in a sense in calling into question our certainty over the nature and use of objects. What is a table when it's hanging upside down? Why is the table chained up like that? How can we eat (a fetish) when the table is upside down?



At the same time however, we can see that it is not necessarily the case that such questions in any way suggest the failure of representation (i.e. the politicization of art). We continue to expect answers to our questions. Surely there is a reason that the artist chained up the table. Surely the intriguing title 'Eat Fetish' means something, has some secret to impart. From a strictly Benjaminian perspective we can say that this artwork prominently features the will and the intention of the artist over and above the object's own failure to mean something. We ask: what is the artist trying to say? Here the human dimension, the creativity of the artist and the question of human interpretation may be said to defeat the possibility

bility of the object 'raising a mighty paw' against whatever fetishism it promotes (even a kind of self-aware fetishism).

Another piece by Brazda that similarly evokes the question of fetishism is entitled 'Idle Idol.'⁴ Here, we see a Television (the Idol) painted bright orange (with car paint). Here too the object is trussed up, this time by rope and the rope is suspended from a big metal handle on the wall (which also resembles a giant switch). The TV in this case is 'idle' because it is not turned on, but its fetishistic power, the piece suggests, is not completely erased (once again the title markedly brings our attention to such questions).

Here the question of the use of the object, its status as a commodity, again seems called into question (why is the TV hanging from the wall? Why is it trussed up? What power does it still have when it is turned off or 'idle?'). Yet the power of the object does not seem to come *qua* object but rather from its relationship to human perception. The object seems very much a tool, a thing that we humans have the power to turn off and turn on. The work's power then does not lie in itself but in what it conveys, that is, what it represents (or appears to represent). Such a stance assumes that there is a truth that is to be represented, something that we can and should be able to figure out.

We see here, perhaps, the limits of turning to visuality as a way to challenge or undermine our own fetishism. In the 'Work of Art' essay, Benjamin writes 'For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at historical turning points cannot be performed solely by optical means – that is, by way of contemplation. They are mastered gradually – taking their cue from tactile reception – through habit.' (Benjamin 2003a, 268, italics original) In other words, seeing the fetish as a fetish (if that is indeed what is achieved by Brazda's art) does not in and of itself relieve us of our own fetishism. We need a change in our habits of apperception, one that is triggered, I would argue, not by the 'exposure' of fetishism (including titles that knock us over the head with their fetishistic nature) but rather by introducing an element of apperception that does not merely continue our distraction (so that we can see almost literally anything and not be in any way affected by it).



In making this point I am thinking of a trend that one sees in contemporary popular Hollywood movies wherein an ironic and inside-joke-like tone is adopted about product placement. For an (admittedly dated) example, in one of the ‘Austin Powers’ franchise, one of the headquarters of Dr. Evil (played by Mike Myers who also played Austin Powers) was the Seattle space needle that now had a giant Starbucks sign on it. Inside, there was a Starbucks café and everyone was drinking coffee. The joke is supposedly on the filmmaking industry. Look how bought-into commercialism it is! But in fact the joke is still on us, the viewers. This joke ‘at the expense’ of product placement makes the act of product placement all the more memorable. When we see the movie, we remember to buy Starbucks coffee afterwards. I say this not to argue that Brazda does anything like this but only to show the limitations of a reading of art which relies exclusively on leading our attention to the question of fetishism without

actually challenging the fetish *qua* fetish itself. Such a view suggests a ‘savvy’ position from which it is possible to be ‘in the know’ about fetishism, but from Benjamin’s perspective there is no position outside of representation or fetishism; we can only fight and subvert it from within. Thus we have no privileged perch from which to mock or depict the ‘false consciousness’ of the fetishist, no ironic stance from which to deconstruct and escape it.

Another artist who may be similar in some ways to Brazda is Charles LeDray. LeDray’s use of imagery and his relationship to the object is perhaps more subtle than Brazda. Here, we are not overtly reminded of the fact of fetishism. LeDray’s art juxtaposes many objects together (objects that he constructs himself) which, in their juxtaposition and in their display, seem to potentially overcome their ordinariness, perhaps piercing our distraction as well. For example, LeDray has a piece called ‘Flip Flops’ (2006) in which a bunch of flipflops (or what appears to be flipflops) are hung from a cord off the wall.⁵ Here too, the viewer is invited to ask questions about the value and meaning of the object in question: Why are these flipflops here? Why so many? What use are they hanging from the wall?

A much earlier piece ‘workworkworkworkwork’ (1991) reproduced the kind of spontaneous sidewalk flea markets that one used to often see on Astor Place in New York City, a public space now gentrified to the point where such events no longer (or rarely) take place.⁶ This piece reproduces the kind of items that were on display, including the sweaters and coats that were spread out under them as part of the ad hoc flea market. The miniaturized art objects were also laid out on the sidewalks of Astor Place thus producing a duplicate market, a miniature version of the more humble side of the commodities market.

