

Chapter 1

Introduction

The origins of this thesis lie in a day trip to the shrine of the Virgin de Alcala de los Gazules, Andalusia, Spain. On our yearly visit in the spring of 2007 to see my husband's family in Cadíz, my mother-in-law (who does not drive) asked if we could take her to see 'her Virgin'. I found to my surprise that my mother-in-law is a devotee to this particular Catholic statue of the Virgin Mary. Upon further enquiry, I found that her family is from Alcala and, like many other families at that time, had moved to the coastal city of Cadíz (which is roughly a 45 minute drive from the mountain village), in search of work in the 1950s. Many members of the family maintain ties with the village of Alcala, mainly through yearly visits to see the annual September procession and to visit/venerate the Virgin.

The year before this visit I had begun a PhD which was beginning to focus on religious materiality and museum display. When I entered the shrine on this day trip, I had already accumulated a foundational knowledge of 'material religion'. This set the stage for an overwhelming encounter. Upon entry to the shrine (and having come from a strict southern American Calvinist background), the 'stuff' I encountered made an impact. The shrine was filled with colorful *ex votos*, flowers, electric candles, wall paintings, cherubs, statues of saints, and much more. The smell was a mixture of frankincense and fresh flowers and the shrine, with its floors of black and white checked marble, was cool and dimly lit. Among all this 'religious materiality' I saw the statue of the Virgin, adorned in gold and silver, elevated high in her chamber, the focus of devotion. Then I watched as my mother-in-law clutched and kissed the

cross that hung around her neck, placed flowers at the altar far below the Virgin's feet, and then looked up at the statue in adoration. 'Now this', I thought, 'is interesting'.

What further spurred my interest that day was a lengthy and informative conversation with the *Santero*, the caretaker of the shrine. I told him that I was a student scholar in the study of religions and seeing my interest, he told me about the Virgin, her history, her *power*, how she is ritually bathed, how she appears in visions, the healings and other miracles she has done and how *extranjeros* (foreigners) from all over the world come to see her, including people who are not Catholic, and especially those wishing to have a child. At this point it dawned on me that the subject of 'religious materiality' went far beyond what I had first imagined, i.e. this statue was much more than an iconic representation of the divine.

Upon returning to England, I discussed this encounter enthusiastically with my supervisors and we agreed that this would make an interesting, accessible, case study for me. In thinking about another case study that could potentially parallel the materiality encountered in the shrine of the Virgin, I was told that I should consider the contemporary Pagan temple of the Goddess of Glastonbury. Living in close proximity to the town of Glastonbury, I visited the Goddess Temple. After encountering a temple steward and seeing statues of the Goddess, hearing testimony of 'her' power (mainly the Goddess's curative abilities), and seeing a multitude of creative, viewable expressions of Goddess devotion present in the temple, I agreed. Instead of examining religious objects as they appear in museums, I would study religious objects as they appear *in context*.

Although they form central parts of two distinct religiosities, statues of both the Virgin and Goddess have much in common. They are both 'representations' of the feminine divine who are

often engaged with, paradoxically, as powerful non representations. From the visible offerings left on their altars, at their feet, and in their temple and shrine, one can see that promises are made, and that statues are negotiated with. Housed in their temple and shrine, statues of the Virgin and Goddess are ‘objects’ of devotion who are engaged as if they are ‘subjects’ of devotion. Studied in this way, the remit of the thesis ‘questions’ became clear: relationships are what make these statues ‘tick’, i.e. relationships are the animating qualities of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess.

