

Psychoanalytic Absence: Freudian Object-Focus and the Resultant ‘Pervert Sans-Corpus’

1 THE ‘PERVERT’ IN POPULAR CONCEPTION

The notion of ‘perversity’ is ubiquitous in popular culture: a simple Google search of ‘pervert’ brings up in excess of eleven million results. Many of these references are derisory of moral impropriety, reinforced by tabloid headlines such as ‘Muslim faith healer pervert jailed in depraved teen sexual assault during “naked ritual”’,¹ ‘PlayStation pervert caught pleasuring himself over games console in front of stunned shoppers’,² or ‘Serial subway pervert pictured masturbating in Instagram post busted: police sources’.³ Some, on the other hand, serve as salutary references, such as in youth sub-cultures where the label ‘sick’ serves as an approval or a badge of honour. Almost all references to ‘perversion’, whether negative or positive, seem implicitly to indicate an inherent transgressiveness. However, as Chap. 1 suggests, what this ‘transgressiveness’ might mean as a notion that spans the wide range of associations and contexts for ‘perversion’ is difficult to pin down in way useful as a starting point for a framing for transgressive sexuality. This is especially the case for a foundation on which to base screenwriters’ forays into the underbelly of their characters’ personalities and predilections, given how screenwriting is a materially focused project.⁴ One promising entry-point to such a definition seems to subsist in the notion of ‘transformation through transgression’ that forms part of the founding principles of the Cinema of Transgression.⁵ If ‘transformation’ is to be understood as a process of change brought about by experience, then the notion of ‘fetishism’ fits

the bill: ‘perversion’ as a transformatory and transgressive engagement through the ‘fetish’ practices of BDSM (bondage, discipline and sadomasochism) and its accoutrements (like whips, rubber and leather outfits).

Although compelling as a starting point to framing ‘perversion’ in a more materially identifiable rather than merely fantasy-based way, however, a focus on ‘fetishist’ *practices* does not help identify who ‘fetishists’ *are* in ways suitable for translation into a visual medium. To suggest that ‘fetishists’ are the product of their practices is merely to re-inscribe stereotypes about what ‘perverts’ do in an unhelpful circular logic that takes things no further: that ‘fetishists’ do ‘perverse’ things and that ‘perverse’ actions are engaged by ‘fetishists’. Instead, it is perhaps helpful to disentangle the circular stereotyping logic by considering how ‘fetishism’ might surreptitiously determine the ‘perverse’ character: not through what ‘fetishists’ do, but through the objects they use. A starting point for this is built into the logic of materiality in (illicit) reliance on objects as it intersects with assumptions about how ‘ordinary’ sex is somehow different to ‘perverse’ sex.

‘Fetishism’ is reified in a way that it ‘has virtually become a blanket term to characterize all erotic fixations or obsessions seen as “perverse”’.⁶ Concomitantly, the ‘fetishist’ is so synonymously entangled with the notion of the ‘pervert’ that it becomes almost impossible to view them separately and to disentangle them. All four terms elicit images of forbidden sexualised bodies and objects in ways that are so fuzzy and inexplicit that the ways in which they contribute to Barthes’s mythology of ‘bourgeois folklore’ become almost invisible.⁷ To reach this clarifying objective, references to the people engaging in sexual impropriety must be unearthed through simultaneous readings of literature, signs, language, politics, power and sex.⁸ These readings reveal various articulations of sexual transgression that mutate back and forth between the visual and the linguistic in popular culture in ways that might prove instructive for a helpful filmic episteme for ‘perversion’.

However they might manifest, allusions to ‘perverts’ seem to coalesce in a representational clutter that characterises them, whether in affirmative or derogatory terms, as people whose inherent focus on a ‘fetish object’ serves as the primary locus of identification, which in turn renders those people as ‘fetishists’. This takes place through the language of nominalisation, whereby the practice of ‘fetishising’ as ‘engaging in perversion’ is represented in the nominative as simulacra of the nouns ‘fetishism’ or ‘perversion’: the verbs are turned into noun-like words or

signs and thereby into entities in their own right, abstracted from the people engaging in the actions.⁹ ‘Perverts’ are represented not as people with unusual desires, but instead as instances of ‘*the* pervert’: a *thing* that can be touched and held in the same way as the objects engaged with that define ‘perversion’. ‘Fetishists’/‘perverts’ are thereby often subtly reflected as naturalised representations of physical objects amongst other physical objects in the Cartesian mould: as ‘ambulatory objects’.

