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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Phallic Presence in the Sculpture of Michael MacGarry

An Inquiry into Competing Nationalisms in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Declaration

I declare that this is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts (History of Art) (Course Work and Research Report) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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Introduction

This research report is an attempt to position Michael MacGarry's sculptures within a context of critiques of nationalisms in the postcolonial state. Looking specifically at Zulu and Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa, I consider the constructed nature of nationalism and highlight how it is always an imposition of rigidity upon the organic flow of peoples through spaces. By exploring the theme of the phallic signifier in conjunction with multiple conceptions of the *fetish* in Michael MacGarry's work, I explore the idea of competing nationalisms in South Africa. My research is a contribution to the existing literature on MacGarry in that it explores these readings of his work through a psychoanalytic framework. I show how MacGarry's work engages psychoanalytic discourses in relation to social and political formations in order to critique the construction and reproduction of state control through representations of the body politic, a concept articulated by Nicholas Mirzoeff (1993). MacGarry has created his sculptures in such a way that they can be read through all major registers of the *fetish*: ethnographic, Marxist, psychoanalytic and Modernist. Following Anne McClintock (1995):

> Since beginnings are never absolute, reading fetishism as simultaneously historical and psychoanalytic upsets the reductive assumption of phallic universality and gives rise to far richer possibilities of cultural analysis. (McClintock, 1995: 185)

Through a close reading of particular series of sculptures by the artist, I will employ notions of the phallus as a signifier of cultural hegemony and patriarchal control as it has developed conceptually in the discourse of psychoanalysis. Focusing on the

application of this psychoanalytic framework to an analysis of societal construction, I will explore critically the idea of the phallus as a signifier.

This psychoanalytic framework is best exemplified in Freud's conception of social order, which is made manifest by the subject's navigation of the Oedipal Complex, which is, in turn, deeply rooted in paradigmatic notions of paternal control and civic law. The concept of the phallic signifier proves useful in relation to ongoing debates about the effects of colonialism, neo-colonialism and competing nationalisms in South Africa. The use value of the phallic signifier is an index of the masculinized or patriarchal view's disavowal of feminine agency as it has been transferred onto colonized subjects. This is clearly exemplified in the object of, what has come to be called, the *fetish*, itself a misinterpretation of the material infrastructure of the religious practices of African peoples. The *fetish,* or *nkisi* as it is understood in the discourse of ethnography relating to the BaKongo people, represents a set of complex historical problems that stem from the troubled and coercive engagement of westerners with Africans on the continent. Indeed the *fetish* as it is referred to in western discourse has been cited as part of a rational of degeneracy that saw (and perhaps still sees) Africans misrepresented as incapable of logical thought and reason and consequently feminised, logic having been seen, until very recently, as the exclusive domain of white male patriarchs.

The phallic, read metaphorically, in MacGarry's work, I will argue, provokes the audience to engage on the level of the psychical, and to question, not only patriarchal politics, but also the construction and reconstruction of ethnographically specific

cultures as competing nationalisms. Here the idea of the body politic is useful as a description of the unchanging shape and means of reproducing political power that Nigel Gibson (2011) refers to as the post-apartheid project of 'neo-liberal structural adjustment' (Gibson, 2011: 4). This point is suggested in the artist's bust-like commemorative sculptures which invoke apartheid era leaders of the old Nationalist Party positioned in relation to figures that represent members of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) and present-era presidents, using similar formal qualities, most notably the phallus. Lucy Rayner's (2010) contribution to the discourse on MacGarry's work is the closest to my own. She has explored the concept of the carnivalesque in MacGarry's sculptures and has likewise pointed out the phallic form in some of his work, however she does not explore the idea of contested nationalisms. Two historically entrenched South African nationalisms are depicted, but implicit in their apparent conflict is the idea of the Constitution and its legal provisions. This is surely because any visual representations of the authority of the Constitution and its enshrining of racial and gender equality do not match a form and a concept that are both monolithic and phallocentric. There is nothing egalitarian about imposing statues of powerful men.

MacGarry's phallic sculptures, I will argue, represent a polemical and poetic body politic which employs the dialectic of presence and absence in order to produce meanings, as outlined above. The castrating effect of colonial culture on the colonized subject, I read as a metaphor that uses the phallic signifier to picture the disabling effects of colonization. I propose that an aesthetic unity exists between the series of MacGarry's works titled *Tip-ex Politics* (2007–2008), the *Young Liars* series (2007–2008), the

Champagne Socialists (2008) and the most recent adaptation of the form in *Historical Materialism* (2011). The unifying formal link between the sculptures in these series is the repetition of what I argue can be read as a phallic shape as well as the idea of its substitution, the *fetish*. The viewer is drawn to make comparisons between individual works and link them according to their visual and visible differences and similarities. Furthermore, the formal qualities of these works suggest some of the discursive frameworks that have been developed in the language of the discourse on the *fetish*.

The precariousness of the social contract in Lacanian terms[1] in South Africa is one of the subjects in MacGarry's series of sculptures. The three series of sculptures chosen for this paper form part of his broader oeuvre, which, he claims, 'investigates the ongoing ramifications of Western Imperialism within the African continent' (MacGarry, 2010: 5). The three series in question also bear the names of apartheid-era leaders (in the case of the *Tip-ex Politics* series) as well as post-apartheid leaders in the *Champagne Socialists* (such as Thabo Mbeki) and the ANCYL in the *Young Liars* series. Unfolding in these works is a kind of comparative analysis of different and conflicting nationalisms: a moribund Afrikaner Nationalism and a conflicted and fractured African Nationalism. Significantly, MacGarry applies similar formal solutions to the problem of representing power in each case.

[1] The phallus, in Lacan's view, signifies the Law of the Father. This is the law that insinuates a break in the child's initial sense of bodily continuity with its mother. The threat of castration 'demands the sacrifice of the boy's corporeal closeness to and pleasure with the mother. In exchange the boy is offered the name – of-the-Father, a position like his father's, a place in the symbolic order as a phallic speaking subject' (Eagleton, M. 22). The Law of the Father sets the ground work for that which the individual later comes to understand as societal law. Indeed it sets the scene for what the child will come to understand as the social contract governing his or her dealings with others.

It is against this historical backdrop of receding and emerging nationalisms that I explore the phallic signifier in MacGarry's work as a substitute for or exemplar of a body politic. The body politic, as Nicholas Mirzoeff explains in his essay on the topic, found its earliest manifestation in idealistic representations of monarchs. He takes pre-revolutionary France with its absolute monarchs and their divine right to rule as his case study, because it allows him later to explore the problem of manifesting such a single body publicly in the context of a democratic, post-revolutionary state, with no single monarch to signify/represent it. Furthermore the leader in charge of the nation is democratically elected. The visual language of monuments and memorials is polemicized in MacGarry's sculpture in ways that present the antithesis of the idealization of the body politic. An extreme example of this kind of satire can be seen in the work of Brett Murray, whose controversial painting *The Spear* saw two thousand demonstrators picket outside the Goodman Gallery where it had been displayed until it was defaced and removed. The waves of emotion that have swept the nation, unhinging rational argument, testify to the significance of representations of the body politic in South Africa. I conclude this paper with a comparative analysis of Brett Murray's painting and MacGarry's sculptures and explore some parallels within these works. My reading in this case may be disputed of course, but what is self-evident is that these works locate particularly South African nationalisms within psychoanalytic and art historical discourses.

Chapter 1

The Body Politic in Michael MacGarry's Work

Concept of the Body Politic

My research is based in several series of sculptures produced by Michael MacGarry, which I have posed in relation to Anne McClintock's agenda-setting collection of essays collated and entitled 'Imperial Leather'(1995). McClintock explores at great length the conception and application of the idea of the *fetish* to various discursive frameworks, but in this chapter I focus on how her theory relates to notions of the body politic. The concept of the body politic is vital to an analysis of MacGarry's sculpture, because, I argue, much of his work can be seen as a critique of the reconstruction of the body politic in the postcolony. McClintock deals only indirectly with notions of the body politic, per se, but more specifically introduces ideas about public spectacles as vehicles for the fetishisation of nationalism through the body politic. The body politic, as articulated by Mirzoeff (1995), I argue, operates primarily in the realm of public spectacle. I will therefore further elaborate what the body politic is in this chapter, particularly in relation to Achille Mbembe's essay 'Provisional notes on the Postcolony'(1996).

Mbembe describes the postcolonial body politic through its cultural manifestations as image, public spectacle and the various iterations of political satire that characterise the social and political landscape of the postcolony. He focuses on the body politic in its carnal, grotesque and derisive dimensions, pointing out a postcolonial preoccupation

with hyper-sexualised phallic and scatological imagery in relation to political power. Mbembe's essay is useful in an analysis of MacGarry's work because of its conceptual affinities and aesthetic parity. As Lucy Rayner has pointed out:

> It becomes clear in examining his [MacGarry's] works that they are intimately aligned with many of Mbembe's assertions on the postcolonial country. MacGarry's Africa is undoubtedly one 'characterised by a distinctive style of improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion. (Rayner citing Mbembe 2010: 10)

As I argue, MacGarry's grotesques draw on a number of modes of representation: 1) the tradition of portrait busts of commemoration; 2) the phallic language of monuments and memorials, which is, in this case, synonymous with patriarchal power; and 3) the visual language of the carnivalesque inversion, here articulated by the presentation of the excremental in public. A fourth aesthetic cue, and undoubtedly the most important to my reading of the work, is to do with a play on the idea of the 'fetish'/*nkisi*.[2] All of the above modes of representation can be said to fall into the general category of fetishes of nationalism and are envisioned primarily through the metaphor of the body politic (Mbembe, 1995: 4).

I focus on several series of sculptures, produced by MacGarry in critique of the South African body politic in particular. These series are entitled: *Tipp-ex Politics* (2008) (figure 1.), *Young Liars* (2007–2008)(figure 2.), *Champagne Socialists* (2008) (figure 4.), and *Historical Materialism* (2010)(figure 3.),*Tipp-ex Politics* (2008) is comprised of individual representations named after *J.G. Strijdom, D.F. Malan, H.F. Verwoerd, P.W.*

[2] The discourse of fetishism is dealt with at length in the following chapter, even though it is not exclusive of the ideas presented here. This is because the primary objective of this chapter is to introduce the concept of the body politic and its various manifestations in relation to MacGarry's work and Mbembe's essay.

Botha, B.J. Vorster, F.W. de Klerk (figure 1), all of whom were apartheid-era presidents who oversaw and implemented the intensified policies of segregation that defined South African republicanism from 1948–90.

The *Young Liars* series of 2007–2008 is quite obviously a pun on the leaders of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), who have received the bold appellation: 'Young Lions'. The ANCYL has long been an ideological testing ground providing leadership experience to a pool of, as yet, unseasoned political talent from which the ANC has historically drawn its leaders, the most notable being Nelson Mandela.

The *Champagne Socialists* series includes a portrait of *Thabo Mbeki* (figure 4.) which bears a striking aesthetic likeness to the *Tipp-ex* politics series, and finally the sculpture titled *Historical Materialism* (2010) (figure 3.). This work, which appears to be the final instalment of this body of phallic sculptures could be seen to represent the Zuma administration (2009–), but the title suggests another more oblique reading which deals with fetishism in more detail, and which I will come back to in the following chapter.

The body politic is often realised in visual forms and images in order to distil abstract ideas and ideologies about statehood and state power. As an expression of nationalism, these images are primarily used as spectacle. Likenesses of ancient Greek and Roman kings were perhaps the first in the western tradition to be composed of the material

infrastructure of representation, with the body politic initially manifesting in the bronze and marble statuary as well as in paintings and on coins. These images become the *fetishes*[3] of nationhood around which identities are built. Leaders of nations are usually referred to as the *heads* of state.

To extend the metaphor we see the head supported by a *corps* (from the Latin *corpus* meaning body) of police and military personal. This way of imagining the state, indeed the nation, has its roots in the idea of the king's two bodies, a notion that has been clearly articulated in French politics. Nicholas Mirzoeff's essay, 'The Body Politic'(1995), historicizes the concept of the body as a metaphor for political power by looking at the ways state power was imagined, indeed transformed, in visual culture during the transition between the feudal and republican systems of government in France. [4]

The King's Two Bodies

In his essay, 'The Body Politic', Mirzoeff describes the importance of monuments to national leaders as imaginings of the nation state and its power. Drawing comparison between feudal kings and modern dictators, he looks at the way imaginings of the body

[3] 'In the Postcolony the *commandement* seeks to institutionalise itself, in order to achieve legitimation and hegemony (*recherché hégémonique*), in the form of a fetish. The signs, vocabulary and narratives that it produces are not meant merely to be symbols; they are officially invested with a surplus of meanings which are not negotiable and which one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge.
(Mbembe, 1996: 4)

[4] While Mirzoeff's history and conceptualisation of the idea of the body politic is specific to the years of revolution against the *ancien regime* in France (1789–1799), and therefore of limited relevance to the contemporary postcolonial moment in South Africa, some concepts and ideas are worth mentioning, particularly with regard to the attempts made in both cases to imagine a body politic as egalitarian and representing a horizontal sharing of power between subjects of the state. David's Oath of the Horatii (1784) is a good example of this kind of imagery.

of the leader – in its capacity both as an ideological and political construct and as an organic and mortal frame – have shifted over time. Mirzoeff has historicized this cultural imaginary by referencing the 'two bodies' of the French king in pre-revolutionary France as paradigmatic of the split between, on the one hand, the 'perfect' body as an incorruptible and timeless entity freed from the burdens of disease and aging and, on the other, the 'too, too solid flesh' of the actual body, which must ultimately wane and die (Mirzoeff, 1993: 59).

The body politic imagined through images of the king can be seen as representative of a political ideology as it became manifest in the laws of the land. The body politic represents, in images, the power of the state to control and organize its subjects and territories through the enforcement of the law and to threaten violence where the law is contravened. The law itself is synonymous with the qualities of the king's divine inheritance. 'The perfection of the body politic justified and compelled violence against other bodies.' Such was the case for all crimes committed in the king's jurisdiction. According to Foucault, 'Beside its immediate victim, the crime attacks the sovereign: it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign; it attacks him physically, since the force of the law is the force of the prince' (Foucault, 1977: 47 cited in Mirzoeff, 1993: 60). All metonymical monuments and images of state power represented an emphatic threat to those within or without the state who might seek to challenge that power. Images of the king were treated with a mystic reverence, as Mirzoeff has elaborated:

> The famous portrait (1701) of Louis [de Bourbon XIV] by Hyacinthe Rigaud, which showed all the pomp and panoply of majesty, took the king's place in the throne

> room at Versailles during his absence and it was as much an offence to turn one's back on the portrait as it was to do so to the king himself. (Mirzoeff, 1993: 64)

Mirzoeff quotes Luis Marin in summary of this idea: 'The king (with a small k, the real individual with knees swollen by gout – the organic body) is changed entirely into his 'image' and becomes 'representation' – the King (capital K, dignity, Majesty and political body)' (Mirzoeff, 1993: 60). To the citizens of the feudal state and the peoples of newly conquered territories, statues and images of the king erected in public spaces were seen to possess something of the spirit of the king and were treated with an almost superstitious deference, an irony that becomes clearer when we look at the way the so-called fetishism of Africa was used in arguments for thinking of conquered people as degenerate and dependent on magic.