Both of these pieces by LeDray suggest a way to become more aware of the object as such, to see it out of context (or even, in the case of ‘workworkworkworkwork’, in its same context albeit in a different form). I’d suggest that LeDray’s work may bring us a bit closer to Benjamin’s model than Brazda’s if only because of its subtlety. In this case, the objects are allowed to speak a bit more for themselves (even though they are objects that the

artist himself has created). Yet, here too, I would argue that we may discover the allure of the object, see it as a fetish, without having that fetishism finally altered or undermined. We still seem to be striving to represent, to communicate something, and so the failure of the fetish does not become paramount, only its existence.

Fighting fetish with fetish

There are some artists who, in my view, may better advance the Benjaminian project than those already discussed insofar as they help make it clearer what allowing the object to subvert its own fetishism might look like. Two artists in particular, Kara Walker and Paul Chan, may help in this regard.

Kara Walker is well known for her outlandish silhouettes that transform a traditional southern (US) artform and turn it on its head.⁷ The silhouettes are shown engaged in intense pornographic and scatological activities. The idea of a happy slave society, the nostalgic evocation of an era that is implicit in the genre of silhouette that Walker adopts, is revealed to be a scene of intense violence and sexual exploitation. In some ways, it appears as if Walker is engaging with simple stereotypes; the idea of hypersexualized African Americans, the violence of Southern life, all seem to be portrayed here. Yet, as the Lacanian philosopher Joan Copjec writes of her art:

‘Kara Walker’s silhouettes are filled with figures violently merging with and protruding from each other. They swallow and secrete, tear at and torture each other. It is as if they represented not just a number of different figures battling among themselves, but a parasitized body joyously trying to free itself from its slavery to itself. For this reason it is precisely wrong to criticize them as a recycling of stereotypes. They are on the contrary an erotic disassembling of them, a mad and vital tussle to break away from their stale scent and heavy burden. Allowing her work to be haunted by the traumatic event of the antebellum past, that is, by an event that neither she nor any other black American ever lived but that is

repeatedly encountered in the uncanny moment, she opens the possibility of conceiving racial identity as repeated self-difference.’ (Copjec 2004: 107)

If we consider Copjec’s understanding in terms of our inquiry regarding Benjamin, we can see that in some ways Walker’s art allows the object (in this case the stereotypical object) to supersede itself, rather than merely succumb to the phantasms that we project onto the object, that is, our own relationship to the fetish, Walker turns that fetish on its head. We could even say that Walker can be read as fighting the fetish with a fetish – oversaturating it with its own fetishization so that the whole system overloads into a ‘disassembling’. (If this is the case, it is analogous to Benjamin’s suggestion to fight the distraction of the contemporary viewer with a further, and subversive, distraction).

In this way, Walker does not deny or ignore the violent and racist past (and present) of the American South (Copjec writes of her work that ‘History flows through these figures but it does not contain them.’)⁸ Nor does she point to some utopian future that can be free of such representational forms. Instead she employs the tropes, figures and forms of that place as a way to disrupt and disassemble the sense of the inevitability of such arrangements, the ‘truth’ of what those forms convey.

To make this argument is not to claim that Walker somehow avoids the framework of representation in a way that Brazda and LeDray do not. Her silhouettes clearly inhabit a representational discourse. In fact, in their lack of color or internal content, Walker’s works point to a kind of pith of representation. But in her hands representation is both noted (as it is with the other artists) and resisted (as it is not). The failure of representation is, in a sense, rendered legible in Walker’s work not by turning away from such forms (once again implying that there is a position that is free from representation or fetishization) but rather by turning deeper into the fetish. As already noted, she fights the fire of fetishism with the fire of representation itself – turning the materiality of representation (‘a mighty paw’) into a weapon against the fetishism it would otherwise foment in us.

A very different artist, Paul Chan, may be said to achieve a similar result in an entirely different way. One of his works, a series entitled ‘The 7 Lights’, engages with shadow and light (not unlike Walker’s silhouette’s in that one sense).⁹ Using old computer technology, images from Greek myth, and Baroque painting, Chan evokes many moods and responses in his work. No actual objects are visible. Instead, shadows are produced by strong lights which change colors and force over the course of the day, revealing and submerging images as it goes along.¹⁰

What is critical to note for our own purposes is that the objects themselves are not available. This is a fetishism with no apparent fetish; once again it evokes the pure pith of representation, the merest promise of a form. Thus all of our responses, emotional or otherwise, to what we see before us is purely spectral, purely phantasmatic. Here, the materiality of the object has itself been withheld, both exposing and denying our longing for answers and certainties in the process.

In this case, as with Walker’s art, I would say that Chan has engaged with the fetish by going deeper into it, by really giving us a vision of what fetishism is, how it works, what needs and fantasies it evokes in us. Whatever our response to it, Chan suggests the unreality, the shiftingness, and ultimately, again, the failure of the fetish. By rendering our relationship to commodification so dreamlike, so phantasmic, Chan reveals more the fact of phantasm itself than the promise of a successful ‘truth’, a fetish that is at once exposed and undermined.