Phrased otherwise, in terms describable by Derridean semiotics, the ‘pervert’ as an ambulatory object becomes reified through his/her affiliation with attributes allocated in terms of language as a binary reciprocal delimitation that represents things through comparison with their opposites.¹⁰ In terms of this delimitation, ‘the pervert’ is represented as a diametric opposite of ‘the non-pervert’, in a conflation that renders invisible that the only difference between the two is their putative reliance on ‘the fetish object’, which in turn is similarly defined in terms of the person wielding it:

Psychology: a thing abnormally stimulating or attracting sexual desire, and

- a) an inanimate object worshipped by primitive peoples for its supposed inherent magical powers or as being inhabited by a spirit
- b) a thing evoking irrational devotion or respect.¹¹

This definition presents the ‘fetish object’ in illusory terms, as an imagined entity defined by what is *not* present, *not* ‘here’. This reciprocal delimitation seems to refuse an identifiable substance to either ‘fetishist’ or ‘fetish object’, thereby constructing the ‘pervert’ as a sexual ‘thing’ rather than a human agent. As characterised in terms of dominant discourses by ‘abnormality’, ‘the primitive’, ‘magic’ and ‘irrationality’, he/she is implicitly *not* normal, *not* sophisticated, *not* pragmatic and *not* rational. Since dominant discourses prioritise normative conformity, specific constructs of sophistication, socially acceptable versions of pragmatism and ordinary notions of what counts as rationality, ‘the pervert’ is silently phrased as an unacceptable aberration that at the same time does not exist.

The non-presence built into this to-and-fro non-definition is not merely a by-product of casual turns of phrase, nor is it a semantic hiccup of popular discourse easily avoided or by-passed by writers seeking alternative representations for transgressive characters. Instead,

it is deeply embedded in the authoritative psychiatric epistemologies that found notions of what it means to be human. These epistemologies have clearly had a profound influence on how people are represented in film and, arguably, influence screenwriters' conceptions of what constitutes character identity, if not in a direct or causal way then in terms of how dominant discourses reflect sexuality.¹²

2 THE 'NOW YOU SEE HIM, NOW YOU DON'T' PERVERT

The notion of the 'pervert' arose from foundations in nineteenth-century sexological discourses that reflected perverse prurience in terms of a discursive absence: an 'is-not-ness'. This absence was built into the codifications developed by European sexologists such as Binet and von Krafft-Ebing, who substantially constructed the notion of the 'pervert' or 'deviant' from the newly emerging idea that 'sexuality' was distinct from 'sex', the latter which had historically incorporated the former into its descriptions.¹³

Despite the more tolerant views amongst certain English, German and Austrian sexologists (including Freud) that the 'perversions' are natural variations of the norm,¹⁴ their definitions remained phrased in ways similar to how Von Krafft-Ebing engaged attempts to classify them, in *Psychopathia Sexualis*¹⁵: as entities empirically identifiable in the same way that material phenomena can be perceived by means of the senses. Such empiricism stands in opposition to the non-material nature of psychodynamics as abstracted constructs that are not directly perceivable, a logic that remained largely unnoticed by the early sexologists. Instead, in accordance with the proto-scientific methods of the time, such sexologists assumed that 'the perversions' were quasi-material entities that had merely to be identified and categorised in ways consonant with Karl Linnaeus's binomial biological nomenclature,¹⁶ which was accepted as an indisputable part of enlightenment rationality, borne of a provenance in Classical allusions and then imported wholesale into Freudian psychodynamic frameworks.¹⁷

In an attempt to normalise what had previously been seen as unacceptably deviant and following Freud's insistence that 'perversions' are merely a variation of the norm, 'perversions' have now been rephrased in psychiatric discourses as 'paraphilias'. On this basis, more coherent framings for sexual engagements have been developed in psychiatric epistemologies, as a way to move beyond the demonising tendencies

apparent in the history of psychology. Sexual engagements such as paedophilia and public exhibitionism are now seen as psychopathological and criminal, resulting in mandatory psychiatric counselling and sex offender registration.¹⁸ On the other hand, sexual interests like exhibitionism (exposure of the genitals), frotteurism (touching and rubbing against a non-consenting person), sexual masochism (receiving humiliation or suffering), sexual sadism (inflicting humiliation or suffering) and voyeurism (watching others engage in undressing or sexual activity) have been decriminalised and depathologised.¹⁹

