

Mirror

2h*-smudged lipstick! The nightmare I'm faced with trapped in the mirror-less hell of my new unvarnished bedroom. What do I look like now? What will people think of me! My favourite mirror is the only thing that can transform me from a morning wreck to a more feminine entity with corresponding clothes and immaculate mascara.¹ Plus I miss it. It has a story. I bought it whilst on a volunteering trip in Peru. I remember my boyfriend and him complaining at my indecision whilst souvenir-shopping: 'What's the difference? Both just show your reflection!' 'Yes, yes, that's obvious' - my debate was between the rectangular one with a patterned edge of turquoise mosaic or the slightly smaller rustic but surely one next to it!²

It cost \$2. After all I'm a Western tourist and I wanted to support local products. I returned the orphanage feeling like Mother Teresa. But was I?

Investigations into this little reflective friend lead me to one label 'Made in Bolivia'. Bolivia – 4th largest global producer of tin.³ Tin – mirrors, vital binding element enabling the silver backing agent to merge with the glass and reflect.⁴ Tin mining experience? EXPLORATION. 'Before entering the mine, miners greet their tin (god): 'good day, old woman, don't let anything happen to me today'. When they leave, they thank her for their life.'⁵ It's an industry that thrives off cheap child labour⁶ and premature death.⁷

Far from supporting the local community, my \$2 was actually promoting deaths and suffering of innocent workers. Plus what about the unseen paths of copper, silver, aluminium, glass? From now on when I look into my favourite mirror, they, too will stare back at me.⁸

Footnotes

¹ My mirror makes me cyborg because its reflective surface of interacting metals affects the way I look and am, allowing me to achieve a sense of self - through technology it's possible to construct your identity, your sexuality, even your gender, (Haraway, 1991: 122). This is a strange Cyborg because I consume it from far away, but Kuznar makes an example of Haraway looking at a shelf of carbo-loaded bodybuilding foods - enough for her to realise that she's in a place that wouldn't exist without the idea of the body as high-performance machine (Kuznar, 1997: np).
² This mirror constitutes commodity fetishism. Although it isn't marketed, 'enchanted' (Bennett, 2001: 122), per se I am at this point able to construct my identity ignorant of the pain and suffering embedded within the commodity itself, the essence of the notion, 'Fetishism is the capacity of humanity to ignore the fact that we create our own material culture and instead treat commodities as though they come to us as the products of some other force' (Miller, 2003: 360). In failing to recognise this transgressive nature of the mirror (Carter, 2001) I act to 'disguise extremely important connections' (Sack in Cook and Crang 1996, p.132).

³ Anon (2009).

⁴ Anon (2011).

⁵ Tansig (1980: 148).

⁶ According to the 2001 national census, some 1.7 million children from ages seven to 14 were engaged in tin

mining (Cook, 2007).

⁷ Many miners wear headscarves with skulls, indicating their casual acceptance of the risks. Most will not live past the age of 40, succumbing to mal de mina (miner's disease) caused by the inhalation of silica dust and other toxic minerals' (Cook 2007, 2002: 2).

⁸ I am now a responsible cyborg. This approach has 'expanded human consciousness to encompass a recognition of our embeddedness in constitutive relations with the non-human world' (Whitmore 1997: 197). What has been revealed is that 'being ourselves is a huge collaborative effort' (Angus et al 2001: 197) and awareness that being a node within an exploitative network of capitalism brings with it responsibility. For just the vain amongst us? Imagine a world without mirrors. Dentists' tools, opticians' lenses, car mirrors, bathroom cabinets. Inescapable. Everyone's responsibility.