

Conclusion

From time spent at the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess Temple, with their devotees, and with the statues themselves, using a relational methodological approach, I have found that the ‘things’, the materiality, discussed in this thesis have proved to go far beyond any categorical distinction that theorists from any discipline can easily make. The statues of the Virgin and the Goddess play subjective roles towards their devotees that defy both the idea of religious representation and the types of agency that might be ‘attributed’ to objects by material cultural theorists. They are, in fact, engaged as subjects of devotion instead of objects of devotion, and this is evidenced in the relationships that devotees have with them, i.e. how they are treated, addressed, negotiated with and given gifts. It has been through ‘relationships’ that the animate qualities of statues have come to light.

The questions raised from observing the relationships that take place with the statues discussed in this thesis have resulted in two outcomes. First, a concept of relationality has been created that is capable of addressing the volatile engagement that takes place in the shrine and temple. Using both animist and fetish relational discourses, this is based on the idea that objects and subjects bring each other into co-inspired, mutually responsive, deliberate forms of being during fully inter-personal moments of active relating. Fetishist relationality refers to what happens when a statue is related to as if it were power inherent in matter, while animist relationality refers to the overall relational personhood of so called objects. Second, through the use of Mauss’ gift (2006), the roles of offerings have also been tested and found to be a major component in both exemplifying and communicating relationships with the Virgin and the Goddess. The fetish is engaged further as a lens through which to examine the value and

materiality of offerings and their transformative potentialities within the modalities of devotion that take place in ‘Western’ religiosities such as vernacular Catholicism and Goddess Paganism in England and Spain. My research has found that the concept of relationality can be applied to things generally in Western culture, yet it is through the roles of religious objects that their potentialities are tested to their full relational capacities.

Statues

The role of relationality is not, however, the same as that of Viveiros de Castro’s ontological perspectivism, Harvey’s animism, or Scott’s ontological emergence. These theories have served as ways in which the dynamic relationality of objects can be tested. Relationality is an aspect of Harvey’s (2005b) animism which suggest that animals, objects and other persons are animated when they are in relationship with another person (as indicated by treatment and behavior toward that person). Although the concept of relationality can be applied across a broad cultural spectrum and to many types of objects, here it has been radicalized in a) its application to the statue devotion that takes place in ‘the West’, specifically, England and Spain; and b) because it is *only in moments* of active relating that statue persons come into being. Dependent on what a devotee brings to the encounter in terms of epistemology, this form of radicalized animist relationality is so relational that Tylor’s animism (1913 [1871]) might also be useful to account for that which takes place in momentary relationships with statues. Relationality is such that it allows statues to contain ‘spirits’, be embodied with divine presences, be representative of a divine presence, or be inert matter. Scott’s (2006) idea of ontological emergence describes that which occurs in moments of relational engagement with things of nature such as trees and different animals. Yet in addition to simultaneity, I am emphasizing that relational encounters

with statues are deliberate, intentional and informed by the modalities that constitute the Goddess Paganism and vernacular Catholicism.

Drawing on Viveiros de Castro's (2004a) ontological perspectivism where different worlds are known through corporeally diverse points of view, the bodily perspectives of statues have been taken into consideration. Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess do not have 'souls' in the ways that animals or humans do, nor the centrality of a spiritual unity to which they belong and are diversified through their bodily differences. Their 'bodies' are, like the bodies of other persons, alive because their material properties form part of the meshwork (Ingold, 2011: 28). Further, relationality is not a departure from Ingold's theory of meshwork, but an addition which, based on religious events in context, contributes an active relational dynamic to this theory. This means that the statues of the Virgin and the Goddess *and* their material components (cedar and willow) can be recognized as being a part of a living, fluid, relational schema because they form part of the whole, i.e. that which is in constant relationship with all that is, and that is always in process of being and becoming.