In their contexts, statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are housed, bathed, given gifts, petitioned and cared for within highly sophisticated systems. These so called objects are capable of pushing materiality to its limits in terms of objects and their agency, or ‘liveliness’. This leads to two further assertions which create the underpinnings of this thesis: first, this thesis introduces the concept of relationality. Dependent on relational engagement, objects and subjects (statues of the Virgin and the Goddess and their devotees) bring each other into co-relational *being* through encounters. Demonstrated through the giving of gifts to statues, relationality (discussed in theoretical Chapter 6) asserts that objects and subjects, spirit and matter, representation and embodiment, are fluid concepts as opposed to fixed theoretical boundaries. Relationships with the divine in statue form take place within a relational zone, the place where dualities are both engaged and expanded upon. Second, the transformative roles of objects found in the gifts given to the Virgin and the Goddess (exemplified through the fluid economies found in the temple and shrine) further enrich the concept of relationality and are demonstrative exaggerations of the ways in which Westerners value and approach material ‘things’ generally. This second assertion, discussed in Chapter 7, engages Mauss’ (2006) idea of the gift, explores the materiality of offerings, and re-imagines the ‘fetish’ as a way in which to consider the *powerful* roles of

objects. After all, it is through the acts of the giving of gifts and entering into negotiations with these statues that we know we are dealing with a particular form of relational engagement that goes far beyond the ‘social life of things’ (Appadurai, 1986).

The theoretical implications of the thesis questions have led to an inevitable encounter with material culture studies. Religious objects such as offerings and statues of the Virgin and the Goddess readily test distinctions such as subject/object, transcendence/immanence, spirit/matter, mind/matter and nature/culture in ways that ‘everyday things’ such as cars, rugs and lamps cannot. They are set aside and marked for purposes that challenge Enlightenment rationality and certain modern dualities. Material culture studies are here informed by the study of religions because the religious objects found in the shrine of the Virgin and the Goddess Temple, with their transformative abilities, mysterious, spiritual value and otherworldly ‘hybridity’ (Mitchell, 2008) can be considered *exaggerations* of the roles that materiality play in Western culture generally. In the literature review (Chapter 2) I have surveyed anthropological and sociological theoretical approaches to materiality that underpin my contribution to an emerging debate about religious materiality. Indicating where the study of religions needs more considered engagement (which it sometimes receives), drawing on such theories offers both the study of religions and material culture studies different ways of considering statue veneration. This thesis does, however, remain firmly planted in the study of religions.

Animism

Religious statues are generally relegated to being representations of the divine instead of tangible, embodied, powerful beings. Animism is therefore used to initiate this discussion concerning the relational engagement and roles that materiality play in the cases of the Virgin

and the Goddess. Through its many incarnations from Tylor (and indeed his predecessors) onwards, the term animism is capable of addressing questions relating to the problem of materiality and the roles of matter, i.e. matter versus spirit, *dead* objects versus *live* objects. As I will use it here, animism is a momentary, ‘happening’ that points toward ways of being and becoming in moments of active relating, i.e. it is through relationships with statues that so called objects of devotion become subjects of devotion and the potentiality emerges for devotees and statues to bring each other into co-relational being during the process. This type of animist relationality is built on Harvey’s (2005b) ‘new animism’ where relational engagement indicates personhood and Scott’s (2006: 61) idea that spontaneity is key to understanding how ontologies emerge between things/persons. That is the gap that exists between encountering and relating to a *thing*, or statue, intrude upon the quality of the momentary relationship in focus, whether that relationship is between a human person and a tree person, or a statue person and a tree person. The form of animism used in this thesis is not, however, completely different from Tylorean (1913 [1871]) animism where alien spirits inhabit *things of nature*. Depending on the particular mode of encounter, i.e. who is doing the encountering and what they ‘bring’ to that encounter in terms of epistemology, the Virgin and the Goddess are so relational that they are sometimes representations, sometimes ‘inert matter’ in which the divine takes up residence and animates a statue or a thing, and sometimes inherently powerful. Further, Viveiros de Castro’s ‘ontological perspectivism’ (2000: 469) which asserts that reality can be apprehended from distinct corporeal points of view (here applied to statues), is also engaged as a way in which to pay to the potential roles of matter. These ideas challenge and expand upon the theoretical boundaries set by commonly accepted dualities (subject/object, spirit/matter), thus widening modern discourses to

include that which takes place relationally in encounters with statues of the Virgin and the Goddess.