Mirzoeff argues further that artistically imbued with a mystical aura, the King's (here with the capital K) mortal body informs representations of the semi-divine body politic in the feudal world, and manifesting in equine statues and monuments in mediaeval and early modern western history. Art had been indispensable in the imagining and deployment of a body politic during the *ancien regime,* and was again vital to the imagining a republic during the years of revolution from 1789–1793. Artists were crucial participants in the revolution, guiding its policies and creating new images. Made of granite, marble and bronze these eternal metonymies of power stand in contrast to the *body natural*, but also in inextricable relation from it.

The socio-political context of MacGarry's work is obviously different from that of eighteenth century France. Nevertheless, the idea of the body politic is very much at play in South Africa at present, suggesting that this idea of the body politic is not foreign to African cultures. It is a visual phenomenon that is composed of multiple signs dotted throughout the landscape and the cultural imaginary, around which identities have taken shape. Images of the leader printed on t-shirts are now common. These are worn especially at rallies and gatherings where the spectacle of the crowd gives credence to political power. Statues of leaders erected in public spaces still redeploy time-honoured codes of representation, with bronzes depicting the likeness of leaders such as Nelson Mandela being erected around the country. These days, however, the body politic is a more complex phenomenon. Not only have new forms of media changed the ways power can be depicted, but also the very relations of power have shifted radically and ambiguously. The body politic is no longer a thing of perfection, justifying violence against those who challenge its absolute power, nor is it constructed through heroic depictions and lofty ideals. MacGarry's work thus draws on modes of representation that are inextricable from the formation of the body politic, to critique the body politic, and as I will now argue, are travestied in a ways that show great aesthetic parity with Mbembe's vision.

Mbembe's Grotesque Body Politic

Achille Mbembe argues that the body politic is a complex phenomenon in the postcolonial context and that we should do away with overly simplistic binary oppositions such as 'resistance versus passivity', 'autonomy versus subjection', 'state versus civil society' and 'hegemony versus counter-hegemony' (Mbembe, 1992: 3). The

relationship between what he refers to as the *commandement* and its subjects, living side by side in the same space within the same national framework of signifiers, is best described as one of 'illicit cohabitation'. He goes on to describe how this illicit cohabitation has resulted in a 'mutual zombification' of both the *commandement* and its subjects. Robbed of life force both groups are left 'impotent' (Mbembe, 1992: 4).

Power within this dynamic is never fully granted to the *commandment* by its subjects and to describe this situation Mbembe uses the word 'impotent', which in English is part of the lexicon of the phallus. Indeed the ambiguity of the postcolonial situation is best captured by Mbembe's description of public spectacles where the crowd, in its vast numbers, suggests the power of the *commandement* whilst simultaneously undermining this power by engaging in satirical and subversive language. Thus common lexical references to the head and the hand with regard to the body politic are derided within the popular imaginary and replaced with references to the genitals and the body's orifices.

> For instance, when Togolese were called upon to shout the party slogans, many would travesty the metaphors meant to glory state power… Under cover therefore, of official slogans, people sang about the sudden erection of the 'enormous' and 'rigid' presidential phallus, of how it remained in this position and of its contact with 'vaginal fluids'. (Mbembe, 1992: 6)

The image consequently produced is the public spectacle of political support represented by the crowd, simultaneously undercut by satirical laughter: 'and everyone is content to sustain a link, if only for a second, of familiarity, of collusion even, with violence and domination in its most heady form' (Mbembe, 1992: 20). Mbembe describes how the fly-infested bodies of the poor line the streets, their bellies swollen

with kwashiorkor, but when the presidential cavalcade passes they cheer. Dressed in the party colours and wearing t-shirts emblazoned with images of the leader the women sway with the rhythm of the music thrusting out their torsos in undulating movements that evoke the penetration of the penis (Mbembe, 1992: 20).

The ambiguity of masculine prowess as a metaphor for political power in the postcolony is this seen in the vision of the presidential cavalcade penetrating the crowd, who partake, only for a 'heady moment of collusion', in the glory and triumph of liberation and political power. In the wake of this climactic moment the reality of subjugation and starvation becomes apparent again, throwing into stark contrast the hopes attached, ironically, to the image of the leader and his potency.

Mahmood Mamdani argues that the conundrum of this mutual zombification is inherent within the postcolonial state and he opens his argument by questioning to what extent contemporary power in Africa has been moulded by the colonial period rather than by anticolonial forces.

> To what extent was the structure of power in contemporary Africa shaped in the colonial period rather than born of anticolonial revolt? Was the notion that they introduced the rule of law to African colonies no more than the cherished illusion of colonial powers? If so, is it not too simple, even if tempting to think of the anti-colonial (nationalist) struggle as just a one sided repudiation of ethnicity rather than also a series of ethnic revolts against so many ethnically organized and centrally reinforced local powers – in other words, a string of ethnic civil wars? In brief, was ethnicity a dimension of both power and resistance, of both the problem and the solution? (Mamdani,1996: 8)

An analytical linkage of European feudalism with 'tribalism' in Africa, in terms of an aesthetic of the body politic, is made complex by the influence of colonialists who frequently 'misunderstood' the kin relationships that created political order within tribes.[5] Tribal leaders were misunderstood to occupy roles similar to those of feudal lords or kings who owned the land their subjects lived on; and as such, they were seen to have inalienable property rights allowing them to sell their land to the colonialists. This 'misunderstanding', as Mamdani proposes, may have been more opportunistic and self-serving than the term suggests.

Francis Fukuyama, in his book, *The Origins of Political Order* (2011), taking Mamdani's argument further, states

> 'the Europeans deliberately empowered a class of rapacious African Big Men, who could tyrannize their fellow tribesmen in a totally non-traditional way as a consequence of the European's desire to create a system of modern property rights, thus contributing to the creation of neopatrimonial governments after independence (Fukuyama, 2011: 69).

Achille Mbembe refers to a hybrid postcolonial ideology when he states his concern with the way state power operates in two ways as it

> (1) *creates*, through its administrative and bureaucratic practices, a world of meanings all its own, a master code which, in the process of becoming a society's primary central code, ends by governing – perhaps paradoxically – the various logics that underlie all other meanings within that society; (2) attempts to institutionalise its world of meanings as a 'socio-historical world' and to make that world fully real, turning it into a part of people's common sense not only by

[5] The term tribe is a deeply problematic designation. It was used in the discourse on colonisation to describe 'other' people's social formations. Following Mahmood Mamdani, the very idea of the tribe became part of a divisive colonial strategy to categorize and manoeuvre South Africa's black population. It would later form the basis of apartheid 'homelands' policy.

> instilling it in the minds of the *cibles*, or 'target population', but also integrating it into the consciousness of the period. (Mbembe, 1992: 3)

The paradox which Mbembe refers to is to do with precisely the problem of imagining an egalitarian and democratic postcolonial political system when the raw material, ideas and concepts have been transplanted from the imperial centre. This is especially the case in a society that turns to a tribal past for a rubric of cultural value without disentangling the power structures that were transposed onto it by the colonists in the first place. When Mbembe speaks of attempts to institutionalise a world of meanings as a socio-historical fact, he is talking about the very fabrication of 'the tribe' as a marker of difference when the definition may not even have been applicable.[6]

Mamdani deals extensively with the idea of the split or bifurcated state as it evolved under colonial supervision in Africa and particularly by the English within the colony of Natal. The creation of tribes where there may have only been the suggestion of such, formed part of the colonial apparatus. Mamdani has argued that the bifurcated state operated on a system of indirect rule whereby a remote chief would be set up and reinforced by a centrally located metropolitan power. In his treatise *Citizen and Subject* (1997) he points out that:

[6] Jabulani Sithole points to the tiered hierarchical structure of Zulu society, which saw tribes most recently subjugated during the period of Zulu expansionism known as the *mfecane*, inserted at the bottom of the order. Those clans which had been incorporated earlier tended to be located higher up in this scheme. This fact underpins current conflict around who is considered to be Zulu and who or which clans still retain substantial vestiges of separate tribal identities that they wish to assert. Early missionaries who worked to categorize the Zulu in ethnographic surveys are also complicit in misrecognizing some clans or tribes as Zulu when they in fact spoke other Nguni languages, as in the cases of the Hlubi and Nhlangwini, who still maintain an identity apart from that of the idea of Zulu nationalism (Sithole, 2008, xiv).

> although the bifurcated state created with colonialism was deracialized after independence, it was not democratized. Postindipendence reform led to diverse outcomes. No nationalist government was content to reproduce the colonial legacy uncritically. Each sought to reform the bifurcated state that institutionally crystallized a state-enforced separation, of the rural from the urban and of one ethnicity from another. But in doing so each reproduced a part of that legacy, thereby creating its own variety of despotism. (Mamdani, 1996: 11)

The primary impetus of Mamdani's argument is that if we accept that tribes were, at least in part, colonial creations then tribalism must also be done away with in order for a complete decolonisation to occur. When the divisive co-ordinates of despotism have been locked both politically and economically into place, however, is it possible to talk about liberation movements like the ANC in South Africa in terms of the desired 'decolonisation of the mind', to use Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's often quoted words (Gibson, 2011: 4 citing wa Thingo, 1986). Following Mamdani, the despots of Africa are a hangover from an incomplete revolution against the systems of power sharing that colonisation installed.

It is my contention that Michael MacGarry's work uses the spectacle of the body politic and the feudal image of a rapacious 'big man' (exemplified most succinctly in Achille Mbembe's writing) to illuminate and comment on recent and current South African politics. His commentary exploits the Mamdanian concept of the 'bifurcated state'.

I will now attempt to show how MacGarry reflects these ideas. In the body of work under inspection, MacGarry presents the leaders of the apartheid regime in the *Tipp-Ex Politics* (figure 1.) series first, suggesting a particular rubric for the reproduction of

power exists and can be repeated. Thus Mamdani's and Mbembe's arguments, above, about modelling power and its concomitant legacies are pertinent as they are echoed in by MacGarry's repetition of forms.

Each sculpture is constructed out of polyurethane foam and coated in Nippon wax and oil paint, creating a glossy almost translucent 'white washed' film. The foam is suggestive of the internal emptiness or insubstantial froth of Afrikaner ideology, the political expediencies and nationalist myths out of which the Nationalist body politic was constructed. The *Tipp-ex Politics* series speaks not only about the *broederbond* (bond of brotherhood) that existed amongst white Afrikaner patriarchs during the consolidation of an Afrikaner identity – a fragile identity fabricated from a rag-tag gathering of poor whites who spoke several differing dialects of the as yet un-codified Afrikaans language at the end of the Boer War – but also of the erasures required to construct a particularly white and male dominated Afrikaner identity (McClintock, 1995: 368).

Central to the myth of Afrikaner nationalism is the idea of the empty virginal land as yet uninhabited by the time the Afrikaans people arrived in South African interior. Ideologically, black South Africans were quite literally erased from the narrative of the Afrikaner occupation of the interior during the great trek. Historical and archaeological evidence exists that black Africans' settlements existed within the interior for thousands of years prior to the arrival of the whites. The ideological excrement of the white

landscape suggested above is the political lie of the empty land which became a founding myth of Afrikaner nationalism.

It is no coincidence that the interior of the gallery space is white – the white space of projection and supposed neutrality and also a colour associated with purity. But as MacGarry himself attests in his catalogue by quoting Mathew 23:27, these sculptures are like the 'whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanliness'(MacGarry, 2010: 70). Hardly surprising then that, roiling beneath that thin white filmy surface, we see faecal matter and other detritus forming the very structure and foundation of the sculptures. The Afrikaans patriarchs are held up by shit.

A further erasure of the past is the unmentioned role of the women who participated in the Anglo Boer War and the construction of the idea of the *Volksmoeder* as the antithesis of the image of women as strong fighters. The idea of the fragile and stoic mother appears as the product of male-dominated Afrikaner nationalism, which at the end of the Anglo Boer war is figured as an organized military conquest and a 'male birthing ritual' (McClintock, 1995: 369). Women, who played a central role in both farming and war making,[7] are re-imagined as stoical mothers, stern but passive and weeping for

[7] 'We have long known, however, that at particular moments, Afrikaner women have played a major role in politics, as when they rejected their menfolk's acceptance of the British annexation of Natal in 1843. Both John X. Merriman and Olive Schreiner believed that women had played a major role in the 'first war of independence' in 1881. In the Anglo-Boer War itself many women in the Transvaal and Orange Free State were active – at least one served with a commando – but most took on the considerable responsibility of running farms in the absence of men. There is little evidence that they were a force for surrender or accommodation, and much that they were a force for militancy' (Butler,1989, 61).

their children.[8] They were portrayed in a way considered more seemly for the role of a lady in the emerging culture. In this case the assertions about the body politic are intimately bound up with the idea of nationalism and both are imagined as white male enterprises.

MacGarry's busts reduce recognizable facial likeness to the most extreme limit; verisimilitude gives way to iconoclasm. Indeed it is only the sculptures' titles that indicate the identity of each apartheid-era leader. The surface qualities of these sculptures is best described in terms of excretion and ejaculation. The works push phallic, genital and faecal imagery to the most obscene dimension of the grotesque. A language of the body is indeed required to describe MacGarry's depiction of the body politic. Not here a lexicon to describe the gracious and dignified planes of Roman marble heads, but rather a language reserved for the sexually charged realm of dirty jokes, taboos and carnal dreams. If the phallic codes signifying the body politic, in Mirzoeff's view are characterised by grandness, verticality and implicit perfection, then Mbembe's body politic subverts those phallic codes by presenting a body politic that is more keenly linked to the natural body with all its attendant decay and leakage.