Notwithstanding these changes to psychiatric discourse and practice, however, one foundational blind-spot remains: the difference between material categorisation and non-material psycho-emotional concerns, which derived early on from the methodological lacuna that approached material existence as being the same as psychical identification. This results in an ongoing failure to fully engage attempts to theorise sex scientifically on a more philosophically sound basis. The epistemic foundations for sexuality therefore also remain, phrased in terms of observations of empirical evidence (somatic ‘diagnosis’) as a way to describe the abstraction of ‘dysfunction’.²⁰ As with how ‘perversion’ and ‘fetishism’ are linked, this position is enabled by the nominalising tendencies of epistemologies that remain invisibly embedded in modern psychiatric discourses and that phrase both ‘perverts’ and ‘fetishists’ as epistemically absent ambulatory objects. Renaming the ‘perversions’ as ‘paraphilias’ has not modulated the conflation of a language of materiality with one of abstraction and indirect association, a conflation inappropriately phrased in purportedly self-explanatory and authoritative terms. This language leaves intact foundational discourses built into the psychiatric epistemologies for ‘perverse’ sexual activities, which implicitly merely rename ‘perverts’ as ‘paraphiliacs’ without referencing changes to their epistemic substance, which arguably suggests to both psychiatrists and lay-people that ‘the pervert’ is a creature whose characteristics are empirically identifiable as instances of ‘paraphilia’.

These characteristics remain opaque beyond implicit assertions in psychiatric discourses that the ‘paraphiliac’ is someone who engages in potentially problematic behaviour that incorporates engagements with empirically identifiable objects. The nature of the act of ‘paraphilia’ remains obscured by a focus on the object of interest: children (paedophilia), genitals (exhibitionism), non-consenting other parties (frotteurism), pain or humiliation via tools of ‘torture’ (masochism and sadism),

or clothing (public exhibitionism and voyeurism). ‘Paraphiliacs’ therefore remain identifiable, but without substance or positively identifiable characteristics.

Through definitions based in the objects of interest, ‘paraphiliacs’ are therefore epistemically absented by being obscured by what *is* empirically identifiable: the act and object of ‘perversion’. This epistemic absence cannot be easily remedied by rephrasing ‘paraphiliacs’, since the concern lies not primarily in the nominalising discourses of modern psychiatry, but much deeper: in as-yet unexplained differences between psychiatric and physical presence that are hidden in the underpinning Freudian classifications that phrase ‘perversions’ as improper sexual activities that

- *extend*, in an anatomical sense beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union; or
- *linger* over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim.²¹

Although certain of the overtly moralising elements such as notions of ‘improper’, ‘designed for sexual union’, ‘normally’ and ‘final sexual aim’ have now been explicitly excluded from modern renditions, the Freudian framing remains implicit in the underpinning discourse.²² In particular, the notion of ‘extending’ and ‘lingering’ problematically serves to create two distinct categories of ‘perversion’:

- perversions relating to objects: where the subject finds pleasure in partners not conforming to (hetero)norms, including homosexual partners, animals, children, non-consenting persons, dead bodies and substituted objects; and
- perversions of aim: in which pleasure is gained exclusively through activities that are ordinarily secondary or less important in sexual relations, such as looking, touching and stimulating.²³

In the absence of a clearly demarcated substance to ‘the pervert’, these two categories embed into the psychiatric discourses of ‘perversion’ a dual definitional nexus based on the sexual objects and the sexual activities of the psychical subject, neither of which describes the subject him/herself. These categories were embedded by Freud in the notions of

‘fetishism’ that he adopted from Binet and Krafft-Ebing, who in turn reconstructed them from Rousseau, Darwin and the ethnography of the time and then translated them into the sexual sphere.²⁴

The invisible categories of ‘perversion’ are particularly visible in the Freudian constructs of ‘fetishism’, ‘transvestic fetishism’ and ‘fetishistic transvestism’. These define sexual activity in terms of a psychodynamic relationship to material objects that defines the (psychiatric) constitution of the ‘pervert’ in terms primarily of a relationship with the material world rather than through any personal characteristics. This is unhelpful for writers, who need to rely on *both* a conception of the personality of the ‘pervert’ *and* material instantiation of that personality, from which they might construct in scripts engagements with the material world.

This concern is especially visible in various commentaries in Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which refer to ‘Fetishism’ in terms of a ‘now you see it, now you don’t’ approach that has now become discursively central and found in many dictionaries.²⁵ In terms of this paradigm, ‘fetishism’ inexplicably relies at the same time on both the presence and absence of a fetish, which serves as ‘a substitute for the missing penis, thus relieving the anxiety (and restoring in a displaced way) the erotic attachment to the female’, thereby serving as a mechanism by which the act of substitution is forgotten.²⁶

Here, the fetish object replaces the mother’s penis, serving to fend off the castration that the child believes he (not she, since there can be no female fetishist in Freudian constructions) knows to be true when faced with his mother’s ‘missing’ penis, and that he fears to be the outcome for himself. As an episteme, this obscures the ‘fetishist’ behind objects and (proscribed) activities, describing him/her as an abstract notion that implies but does not embody the ‘subjection of the human body ... to the influence of certain significant material objects that, although cut off from the body, function as its controlling organs at certain moments’.²⁷ In the absence of any other identifying characteristics, this serves to define the ‘fetishist’ in terms of the ‘fetish object’ as a fabricated item worn on the body, which effectively becomes part of the body and takes control of it even though it is not part of it. This serves to render the ‘pervert’ as a symbol rather than a materialised person, which in turn renders him/her epistemically absent, being merely a body “‘fixated” in relation to certain material things’.²⁸