Fetish

This discussion of objects, the potential power in matter, representation and animism has further inspired re-interrogations into discourses surrounding the use of the term ‘fetish’. The fetish is capable of critically advancing an argument about that which pertains to the relational, volatile, unpredictable territories of devotion where unknowable relationships, communications, mediations, and negotiations take place. Johnson says,

Using the inversion of the fetish to reveal the power of objects to elude classification and to examine the process of classifying fixation itself, there is no reason to assume that the fetish has outgrown its academic use- (or exchange-) value. Perhaps it merely requires a bit of dressing up once again to entice and seduce (2000: 248).

Indeed, as will be demonstrated in this thesis, many scholars from different disciplines are beginning to ‘dress up’ both animism and fetishism as remedial solutions to advance relational theoretical stances. Although the fetish is engaged throughout Chapters 6 and 7, it is done so as a sub-category of a more broad relational, animist discourse, i.e. fetishism is ‘matter specific’ animism because it is concerned primarily with the creativity and power of matter which influences how and why statues are given gifts, as well as the transformative roles of the gifts given. Complementing the relational status of animist relationality, fetishist relationality deals with that side of relationality where power is inherent in the objects engaged. Expanding on an examination of the mediating roles of offerings, including altar exchange, questions of value, and reciprocity, power relations that occur between statues and devotees are also addressed. Thus the

fetish re-imagined as a discursive tool finds its home in relationality, animism and statue veneration.

In terms of epistemology, the critical engagement of the terms animism and fetishism is, however, tricky. It must therefore be addressed for two reasons: first, because both terms have sordid pasts in the academy that were founded on abuses of power and ethnocentricity. Secondly, neither vernacular Catholics nor Goddess Pagans self-identify as animists or fetishists. I am not, however, suggesting that they do, or they should. This would be an imperialist claim equal to those who began unfairly labelling ‘others’ in such a way during trade and colonial encounters. The assertion here is that Goddess Pagans and vernacular Catholics have relationships with objects in shrine and temple settings that can be better understood by engaging animism and fetishism as critical terms. They are useful because they provide different ways of understanding the volatile nature of religion as it is practiced. Further, instead of using the terms animism and fetishism, I could have simply used ‘relationality’. Yet animism and fetishism are culturally *ours*. As terms they were created in colonial and post-colonial eras as a way in which modern, civilised peoples could be distinguished from the non-civilised peoples being colonised. Thus employing animism and fetishism as critical terms means redressing an imbalance where ‘others’ have been unfairly marginalised from within a scholarly heritage for something that ‘moderns’ have always done.

Terminology

With regards to terminology, discussing materiality has meant working with and challenging commonly accepted dualisms. Terms such as vernacular/official, subject/object, Western/non-Western, modern/pre-modern, Protestant/Catholic, objects/things, secular/sacred, have proven problematic through the writing of this thesis. Indicative of the problem of materiality (which is

dualistic in nature, i.e. what it is to be human is often defined in contrast to what it is to be an object), these ways of thinking about things, our humanness, and world around us, is reflected in a cultural arrangement of words. Primiano says

Questions need to be asked and then reasked about those basic theoretical perspectives, including the words, terms, and meanings which are freely taken from received scholarly traditions even before we have had our first interactions in the field (1995: 38).

Therefore several terms of engagement will necessarily be problematised throughout this introductory chapter. Intended to reflect the theoretical stance of this thesis, i.e. that relationality implies fluidity, many of these dualistic terms are engaged in order to both demonstrate and challenge their limitations. In other words, they must be acknowledged to be surpassed.

Vernacular/doctrinal

While material culture studies may have largely transcended the subject/object divide through its discussions of the politics of representation, these issues in the study of religions still requires some thought. The difference between vernacular and doctrinal religion is important to highlight because in the study of religions, they are often set on different trajectories, i.e. vernacular religion is always in dialogue with official and academic understandings. This is because the formal study of religions in Comparative Religion/History of Religions had a largely textual bias until the 1960's (Bell, 1998: 206). The significance of studying religions in the vernacular, or as it is 'done' forms part of an ongoing exploration in the field. Bowman says,

In order to comprehend religion in its broadest sense it is necessary to appreciate how official, folk, and individual ideas and behavior interact with each other (2004: 5).