At the risk of stating the obvious, South Africa's leaders have, until now, all been male. Statues of, for example, Paul Kruger in Church Square, Pretoria and Cecil John Rhodes in the Company Gardens in Cape Town and indeed the Voortrekker monument itself are easily seen as phallic symbols. They are singular, columnar and, as Nicholas Mirzoeff has

[8] 'British soldiers and policy-makers frequently commented on the behaviour of the women, and evoked the image of a "Boer woman in [a] refugee camp who slaps her protruding belly and shouts 'When all our men are gone, these little Khakis will fight you' '' (Butler, 1989, 61).

argued, represent the 'codes of vertical monuments symbolizing power and honour' that stand erect above the landscape (Mirzoeff, 1993: 94).

In MacGarry's portraits male leaders are also represented by phallic forms. However, MacGarry is critiquing the body politic as encoded in these honorific markers, monuments and memorials; he is challenging the phallic proportions of the colonialist language of representation. Following Mbembe, MacGarry uses the phallic structure as a way to subvert displays of power and honour rather than glorify them, he is performing an act not unlike that of the Togolese as described by Mbembe, who subvert the leader's power by swaying in a sexualised way as he passes. MacGarry 'travesties' this solemn visual code by linking it back to those aspects of the body deemed most private and thus destroying, through iconoclastic gesture, the public face of these grand masculine desires. Citing Cynthia Enloe, McClintock points out that nationalisms as imagined within the rubric of the body politic are 'typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope' (McClintock, 1995: 353).

MacGarry performs a similar subversion in the series of sculptures of South African youth leaders, the so-called Young Lions. This honorific is 'travestied' by MacGarry's choice of title for his work – the *Young Liars* (figure 2). The implications are similar to those suggested in the *Tipp-Ex Politics* series, where political expediency, fraudulence and corruption are central to the re-imagined theme of the body politic.

Besides this somewhat simplistic reading of MacGarry's subversion of the phallus, I argue that a more subtle and nuanced reading of the meanings associated with masculinity and power is also possible.

MacGarry's work criticising the gendered construction of political power through a repetition of phallic signs is analogous with Mbembe's critique of patriarchy and patronage. This repetition of form, I argue, is illustrative of the body politic, which

> formed a distinct and palpable entity, it was not an individual body, but an entity whose superiority was derived precisely from its capacity for multiple and *unending representation*. (Mirzoeff, 1993: 65, emphasis mine)

Here Mirzoeff is referring to Louis XIV, who represented the French monarchy as the head of a body politic that would ultimately outlive him – the head is everlasting, whereas the king is finite. To further illustrate this point during the English Revolution (1642–9), parliamentarians were able to rebel against Charles I, by claiming allegiance to the Body Politic of the King, thus avoiding accusations of treason.

Accordingly, in Michael MacGarry's series of sculptures, *Tip-Ex Politics*, *Young Liars* and *Historical Materialism,* individual leaders of South Africa under apartheid as well as leaders of the ANC Youth League and presidents of the ANC are represented in a style so repetitive in its representation that it is safe to say a personal critique of these individual leaders is not in question. What is in question is the more general critique of how power is manifested in the form of a body politic. In MacGarry's grotesque re-

imagining, the body politic is comparable to Achille Mbembe's image of a smouldering spectacle of excess, excrement and ejaculant.

In South Africa, I argue, we have two competing and contradictory images of the body politic. On the one hand, we have the ideal of rationality embodied in the Constitution, one of the most liberal in the world, which sets down the guidelines for a free and equal society across race and gender divides. This is often imagined as justice under a tree. The Constitutional Court, situated in Johannesburg, abounds with architectural representations of a tree, providing a space for shelter as well as a space for the horizontal sharing of power. Desmond Tutu's attendant image is of 'the Rainbow Nation': fractured or fragmented but bound in a common purpose. Yet on the other hand, the body politic is expressed in contradiction as a venal fusion of strategies that can be defined, as Mahmood Mamdani has suggested, as broadly neo-patrimonial. Here patriarchy and patronage are crucial elements of a system of influence baring a striking resemblance to earlier models of political power, primarily that of European feudalism. Here tribal or ethnic categories are often invoked although they are fundamentally at odds with contemporary constitutional democracy.

Critiquing the project of reconstructing of the body politic in post-apartheid South Africa is of significance in light of the ideals the constitution encompasses. Envisioned in the latter is an egalitarian society where a mutual respect for differing cultures allows subjects to live and identify themselves as they choose without fear of discrimination. The rights of women are protected in a vision for a society that is egalitarian, but

MacGarry's reflections on the evolution of this project are embodied in phallic and grotesque sculptures which cast a menacing shadow. In the following chapter I investigate some of the aspects of this cultural turning back to a notional past prior to colonisation, particularly in relation to the development of the discourse on the fetish and MacGarry's sculpture entitled Historical Materialism, which I contend, relates to South Africa's third democratically elected president, Jacob Zuma.

Chapter 2

The Fetish: a Close Reading of *Historical Materialism*

The *fetish*[9] is a powerfully evocative problem that runs through much of MacGarry's artistic production. In his work; gnarled assemblages of objects, often recognisable as consumer goods, studded with nails, are made to signify the so called *fetish* objects of West Africa, perhaps most notably the *nkondi nkisi* (nail *fetishes)* (figure 6) of the BaKongo people. In this chapter I begin to explore the etymology of the word fetish by detailing its origin as a term used by Europeans to mark a particular category in their first encounters with Africans' objects. The etymology of the word is useful to an analysis of MacGarry's work, because he deals with the 'ongoing ramifications of Western imperialism within the African continent', and the influences that have shaped the evolution of the term also track the unfolding of the processes of European colonisation (MacGarry, 2010: 5). I focus here on a close reading of MacGarry's work *Historical Materialism* (2010) (figure 3), as it is my contention that it demonstrates the clearest link, from amongst the selected series, to the *minkisi* of the Bakongo.

Nkondo minkisi so-called 'nail fetishes' may be the most notable examples to the western eye, but are by no means the only kinds of *fetish* objects that were produced. In MacGarry's work, similarly, nail studded surfaces are not the only way of signifying a *fetish*. It is useful, moving forward, not to think of the *fetish* as a singular idea, object or

[9] The word *fetish* is a pejorative one and heavily laden with the baggage of the imperialist discourse on degeneracy. It is useful, however, to use the word in this analysis and to problematize its etymology.

style, but as a discourse in its own right. This is because of the many variations of the so called *fetish* within the many cultures in which they were produced means that the word has come to encompass a multiplicity of meanings.

Anne McClintock's agenda-setting collection of essays, *Imperial Leather,* deals extensively with the problem of the *fetish*, clarifying and providing useful insight into the centrality of the *fetish* to some of the key discursive frameworks of the twentieth century. Frameworks which are intimately aligned with MacGarry's artistic production include Marx, modernism, anthropology and as I will argue later, psychoanalysis. The subjects of this chapter, then, are the questions of how and why Michael MacGarry's work incorporates the problem of the *fetish* and why this discourse is so useful to both the reader and MacGarry in his investigations into imperialism and its ramifications in Africa (MacGarry, 2010: 4).

In discussing the *fetish* I will focus on the etymology of the word itself. As William Pietz has argued, the term *fetish* is made problematic by the fact that it is particular to no specific culture or institution, but arises from the cross-cultural influences of two radically different social orders which came into contact with each other on the west coast of Africa from the around sixteenth century onwards (Pietz, 1985: 5–17). This is the geographical zone where the term evolved from its Portuguese root: *feitiço* to the pidgin, *fetisso* and then on into its Northern European spelling (*fetish*) over the course of

several hundred years. As a term *fetish* denotes a concept that is promiscuous and notoriously difficult to define specifically and loaded with pejorative references.[10]

The term *fetish*, as it came to be used in the discourses of Northern European Enlightenment thinking, is heavily laden with imperialist baggage dividing, Pietz argues, post-modern and postcolonial schools of thought between particularists and universalists, both of whom seek to dismiss the term, albeit for differing reasons. Particularists such as the anthropologist, R.S. Rattray, would have us abolish the term as a pejorative and othering device, favouring instead the use of terms derived from specific indigenous lexicons – *nkisi* (power figure) in the case of the BaKongo peoples would thus substitute for the term *fetish*.

William Pietz has observed that this manoeuvre, whilst rescuing these cultural objects from a stigmatized colonial historiography also claims an ideologically 'pure' space, prior to the experience of the colonial encounter for such peoples, and ignores the cross-cultural status of the problem that is the *fetish* (Pietz, 1985: 5–17).

Psychological Universalists on the other hand 'subsume fetishism to an allegedly universal human tendency toward privileging phallic symbolism', even though phallocentrism was only recently articulated in the theory on psychoanalytic fetishism in the late nineteenth century (Pietz, 1985: 6). I follow Pietz's dismissal of both

[10] It is crucial to note that the term is often used pejoratively, particularly in regard to questions of race and sexuality, adding to the complexity of the problem the word encompasses for art historians, anthropologists and economists, hence the italicisation of the word thus far.

universalist and particularist assertions and his proposition that it is equally possible to study the *fetish* as a 'novel' product of the 'abrupt encounter of radically heterogeneous worlds' and as the 'remnant of the creative enactment of new forms of social consciousness'. Here Pietz is referring to the economics of Marx and the psychoanalysis of Freud, but I would go further to claim that his theory can also be used to explain a consciousness that was spawned by colonisation itself. Embracing the term *fetish*, the reader of the artwork is asked to navigate the *fetish* as an intersection of different, but overlapping, forms of social consciousness embodied in the artwork, which is seen self reflexively, and therefore self critically, for the viewer, as the 'novel' product of colonisation.

Focusing, in particular, on the sculpture entitled, *Historical Materialism*, which was first presented by MacGarry at the Stevenson Gallery in 2010 as part of a solo exhibition titled 'Entertainment', I will attempt to cover some of the most salient aspects of the *fetish* in MacGarry's work. *Historical Materialism,* the title of MacGarry's most recent phallic sculpture *is* also the name given by Marx to his idea that consciousness arises from material circumstances and draws strongly on the modernist traditions of Dada and Surrealism as it has been constructed to be read through all of the major registers of *fetish* discourse (ethnographic, Marxist, psychoanalytic and modernist) by 'appearing as a perversely anthropomorphised or sexualised thing' (Pietz, 1985: 10). The multifaceted nature of the 'thing' at hand lends subtlety to readings of MacGarry's art because it acknowledges the *fetish* as a radically ambiguous category of things, an intersection of possibilities, but one that also quite specifically reveals how 'imperialism

(has) returned to haunt the enterprise of modernity as its concealed but central logic' in the form of an artwork (McClintock, 199: 182).

Evidence of Degeneracy: the Disparaging Origins of the *Fetish*

Much like the term *fetish*, 'tribe' and its concomitant designations are stigmatizing terms, and came to be used to define groups of people as marginal and 'other' in relation to monolithic normative concepts of European selfhood. Mindful of its limitations, it is with caution that I speak of the history of the BaKongo, which began in the fourteenth century with the rise of the Kingdom of Kongo as one of the emergent states in central West Africa. 'The people of the Kingdom did not use present day ethnic names, which are a legacy of a colonial past, to identify themselves' (Williams, 1993: 11). From European (mis)interpretations of African religions through the particular material infrastructure of the power figure (*nkisi* in the singular and *minkisi* in the plural), the idea of *fetishism* developed, and was ultimately taken up by Enlightenment thinkers, as Anne McClintock has argued.[11]

The word *feitiço* was in circulation in mediaeval Portuguese discourse as a term for sorcery and magical arts at the time of the first colonial encounters with Africa and was both defined and denounced by Christian clerical powers during the Portuguese

[11] 'In 1760, a French philosopher, Charles de Brosses, coined the term fetishism as the term for 'primitive religion'. In 1867, Marx took the term commodity fetishism and the idea of primitive magic to express the central social form of the modern industrial economy. In 1905, Freud transferred the term fetish to the realm of sexuality and the domain of the erotic 'perversions'. The 'sciences of man' – philosophy , Marxism and psychoanalysis – took shape around the invention of the primitive fetish. Religion (the ordering of time and the transcendent), money (the ordering of the economy) and sexuality (the ordering of the body) were arranged around the social idea of racial fetishism, displacing what the modern imagination could not incorporate into the invented domain of the primitive. Imperialism returned to haunt the enterprise of modernity as its concealed but central logic' (McClintock, 1995: 182).

Inquisition (1536–1821). The first encounters of the Portuguese with the inhabitants of the Mina coast of West Africa – which include that of Alvise de Cadamasto, a Venetian who sailed there sponsored by the Portuguese crown in the 1450s – happened in the context of religious intolerance and discrimination within Europe.[12] When early European traders began to deal with Africans they used the terminology available to them from existent discourses to categorize what were, for them, strange amulets and figures that were held by locals to have powers for good and bad. The evolution and dissemination of the word developed in tandem with the travel writing of early explorers and traders who documented their journeys into Africa. They perceived this alien tradition as a kind of witchcraft or magic. Ignoring their own trade in reliquaries and, indeed the Eucharist of Catholicism, early traders and explorers began, hypocritically, to define as irrational African religious practices that Europeans assumed incorporated spirits in inanimate objects.

Again it is worth emphasizing the point that Portuguese feudalism and African lineage-based social orders were radically different from each other. Indeed, to use William Pietz's description, they were 'incommensurate' with each other. And it is precisely the crisis of value that arose between these different social and institutional systems of valuation that came to be embodied in the *fetish*. At one level the question of aesthetics has always played a crucial part in the problem of the *fetish*. For the European observer of the Enlightenment era, these were ugly, grotesque and frightening objects. Of course, with hindsight, we now see it as problematic to have so insensitively applied European canons of beauty to objects which had never been produced to be sensuously 'beautiful'

[12] Early modern witch-hunts are said to be responsible for around fifty thousand executions in Europe and North America between 1480 and1750.

in the first place. Indeed, being incommensurate social orders, who is to say what was or was not beautiful?[13] Revising this position MacGaffey has made an argument for the deliberate creation of power objects that, in themselves, produced a sense of astonishment, rather than sensual delight, in the viewer.

During the course of history, periods of crisis and hardship have often caused people to turn to supernatural means to relieve their suffering. *Minkisi* are both a dramatic example of Kongo resilience and a visually spectacular response to such needs. They are, according to MacGaffey (1988: 189), 'constructed with great care in order to produce a visual effect; the texts describing them confirm that this is so. The appearance of the things in the context of use, conveys the message that they are remarkable and powerful' (Williams, 1993:12).