These two artists are certainly not unique, but with them it becomes possible to better see how the object’s own rebellion against fetishism can be enhanced, rendered legible by art. For Benjamin art is a kind of training ground, a way to distract the distracted, to fight the fire of fetishism with more fetishism in a way that is self-cancelling. In this respect these works point a way (I wouldn’t say the way) towards both a rethinking of what art can do for us and what it cannot.¹¹

Conclusion

At this point it should once again be stressed that no piece of art (at least none I’ve ever heard of) has had the power to disrupt capitalism or bring an end to the phantasmagoria. We shouldn’t oversell the power of art to resist the fetish, but it seems just as clear that art can play its part – and a crucial part – in resistance and in producing what Benjamin refers to as ‘new tasks of apperception.’ To politicize art is a step in the right direction, a way to resist the manner in that fascism (and, after fascism, yet more capitalism in its liberal variant) has turned politics itself into a kind aesthetic form where groups and masses become themselves mere objects meant to be displayed in pleasing and symmetrical styles.

Looking at the question of art via Benjamin’s attention to the fetish helps us to better understand what he might have meant by his call to politicize art. It means to engage art itself in the task of combating the miasma of misrepresentation that constitutes the phantasmagoria. It also gives us a discerning mechanism by which to make judgments about individual art pieces. I do not engage with such a mechanism in order to condemn one artist and praise another (personally, I like all of these artists’ work very much) but rather to show how a critique is possible that is based on a relationship to fetishism and our connection to the object. It is true that by its nature, art tends to take an object, and via the very fact that it has put the object on display, render it something other than itself. Yet, as we have seen, this in and of itself does not lessen the allure of the fetish; we can know we are seeing a fetish and still be drawn by its insistence on being true or representative. What Benjamin offers us then is a language of critique that can be of service to us in thinking further about the politics of art, its possibility of resistance and the ways that even (or, for Benjamin, especially) artistic commodities can be employed in fighting the effects of commodity fetishism. For all of these reasons, I find that Benjamin’s essay on the Work of Art, despite being 75 years old, is as relevant as it ever was. More accurately, it is Benjamin himself in his ‘On the Concept of History’ who shows us that moments in the past will always be relevant insofar as they can serve to subvert and undermine the certainties (and hence, fetishism) of our own time. Benjamin tells us that two moments can be connected ‘through events that may be separated [...] by thousands of

years' (Benjamin 2003b: 397). In light of this, the seventy-five years that have passed since Benjamin wrote his essay vanish and are no barrier at all.

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Bozidar Brazda

<http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/CharlesLeDray/Images>

Charles LeDray

<http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/KaraWalker>

Kara Walker

<http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/20>

Paul Chan

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¹ Adorno writes to Benjamin (on March 18, 1936) that the effects he sees in the work of art which in fact can only be ‘accomplish[ed] through the theory introduced by intellectuals as dialectical subjects’ (Adorno and Benjamin 1999: 129). Of course, Benjamin too is engaging in theory on some level but his theory is devoted to getting out of its own way by allowing the object to speak, as it were, for itself.

² It should be noted that there has been a significant school of Benjamin-influenced art critics who have taken his notion of fetishism – as well as his notion of the role of allegory in fighting such fetishism – seriously. See Foster 2002, including Ulmer’s essay; Owens 1980; Buchloh 1982.

³ Image courtesy of the Saatchi Gallery, London, © Bozidar Brazda.

⁴ Image courtesy of the Saatchi Gallery, London, © Bozidar Brazda.

⁵ See <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/CharlesLeDray/Images>.

⁶ See <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/CharlesLeDray/Images>.

⁷ See <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/KaraWalker>.

⁸ Copjec 2004, 107. This understanding of time is, I would argue, very consistent with the understanding of time and narrative that Benjamin himself evokes in his ‘On the Concept of History’. For Benjamin, time itself is not a linear progression but a series of events that can be made contiguous and mutually influential by juxtaposing them side by side. By having the racist past evoked as she does, Walker engages with a racist present as well; she has one moment in time interfere with the fetishes and notions of another in the same way that Benjamin does in his own work.

⁹ See <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/20>.

¹⁰ For bringing Paul Chan to my attention, and also noting that in his case the absence of an actual object is critical, I am indebted to Tina Takemoto.

¹¹ This question of the possibility of art to resist fetishism also raises the question of the role of art institutions in doing so, especially in light of Benjamin’s own interest in such institutions. While this question goes beyond the purview of this paper, I would still say that it is by no means a sure thing that an art institution, by virtue of its engagement with commercial interests and the need to support itself financially, is condemned to fetishism. One of Benjamin’s greatest insights is that commodity fetishism is best fought (as his work on Charles Baudelaire suggests) from deep within the maw of the phantasmagoria. No actor or institution is thus lost from the ability to fight fetishism and, when it is dealt a blow from the center of the commercial phantasms that sustain it, fetishism suffers all the more.