Although vernacular and doctrinal religion are mutually influential, fluid, and interrelated, the term 'vernacular religion' is used to distinguish not only the difference between official text

based studies and that which happens among devotees/believers, but to draw attention to this thesis' focus, i.e. that which occurs 'outside' of official versions of religion is unpredictable, irrational, and emotionally imbued. It refers to location specific Catholicism and Goddess Paganism, and it also refers to the methodological approach outlined in methodology Chapter 3.

Primiano coined the term 'vernacular religion' as a remedial solution aimed at redressing 'a heritage of scholarly misrepresentation, in what I [Primiano] see as the necessary methodological reflexivity on the ethnographic process' (1995: 42). He describes it as 'personal' and 'private' and says, 'Vernacular religion is, by definition, religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it' (1995: 44). This needed advance was created to circumscribe the scholarly tendencies of anthropologists, historians, sociologists, folklorists and those in the study of religions who have 'consistently named religious people's beliefs in residualistic, derogatory ways as "folk," "unofficial," or "popular" religion, and have then juxtaposed these terms on a two-tiered model with "official religion"' (1995: 38). Primiano adds that this juxtaposition implies 'that religion somewhere exists as a pure element which is in some way transformed, even contaminated, by its exposure to human communities' (1995: 39). It can also be suggested that 'high' religion regards vernacular or 'low' religion as invalid, and in some way inauthentic. This last refers to the elitism found in the text based study of religions and academic disciplines that consequently marginalizes its practitioners. According to Primiano, although several scholars in recent years have addressed the problematic nature of the two-tiered, dualistic model, no alternatives were being found, even though 'what scholars have referred to as "official" religion does not, in fact, exist' (1995: 45). Every religiosity, whether doctrinal or non-doctrinal, has no choice but to be vernacular in that it takes on the qualities and physical expressions of the places where they take seed and grow. In this vein, and contributing to

Primiano's discussion (1995) about official versus unofficial religion, in terms of materiality, Harvey says,

it can be hard to see veneration of masks or statues without being tempted by words such as "idolatry" or "fetishism" into thinking that materiality must be separated from true religion (2005a: 3).

So in terms of the 'private', intimate relationships that take place with materiality, i.e. the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess, involvement with vernacular, popular or folk religious practices entails theoretically 'getting a bit messy.' Hence, vernacular religion is not a refined dining experience with the House of Windsor; it is a hearty outdoor feast with old friends.

Western

The word 'Western' requires prolematising, as the idea of a single, unified Western culture is flawed. There are several 'cultures' within Western culture. On a vernacular level, France does not share culture with Spain, no more than England shares culture with Australia or the United States. However, when considered on 'the whole', the countries that fall under 'Western culture' as an umbrella term have inherited certain characteristics that can be considered binding. For example, although these considerations are interwoven, they can be described as sharing intellectual (Enlightenment/modern rationality), philosophical (Cartesian, Platonic, Socratic), economic (capitalist, socialist), and religious traditions (Christendom, Protestantism, Catholicism). In terms of the Christian religion specifically, within its many forms in 'the West', it is often defined as transcendent, i.e. life is a temporary affair and this world must be transcended in order to obtain a place in the afterlife. God exists out there in the ether and the material substance of this world must be surpassed, and 'officially', religious objects, i.e. images,

icons, paintings and statues are considered representations of the divine. As will be discussed further on, it is worth mentioning that the Occident shares the idea of religious ‘representations’ with many Eastern religious traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, a fact which will be addressed further on this chapter and in Chapter 4.