Whatever early explorers may have felt about *nkisi*, they certainly realised that they were powerful objects that commanded reverence from the peoples who participated in the cultures that produced them. As colonial presence grew on the West coast and began to push into the interior, early missionaries burnt thousands of *minkisi* in an effort to dissuade ancestor-based religions. According to MacGaffey, the most powerful witchdoctor (*nganga*), in BaKongo society was the King and *minkisi* were treated as embodiments of his power and so accorded both the reverence deserved by the king himself as well as the awe of his power to summon the ancestors to seek retribution for

[13] The judgment is also strikingly hypocritical when one considers that the central image in Catholicism envisions a man tortured and nailed to a cross.

transgressions or, indeed, his power to heal. Some *minkisi* were in fact likenesses[14] of the BaKongo king himself and developed reputations that travelled far beyond the villages where they were operated. MacGaffey argues that to the colonial eye these objects worked or were activated in what came to be defined as '*fetishistic*' practices (MacGaffey, 1993: 33). The obvious reverence accorded these objects as instances of what could be referred to as a body politic made them powerful and threatening to imperialists, vested with European interests manifested in the ideologies presented by Christianity and Enlightenment thinking.

> The powers – Portuguese, French, and Belgian – that were moving inland to incorporate the BaKongo and their neighbours into new colonial states found that *minkisi* were important components of African resistance. Missionaries burned *minkisi* or carried them off as evidence of a paganism destroyed; military commanders captured them because they constituted elements of an opposing political force. (MacGaffey, 1993: 33)

Many of these objects found their way into European ethnographic displays and curiosity cabinets. The display of 'fetishes', sealed behind glass in vitrines on trade expositions, was a potent method of visualising the castration and containment of African cultures for Europeans. The power of the object, which was destroyed by its removal to the dead space of the museum, would otherwise have functioned within larger complexes called *minkisi*, also dissuaded Africans from following ancestral religions. The discourse of containment was actualized in the form of the vitrine, because it locked the power object away from a vital signifying complex, indeed the continent of origin, where elaborate performances by the *nganga* were carried out in activation rituals. Such *minkisi* complexes comprised several different kinds of *nkisi* and

[14] Here likenesses of particular kings were not naturalistic representations but symbolic incarnations of the power a particular leader.

formed the material infrastructure for the performance of activation rituals which evoked the power of both archetypal spirits and ancestors in aid of the *nganga's* cause. Without these activation rituals performed on the very land where the ancestors dwell, *minkisi* die.

When Anne McClintock points out that racial *fetishism* returned to haunt the project of modernism as its concealed but central logic, she makes the point that all that was untenable for the European conception of selfhood was conveniently displaced onto Africans as their dialectical other. Wyatt MacGaffey's has argued that the dialectic that Hegel developed in his *Philosophy of History* amongst other works, which ultimately came to inform Marxist thinking, took as a case study the irrationality of the African as compared to his rational European counterpart. MacGaffey has argued from a particularist point of view and has countered quite strongly that for Europeans

> Anything upon which an African's eye happened to fall might be taken up by him and made into a 'fetish,' absurdly endowed with imaginary powers. We are still trying to disabuse ourselves of this condescending misrepresentation. Let us remember that 'fetish' is an entirely European term, a measure of persistent European failure to understand Africa. (MacGaffey,1993: 29)

William Pietz, favouring a middle road, has argued elsewhere, that the *fetish* only began its evolution as a European word and that a pidgin variant (*fetisso*) was used by African people in exchanges as trade relations grew, in doing so it left an exclusively European milieu and became part of a localised lexicon. By doing this Pietz emphasises a level of intercultural exchange of ideas which may well have been the case in the beginning. This is important to recognise because Pietz has focused his history of the *fetish* on the earliest encounters in his series of essays entitled *The Problem of the Fetish*. MacGaffey

has focused on the period of the scramble for Africa which happened four hundred years later (1885–1921) (MacGaffey, 1993: 33). There can, however, be no doubt that the term fetish was used pejoratively from the start and that the objects that were removed from Africa and sent to Europe to be displayed in ethnographic exhibits highlighted the supposed irrationality of divinity imagined as something so startlingly grotesque in appearance. I am following Pietz's assertion that the word *fetish* is useful, particularly so in relation to MacGarry's work, although the word's etymology and problematic status must be taken into account.

In an analysis of the *fetish* then, it must be taken into account that it is a word of European origin that was initially used to describe African religious practices. The modern movements of Negritude and Black Consciousness have moved to incorporate such imaginings of Africa and to reconstitute some essentially African notion of what it means to be African. What the etymology of the word *fetish* suggests to us however is that all early accounts of Africa were mediated by European discourses giving rise to the problem that African people have no ontological recourse to themselves that has not in some way been shaped by its encounter with white traders, missionaries and settlers. In Michael MacGarry's vision of a grotesque body politic we are presented with work that constitutes a critique of the body politic that could be naively read as a simple pejorative take on an Africa in search of an 'authentic' self in a before time. This kind of politics is given over to nostalgia for a primitive past, imagined as a golden age and a tendency towards ethnic sectarianism. But this would be to mistake the work for another racist slur. The work in fact reminds us that any pejorative notion of the

primitive is first and foremost a construct of Europe displaced onto its apparent other. This has had a palpable psychological effect on Africans themselves.

Fanon, in his essay *The Fact of Blackness,* describes an archival search for something essentially African to help him locate his selfhood in a 'deracinated' world in which he finds himself the alien 'other'. He describes the emotive quality of this project of selfhood, even though he is simultaneously disillusioned by it. 'Had I read that right?' Fanon asks of Leopold Senghor's poetic description of the 'primordial purity… in the masterpieces of Negro art'. 'I read it again with redoubled attention,' he continues, 'from the *opposite* end of the white world a magical Negro culture was hailing me. Negro sculpture! I began to flush with pride. Was this our salvation?' (Fanon, 1967: 123). In mocking tones, bitter with irony, Fanon here rejects ideas about Africanness put forward by Africans themselves. Having rhythm, being more intuitive and connected to nature and the earth and Negro sculpture were all things championed by the movements of *Negritude* and Black Consciousness, but come up for searing criticism by Fanon for their replication of reductive Western tropes which maintain a black and white binary. The received ideas of blackness to which you subscribe have been the subject of a powerful initial definition. You are always seen through the eyes of the white man, a gaze you cannot escape. The self then is always an idea imposed by someone else. The ideologically fraught history of the definition *fetish* exemplifies the naturalisation of such pejorative ideas. And as Tina Chanter points out, the return to the archive for something essentially African is itself a *fetishistic* practice.

> If that turn to the cultural past is in a strict sense fetishistic because it involves the desire for an image of wholeness to set against the mutilating experience of deracination and alienation, it is so not merely on account of the subjective sources of the desire. It is in the first place necessarily fetishistic because of what Fanon terms the 'sclerotization' of the colonized culture, the paralysis of a society whose previous, relatively autonomous paths of transformation have

> been blocked by colonialism. What the dispossessed intellectual turns to is fixed, archival and available for fetishistic recovery only in part, because of the intellectual's relation to it; in large part, it is because that culture no longer exists except as an object of archaeological recovery. It is, indeed, strictly speaking 'fetishistic' in involving the disavowal of the intellectual's cultural mutilation by way of fixation on an apparent prior wholeness. (Chanter, 2008: 259)

Fanon makes the radical argument that the black person cannot see himself, unmediated, as a self (Fanon, 1967: 109). This is because history has quite literally been dominated by victors wielding both swords and, perhaps more devastatingly, pens. Early travel writing, later anthropology along with ethnography, all played a part in the racial project of imperialism, as discourses of containment.

Fetish in MacGarry

MacGarry's *Fetish* (2008–2009), *Comrade* (2008–) and *Satrap* (2008–) series introduce, as the titles indicate, the idea of the *fetish*. Whilst all of the works produced in these series have the actual AK-47 as structural support, MacGarry's modifications draw on *nkondi nkisi* (nail fetishes). *Nkondi nkisi,* sculptures in the form of human and animal figures, were commissioned from sculptors but completed by the *nganga* who added magical materials to receptacles within the sculpture. Activation ceremonies were made spectacular by the igniting of gunpowder and hammering of nails into the figure to seal contracts and agreements with 'clear implications as to what would happen to people who broke said agreements' (MacGarry, 2010: 64).

The suggestion of violent retribution, implied by the hammering of nails into the object, MacGarry suggests, was a product of the Portuguese introduction of crucifixes into the area of the Congo at the end of the fifteenth century (MacGarry, 2010: 64). His sculptures, therefore, take part in a dialogue between the colonised and the colonizer reframed as a reciprocal movement of cultural artefacts between the urban metropolis and the rural community, in which religious signs become markers of syncretism. Looked at from this position, MacGarry's sculptures trace their genealogy back to Catholic images of suffering, indigenised to become a variant of the ceremonial activation of *nkisi*, recaptured by anthropologists and taken back to imperial centres as evidence of a barbaric and violent pagan culture destroyed and contained. MacGarry's work is thus a self-reflexive take on the centrality of violence justified and then denounced by the imperial centre. MacGarry writes:

> As a *fetish* object; form of currency; power symbol and instrument of both aggression and self-determination, the AK-47 has become synonymous with the African continent… The inherent binary logic of marrying the devastating legacy of the AK-47 to the spiritual, social and ideological role of the traditional Nkonde *fetish* object intends to comment on the degree to which violence, corruption and civil destruction are now an intrinsically institutional pandemic in the African continent, to the extent that this has diseased even [it's] spiritual character [*sic*]. (MacGarry2010: 64)

The central framework of these sculptures is the AK-47, a product and legacy of the wealthy nations who manufacture these weapons and then sell them on to governments, warlords and rebel armies in the developing world. Around this central framework the bristling encrustation of nails and other material applied by MacGarry could be said to 'Africanise' the weapon but then the African-ness of this 'traditional' reference itself is questionable and possibly Catholic in origin. The work is thus symptomatic of what MacGarry calls the 'ongoing ramifications of imperialism'. As

artworks which are fetishisable, take part in the cult of personality of the artist and are sanctioned by wealthy elite 'tastemakers' they look less and less essentially African and more and more like a dark spectre of European expansionism and greed.

MacGarry's *Historical Materialism*, could be viewed as a memorial to Marxist ideas and reference to the current atmosphere of hollow socialist rhetoric used by politicians, as indicated by the title. But *Historical Materialism*, could also be read as a more pathos laden object and a comment on the attempt to reconstitute the self through the body politic. If all of the other phallic sculptures in the series under discussion which bear likeness to *Historical Materialism* are named after leaders and presidents of South Africa, then it is plausible that *Historical Materialism* represents the incumbent president, Jacob Zuma.

Looking at South Africa's third democratically elected president, Jacob Zuma, it is plain to see that the head of the nation thinks otherwise on questions of gender equality. This is because his relations with women indicate that he does not follow the constitutionally-enshrined understanding of gender equality. His reneging on this front is demonstrated by his promotion of polygamous marriage which undermines women's rights in favour of traditional cultural expression. This could be seen to represent an atavistic return to notions of an Africa that is untainted by the colonial encounter and is reflected in the promotion of so called traditional mores and values. Furthermore some of his wives are kept in a palatial home that has been styled to reference a traditional kraal, which, in light of all his wives, is reminiscent of the women's quarters of the Zulu King's household, the *isigodlo*. His compound is a collection of separate homes built around a cattle kraal. The homes are thatched in a style that could be said to reference

the grass huts of the traditional Zulu homestead, but scaled up in proportion and luxury features. Zuma's singing of struggle songs associated with the Zulu language, like *Awuleth'Umshini Wam* (bring me my machine gun), incite ethnic violence and draw on tropes of the noble savage evolved, ironically, by the English. A search for the song online yields a Wikipedia article[15] which claims that"

> Most recently, the song is identified with the persona of Jacob Zuma, the current President of South Africa, and is often sung at rallies which involve him and his supporters, including the ANC Youth League.

That the persona of the president and the suggestion of violence are conflated is indicative of the way the body of the president becomes a *fetish* of black power and, notionally, African culture. Not only is Zuma a potent patriarch with many wives and a tribal homestead he is also a warrior. Referring Back to MacGarry's series entitled *Fetish,* the rifle is deployed as a signifier of both power and anticolonial sentiment in a way that could be said to *fetishise* black power and potency. Associated with the image of the machine gun are a complex of signifiers: phrases and rallying cries that have been bandied about at political gatherings since the 1980's have included lines like the Pan African Congress' 'one settler, one bullet' and the ANC's 'kill the boer, kill the farmer' originated by Peter Makhoba at the funeral of Chris Hani. Jacob Zuma is productively likened, by MacGarry to the *nkisi,* a power figure that exists within a larger signifying complex or *minkisi*. All of the above mentioned attributes, rather perversely, contribute to a beguiling aura of power that surrounds him and seems to legitimate his authority rather than undermine it.

[15] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umshini_wami

In *Historical Materialism* we see MacGarry deploy all of the signs of a *fetishistic* display of the power of the postcolonial body politic. The phallic structure is composed of consumer goods bespeaking a tendency to commodity fetishism, which I deal with in the next chapter, congealed together and surmounted by a skull. The skull, read with the hand rifle that is clearly visible in the base suggests threat, but oddly enough is made satirical by the presence of a prosthetic nose on the face of the skull. This nose is reminiscent of the ubiquitous Zapiro cartoons (figures 7 and 8) where Jacob Zuma is represented with a shower head protruding from his cranium. Zapiro began to include this shower head as a sign to remind the public that Zuma was accused of raping a family friend's daughter in 2005. The young woman was known to be HIV positive. When asked if he had taken precautionary measures to protect himself from HIV he responded by saying he had taken a shower after coitus and this was enough (Dubin, 2012; 125). This comment falls in line with a history of misrepresentations made by some leaders of the ANC, to the public, about the real dangers of HIV and the ways it is transmitted. In Historical Materialism then, at one level we could read a reflection of the state as harbinger of death and destruction, given to a greed for consumer goods, cast as totem of power. But as Mbembe has argued, it is no good to view this body politic in terms of a binary relationship between the powerful and the dispossessed because, as he points out, the illusion is sustained and colluded with, by a public who are at times won over by or even allowed to partake in its beguiling power (Mbembe, 1992: 3).

In South Africa today there is an increased turning to 'tribal' values and aesthetics as recourse to identity formation in the face of homogenizing and dehumanizing global capital in the aftermath of colonialism and Apartheid which has left most of Africa

deeply scarred by humiliation, degradation and poverty. Although these manoeuvres centre more power in the hands of men, the constitutional democracy of South Africa enshrines the values of race and gender equality. In reality, tribalism, that age-old trope of colonialism that divided and conquered, is being perversely redeployed in the present as the foundation of reinvigorated assertions of patriarchal power. This highlights a central paradox in the ideology of most nationalisms, which, according to Benedict Anderson, is the '....objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye versus their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.' (1991: 5). All nationalisms are constructs and they are all dangerous because of their exclusive binary dynamic. Because the modern state is envisioned in intellectual terms as both modern and 'progressive' but containing powerful atavistic sentiment, 'the issue at hand is how the signs of imperialism are read and reformulated by its various subjects' (Kaspin, 2002: 320). The concept of the *fetish* has evidently been just such a term of reformulation.