3 AGENCY, OR LACK THEREOF

The epistemically absented 'pervert' *qua* dematerialised, symbolised object is rendered, together with the object of his/her attention, as a disembodied linguistic product, which thereby refuses the person any notion of epistemic 'is-ness'. This is problematic in and of itself, since there remains nothing left of him/her to grab hold of. It is further problematic since the disembodiment refuses any notion of the individual's personal agency. The failure to ascribe an embodied nature to the 'pervert' serves as a failure to ascribe substance to the sexual subject's capacity to engage in activities, thereby denying a central characteristic by which humans distinguish themselves from both the material world and other instances of life.²⁹ Such a denial of the possibility of choice is inconsistent with cogent assertions made from a moderate social constructionist position that the social world is textually constructed.³⁰ These assertions acknowledge that events take place in the social world through the actions of people, rather than through discursive constructs alone, as extreme versions of discursive construction might imply.³¹ This is clearly a problem for 'perverts' in the real world who fight to assert their claim on full personhood. It is equally problematic as a basis for an episteme for 'pervert' characters, since it denies them the capacity to engage a key element of a narrative: choice.

The inherent lack of agency ascribed to such a human product becomes especially visible in the psychodynamic construct of the Oedipus complex, which came about in the context of the proto-evolutionary influences of Freud's time, during which reasons for phenomena were sought in causal logic lodged in material circumstances and which resulted in constructs of the mind as a function of the material world.³² In particular the framing of fixation through disavowal as a response to castration anxiety writes 'perverts' as 'fetishists-as-objects' without the capacity to make choices and decisions, which is similar to how artefacts and commodities are deemed significant only through how they are moved around between people and places.³³

'Perverts' are thereby implicitly constructed as 'things' that obtain life through meeting other (sexual) things socially, as if they were people.³⁴ Since consensus logic refuses the possibility of phrasing things as people, this serves to render the person in the engagement a 'thing'. At the same time, both person and thing are represented as subordinate to implicitly inevitable processes engaged by invisible/absent/missing agents.³⁵

This framing is especially comprehensible in two underpinning areas of Freudian psychical construction, which together frame the ‘fetishist’ as absent:

- ego-splitting and disavowal as framings that hand agency over to the ‘fetish’ object; and
- defence and repression that hand over agency to an amorphous and unexplained notion of the activity of ‘fetishism’ as if it exists outside of the psyche of the ‘fetishist’.

3.1 *Ego-Splitting, Disavowal and Fetishism*

Freud’s construction of ego-splitting and disavowal is foundationally based in notions that the ‘fetishist’ is psychically unable to ignore the (absent) penis. This notion is perhaps based on the definition of ‘fetishism’ as a response to castration anxiety, which translates into a fear of the absence/removal of the penis, which, through psychical mechanisms, thereby remains the main focus of attention, whether in presence or absence. The fear of the absent penis purportedly results in ego-splitting, which is exemplified in ‘fetishism’ as a general principle of all psychodynamic constitution.³⁶ This happens through boys’ refusal to recognise that women do not have penises. In the face of their mother’s penile lack, and as a result of their inability to conceive of someone similar to them without a penis, they consistently try to see in others either themselves or a mirror image of themselves.³⁷ The child ‘fetishist’ is caught between the id and reality and is compelled either to acknowledge a real danger, give into it and deny an instinct satisfaction; or to ‘disavow’ reality and choose to believe there is no reason for fear, in order to hold onto satisfaction. Here the ego does not choose between the id and reality, but holds both together.³⁸

As such, ‘fetishism’ is an ‘oscillation’ between two contradictory reactions, both of which remain valid and effective, but which oscillation is ‘only possible under the dominance of the unconscious laws of thought—the *primary process*’.³⁹ This notion is best understood in terms of Freud’s description of primary and secondary processes that dates from early in his work. In the 1895 *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Freud notes the distinction between ‘primary psychic processes’, where ‘wishful cathexis tends toward hallucination, which in turn entails the full development of unpleasure and defense’, from ‘secondary processes’,

which involve ‘a moderation of the foregoing ... through the correct evaluation of reality-signs’.⁴⁰ In primary processes, wish-fulfilment and defence work together: ‘[t]he wishful state results in a positive attraction towards the object wished for, or, more precisely, towards its mnemonic image; the experience of pain leads to repulsion, a disinclination to keeping the hostile image cathected. Here we have primary wishful attraction and primary defense’.⁴¹