The ways in which the two vernacular religiosities discussed here can be either typical or exemplary of their overall religiosities is significant. Each case study typifies vernacular Catholicism and contemporary Goddess Paganism while having unique characteristics that make them stand out. There are, for example, shrines of the Virgin in many villages and cities in Andalusia. *La Señora de la Aelgria* in Cadíz, *La Virgen de la Regla* if Chipiona, *La Virgen de la Paz* of Medina Sidonia, *Nuestra Señora del Carmen*, *Patrona de San Fernando* and *La Virgen Del Rocia* in Huelva exist in local Catholic churches. The difference between the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and others is that the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala is not a church, but a shrine, an *ermita*, specifically dedicated to *her*. Of the other *ermita* I did visit in Andalusia (i.e. *La Ermita de Santa Ana con la Virgen Niña* in Chiclana de la Fronterra), in comparison to the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala, *La Ermita de Santa Ana* is a blank canvas in that there is very little by way of material devotional display.

There are also other temples dedicated to the Goddess in England, such as those in Brighton and London (which opened after my research with the Glastonbury Goddess Temple was well advanced). Affiliated with the Glastonbury Goddess Temple, there are also two Goddess Temples in Australia, one in Belgium, Holland, Hungary, Sweden, and a further four in the United States. Both the Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala are exceptional in how they deal with, produce and engage materiality. For example, according to its founders, the Goddess Temple in Glastonbury is the first of its kind in the British Isles in 1,500 years. Because

the Glastonbury Goddess Temple is the ‘original’, it can be considered the inspirational ‘mother temple’ of the other temples. The priestesses and founders of these other temples have trained with the priestesses of the Glastonbury Goddess Temple, and the training helps in learning to create and use Goddess materiality in a way that is specific to the Glastonbury Goddess religiosity. The *ermita* of the Virgin of Alcala is the one of the largest and most popular in the region. Although the ways in which other Virgins are venerated, and made offerings to, are similar, the Virgin of Alcala is the only one that can be physically interacted with (discussed in detail in Chapter 4). Each religiosity is unique in that it is vernacular, i.e. it is shaped by its environment and the devotees responsible for maintaining its status. The shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess Temple are both typical *and* exemplary forms of their religiosities.

Femininity

This thesis surveys the deep, personal, intimate relationships that take place between devotees and statues of the divine feminine as they take place in the vernacular compared with how they might be examined theologically and *theologically*, the latter defined by Mantin as the ‘reflection on the nature of divinity within a female perspective’ (2004:147). The significance of choosing two case studies which focused on the divine *feminine* in statue form was, it must be confessed, an afterthought. Once I began to understand the roles that the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess play to their devotees, I understood that their feminine roles deepen their relational statuses. Generally, femininity is characterized as synonymous with communication, relationships and relating, emotions, and a certain amount of hysteria, irrationality and emotional unpredictability. This makes relationships that devotees have with the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess ‘incredible’ to some extent, which further supports the claim that

‘vernacular religion’ is an important distinction to make. According to Christ, relationships are typically seen as weaknesses within dominant Western cultural discourses. Christ writes,

The notion that relationship is a weakness can be traced back to Plato and the traditional thinking that followed his lead. Besides saying that the Good cannot change, Plato also said that the Good is ‘absolute, existing alone with itself, unique, eternal’. The idea of the Good or God as “existing alone” is contrary to the biblical picture of God involved with the world, creating, loving and judging it. So why did Plato and the philosophers and theologians who followed him assert that God exists alone? Because they viewed the risk involved in relationship as a potential liability (Christ, 2003: 71)

Christ’s comment gets to the root of the problem and points to one of the reasons why case studies formed around two divine feminine statues/principles are poignant. The ‘female form’, sexuality, touch, the profane, the earth, and the body, are all things that must be transcended. Mind and idea take precedence over body and sensuality. How then can a statue be worthy of corporeally ‘containing’ the presence of the divine?

The Problem of Materiality

A discussion concerning how the problem of materiality is characterized and understood is necessary to serve the theoretical implications of this thesis. Although they are mutually influential in terms of relevance to this thesis, the problem of materiality can be divided and considered in two veins: there is the academic problem of materiality in material cultural studies, and there is the academic problem of materiality and how it is understood in the study of religions. In relation to the roles that materiality play, one of the questions that concerns both of these disciplines is whether or not objects capable of their own agency apart from human

intentionality, i.e. where does the ‘weight’ of agency lie, with humans or with objects? Further, this leads to a brief exploration into the inherited ideas that shape the concept of modernity.