As far as *fetish* objects represent crises in cultural values between the colonized and the colonizer, MacGarry's work could be seen to tackle the question of race and cultural mimesis versus cultural atavism by indication of the conflict as the subject matter. The very discourse of *fetishism* which sees a fracture between *fetish* versus the *nkisi* embodies the crises of the historical inability of the West to fully comprehend Africa. *Historical Materialism,* draws on a tradition of visual culture that could be seen as a form of resistance to the effects of colonialism through an embracing of the *nkisi* power figure as symbolic of the ancestral religion it represents. But if it does this, there is also a wry warning about the emptiness of such a gesture.

Chapter 3

Marx and Commodity Fetishism

In the previous chapter I looked at the evolution of the word *fetish* and its etymology. I linked the word to the concept of the body politic, which I set out in chapter one, and showed how these concepts combined to form a framework through which to read MacGarry's sculpture. In this chapter I unpack the title of MacGarry's sculpture entitled 'Historical Materialism' (2010) (figure3), which is also the name given by Marx to his idea that consciousness arises from the material circumstances of human life (Kolakowski, 1978: 156). Humans, according Leszek Kolakowski's interpretation of Marx, are distinguished from beasts, first and foremost, because our ability to produce tools, and over the course of history, to reproduce our material existence by way of those tools (Kolakowski, 1978: 156). Germane to this theory of the reproduction of the circumstances of human life is its shadow; Marx's idea of commodity fetishism. In this chapter I explore the idea of commodity fetishism, first by investigating how the word *fetish*[16] was taken up into the discourse on economics by Marx, and second by looking at how the idea of commodity fetishism can be used as a framework through which to read MacGarry's sculptures.

If the idea of the fetish names a problem, then so too does the idea of Historical Materialism. When Marx referred back to the 'mist enveloped regions of the religious

[16] In chapter two I discussed the problematic status of the word *fetish*. Having identified its problematic status I will no longer italicise the word and its derivations moving forward.

world' for an analogy for what he understood as a 'historically singular social construct able to create the illusion of natural unity among heterogeneous things', he was trying to define, in a term, that characteristic of the capitalist social order which treats commodities in a fetishistic way (Marx, 1976, cited by Pietz, 1985: 9).[17] This is to say that the term was 'useful as a name for the power of a singular historical institution to fix personal consciousness in an objective illusion', namely the commodity form (Pietz, 1985: 9). And as Appadurai surmises briefly: the commodity both conceals and represents social relations because the value of things is determined by society (Appadurai, 1986: 54). The commodity fetish is thus the object that gives rise to the false consciousness (illusion) that Marx saw as a fatal flaw in the capitalist social order because it hides the true nature of the labour relations that produce the commodity.

It is around the commodity as fetish that Marx built the framework of Historical Materialism as mode of analysis. But, perhaps, woven into his words is the self-fulfilling prophecy that his own text would come to be treated as all religious texts are, which is to say that it became subject to different interpretations which have varied between schools of thought. Ultimately Historical Materialism as a mode of analysis would become reified, giving rise to socialist and communist movements around the world.

[17] 'There the existence of the things *qua* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labor which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There is a definite social relation between men that assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches to the products of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities' Karl Marx (Capital, I Ch. I: 4).

Treated as an ideology, Historical Materialism is now often blamed, by capitalists of varying kinds, for the erosion of economies and the political manipulation of the masses.

Michael Ryan, points out, that, while Marx was not a scholar of the arts, he did think about culture and noted that at different times, different ideas predominated. These ideas usually reflected the interests of the ruling classes and can be loosely defined as an abiding ideology. (Ryan, 2007: 115). Ideologies are difficult to define and fraught with internal contradictions, but can nevertheless be discerned in 'cultural' expressions like art, literature, law and politics. 'The painter Henri Matisse once remarked that all art bears the imprint of its historical epoch, but that great art is that in which this imprint is most deeply marked' (Eagleton, 1996: 207). This, Eagleton argues, is because the individual work under analysis, or its maker, is only constituted as a subject through a process of *subjection* to ideologically prescribed norms which help to maintain the class position of the dominant group. Eagleton maintains that

> to understand an ideology, we must analyse the precise relations between different classes in a society: and to do that means grasping where those classes stand in relation to the mode of production. (Terry Eagleton, 1996: 209)

This brings into play the theoretical concept of the base (labour or the means of production) and the superstructure (the owners of the means of production), or rather the particular relations of the base to the superstructure.

In his work, *The Economy of Modernity* (2005) (figure 5), MacGarry explores these themes in relation to the sculptural language that he is developing. This work is also

important to look at as it represents the first in the line of particular phallic/fetish forms which evolved into *Historical Materialism.* We can see in this example the beginnings of MacGarry's particular encoding of the materials he uses later in *Tipp-ex Politics, Champaign Socialists, Young Liars* and *Historical Materialism*. The image of a rickety-looking wooden structure, at first sight nothing more than an incomplete sculptural armature, is reminiscent of the ad-hoc or make-do construction methods used by the poor to build shacks. This is surmounted by a head or carapace of solidified expanding foam above and supported on stilts made of brass beneath. The sculpture looks like a *primitive* mess of organic and geometric forms which could, on an anthropomorphic level, be read as a portrait bust with the wooden structure reading as bones and perhaps ribs. In the catalogue, *End Game*, MacGarry comments on this sculpture:

> The large mound of industrial foam was built by the *empiricists* – who stressed the importance of basic human needs. The superstructure was made by the *rationalists* who followed the advocacy of Gropius in parallel rows of linear blocks. The brass stilts – for purely functional reasons were made by *the workers*. (MacGarry, 2010: 41)

The above extract is reminiscent of the nonsensical but deeply associative and evocative language used by the Dadaists. This is a valuable reference in itself because the Dada movement was an attempt to subvert and critique the so-called rationality of the Enlightenment, which had nevertheless led Europe into the horrors of the First World War, and MacGarry, in a similar vein, is critiquing the structure of capitalist society by presenting an object that is both ugly – thereby subverting Enlightenment cannons of beauty – and incomplete –undermining the Modernist finish 'fetish'.[18]

[18] Mies Van der Rohe and Walter Gropius were major proponents of Modernism, which tried to democratize the arts and to remove what they saw as the pompous excesses or European architecture in favor of a minimal look that prized finish and simplicity over decorative design complexities. Ironically, the design of the Bauhaus

Perhaps the most salient point for the ongoing analysis of *Historical Materialism* (figure 3) is raised by the industrial foam which MacGarry links to the empiricists. Empirical science was one of the major conceptual advances of the Enlightenment, giving rise to the advances in knowledge made by the likes of Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin (Burke, 2012; 156–9). It, however, also lead to the development of the schools of anthropology, ethnography and phrenology, which, in the earliest encounters with Europe's 'others', tended to provide distorted accounts that would ultimately give a racializing ideology the illusion of an objective scientific weight.

The foam, here, is the foam of ideology that forms on top of the superstructure. The head of foam in *The Economy of Modernity* (figure 5) is in MacGarry's view, grotesquely oversized and threatening to overwhelm its support, the superstructure. The head of foam in this view is supernumerary to the usual base and superstructure. The superstructure itself is grossly disproportionate in representation to the base, here represented by the measly brass stilts that MacGarry links to the workers. As visual metaphor of Marx's idea of the commodity as fetish, the work is concealing the true weight of those relations: here the innocuous brass stilts can be likened to the barely visible 'made in China' stamp on the underside of a piece of tourist tat like a plastic reproduction of Big Ben. The sculpture seems to subvert usual diagrammatic representations which are often imagined as a pyramid, the base being proportionally larger than the superstructure. In Raymond Williams' (2005: 31–49) analysis of Marxist thinking, the superstructure is represented as the cap of a pyramidal shape with the base representing the masses and the greatest volume. However, MacGarry, in this

became a marker of prestige and power for those who can afford what still remains on the market and which has not been 'enclaved' in museums of modern art.

work, virtually ignores the base and by extension the masses. What takes primacy is not even the rickety superstructure, but the overwhelming ideology that forms on top of the superstructure.

The work could be read as a kind of diagram of false consciousness and its grotesque distortions. Here the use of industrial foam needs to be unpacked further. Polyurethane foam is extremely light and almost substanceless; before setting it expands to as much as 200 per cent of the extruded volume and is primarily composed of pockets of gas. These qualities are also suggestive traits of what we might call the ideology represented in the *Economy of Modernity*. The irony implicit here is then further compounded by the visceral appearance of the foam, which MacGarry has built up to look like faeces. The deep internal processes of the body which are normally hidden from society are now displayed in public. Consumer society is confronted with an image of its guiding ideology, embodied in the artwork as commodity, exposed as a pile of frothy faecal matter, a mess without any real substance, a symptom of the disease which sees the consumer unable to process, adequately, the material world in which s/he lives.

The ideology that MacGarry confronts head-on is the commodity culture that defines our time, which as Ryan points out,

> turns everything into a commodity, and commodity culture creates a way of thinking or consciousness appropriate to it. Minds become routinized and uniform. We cease to be able to criticize intelligently the world we live in because we are pacified by consumption…We cease to be able to refuse to participate in commodity culture because all our needs are routed through it. (2007: 117)

Historical Materialism represents the challenge of a defamiliarizing art object which draws attention to its materiality and its commodity status while simultaneously engaging the viewer in the routinized pacification that commodity culture represents, because as an artwork it is fetishisable. Looked at through the lens of the dialectical tradition of Marxist analysis, the work can be seen to perform a vital act of negation. The work then occupies an ambiguous space as both a commodity and the idea of the critique of the commodity. One aspect of the fetish that Pietz insists is germane to all applications of the word in different discourses is that it always refers to a material object, so it is logical that as an artwork, *Historical Materialism* is deeply ironic.

An empty and overturned champagne bottle appears prominently amongst other objects identifiable as commodities – a game console and various plastic dolls and animals, cellphones, guns and knives and beer bottles – piled together into the totemic column of *Historical Materialism*. Surmounted by a skull, the sculpture echoes the vision of *The Economy of Modernity*, with its suggestion of a base and superstructure. Although in this instance the differing strata are not so mechanically distinguished. All the component parts of this work are held together by MacGarry's deeply ideological foam, bringing to mind, humorously for me, Marx's line that, 'As valuables, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labour time' (cited in Renfrew, 1986: 157). The point stressed here is that, in a capitalist system, what commodities most often have in common is labour value. Products, however, in the classical Marxian sense of commodity fetishism, both conceal and represent social relations because the value of things is determined by society and expressed as *exchange value* (Appadurai, 1986: 54).

This is one of the core thematic problems of the fetish according to Pietz: the problem of the non-universality and constructed-ness of social value.

> The mystery of value – the dependence of social value on specific institutional systems for marking the value of material things – was a constant theme in transactions on the Guinea coast during the period. The problem was especially expressed in the category of the trifling: European traders constantly remarked on the trinkets and trifles they traded for objects of real value (just as the socioreligious orders of African societies seemed to them founded on the valuing of 'trifles' and 'trash'). (Pietz, 1985: 7)

The question, of value is equally problematized by MacGarry. Being rendered useless by their incorporation into this sculpture, none of the identifiable objects can be said to have use value. The sculpture could also be read as a pile of trash, of objects rendered useless, having served their purpose. The image of a pile of trash can thus be read symbolically or metaphorically but in light of the fact that the pile is cast in bronze, a commodity of value in its own right and traditionally associated with institutions of fine art in the west, the trash is rematerialized as a commodity fetish of greater value. It is arguably a rather simplistic reading at this level, but the irony is worth noting – the trash or 'trifling' was being sold back to the, in all likelihood, white Western audience in 2010.

Another, and perhaps more common, understanding of commodity fetishism sees artworks, or indeed any luxury goods, as an embodiment of their makers or corporate brands. Buyers of art then partake in a cult of the personality of the artist, one that sees their own needs for social approval met by the special aura of the artwork. The work functions as a status symbol. MacGarry's works problematize novelty (particularly the

artwork as a kind of commodity fetish[19]) as well as the art gallery as a site for the reception of problematized histories by presenting work that does not abide by western canons of beauty or finish. A fissure opens at this juncture, however, because the work is made to raise funds for other work and must partake in the economy of art objects, and in that sense MacGarry's work is no different from any other artist's object based practice. The irony here of presenting works which deal with the histories of the disenfranchised as Beller points out, is that

> to 'make it,' they [artists] must brand themselves and find a market niche in spaces sanctioned by capitalist taste makers, be they philanthropists or collectors– the masses get not the right but the chance to represent themselves, and empowered wealth will adjudicate. (Beller, 2009: 39)

Gayatri Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak becomes a moot point in this situation (Spivak, 1988; 271-313). Indeed, can anyone, let alone artists, speak for the disempowered poor? A point that has been made by several South African artists, including Brett Murray, Kendell Gears and of course, Michael MacGarry, is that Historical Materialism has often been applied as a rhetorical device in political discourses in Africa. The aim of this usage appears to have been to mask the true nature of the agenda of political elites in Africa, which has been to strip their countries of their assets whilst augmenting personal offshore bank accounts.[20] MacGarry quotes Russian

[19] By underlining the status of the artwork as fetish linked to the cult of personality of the artist, MacGarry, 'One might find reason to wonder if the institution known as "Art" has not itself become an alibi of fascism – an ideal expression of present-day fascism. The art world, busily constructing tchotchkes and experiences for the rich continues to be characterized by a cult of personality, which as Walter Benjamin noted so many years ago, leads to "a processing of data in a fascist sense." Artists are free to risk everything on their vision…, but to "make it", they must brand themselves and find a market niche in spaces sanctioned by Capitalist taste makers, be they philanthropists or collectors– the masses get not the right but the chance to represent themselves, and empowered wealth will adjudicate' (Beller, 2009: 39).

[20] 'A large part of sub-Saharan Africa's surplus leaves the continent as debt repayment, expatriation of profit, capital flight, and so on. One of the most disgraceful but underreported scandals in Africa is the extent to which African elites export capital from the continent. According to the Commission for Africa, nearly 40 per

social commentator Alexander Herzen's *From the Other Shore*, 'It is they, none other, who are dying of cold and hunger… while you and I in our rooms on the first floor are chatting about socialism over pastry and champagne' (MacGarry, 2010: 68). It is thus with a sense of pointed irony that MacGarry has titled his effigy, *Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki* (figure 4), former president of South Africa, under the heading *Champaign Socialists*. MacGarry's work, whilst criticising imperialism and the capitalist structure which inform neo-imperialism, seems to corroborate Ryan's point that an intelligent critique of the system using the commodity form is unintelligible, unless it is read as ironic.

