

Fetishism and Symbolic Violence: Anish Kapoor's *Svayambh*

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Abstract

This article offers some reflections inspired by *Svayambh*, a work presented by the contemporary Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in December, 2009. Mirroring the undefinable and disturbing essence of Kapoor's sculptural practice, the article aims to reproduce, on a discursive and a theoretical plane, the disorienting materiality of this work of art. Accordingly, the first part provides a characterisation of the object from the point of view of the psychoanalytic category of fetishism while the second section elucidates the significance of the work's temporal unfolding and perceptual de-familiarisation as a critique of symbolic violence. The notion of “symbolic violence” is borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu's sociological research and understood as the pre-reflexive and corporeal domain of unconscious and invisible structures of ideological codification and social domination. In conclusion, the critical value of this artistic practice is related to the formulation of a negative aesthetics, a creative process able to challenge the symbolically violent sedimentation of a false immediacy and to disclose an original philosophy of alterity.

Keywords: symbolic violence, psychoanalysis, fetishism, aesthetics, Anish Kapoor