The Study of Religions

The ‘Problem of Materiality’ is not new. Because the focus of this thesis is the study of religious objects, this discussion highlights the ‘two great moments’ which changed the courses of materiality’s theological destinies: the iconoclast/iconodule debate and the Protestant Reformation, exemplified in issues surrounding transubstantiation. To begin with, the root of the problem can be identified as this: religion is often defined in terms of transcendence, representations, and/or metaphysics. This, from the outset, is dualistic. Manning and Meneley (2008), observe that

One of our many anthropological inheritances from the anti-idolatrous iconoclasm of the early Protestants is our general tendency to divide a category of ‘religion’ away from the general material muck of human existence. To speak of the materiality of religion seems oddly contradictory, even debased (Masuzawa 2000) (2008: 289).

Materiality is a problematic and ‘messy’ area of study because it confounds scholarship bound to Enlightenment binaries of mind and matter, rationality and irrationality, subject and object. In other words, materiality is only messy if approached with certain faulty assumptions that ignore the relational status of religious objects in Western countries such as England and Spain in preference for favouring theory over practice, or text/doctrine over relational engagement. Thus, instead of referring to the problem of materiality, we should more appropriately be referring to ‘the problem of duality’. After all, what happens in religion as it is *lived*, i.e. practiced and

engaged by devotees/believers, tells another story that reflects the before mentioned combination of popular piety and doctrine.

According to Chidester (2000), early Christian encounters with icons, images and statues demonstrate that the divide between the material and the spiritual was very narrow, if existent at all. He writes,

Byzantine and medieval Christians did not operate within a strict conceptual dualism that separated spiritual and material realms. Rather, materiality itself – the bread and wine of the eucharist, the holy images of the church, and the sacred relics of the saints – contained and conveyed Christian spirituality (2000: 216)

This suggests that sophisticated ideas about the inter-related nature of the material and the spiritual exemplified in transubstantiation was ‘normal’ in early Christian understandings of religious objects. However, the council at Nicaea (754) (2000: 226) was formed as an iconoclastic council that accused iconodules of ‘two blasphemies – they [images] limited God by confining divinity within material forms and they confused the human and divine by assuming that products of human art could hold and convey divinity’. Chidester writes,

According to the defenders of icons, the merger of spiritual and material in these holy images corresponded directly to the merger of divinity and humanity in the incarnation of Christ. “I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead,” John of Damascus observed, “but I paint the image of God who became visible in the flesh” (2000: 225-226).

This reflects the Catholic stance on their ‘justification’ for their uses of images and statues. Then, according to Muller (1954:16) image and statue use/veneration in Catholicism, despite the

Second Commandment which warns against making 'graven images' (and after many years of dispute and attacks instigated by iconoclasts) was finally re-instated in the year 843 C.E.

Later Protestant Reformers such as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin would, however, 'turn the theological tide' with regards to religious materiality and be heavily influential in their promotion of Christianity as a religion of 'hearing' instead of 'seeing'. Chidester says

Luther argued that Christian worship required no material support from things that could be seen. In 1522, for example, he insisted that proper worship needed no lights, candles, paintings, images, or altars (2000: 348),

He adds, 'As the Protestant Reformation developed, genuine Christian religion came to be defined by the reformers as an ongoing war against idols' (2000: 348). Chidester writes, 'Since the true God was purely spiritual, any material image used in worship, whether a painting, a statue, or a relic, became the locus for what Zwingli called 'strange gods'' (2000: 349). It was, however, Calvinism that emerged as the Protestant alternative to Catholicism (Chidester, 2000: 352-53). McDannell (1995) tells us that

[Calvin] maintained that humanity comes close to God only in our souls because God is a spirit. "Since God has no similarity to those shapes by means of which people attempt to represent him," he wrote in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "then all attempts to depict him are an impudent affront...to his majesty and glory." Divinity, the wholly other and sacred, should not be brought into the profane world of bodies and art (1995: 5).