In the previous chapter I linked MacGarry's sculpture entitled *Historical Materialism,* to Jacob Zuma through the concept of the body politic as it is made manifest in MacGarry's work. The sculpture brims with commodities as fetishes in two senses. Firstly, in the Marxist sense argued above, the commodities that form the base of this sculpture conceal labour relations. Many of the objects and particularly the cell phones and cameras and other high tech commodities are produced on foreign soil, often using minerals extracted from Africa. Implicit in this set of foreign trade relations is the exploitation of black workers in the extraction of minerals and raw material need to produce these commodities. Mine bosses make huge returns on their investments in infrastructure and equipment, but perhaps the biggest mark ups are made by countries that turn these lumps of raw material in high end goods. These goods are then sold back to Africa where they are fetishized as signs of wealth and status, and where, comparative to overseas prices, these objects are very expensive. This movement of commodities around the globe tends to trap Africa in a cycle of poverty because it does

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cent of Africa's private wealth is kept outside Africa, compared to only 3 per cent of South Asia's private wealth and 6 percent of Asia's (Mbeki, 2009: 146).

not engage in enough tertiary production to produce wealth beyond extractive processes. This brings me to the second sense in which fetishism is present in MacGarry's work. The commodities themselves are fetishisable and form part of a complex array of signifiers that are seen to accrue certain kinds of credibility and social acceptance to their owners. Linked to this, weapons such as guns have been fetishized as part of a reactionary formation to the emasculating experience of colonised people, amongst other reasons. Guns confer the power of life and death on their owners. Perhaps the most pointed example is the linkage of the persona of Jacob Zuma to the machine gun as I argued in the previous chapter. In the next chapter I will further explore the dimensions of emasculation for colonised people by looking at the way the word fetish has been deployed in the discourse on psychoanalysis.

Chapter 4

Transfer of the Term Fetish into the Discourse of Psychoanalysis

In this chapter I explore the way the term fetish was taken up into the discourse of psychoanalysis as part of the ongoing concern with degeneracy that characterised European attitudes to Africa and the peoples deemed 'other'. I argue, here, that the Freudian conception of the fetish, which centres on the phallus, is useful to an analysis of MacGarry's work as reflective of the debates about colonisation, because he uses it as a metaphor for the castrating effects of colonisation.

According to McClintock, the French psychologist Alfred Binet was the first to transfer the term fetish into the realm of psychoanalytic theory to describe types of 'sexual perversion' in the 1880s (McClintock, 1995: 189). McClintock argues that the word became a kind of 'switchboard term' mediating between 'race and sexuality, the colony and the metropolis', because Binet likened his accounts of the European 'sexual adoration' of inanimate objects with the accounts, given in European travel documents, of the spiritual adoration of 'fish bones and shiny pebbles' among Africans. It was through this nominative process, that the sexual deviant of the European metropolis was likened to the savage of the colonies, thus displacing 'what the modern imagination could not incorporate onto the invented domain of the primitive' (McClintock, 182: 189).

Central to a discussion of psychoanalytic fetishism is the idea that sexual deviance represented a kind of primitivism, given to impulse, irrational and outside of the proper functioning of the social order[21] of western society. For Freud, who went on to further develop Binet's notion of the fetish, the Oedipal Complex is the single most important process that the individual must navigate in order to be inducted into the social order of society, which was, and still largely is, deeply patriarchal and centred on the nuclear family as the most basic unit of civilization. The patriarch held the power in the family and particularly the power to castigate and punish, just as the government or law of the land held those powers over society at large and inevitably privileged masculinity and thus the phallic signifier. Fetishism, it has been argued by McClintock, in the Freudian phallocentric view, is a way to control castration anxieties for the individual who has failed to adequately navigate the oedipal complex (1995: 189).[22]

Pietz, however, has argued that 'Psychological universalists subsume fetishism to an allegedly universal tendency to privilege phallic symbolism…the fetish's ultimate referent as the phallus was articulated only in the late nineteenth century' (Pietz, 1985: 6). The discourse on fetishism had already begun its evolution in the fifteenth century, so it is a point of interest that its most popular modern meaning is to do with the psychoanalytic construct of sexual perversion and castration anxiety. Historically, however, fetishes, as they were defined by Europeans, could be any object at all and need not have anything to do with phallic substitutes. As Binet had come to learn from

[21] The social contract is perhaps the most salient feature of what I am calling the social order. The idea of the social contract was first articulated in the jurisprudence of Hobbs, Locke and Rousseau. These writers were concerned with establishing a normative language of obligations and corresponding rights (Myerson, D. 2011; 36).

[22] Debates around interpretation of the theory exist and I deal with this later in this chapter.

the disparaging accounts of European merchants and travel writers, fetishes, perhaps frustratingly, could be stones, feathers, mountains, relics, plants and animals (Pietz, 1985: 9).

Despite the arguments against psychoanalytic universalization, it can be argued that the social order of the west is, however partially, installed in Africa through the ideological processes of colonisation, read as a kind of universalizing and standardizing process, exemplified by the codification of the law as a bearer of values. The social order posited by Freud takes the nuclear family as its primary source of meaning and ultimate referent for the structure of society. This implies that a reading of the phallic content of MacGarry's work through the lens of psychoanalytic universalism is not entirely out of place in a colonial or postcolonial context because white patriarchy is indistinguishable from military force, legal and economic coercion in Africa. McClintock discusses the transference of a version of the western social order onto African colonies in her essay *The White family of Man,* where she analyses Rider Haggard's novel *King Solomon's Mines*.[23] She points out that Haggard was

[23] Ann McClintock performs a close analysis of Ryder Haggard's bestselling novel *King Solomon's Mines* in her essay *The White Family of Man*. The novel is of importance for its instant popularity in England on publication in 1885, only a few months after the division of Africa among European powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884, because, as McClintock argues, it represents some important strands of European thinking about the project of imperialism that were also elsewhere evident. The main thrust of McClintock's argument is that the book illustrates, in allegory, how the imperial project allowed for the 'regeneration of the authority of the white father in the historical form of the English upper-middle-class gentlemen' (McClintock, 1995: 234). McClintock explores the 'reordering of black labour and the black family' and argues that this reordering, (what I have called the installation of western social order in Africa) was legitimized by discourses of progress and degeneration on the one hand and the 'invented tradition of the white father at the head of the global family of Man', on the other.

> representative of a specific moment in imperial culture, in which the nearly anachronistic authority of the vanishing feudal family, invested in its sanctioned rituals of rank and subordination, was displaced onto the colonies and reinvented within the new order of the colonial administration. (McClintock, 1995: 239)

MacGarry's introduction of the phallic image could thus be seen as a way to implicate the discourse of psychoanalysis, over and above references to sexual perversion, within the discourse of the fetish, as a signifier of the psychoanalytic discourse itself. I argue that the psychoanalytic dimension to be discerned in MacGarry's work has not been articulated in his own writing, where he has chosen to focus on the economics of Marx and the art historical references of early modernism.[24] If the process of colonisation itself represents a kind of political and psychological castration for peoples colonised in Africa, then the image of the dismembered phallus, or read another way, as its substitution, is useful in an analysis of the fetishisation of political leaders. MacGarry presents just such an object, by pointing to psychoanalytic discourse by way of the phallic signifier but subverting a purely Freudian analysis by simultaneously presenting the object as a fetish of nationalism. By making this link between politics and psychoanalysis, MacGarry effectively reduces Freud's archetypal theory of a traumatic castration to the level of allegory. As an allegory it is particularly efficacious because it dramatizes and personalizes violence against the body. By relating back to a

[24] Freud is particularly important to art history, and notably the Surrealists. Andre Breton, a founder of the movement, was among the first artists to start applying the ideas of the fledgling discipline of psychoanalysis to the production of art, and was at times in correspondence with Freud. According to Jennifer Mundy, 'The new focus [among Surrealists] on desire – a word that was used more frequently in the Surrealists' writing and in the titles of their artworks – reflected, in part a much greater familiarity with the writings of Sigmund Freud'(Mundy, 2002:11). Indeed, it was Breton's interpretation of Freud's writing, an interpretation Freud himself did not always sympathize with, that issued in dictates like Breton's 1937 assertion that 'we must not let the paths of desire become overgrown'. This atavistic return to mental states altogether less suppressed and less neurotic was a direct response to the horrors of World War 1 which, to the Surrealists, was the culmination of the rationality and logic the thinkers of the Enlightenment had aspired to. The response in Surrealist art was a self-conscious identification with the so called primitive arts of Africa, Oceania and native America. In this view Africa represents a timeless idyll and a kind of Edenic golden age of man connected to his own nature as well as the earth. The Surrealists could be criticized for being romantically inclined toward an essentially racist vision of Africa.

masculinized experience of the body, the phallocentricisim of both discourses becomes apparent and the subject for critique because it underscores the blanking out of women's roles in history generally. Because MacGarry employs the idea of the fetish in several different guises in his work, he is pointing to the radical ambiguity that the fetish represents in its myriad possible manifestations, beyond penis substitutes. This does not make a psychoanalytic reading redundant, but it does complicate male dominated narratives. For now, I will flesh out the idea of the fetish that has been transferred into the discourse of psychoanalysis and then focus on the implications that arise for my reading of MacGarry's work.

The term fetish is indeed a promiscuous one; not only has it been used in different registers depending on the particular discursive field it has been applied to, it is also subject to differing interpretations within specific disciplines. Scruton (2006), for instance, argues that there are two broadly defined kinds of theory concerning fetishism within the discourse of psychoanalysis, one causal and the other, symbolic. The fetish, according to causal theory, gains its power by association. This is to say that the object, for the fetishist, which had been involved in the scene of some legitimate and 'normal' expression of desire involving another person, has become detached. Henceforth the object or contemplation of the object *alone* comes to generate sexual feelings quite apart from the person or sexually charged scenario of which it was originally a part. The fetish thus becomes the object of desire in itself.

According to the symbolic theory, in Scruton's view, the fetish object becomes powerfully activated not because it is associated with the scene of sexual activity but because it symbolises sexual activity or at least the prospect of sexual activity and at the very least a particular person.[25] Positing what appears to be a symbolic theory of fetishism, Freud has noted in *The Psychology of Love* that:

> The substitute for the sexual object is a body part (foot, hair) which is generally unsuited to the sexual purposes, or an inanimate object demonstrably connected to the sexual person, or best of all with that persons sexuality (items of clothing, white linen). It is not without some justification that this substitution is compared with the fetish in which primitive man sees his god embodied. (Freud cited in Whiteside, 2006: 131)

For Scruton, however, the Freudian theory of fetishism as substitution constitutes a causal theory, because 'objects of sexual feeling may substitute for one another and desire become[s] attached… to new and peculiar objects' through associative emotional charge. Freudian analysts tend, however, to present the theory as a symbolic one and treat the fetish as a representation of something else; the true object of desire. The fetish is not the true object of desire itself, but unconsciously symbolises another fantasy object.[26]

Scruton has elaborated:

[25] It is not, in itself, the object of desire, any more than the image [in Christianity] is the object of worship. It serves to direct attention to, and to focus feeling upon, the *real* object of desire, which may be provided by some former or imaginary sexual episode of a wholly normal kind (Scruton, 2006: 316).

[26] In this regard Freud has quoted lines from Faust: 'Bring me kerchief from her breast, A garter of my love's delight!' (Whiteside, 2006: 132). For Freud, this level of symbolism is germane to all healthy sexual attachment especially in the early stages of courting where the desire might initially have been frustrated by social conventions. What Scruton describes as the causal theory of fetishism bares more relation to what Freud describes as the pathological limit of fetishism, 'when the striving for the fetish becomes fixated beyond such conditions [when the normal goal appears frustrated] and takes the place of the normal goal, or if the fetish breaks free of the particular person and itself becomes the sole sexual object' (Whiteside, 2006: 132).

> Only the causal theory gives a clear picture of the *perverted* quality of fetishism. And it is this theory that was suggested when the term 'fetish' was originally borrowed from the description of primitive religion. The religious fetish is itself supposed to possess the supernatural powers that are wielded by means of it. The fetish is more like an incarnation than a representation. Likewise the shoe itself possesses the sexual magic that attracts the fetishist. He caresses the shoe because he wishes to caress *it,* and because he finds pleasure *there*. (Scruton, 2006: 316).

For Freud an underlying trauma is often at the root of any neurosis and for him the prospect of the mother's castration in the little boy's mind was that trauma, indeed threat, because surely the father, having castrated the mother, so the theory goes, could also castrate the boy.[27] It is though this complex process that the child, which has, as yet, no centred identity, begins to be constituted as a subject as a result of the fundamental repression of his desire for his mother. Through an adjustment to the 'reality principle' the boy submits himself to the father and gives up his incestuous desire

> he detaches himself from the mother, and comforts himself with the unconscious consolation that though he cannot *now* hope to oust his father and possess his mother, his father symbolizes a place, a possibility, which he himself will be able to take up and realize in the future. (Eagleton, 1983: 155)

The little boy thus comes to appreciate the law of the father and by extension society. For Freud the little boy's successful navigation of what he called the Oedipal Complex is achieved by suppressing his primordial desire for his mother and acknowledging his father as the ultimate source of authority and punishment, which properly installs him within the social order. For the little boy who fails to navigate the Oedipal Complex satisfactorily, a fixation on the image of the mother is possible. For Freud this could lead

[27] For Freud modern society was fundamentally neurotic. If neurosis was the product of the suppression of drives and desires, then the social codes of society, its laws, values and social contracts – the law of the father – are the formula for the suppression of those desires towards a productive and socially acceptable sublimation of those energies (Eagleton, 1983; 156).

to what was then considered the perversion of homosexuality which was associated with an overvaluing of the image of the mother, or a fixation on the mother's apparent mutilation as in the case of the fetishist (Eagleton, 183: 155). McClintock summarises the root of the Freudian fetish as a 'permanent memorial to the horror of castration, embodied not in the male but in the female, as well as 'a token of triumph' and safeguard against the threat of castration (McClintock, 1995: 190). The mutilated woman can be restored to an imaginary prior wholeness as long as the fetish object is kept in sight. The term fetish is made phallic by virtue of its incorporation into an already phallic theory of psychic development.