The primary process is regulated by the pleasure principle, an example of which is provided by Freud in the form of a hungry baby hallucinating the breast.⁴² The baby’s wishing replaces hunger with images of satisfaction, which at the same time prevents an ‘investment or cathexis’ in the painful experience. Wishing makes what Freud refers to as ‘a perceptual identity’ (*Wahrnehmungsidentität*) by destroying the difference between memory and perception. The child repeats the perception connected to its prior sense of satisfaction, getting back the psychical rest state (*psychische Ruhezustand*).⁴³ As the child grows, life experiences force the psyche to create a secondary way of doing things (the *secondary process*).⁴⁴ The child moves from a closed, self-contained and self-regulated system, through being forced to recognize and confront reality, which stands in the way of its pleasure (the reality principle). ‘[T]he non-appearance [*das Ausbleiben*]’ of the expected satisfaction, as the failure of the psyche to defend against an increase of tension by way of hallucinatory wish-fulfilment (primary process), forces the psychical apparatus to change its defensive strategy. ‘A new principle of mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable.’⁴⁵

In ‘fetishism’ the *primary process* defence does away with the ‘disagreeable’ reality of genital difference and the fetish makes reality ‘agreeable’ again. Disavowal therefore uses primary-process wish fulfilment or fantasy in a delusional way to correct the unpleasant reality.⁴⁶ Freud maintained that primary processes do not disappear as we grow, but rather they remain in our dreams and ‘our waking tendency to tear ourselves away from distressing impressions’, as well as in disavowal.⁴⁷ In this respect the term ‘primary’ does not indicate that it is replaced by the secondary process, but rather is something that must remain in balance with the secondary process by means of a knowledge of the ‘fiction’ of an unbridgeable gap between an experience of satisfaction (i.e. a perception) and the ‘hallucination’ of the memory of satisfaction.

This implies that reality has been registered and rejected and that not quite realising a self-sufficient psychical system means recognising the dependence of the primary process on something that is equally, if not more, primary (i.e. the secondary process).⁴⁸ Such a rejection of reality serves to render the ‘fetishist’ subservient to the ‘fetish object’, which in turn nullifies his/her agency. This reliance on a primary and secondary process of wish fulfilment is based on the underlying notion that the psychical subject does not inherently enjoy the agency to deal with the horrifying reality of a fear of castration. This implies an inherent epistemic denial of the subject’s ability to manage an internal dynamic, thereby concomitantly prioritising the power of the ‘fetish’ object. This serves as an inherent denial or demotion of his/her agency, whether or not the subject’s inability is suitable for diagnosis as a neurosis.

3.2 *Fetishism, Defence and Repression*

The epistemically expressed possibility of neurosis is itself a separate cause for concern, since it further denies the subject’s agency. ‘Fetishism’ would not implicitly epistemologically deny the psychical subject agency if it did not frame the inner psychical gymnastics required in the primary and secondary processes as inappropriate in adults, in whom ‘fetishism’ indicates psychosis even though it is not inherently a neurosis.⁴⁹

Freudian ‘fetishism’ is framed as a normal part of the psyche in children, where it is seen as not uncommon and not dangerous.⁵⁰ This is because a boy’s disavowal successfully wards off the ‘reality’ of a mother’s missing penis, which must be there, failing which the castration possibility is real.⁵¹ The fetish is therefore created in order ‘to destroy *the evidence for the possibility* of castration’.⁵² In adults, however, ‘fetishist’ psychical activity is framed in terms of unconsciously motivated behaviours that effectively serve to disallow the subject’s agency by rendering the decision-making capacity of the subject subservient to the behaviour engaged through the primary process. In this paradigm, the adult ‘fetishist’ continues with an immature reaction to perceived differences between male and female anatomies, thereby retaining two incompatible positions.

That the fetish substitutes ‘for a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important ... but had later been lost’ implies that, for the adult ‘fetishist’, the mother’s missing penis remains both lost and found.⁵³ This purportedly takes place through the process of

disavowal—‘having it both ways’,⁵⁴—which allows the fetishist to disregard reality and continue believing in an imagined construct. The ‘fetishist’ therefore sees and does not see at the same time, holding onto the belief that women have penises and he has given it up. This framing of adult ‘fetishism’ as a psychodynamic defence is one in which the ego struggles against incompatibilities in experiences, representations or sensations, which distress it to the extent that it protects itself by denying what has happened.⁵⁵

This notion of ‘defence’, which waxed and waned through Freud’s work and at one point was replaced with ‘repression’, remains an epistemic framing that denies agency. The depth to which the notion of ‘defence’ against an incompatible reality is epistemically lodged is seen in how it resurfaced in Freud’s later work (*Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*) as a way to restrict the idea of ‘repression’. It is further demonstrated in the notion that it supposedly takes place as a reaction to distress that is so extreme that the ego is in an impossible situation and must forget the distress if it is to survive. Freud considered this an impossibility, which inevitably leads to various conditions defined as pathological, such as hysteria, obsession or hallucinatory psychosis. In these instances, the ego remembers the distress, does not force away the incompatibility and survives through ego-splitting, which functions to separate the representation from its effect and turns a strong representation into a weak one. This can purportedly result in neurosis.