Although Calvin was familiar with John of Damascus's argument in the eighth century, i.e.

'Rather than worshipping an object as if it were a deity, Christians who venerated a relic or icon

were directing their devotion to the invisible reality that the material object represented', Calvin maintained that Christians who used images and statues were idolators who ultimately dishonoured God and deserved to be punished (Chidester, 2000: 352). The doctrine of transubstantiation was rejected by Reformers because it was thought to be misguided, erroneous and a sinful distraction from the one, true God, not because it was thought to be impossible. Keith Thomas' work *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) discusses the role that transubstantiation played for the lay people of medieval Catholic England and the effect that the Reformation had on the Mass. He tells us that 'The ritual [Mass] was said, in a notorious phrase, to work 'like a charm upon an adder'. In the actual miracle of transubstantiation the 'instrumental cause' was the formula of consecration' (1971: 36-37). According to Thomas, although theologians had made attempts to purify this doctrine, their means were too subtle to be understood by lay congregations. Thomas writes, 'What stood out was the magical notion that the mere pronouncement of words in a ritual manner could effect a change in the character of material objects' (1971: 36-37).

Thomas tells us that regardless of what the official Papacy, clergy, and other 'elites' were doing, lay persons had their own interpretation of the eucharist and the priests powerful role therein.

The priest was a vehicle for the administration of the Host whose transformative abilities made it such that 'it' would become the flesh and blood of Christ during the eucharist, be consumed, and still be able to be the transcendent Son of God simultaneously (1971: 36).

To Reformers, the ability to change the 'character of material objects' was no less than sorcery and magic. Thomas says

For if all conjurations and exorcisms were ineffective, then what was transubstantiation but a spurious piece of legerdemain – ‘the pretence of a power, plainly magical, of changing the elements in such a sort as all the magicians of Pharaoh could never do, or had the face to attempt the like, it being so beyond all credibility’. The Papists, wrote Calvin, ‘pretend there is a magical force in the sacraments, independent of efficacious faith’ (1971: 60).

However, the onslaught of the Protestant Reformation on the Catholic doctrine of the Mass changed the way in which the eucharist was to be understood and administered. With a view to stamping out any grounds for what they considered ‘ancient superstitions, Protestant reformers created simple commemorations to replace the sacrament where consecrated objects were transubstantiated (1971: 61). This understanding of transubstantiation has its roots in the early, Byzantine Christian debates. According to Miles (1995), ‘Iconoclasts and iconodules argued about images because they acknowledged their power, disagreeing only about the religious implications of that power’ (1995: 167).

In terms of the doctrine of transubstantiation and the Virgin Mary specifically, according to Warner, the Virgin Mary did not bear a particular significance in the theological issues being raised by Protestant reformers. This is because the Virgin Mary had no presence in the rites of the Eucharist. Warner tells us that, however, ‘her cult excited precisely those excesses of external idolatry, with their accompanying hollowness of the spirit, that horrified the men who pressed for reformation’ (1978: 296). Devotees transubstantiate the Virgin and the Goddess through devotion, veneration and relational engagement. This suggestion leads to another issue of importance that must be identified and defined in order for the thesis questions to be adequately

addressed. Embodiment and representation are two terms that require problematising.

Embodiment describes that which occurs when spirits/deities, or ‘the sacred’, are understood to ‘take up residence’ in statues and other religious objects. When statues embody the Goddess or the Virgin, the *presence* of those deities is found in matter. Representation, on the other hand, is used to signal the understanding that divine images/statues represent, or point toward the sacred, or a referent, i.e. a deity in its ethereal or transcendent state. In other words, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, embodiment implies ‘untranscended materiality’ while representation signals ‘transcended materiality’. As a relational stance might suggest, however, these terms are not conceptually independent but are fluid and dependent upon the politics of encounter.