Here the psychoanalytic theory postulated by Freud, problematically privileging the phallus, did so by primarily focusing on the experience of the little boy. The little girl, however, is footnoted merely as an unsatisfactory appendage to the theory. Furthermore, the fetishist is always male and no room is made for women's fetishism. As I have pointed out, this has an interesting bearing on MacGarry's sculptures, which are strikingly phallic in shape and simultaneously reference the notion of the ethnographic fetish (a historical artefact) that was the origin of the psychoanalytic term as well as the fetish of nationalism (the head of state and the idea of the body politic). A singular, columnar and erect form is clearly evident in all the works I have selected from MacGarry's oeuvre for the purposes of my research. Indeed, as separate series, all of the works can be seen as different instances of the same form in repetition. In the early discourse of psychoanalysis the fetish became inextricably linked to a privileging of the phallus but, McClintock has raised serious concerns with the privileging of the phallus:

> Freud does not explain why the fetish object must be read as a substitute for the mother's (absent) penis and not, say, as a substitute for the father's (absent) breasts. Indeed, the logic by which Freud privileges the penis in the scenario of fetishism is itself fetishistic. (McClintock, 1995: 190)

What is important to bear in mind is that these theorists are reflecting the values of the periods and contexts in which they lived and worked, which were characterised by extremely patriarchal attitudes to women and patently racist attitudes to Europe's others. Rather than detracting from MacGarry's work, I argue, the allegory of the Oedipal Complex and the castration anxiety that drives it adds another layer of meaning to the work and is complementary to the already evident narrative about patriarchal political power.

MacGarry has created his sculptures in such a way that they can be read through all major registers of the fetish: ethnographic, Marxist, psychoanalytic and Modernist. Following McClintock:

> Since beginnings are never absolute, reading fetishism as simultaneously historical and psychoanalytic upsets the reductive assumption of phallic universality and gives rise to far richer possibilities of cultural analysis. (McClintock, 1995: 185)

To this end, I have noted that all of the sculptures I have dealt with in this paper are phallic forms, and that they represent a removed or castrated limb by presenting its substitute, the fetish. The substitution, being a phallic form, itself points to the apparent lack of a phallus in particular, as opposed to any other object or person. In other words, because the fetishistic substitute need not be a phallic form, indeed, it can be any object or person at all, it can be said that MacGarry's deployment of the phallic form points to the grotesque absence of the phallus within the allegory of Freud's castration complex,

thus extending the metaphor of the body politic by signifying it. The phallus, here, is missing, making questions of masculinity and lack or castration major themes in this body of work. So the answer to the question of why we are presented with a phallic form in the first place is, at least in part, answered by a linkage to Freud's causal theory of psychoanalytic fetishism, as a kind of perverse and primitive reaction formation.

Chapter 5

A Final Analysis and Comparative reading of 'The Spear'

Unlike MacGarry's *Tipp-Ex Politics* (figure 1) series where individual sculptures are named after specific presidents, the *Young Liars* (figure 2) series is numbered. Instead of starting the numerical sequence with one, however, MacGarry starts with *Ubu Roi*, leaving the rest of the sculptures numbered, like a succession of stooges, to ten. Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* is a figure of political satire with which followers of the arts in South Africa are now well acquainted. He features in a great deal of William Kentridge's production from the mid-nineties, around the time he also directed Jane Taylor's adaption entitled *Ubu and the Truth Commission.* Other artists, such as Robert Hodgins have also explored this figure extensively (Powell, 2002: 42). Translated as 'King Turd' Ubu is a nonsense word that has become synonymous with greedy self-gratification and rapaciousness, making this figure of nineteenth century French political satire a particularly fecund source of analogy in South Africa.

Like Jarry's vision of Ubu Roi, MacGarry's body politic in *Tipp-Ex Politics* and the *Young Liars* series, is imagined in grotesque abstractions similar to those employed by Jarry: an obese body is composed of a conical shape of convex delineation alluding to the fact that the figure is stuffed, or has a capacious hunger. This corpulent body is surmounted by an oddly small head reminiscent of the male glans or the tip of a freshly excreted turd. The iconic spiral which appears on Ubu's belly seems to suggest a descent into chaos that results from an endless appetite and an internal emptiness. What goes on in

the internal space beneath the white shroud of his body is the subject of speculation and manipulation. In MacGarry's work, the 'whited sepulchre' is filled with uncleanliness and corruption. Kentridge, who played Ubu's henchman, captain 'McNure' (a pun on manure), started his engagement with the character in 1975, with Ubu envisioned in *Ubu Tells the Truth* (1996–1997) as a place holder in which the archetypal traits of the id are played out. Jane Taylor has commented on the useful adaptability of the character: 'Rather than represent any particular figure from South African history, Ubu stands for an aspect, a tendency, an excuse' (Taylor, 1998: 4)

Characterised in terms of the excremental, the belly and the phallus in MacGarry's work, as Lucy Rainer has argued, *Ubu* is intimately aligned with some of Achille Mbembe's assertions about the postcolonial body politic, which is characterised by a tendency towards 'excess and lack of proportion.' But the precursor, Alfred Jarry's political satire, seems to point to the fact that this kind of satire forms part of a long standing tradition even though it is particularly favoured in the postcolony. Here after all, we are provided with an example of the imperial centre critiqued from within using the same terms. This does not, however, undermine Mbembe's observations, rather it points to the fact that the means of critique and modes of presentation used by postcolonial commentators/satirists were not newly invented, but were a feature of European (and probably other) traditions beforehand (Holquist, 1990: 89-90). Ubu represents an archetype that could be said to reflect a tendency to excess that go back to ancient figures of despotic corruption like Nero or Caligula. Mbembe's points about the travestying of symbols of power through the perversion of pronunciation are evident in both Jarry's 'McNure' and MacGarry's *Young Liars* which puns on the so called 'Young

Lions' of the ANC Youth League. The obvious reiteration of the penis as a substitute for the head, in terms of the body politic, suggests an inversion of ideals. Surely the world is turned upside down where desire and venal self-gratification, represented by the penis as a site of pleasure, trump high hopes and ideology. Or perhaps the comment to be deduced from any political satire is that all power corrupts, because it is inherently ideological and the product of desire, and always has been.

In the *Young Liars* series each sculpture is an aspirant Ubu Roi and numbered in a way that suggests a line of succession suggesting the jaded prospect that even though one despotic leader may be toppled, another is always waiting to take his place. While this observation may seem simplistic, Mamdani, I have shown in chapter one, has argued that systems of power, once established, are very slow to change, and in the case of a postcolonial/neo-colonial setting like South Africa, a hundred years of colonisation helped to refine a system of ethnic division and decentralised despotism which allowed newly and colonially empowered tribal leaders to tyrannize their own people in wholly untraditional ways (Mamdani, 1996: 11). In trying to govern the colonies by using so called 'tribal leaders' as puppets, and empowering them through legislation, like the Natives Land Act (1913), the British gave these leaders juridical and legislative powers within prescribed territories that went beyond any traditional definition of a chief or elder.

Apartheid may have been overthrown and a new constitution put in place, but the implication of Mamdani's argument that the shape of power remains the same, suggests

that the seeds of decentralised despotism, planted by colonial powers, that have come to fruition in tyrannical postcolonial governance are also likely to bear fruit in South Africa. MacGarry's sculpture representing Thabo Mbeki, which forms part of the *Champaign Socialists* series, is identical in form to the *Tipp-Ex Politics* series but it is coloured black. This can be read as underscoring that those who were forged in the struggle against apartheid rule in the past, will as present-day leaders inevitably and ironically retain some of its legacies, like the fetishizing of race and ethnicity. Race was fetishized under apartheid, as it was under British rule, which gave a special primacy to white patriarchy, a point made by McClintock who writes about the 'invented tradition of the white father at the head of the global family of man' (McClintock, 1995: 234). Black patriarchy, perhaps best exemplified by colonially appointed headmen, had to answer to the 'supreme chief', who would inevitably have been a part of the colonial administration, reflecting the view that Africans were childlike in relation to their white counterparts. This systematic infantilisation of the black populace evolved along with the discourses of degeneracy and progress, which I have shown, is reflected in the etymology of the word fetish as well as the biographies of the religious objects that were carried away to Europe.

Racial fetishism is demonstrably a theme in MacGarry's body of work just as it is a characteristic of the binary political discourse that usually characterises the discussion on access to services, education, and the economy in South Africa. What Nigel Gibson refers to as 'neoliberal structural adjustment' is another facet of the failure of decolonisation because it implies, by its exchanging of white (male) faces for black ones among the leadership, that a continuation of the same exploitative tendencies, and the

same kinds of economically motivated political lies are evident (Gibson, 2011, 4). The white-washing of *Tipp-Ex Politics,* is here replaced by the blacking out of the *Champagne Socialists.* One aspect of racial fetishism is the tendency to assume that people of the same race will share the same values, but as MacGarry suggests with the title *Champagne Socialists,* nothing could be further from the truth. As Gibson pints out:

> Ultimately, a Fanonian perspective insists that we view the sweetness of South African transition from apartheid as bitter, realised at the moment people find out the ubiquitous fact that exploitation can wear a black face… (Gibson, 2011: 6, citing Fanon 1968: 145)

For Mbembe, as I have argued in chapter one, the postcolonial milieu is characterised as one of 'illicit cohabitation' where the ruling class and those who are their subjects exist in a state of mutual zombification. Mbembe uses the French *impouvoir* or impotent to describe the resulting social effects of this mutual undercutting. The use of the word 'impotency' continues the language of the phallic metaphor which, he points out, is linked to political power and specifically the cult of personality associated with the president. This emphasis on the phallus and on masculinity is, in part, a product of a cultural discourse, shaped by debates in the field of psychoanalysis which, as I have shown in the previous chapter, have provided analytical tools which we now use to better understand the individual subject within the strictures of society. Freud's psychosexual model of the Oedipal complex, transferred onto Africa as part of the ideological baggage that came with colonisation and the transposition of western values, appears to have provided a model with which to understand what Tina Chanter refers to as the mutilating experience of colonisation and its resultant fetishistic drives (Chanter, 2008: 259).

Continuing Freud's model, a white paternalistic nation disciplines and punishes an unruly black childlike nation so that it can be of productive use within the white father's family/ idea of civilization. The process of colonisation, seen through this prism is the enactment of a cultural and political castration. This was envisioned in many ways but one potent way of imaging the castration was the categorization, capture and removal of fetish objects, which, as MacGaffey has pointed out, constituted an opposing political force, indeed an antithetical body politic, to European interests. In this way museum and exhibition displays which dramatized the otherness of Africans by incorporating these objects became a material enactment of the colonial discourse of containment. A postcolonial preoccupation, as a result, is the project of restitution, revival and redress. This, in its most ideological manifestations, takes form in the movements of *Negritude* and Black Consciousness, which Chanter argues, rely on the archive for the 'fetishistic' retrieval of evidence of a before time and the existence of a selfhood imagined as whole, prior to the mutilation that colonisation represents (Chanter, 2008: 259). Here Chanter has adapted the Freudian model of fetishistic substitution as a useful metaphor, problematic though it is for its insistence on the primacy of the phallus. Nonetheless, the phallus, being a signifier of patriarchy, whether incipient or fully evolved, is of central metaphorical importance to MacGarry's works because he appears to be problematizing the promotion of an atavistic patriarchy[28] as a fetishistic response to the mutilation of the body politic in Africa.

MacGarry's phallic figures, seen in this light, can be read as a comment, not just about the reproduction of power and corruption, but also their particular allure. The fetishism

[28] The polygamy of President Jacob Zuma can be seen as just one example.

of the political project is multifaceted but centres on the imagining of the body politic as a fetish of both race and nationalism.[29] Here the body politic, once mutilated, can be restored by the appearance of a 'big man' with a certain cult of personality attached to him. Or at least this is the illusion .The political leader in this instance is not just the figurehead of an organisation but also its potent penis too, as Brett Murray has suggested in his painting *The Spear*[30] (figure 9). Mbembe's description of the presidential cavalcade snaking its way through a crowd whose members simultaneously 'travesty' the party name but also, adore the leader seems to be strikingly apt: 'everyone is content to sustain a link, if only for a second, of familiarity, of collusion even, with violence and domination in its most heady form' (Mbembe, 1992: 20).

MacGarry's envisioning of *Champagne Socialists* and *Young Liars* could be seen to point out the political promises made by the combined movements that brought the ANC to power in 1994, which were constituted in no small part by the South African Communist Party and COSATU both of which represent leftist interests. Socialist voices, however, have been silenced in favour of an 'elite pact' made by government and business to maintain the status quo, reducing post-apartheid politics to a project of capturing the state by means of governance, forsaking an expansive democracy built within mass based movements. The political lie that is suggested by the title of *Young Liars* is most probably to do with the relentless socialist rhetoric used to win votes from the poor, which deceitfully masks the desire for self-enrichment amongst the political

[29]It has to, however, be acknowledged that culturally atavistic or ethnically defined fetishistic spectacle of nationalism will never appeal to all members of a multiracial and multi ethnic society. But it will work if a majority within the nation find it appealing.

[30] I deal with Brett Murray and *The Spear* in greater detail later in this chapter.

elite. Commodity fetishism, not understood in a Marxist sense[31] but rather as a legitimating aura of success attached to luxury goods, in which the consumer of the goods can indulge, supplants the purported values of the political movement. MacGarry quotes Alexander Herzen next to an image of his sculpture titled *Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki* in his catalogue, *End Game*:

> It is they, none other, who are dying of cold and hunger…while you and I in our rooms on the first floor are chatting about socialism over pastry and champagne. (Alexander Herzen, From the Other Shore, 1855)

Gibson speaks about the fetishism of the political project in South Africa and the pull of the world market which characterised the gap between 'the elite-driven, wheeling and dealing politics of transition, and the goal of the masses' (Gibson, 2011: 2). The needs of the masses are often constructed in terms of the ongoing dialogue about service delivery in South Africa. What Gibson suggests, however, is that the psychic needs of the people can *appear* to be met by way of the fetishistic spectacle of race and cult of personality. Society, in this view, is fed spectacles of power with which it will 'collude', because, for just a moment, the body of the leader represents the project of restitution and redress in a state of completion. All of the signs of power are deployed in a fetishistic constellation, read together they represent a whole that is exponentially greater than the sum of its parts or what Mbembe refers to as a 'surplus of meanings'.[32]

[31] The commodity as fetish disguises the true nature of the means of it'd own production in a Marxist sense, as I have detailed in chapter three. The issue here is to do with labour relations and not with the commodity as a fetish, by way of the commodity's legitimating aura as an indicator of wealth or success or good taste.