Similarities/differences

The Virgin and the Goddess have much in common in terms of the performances, relationships, aesthetics, and the economies of offerings that take place in relation to them. Despite the cultural and religious differences found between Glastonbury Goddess Pagans and Andalusian Spanish Catholics, similarities are seen in how materiality is related to, treated and addressed in each case study. These include similarities and in some cases, exact equivalence, in modes and explanations for petitioning the divine, altar arrangements, modes of facilitating, continuing, and reciprocating relationships, statue/figure display and veneration, and the types of offerings made.

Further, the centrality of *healing* found in each religiosity indicates similarities in terms of expectations, reliance, interdependence, and within relationships. The Virgin and the Goddess differ in terms of the properties found in their statue bodies and within their religious contexts. The gifts offered to each statue walk both different and similar paths. They are similar in that they range in materials used, are often crude, sometimes economically viable, and always relationally capable of delivering the intentionality of the devotee. Their aesthetic can inspire and inform, and they have the power to further creative modes of devotion, or be none of these things. They are different because each thing that becomes an offering is influenced by the particularities of each religiosity.

Display

Relationality is affected not only by the images, statues and other forms of materiality that are on display in both the shrine and the temple of the Virgin and the Goddess, but the manner in which they are displayed and arranged. Positioning of the Virgin of Alcala makes her physically accessible to her devotees. Because devotees can go beneath her mantle and have private, intimate moments alone with her, her relational status is different from that of the Goddess. In this case, because of the rough nature of the material and the ways in which they are displayed, statues of the Goddess receive comparatively little affection. Further the objects on display in the temple and the shrine ‘work like a language’ (Hall, 2003: 8) that transmits cues and messages capable of inspiring further modes of devotion and playing roles in relational encounters with devotees, even if those roles are indirect. My research demonstrates that the ways in which the materiality found in the temple and the shrine (offerings, colours, statues) are arranged/displayed serve as setting upon which devotees ‘come on stage’ and perform their relational encounters.

Offerings

Mauss' (2006) gift has played a significant role in understanding the value of objects as gifts as they are given to statues in negotiation and exchange situations. Offerings are commodities as well as spiritual, magical, transformative, 'abnormal traffic' discussed by Pels (1998). Due to the materiality of the offerings found in the shrine of the Virgin and the temple of the Goddess, this thesis re-interrogated the fetish which showed that its untranscended materiality served as a useful way in which to re-imagine the roles of both statues and offerings, especially in terms of sentimental offerings.

Value has played a large role in offerings, how they are given. Offerings to the Goddess and the Virgin have been found to be just as transformative and mediating as the roles of statues but in ways that particularly address the relational roles of matter, value and exchange within the Western economic culture of capital. This is why monetary offerings and things of gold and silver are given an important note. The silver and gold that adorn the Virgin (her jewelry, her silver *temple*, her gold crown), for example, are economically the 'best' that can be given to her. No other metals in Western discourse have the qualities and value that gold and silver have. The use of these precious metals further reflects the value put on the relationships that devotees have with her. This conclusion further expands on concepts of value which, apart from monetary offerings that connect the giver with the State, circumscribes the Western normative concepts of value which are reflected by the materials commonly used in devotion (acorns, locks of hair, gold, oak, baby dummies and willow). Objects/offerings of sentimental value exemplify the fact that offerings are relational in their own way – i.e. a way which differs from the relationality of statues. Like the diversity found in their compositions, offerings exemplify relational intentionality and serve as bargaining tools with the divine.

Further explorations in the gift exchange that takes place between statues of the Virgin and the Goddess and devotees resulted in a discussion about the power relations that take place between the two. Statues and devotees do not share personhood. They are persons in different ways. Therefore the 'rules' are different from when human persons (who, at a local level, share law and culturally accepted ways of gift giving and reciprocity) enter into exchange situations with one another. Although statues are relationally capable of being more powerful than devotees (i.e. they have access to supernatural power) devotees also have power over statues in terms of their care, restoration and regeneration. This has resulted in a creative tension where both statues and devotees maintain one another's statuses, which leads to further relational encounters.