This framing relies foundationally on an epistemological framing for ‘defence’ based in assumptions that ‘fetishist’ practices are all but the ordinarily expected psychical engagement of the subject and that these are only avoided if the subject’s response to distress is greater than the tendency towards ‘fetishist’ engagement. This epistemic focus on an all-but-inevitable adult ‘fetishism’ situates the notion of ‘defence’ within a hair’s breadth of the idea of obsessional neuroses that dislodge or transpose the subject’s affect from its original representation to another.⁵⁶ Obsession is based foundationally on the epistemic assumption that the psychical subject is not capable of managing an internal process and therefore obsesses about a ‘fetish’ object. The focus on a misdirected practice engaged by the ‘fetishist’ as a way to reconcile the incompatibilities of interaction with a phenomenal world serves to write the sexual subject as inherently unable to engage with his/her personal experiences and therefore to make strategic choices in relation to these experiences. This epistemically lodged denial of agency comes about as a result

of a focus built into Freudian discourses on disembodied actions and a default towards an obsessive activity rather than on activity engaged through personal choices and decisions.

4 BEYOND ABSENCE

The discourses of the 'paraphilias' have built into them conceptions of 'perverts' based on the Freudian discourses of 'the perversions'. These conceptions in turn are based on an antagonistic oppositional definitional nexus between person and object, whereby the idea of 'fetishism' and 'fetishist' are defined through a focus on the 'fetish' object, in divergent or conflictual terms, without a direct identification of the 'fetishist' as a more complex person. This serves epistemically to phrase 'the fetishist' as someone who is psychically absented by the object of his/her attention (whether the object is the 'fetish object or the missing maternal penis) and his/her unconsciously motivated activities (whether or not these be neurotic) rather than his/her own personality and conscious choices.

Such an argument is based on the Freudian psychoanalytic constructions of 'fetishism' that epistemically imply the absence of the 'fetishist' and which in turn define him/her in terms of neurosis through default foci on the 'fetish' object and on a psychical inability to manage the conflicts around a missing penis. In these constructions, the epistemic focus is either on the object or on the (presumed involuntary) activity focused on the object, rather than the relationship between the two or on the 'fetishist' *qua* person. Such antagonistically object-focused constructions problematically phrase 'perverts' in terms that refuse to call on the interests, perspectives, worldviews or even moods of the people who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts. Instead, they focus on a purportedly stable and unchanging constitution defined as an absence in favour of both the object in question and the unconsciously driven actions of the 'fetishist' in response to that object. Their subjectivities are therefore obscured by psychoanalytic constructions that negate the complexity of psychosocial agency and ignore the central role of embodied experience in sexuality.

This discourse does not provide a sound basis on which to found 'pervert' characters in transgressive filmic narratives, since the only available basis for character construction is a non-basis: a prioritising of objects and involuntary activities that equates to an epistemic absence of the psychical subject. This in turn does not encourage a framing for characters

based on a value-neutral *identification* of the person who engages with the material world, instead focusing on a person *defined* by the engagements with the material world.

However, all is not lost. Unpacking psychiatric discourses with more nuance promises to enable a more helpful episteme for ‘fetishism’, which in turn might enable the construction, through coherent film screen-writing epistemologies, of more complex and interesting transgressive characters that are defined on their own terms, rather than through the epistemological absence implied in psychoanalytic constructs of ‘fetishism’ that over-prioritise ‘fetish’ objects and the activities engaged with them through unconscious processes.