[32] 'In the Postcolony the *commandement* seeks to institutionalise itself, in order to achieve legitimation and hegemony (*recherché hégémonique*), in the form of a fetish. The signs, vocabulary and narratives that it produces are not meant merely to be symbols; they are officially invested with a surplus of meanings which are not negotiable and which one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge' (Mbembe, 1996, 4).

The infamous blue light brigades that go careening through the streets, cossetting cabinet ministers from meeting to meeting, are one good example of a constellation of signs invested with surplus meaning. They display a particular taste for expensive Teutonic luxury sedans and Sports Utility Vehicles, which are seen to indicate wealth and prestige. Multiple cars in single file, suggesting military formation, are uniformly black, a colour associated with presidential cavalcades in the West. The blue lights which make these cavalcades spectacular are associated with police vehicles and suggest an urgency and importance of mission, but also an implicit threat to anyone who does not get out of the way. The presence of body guards emphasises a high level of threat attached to the body of the leader, both as a reflection of his value and his ability to enact a swift punishment for any crime against him. If the crowd have been made to believe that they are worthless, unemployable and expendable then the collusion of the crowd is made fetishistic by the way it sees the leader as the embodiment of their will to some sense of wholeness. The 'collusion' Mbembe speaks of takes place, perhaps, because the crowd has a psychic need to feel the wholeness that the body of the leader represents, at the same time that it is also the providing a legitimating aura around the leader's body. The leader, in this abstract frame of reference, as a potent symbol of the body politic, can act out the fears, desires and rages of the people. The lie, as Mbembe points out, is only apparent in the wake of the spectacle when the crowd must return to the multiple tragedies and quotidian exploitations that mark the everyday.

MacGarry's work subverts traditional encodings of the body politic imagined as a thing of perfection which justifies retribution against those who transgress the laws of the state. His ulterior body politic is composed of a *mélange* of references to libidinal *id*-like

impulses and represents a narcissistically-inspired project of capturing power for the purposes of self-gratification. Here Jarry's scatological political satire is blended with a vision of patriarchal power represented by the phallus. The body of the president, in this view, is fetishized as the penis of the nation and represents the postcolonial project of redress and restitution. This project, however, is undercut by the fact that the fetishizing of this body undercuts the project of redress by reinforcing modes of domination that were inherited from the colonial past. Restitution of the phallus to the body politic is a project of national proportion and is invested in by the citizens of the state. The degree to which this investment takes place was nowhere more apparent than in the events that took place around Brett Murray's painting titled 'The Spear' (2012).

Spectacle of the Body Politic

Mirzoeff makes the argument that the body politic was, at least in its earliest conceptions, composed almost exclusively of the material infrastructure that depicted the King's mortal body. This representation of absolute power was a monolithic image that bears relation to the cults of personality that we see in postmodern times, in that they fetishize the body of the leader as a substitute for other more abstract ideas and ideals. This cult of personality was perhaps most clearly demonstrated in South Africa around the debacle that erupted when Brett Murray's painting entitled *The Spear* which was exhibited at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg in 2011, inflamed the public imaginary by 'exposing' the presidential phallus. The argument that had been put forward by the ANC, against the Goodman and Brett Murray in the South Gauteng High Court is one that envisaged the body of the president as that of an absolute monarch

(Dubin, 2012: 179). *The Spear* had initially been construed by ANC spokespeople as an assault on the presidency, even though it is understood that in a democratic society political satire is a necessary facet of cultural life because it makes explicit the difficult and discomforting realities of power even when couched in humour. This argument then gave way on constitutional grounds and the right to freedom of speech acts, to one that assumed an assault on Jacob Zuma's personal dignity as a black man. 'Arguably,' Anne McClintock commented in the *Mail & Guardian* 'Brett Murray's painting is offensive for the casual cruelty with which it conjures the colonial imagery of black men as hypersexualised. The painting is repugnant in its blindness to what social activist and academic Mamphela Ramphele has called the 'woundedness' of black memory' (McClintock, May 2012: para. 2).

Jacob Zuma, in response to the painting, capitalized on the victimhood McClintock identifies, by publicly likening himself to Saartjie Baartman, a victim of the European trade in exotic bodies for the sake of public spectacle. In Baartman, a slave performer displayed like an animal in a cage, for patrons, Zuma claimed he had found his equivalent. The Goodman Gallery, where the painting was exhibited, has thus been likened, in Zuma's view, to the freak shows of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a place of amusement for an overly privileged white elite who indulge their racialising fantasies. 'Might the Goodman Gallery, before hanging "The Spear" on its walls, not have thought of naked men in South Africa's mine camps, or those photographed for anthropological texts written by whites?' (McClintock, *Mail & Guardian,* 2012). A lot of angry responses to the painting seem to agree, either that Murray has not been mindful enough of the sensitivities of his black countrymen,

suggesting his own undisclosed race bias, or that white people in general are still colluding in a racist plot to maintain a privileged position in South Africa (Dubin, 2012: 180).

When Barend LaGrange then crossed out Jacob Zuma's face on the painting, in an act of vandalism, it was because he wanted to be *seen*, as a white man, to negate what he thought could be perceived as a racist comment made in error. The ANC, too, has done everything in its capacity to enforce a ban on Brett Murray's instance of '*lèse-majesté'*, as Nic Dawes of the *Mail & Guardian* put it, but for entirely different and ominous reasons (Dawes, May 2012: para. 9).

From Dawes's perspective, 'Murray has repeatedly deployed penises of various colours in his work over the years to examine power and its abuse, but, for the vast majority of people now responding to *The Spear*, that is irrelevant – for many, the painting reactivates a history of pain and humiliation that cannot be wished away by art historical analysis' (Dawes, *Mail & Guardian*, 2012). Indeed the painting has become a fetish for racialized demagoguery by virtue of the way that the presidency has manipulated and exploited its existing relationship to a larger complex of signifiers of colonial oppression of which Baartman is one. By extension one can also look to the trade in photographic postcards of Africa over the last century, a subject that Deborah Kaspin talks about in her book, *In and Out of Focus* (2002), to see evidence of a European eye seeking out the most spectacular examples of otherness that could be discerned in Africa for commercial commodification and consumption in Europe.

Images are powerful in the formation of nations 'not because they represent a uniquely efficacious medium of expression, but because they compress complex intentions in economical forms, and because … they often move more easily than language across cultural boundaries' (Kaspin, 2002: 320).

But should this particular image of an exposed black man cause such heartache when he is so clearly not a real victim, not an absconded slave, naked and lynched from a tree in America's deep South, so clearly not a miner from an apartheid era camp photographed naked for ethnographic purposes and not a political prisoner being stripped and humiliated in one of South Africa's prisons? Perhaps Dawes's suggestion that art historical analysis could wish this away can only be read as facetious, because of the way art history in fact works to link the painting to traditions of representation that can help us to understand why the image is so loaded. Or at least why it has been so easy for the ANC to use this image and the history of representations of black bodies to distract us from the real reasons for the political satire.

Conclusion

In chapter one I explored the theme of the phallic signifier in MacGarry's work by looking at how it relates to the concept and fetishisation of the body politic. I have looked at the phallic signifier from a psychoanalytic perspective, in chapter three, to show how particularly the Oedipal Complex and its concomitant concept of fetishism can be used productively to read the phallic content in MacGarry's work.

If colonisation represents a castration of colonised subjects, then the body politic can be seen as a site of symbolic restitution. MacGarry's work, seen in this light, can be read in several different ways, but it is my conclusion that foremost is a reading of the body politic in contemporary South Africa, as an entity that undermines constitutionally enshrined values by reflecting atavistic and patriarchal reaction formations. To this extent MacGarry's work can be said to reflect the idea of competing nationalisms in contemporary South Africa, primarily because we have two different ideas of what the body politic should entail. On one hand the constitution is represented by a tree, under which citizens can find protection and equality in a space of sharing, the tree is an organic body that is not anthropomorphic, and therefore not gendered. On the other, the body politic is expressed as a reiteration of patriarchal control embodied in the president. This ulterior body politic is manifest in a combination of signs and gestures that are generally antithetical to the ideals and images associated with the constitution, but are distilled by MacGarry in his interpretation of the body politic as manifested in his sculptures.

In this regard the phallic signifier is useful because, if we see colonisation as a form of castration, then the appeal of a body politic that appears to address this psychological lack might be better understood as a fetishistic desire to recreate a notional prior wholeness, as I pointed out in chapter two. MacGarry's work, I have argued, can be seen as a critique of the reproduction of state power and its colonial legacies because the repetition of the phallic form explores the repetition of aspects of colonial legacies, in the attitudes and policies of the postcolonial dispensation.

A central concept in both this paper and MacGarry's work is that of the fetish. Following Pietz, I have shown how MacGarry's work can be read through all of the major registers of fetish discourse. In the process I have explored the evolution of the term from the first encounters between Europeans and Africans on the continent and shown how the word was used pejoratively to denounce African religions as pagan. *Minkisi* were also viewed as elements of an opposing political force because they sometimes 'embodied' the power of the king. In this view *minkisi* were elements of an African body politic and had to be removed or destroyed, in order to install western values in Europe's new colonies in Africa. I have also shown how the word became part of a discourse on degeneracy and was used to evidence the supposed lack of rationality of Africans.

I have thus been able to argue that MacGarry quite literally reconstitutes an African body politic made manifest in so called fetish objects by presenting objects that draw heavily both conceptually and aesthetically on *minkisi*. As I argued in chapter two, many of the aspects of western self-hood that could not be incorporated were displaced onto

Africans. In so far as MacGarry's work represents an investigation into the ongoing ramifications of this displacement under imperialism; the term fetish is very useful because the etymology of the word and its evolution can be used to track vital aspects of this process to the present. MacGarry's critique of the body politic by way of the fetish is, I conclude, made complex because it both critiques the postcolony and acknowledges the heavy weight of imperialist baggage that has informed it.

Figures



Figure 1. *Tipp-ex Politics* series (2008), wood, urethane foam, nippon wax, oil paint. Dimensions variable. Image published in MacGarry, M. 'End Game' 2010 published by All Theory. No Practice



Figure 2. *Young Liars* series (2007-2008), wood, urethane foam, nippon wax, oil paint. Dimensions variable. Image available at www.alltheorynopractice.com



Figure 3.*Historical Materialism*, Bronze cast, edition 3. (2010) Dimensions 730 x 220 x 240 mm Image courtesy of the Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 4. *Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki*, Champagne Socialists (2008) series Wood, urethane foam, Nippon wax, oil paint, steel. Dimensions 730 x 220 x 240 mm Image published in MacGarry, M. 'End Game' 2010 published by All Theory. No Practice



Figure 5. *Economy of Modernity*, Urethane foam, wood, enamel paint, brass. Dimensions 1160 x 580 x750 mm (2005). Image published in MacGarry, M. 'End Game' 2010 published by All Theory. No Practice



Figure 6. Nkisi Nkondi Mawenze, before 1914, BaKongo Zaire, Wood, metal, pigment, sea shells, other materials. Height 870 mm. Africa-Museum Tervuren, Belgium. Image published in MacGaffey, W. *The Eyes of Understanding: Kongo Minkisi*, printed in Astonishment and Power, Kongo Minkisi and the Art of Renee Stout, 1993, Smithsonian Institute, Washing

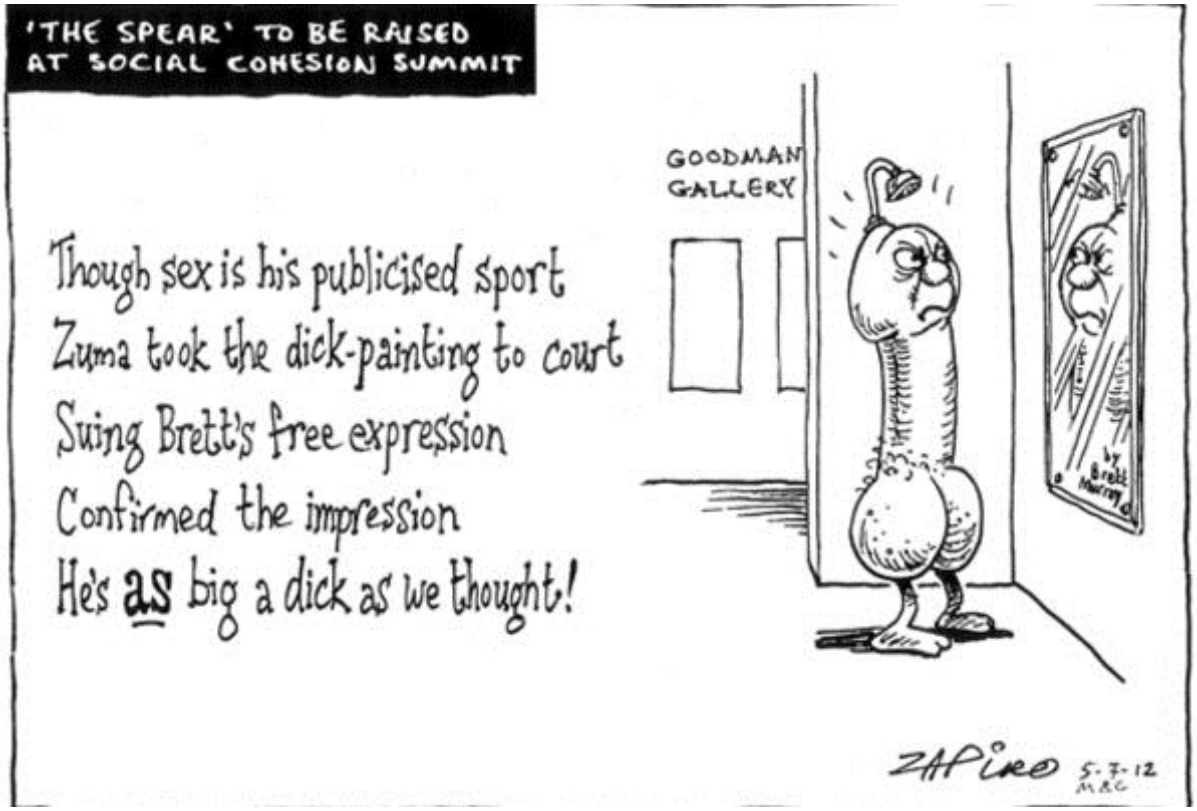


Figure 7. The 'Spear' to be raised at "Social Cohesion Summit" published in Mail & Guardian (5 Jul 2012).



Figure 8. Zapiro *Rape of Justice cartoon II*, published in Mail & Guardian (11 Sep 2008).



Figure 9. Installation view of the *Spear,* (2012) Image no longer available at www.mg.co.za

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