

An animist's fidelity to inanimate objects

Contemporary animism allows the attribution of soul to art objects, walls, buildings, and manufactured articles such as chairs and Mac computers. People project human qualities onto animals and inanimate objects, and are moved when these qualities are reflected back at them. While animism sees humans as equal to animals, plants, and natural forces, western society has established a ritualistic anthropocentrism.

What then is the contemporary meaning of anthropomorphism?

In most beings, form needs matter as much as matter needs form. Historically, the relationship with animals provided an entry point into our engagement with other non-human beings: animal spirits guided the shaman to mediate on behalf of the tribe with the non-human world. Today, our relationship is vastly more complex and compromised – the postmodern animal is contracted out for slaughter in factory farms, creating by-products of jelly sweets for children, briefcases for businessmen and Botox for sagging bits of human flesh; hypoallergenic cats, dogs and horses are bred to create the perfect pet; and in artworks it is represented through a botched taxidermy, only to be met by hypocritical animal rights NIMBYs. This discombobulation leads us to find alternative totem objects through which we can connect with the world.

One might argue that anthropomorphism is a disservice both to man and beast, and an affront to true scientific or philosophical thought: but we are not interested in this argument when it comes to gut feelings and unconditional love for another, animals aside.

A millennium ago, the Doge of Venice (on behalf of his people) ceremonially married the sea as an act of sovereignty, and a ring is annually cast into the sea as a sign of eternal fidelity. On 17th June 1979, Eija-Riitta Berliner-Mauer (born 1954) married the Berlin Wall at Grossziethen Strasse in Berlin. The violent assault on her husband in 1989 was deeply traumatic: "My husband's job was to divide East and West Berlin", she says. "He is retired now." Their souls are entwined for all eternity, and she refers to herself as *objectum-sexual*.

More than just a fetish, this 'objectophilia' proclaims human partners redundant so that there are no limits to the capacity for erotic experience. On 11th September 2001, the beloved of a woman (known only as Sandy K) was publicly executed on the streets of New York. The scenes and dates of the two crimes may be far apart, but what unites these two women is a strange and obscure obsession. Similarly, metrosexual Bill Rifka is in love with his Mac computer. To him, his Mac is male – so although heterosexual, this modern day dandy now truly befuddles our understanding of the übersexual.

Artist Shelly Nadashi's current performative practice makes use of a self-professed magic to transform the human body, allowing it to inhabit objects as well as other human and animal bodies. She uses her own body to question the power relationship between people and things. As she talks to, falls in love with, and allows objects to dictate to her, she confounds the distinction between subject and object. In her most recent performance piece, Nadashi acts out the love story between a girl and a chair – visually and vocally expressing the girl's limerence and then demonstrating what happens on metaphysical levels between the girl and her beloved object.

What will come next in the evolution of the human passion for things? Surely it is only

a matter of time before objectophiliacs demand legal recognition of their sexual inclinations, necessitating a revision of *anima mundi* policy and inevitably allowing anthropoids, animals and inanimate objects to have equal rights to humans. In turn, the very question of what it means to be human becomes a matter of faith.

But, will *they* still believe in us after all this time?

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