NOTES

1. Oli Smith, ‘Muslim faith healer pervert jailed in depraved teen sexual assault during “naked ritual”’, *Express*, October 17, 2015, viewed on 15 November 2015, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/612741/Faith-Muslim-preacher-pervert-jailed-depraved-teenage-sexual-assault-naked-ritual>.
2. Ross Logan, ‘PlayStation pervert caught pleasuring himself over games console in front of stunned shoppers’, *Mirror*, November 8, 2015, viewed on 15 November 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/weird-news/playstation-pervert-caught-pleasuring-himself-6794076>.
3. Dan Rivoli, Thomas Tracy and Joseph Stepansky, ‘Serial subway pervert pictured masturbating in Instagram post busted: police sources’, *Daily News*, September 17, 2015, viewed on 15 November 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/serial-nyc-subway-pervert-busted-police-sources-article-1.2363750>.
4. See Chap. 1.
5. See Jack Sargeant, ed., *Deathtripping: An Illustrated History of the Cinema of Transgression* (London: Creation Books, 1999); Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake, *Rethinking Third Cinema* (New York and London: Psychology Press, 2003). See Nick Zedd, ‘Cinema of Transgression Manifesto’, eds. Jack Smith, G.G. Allin, Joe Coleman, *Underground Film Bulletin* (1985). Viewed on 15 November 2016, <http://feastofhateandfear.com/archives/zedd.html>: ‘to convert, transfigure and transmute into a higher plane of existence in order to approach freedom in a world full of unknowing slaves’.
6. Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen, ‘Perverse strategies: a look at women’, *Female Fetishism* (New York: NYUP, 1994), 51–94; 52.

7. See Philip Watts, 'Roland Barthes's cold-war cinema', *SubStance* 34.3 (2005): 17–32.
8. For recent approaches that address these concerns, see Jonathan D. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002); Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).
9. See Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (New York and London: Psychology Press, 2003), 143–150. See also Michael Billig, 'The language of critical discourse analysis: the case of nominalization', *Discourse & Society* 19.6 (2008): 783–800; Norman Fairclough, 'The language of critical discourse analysis: Reply to Michael Billig', *Discourse & Society* 19.6 (2008): 811–819.
10. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 141.
11. 'Definition of "Fetish"', *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, Eighth edition, ed. Robert E. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 432.
12. For material on this theme, see Glen O. Gabbard and Krin Gabbard. *Psychiatry and the Cinema* (Washington: American Psychiatric Press, 1999).
13. See Robert A. Nye, 'The history of sexuality in context: national sexological traditions', *Science in Context* 4.2 (1991): 387–406. See also John Money, 'History, causality, and sexology', *The Journal of Sex Research* 40 (2003): 237–239; André Béjin and Alain Giami, 'Une histoire de la sexologie française/A history of French sexology', *Sexologies*, 16.3 (2007): 169–169.
14. See Nye, 'The history of sexuality in context: national sexological traditions'. He approaches the inadequacies of historical developmental accounts favouring Foucaultian discursive ruptures, rather stressing social and causal historical explanations.
15. Richard Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study*, ed. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1965). See also the rather interesting collection pertaining to his practice of sexology: 'Photograph collection of a 19th-century sexologist', *Public Domain Review*, viewed on 15 November 2015, <http://publicdomainreview.org/collections/photograph-collection-of-a-19th-century-sexologist/>.
16. Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) was a Swedish zoologist, botanist and physician.
17. See Armstrong, R.H (2005) *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Armstrong argues that we should not forget Freud's construction of human psychology in

relation to antiquity, so as to remember the cultural continuity between antiquity and modernity.

18. The merits of these as ways to protect the innocent are up for debate. See later in the volume for discussion on the difference between morality-based and harm-based distinctions.
19. Popular conceptions of sexual 'perversion' are not codified, but are to be seen in popular sources such as free online medical dictionaries. See the definition of 'sexual perversions' in *The Free (Medical) Dictionary by Farlex*, viewed on 15 November 2015, <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Sexual+Perversions>.
This resource quotes its sources as Thomas Lathrop, ed. *The American Heritage Stedman's Medical Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); and William Alexander Newman Dorland, *The American Illustrated Medical Dictionary: A New and Completed Dictionary of the Terms used in Medicine, Surgery, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Chemistry, and the Kindred Branches with their Pronunciation, Derivation, and Definition* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1901). The dictionary states that these sources 'provide authoritative descriptions of medical conditions, medications, anatomical terms, noted medical personalities and much more'.
20. Note that 'perversion' is a Classically founded idea. See Richard H. Armstrong, *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). Armstrong argues that we should not forget Freud's construction of human psychology in relation to antiquity, remembering the cultural continuity between antiquity and modernity.
21. See Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, transl. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards, The Penguin Freud Library, 7, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1905] 1977).
22. See Chap. 9 in this volume for a discussion on normative and statistical moralising in psychiatric discourses.
23. Gérard Bonnet, 'Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles', *L'Evolution psychiatrique* 67.3 (2002): 496–505, 497.
24. For a compelling insight into the connecting points between colonial and psychoanalytical fetish, see Anne A. Cheng, 'Josephine Baker: Psychoanalysis and the Colonial Fetish', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 75:1 (2006): 95–129. Cheng tracks a path that connects racial fantasy, aesthetic judgement and the cultural concern of intersubjective recognition, looking at sexual and racial fetishism in an historical colonial context, thereby unpacking disturbances around the racial fetish. As Cheng notes, 'there are both structural and functional justifications for thinking about racial stereotypes as specifically a form of fetishism. [T]here are nonetheless several unresolved remainders left by this equation.'