Expanded on dualisms

This research has found that the idea of representation which so commonly reflects the way in which religious images and statues are perceived is not adequate to account for that which occurs in lived context. Devotees do not consistently treat, refer to, or address the statues that stand before them as 'representations', although this sometimes occurs, too. They are engaged as if they are 'subjects' instead of objects. As Georgina said, the willow figures of the Goddess at the temple 'embody' the Goddess, she is within and without. The Goddess has been afforded the possibility to be in more than one place at a time. The Virgin of Alcala is spoken to, employed and treated like a sacred, living woman. When asked if she is 'alive' Yolanda said 'Yes and no. The statue is a statue', but she continued, 'She's the Virgin, our Lady'. There is a kind of conflict involved when surveying statue devotion due to the fact that religious objects (willow branches, cedar wood, altar objects and their arrangements) are spoken to, treated respectfully, given greater or lesser importance, and are at the center of cults of admiration and devotion. Yet there is always the moment of pause when a Spanish or English devotee of a so called object is asked

if their Goddess or Virgin is ‘really’ the deity she is meant to represent. This is because devotees are not only devotees, but are also self-consciously modern Europeans who are aware, as Gell (1998: 122) pointed out, that the statue is a statue. For this reason the terms ‘embodiment’ and ‘representation’ have been employed as two terms which indicate the presence of two further relational possibilities which are dependent upon the relational encounter in question.

Embodiment and representation are, after all, relational in and of themselves and are treated as non fixed, fluid terms which allow for a myriad of possibilities to occur. Instead of a rejection of dualities, the contribution that thesis offers to the modernity debate is that dualisms can be expanded upon to include relational possibilities. This is possible because relationality, in its active flexibility as a critical category works in several different non exclusive ways.

Exaggerations

Relationality has been proposed as a theoretical tool that can be applied to objects across a broad spectrum of cultures and contexts. As seen in the contexts of the Virgin of Alcala and the Goddess, ‘things’ are not always interacted with as if they are the material against which we define ourselves as ‘modern’ humans. Yet due to their relational nature, re-thinking statue and object engagement as exemplified at the shrines of the Virgin of Alcala and the Goddess Temple provides another dimension to the way in which ‘things’ are theorized within in the materiality debate. Material cultural studies can therefore benefit from understanding that which happens in the cases of the Goddess and the Virgin and how these ‘objects’ take on lives of their own, even if momentarily. The answer to the question of whether or not objects are capable of perpetuating/containing their own discourses and ontological possibilities does not lie in ‘relationships’, but in ‘relating’. Hence, the case is not whether or not objects have agency – the

ways that agency is understood in material culture studies does not address its full relational capacity. The point is that agency, too, is relational.

In terms of implications for the study of religions specifically, animist relationality also aids in understanding religion as it is lived, that is in its myriad vernacular, unique forms that shift and change with every encounter and that are continually in process of being, and becoming. This argument can potentially lead to a paradigmatic shift in the ways in which religion and things are understood that adds another, third dimension to religious polemics that have been taking place for centuries. In other words, instead of the religious constructs which perpetuate the sacred and the profane, immanence and transcendence, spirit and matter, relationality can be seen as a bridge which unites these dualisms, placing religious objects and performance on a generative continuum instead of at odds. Further, the case studies provide evidence enough to suggest that the concept of relationality can be applied to many, if not all, cases of statue devotion – whether ‘Western’ or not. The study of religious materiality can thus be greatly enhanced by the relational stances taken by theorists such as Latour (1993, 2005), Viveiros de Castro (2000, 2004a), Miller (2005), Harvey (2005b), Scott (2006), Pels (1998, 2008) and Ingold (2011).

In terms of ‘Western’ objects generally, they are also relational, but their roles differ to those of religious objects. Still yet the transformative potentiality is there with cars, rug, and lamps, even if the likelihood is not. If someone were to pick up a kettle, as Harvey suggests, and relate to it as “Thou rather than an “it” (2005b: 11) and treat it in a way that is special or differs from other objects, then it, too has become a subject of encounter. The ways in which devotees engage Western religious objects such as the Virgin and the Goddess exemplify *exaggerations* of the ways which materiality can potentially work generally.