See also Heike Bauer, “‘Not a translation but a mutilation’: The limits of translation and the discipline of sexology”, *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16.2 (2003): 381–405. Bauer notes that translations from the original German into English of Krafft-Ebing’s work served to obscure the original meaning and bought into dominant homophobic British Imperialist norms, subtly losing the belief that homosexuality was a ‘normal’ variation of human sexuality like variations in eye colour. Bauer also explores similar concerns relating to the work of Magnus Hirschfeld and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs.

25. Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, Gerard Bonnet, ‘Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles’; For other contexts in which ‘fetishism’ has currency, see also Emily Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991); Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); Robert Nye, ‘The medical origins of sexual fetishism’, *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, eds. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).
26. Wray, ‘Fetishizing the fetish’.
27. William Pietz, ‘The problem of the fetish, I’, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (1985): 5–17, 10.
28. Ibid.
29. For a wider exploration of how agency is often evaded in the social sciences, see Margaret S. Archer, *Realist Social Theory: the Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Margaret S. Archer, *Being Human: the Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
30. The concept of agency in sexuality is associated with the concept of the agency of the psychoanalytic subject in the process of psychoanalysis. For an overview and intersection with this idea see Frances Moran, *Subject and Agency in Psychoanalysis—Which is to be Master?* (New York and London: NYU Press, 1993). See also Thomas H. Ogden, ‘The dialectically constituted/decentred subject of psychoanalysis. I. the Freudian subject’, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 73.3 (1992): 517–526. Ogden looks at the theme of the ‘splitting of consciousness’ and the question of the location of the subject within this ‘dual consciousness’. For a review of how Freudian constructs make up the sexual subject, see also Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Thomas Domenici and Ronnie C. Lesser, eds. *Disorienting Sexuality: Psychoanalytic Reappraisals of Sexual Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

31. Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 9; see also Andrew Sayer, *Realism and Social Science* (London: Sage, 2000).
32. For a brief explanation of the Oedipus complex, see Sigmund Freud, 'The passing of the Oedipus complex', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 5 (1924): 419–424.
For commentary on the Oedipus complex see M. Eglé Laufer, 'The female Oedipus complex and the relationship to the body', *The Psychoanalytic study of the Child* 41 (1985): 259–276; Dana Birksted-Breen, ed. *The Gender Conundrum: Contemporary Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Femininity and Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Hans W. Loewald, 'The waning of the Oedipus complex', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 27 (1979): 751–775; Jim Swan, 'Mater and nannie: Freud's two mothers and the discovery of the Oedipus complex', *American Imago* 31.1 (1974): 1–64; Bennett Simon, 'Is the Oedipus complex still the cornerstone of psychoanalysis? Three obstacles to answering the question', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 39.3 (1991): 641–668. Simon addresses questions of the political controversies, the definitions and boundaries and criteria for evidence to prove or disprove it.
33. See John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006).
34. Arjun Appadurai ed., *The Social Lives of Things, Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986).
35. See Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*.
36. Alan Bass, *Difference and Disavowal: The Trauma of Eros* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000).
37. Note that girls purportedly 'disavow' their lack of penis. Elizabeth Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', *MLN* 115.5 (2000): 941–973, 951 & 952.
See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, transl. James Strachey and Anna Freud, XIX, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953–1974), 143–144.
38. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 952.
39. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 952 (Rottenberg's emphasis), Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 154.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Sigmund Freud, 'The interpretation of dreams', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Ch VII (London: Hogarth Press, [1900] 1964).

43. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 952; Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 154.
44. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 955; Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XII: 219.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 968; Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XIX: 252.
50. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 950; Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XII: 252.
51. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 957; Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XXI: 152.
52. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 957; Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XXIII: 203.
53. Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 968; Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XXI: 152.
54. Louise J. Kaplan, *Cultures of Fetishism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 27–28.
 Note that in disavowal the fetishist does not 'scotomise', which is a neurotic and pathological process equated with repression, where the incompatible reality is 'entirely wiped out, so that the result is the same as when a visual impression falls on the blind spot in the retina. Instead, it creates a blind spot where the perception continues [*auf den blinden Fleck der Netzhaut*].' Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster', 952; Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, X: 153–154.
55. For a fuller explanation, see Rottenberg, 'A testament to disaster'.
56. Note that alternative to obsessional neuroses in this construct: that incompatible representations are banished from consciousness together with the affect associated with them, which leads to the psyche treating the representation as if it hadn't happened. This is not 'fetishism', since the item that is served as a replacement by the 'fetish' object is banished as if it does not exist.

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