Western religious systems are not, however, the only ones that have problems with materiality, or who view it as representational. Hindu and Buddhist viewpoints also understand the ‘muck of human existence’ as illusory stuff which must, eventually be transcended. This is illustrated in the Hindu concept of *maya*. Miller (2005) suggests that the problem of materiality initially arose historically in South Asia when wisdom began to be attributed ‘to those who claim that materiality represents the merely apparent, behind which lies that which is real’ (2005: 1). Yet, as Miller tells us, parallel to religious cosmologies are the concerns of the *everyday*, of accumulating and of commodities, materiality being the central point around which cultures, economies, and institutions revolve (2005: 2). Through an examination of the transformative roles of offerings found in the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and the temple of the Glastonbury Goddess, this thesis puts this parallel existence of profane/everyday and sacred/religious objects to the test.

Material Culture Studies

In terms of materiality generally, the problem of materiality is an ongoing one. From the way in which materiality was first characterized in anthropology as the ‘museum object’, to the dematerializing bias that took (and still takes) place, the nature of that which constitutes things as ‘material’ and ‘how far they can go’ in terms of agency and sociality remains under scrutiny. The problem is that most social theorists are happy to recognize the derived social lives of things instead of things as ‘sacred’, i.e. things play social roles as representations or commodities that arise between humans. This relegates the idea of ‘subjecthood’ to mere metaphor – a status which cannot help but to enforce the before mentioned dualisms and consequently negate the relational status of religious objects. Ingold writes

In the world of solid objects envisaged by material culture theorists, however, the flux of materials is stifled and stilled. In such a world, wherein all that is material is locked up in things, it would be impossible to breathe (2011: 28).

Pels (2008) theorizes as to why the disciplines of current theorists display a detachment with regards to materiality by exploring ‘Victorian attitudes toward materialism’. He tells us that the religious dimensions present in how the history of materiality is understood is ‘summarized in the concepts of prophecy and iconoclasm, will help to explain modern anthropology’s dematerializing bias (Pels, 2008: 266).

Latour (2005) suggests that most academics and other privileged elites have been in cognitive denial of their dependence on ‘things’ for centuries. He says:

In their study, sociologists consider, for the most part, an object-less social world, even though in their daily routine they, like all of us, might be constantly puzzled by the constant companionship, the continuous intimacy, the inveterate contiguity, the passionate affairs, the convoluted attachments of primates with objects for the past one million years (2005: 82).

This is hard to dispute, yet anthropology has become more concerned with what it means to *relate*, and this is where this thesis, indeed the study of religions, benefits from material culture studies. Miller (2005), discusses how the ‘centrality’ of materiality to ‘the way we understand ourselves’ and how it is demonstrated in our continual return to it as a topic. He writes ‘Even within the most secular and self-consciously modern systems of belief the issue of materiality remains foundation to most people’s stance to the world’ (2005: 2). This also applies to religious materiality. It shapes the ways in which devotees perceive and therefore ‘do’ their religions.

Modernity

‘Western cultural’ materiality is influenced by inherited notions of modernity as a cultural form of identification ‘characterized by the combination of modern science, a global capitalist economy, and the political power of the nation state’ (Curry, 1997: 22). Currently, according to Hornborg (2006),

Both [Ingold and Latour] are preoccupied with the dubious modern distinction between persons and objects and between Culture and Nature, both recognize that this distinction is paradoxically itself cultural (Hornborg, 2006: 23).

Part of the complexity of the theoretical problems encountered in this thesis has arisen from the fact that although social theorists such as Latour (1993) have argued that *We have never been*

modern, modernity has persisted in existing as a cultural self-identifying tool. Europeans, Euro-Americans and other Westerners generally consider themselves modern and this cannot be ignored. Although it might appear to be anti-modern that Virgin and the Goddess devotees treat, entreat, engage and relate to ‘objects’ as subjects, these practices are sophisticated religious practices that take place in ‘modern’ Western European countries such as England and Spain. Inherited ideas surrounding ‘modernity’ do not adequately describe the culture for which it is designed to fit any more than ‘official religion’ (Primiano, 1995: 38) adequately accounts for the personal, private beliefs and practices of individuals, or public and social vernacular practices either. Relationships are the binding forces that make such encounters ‘work’. Hornborg (2006) says, as

Anthropologists have shown, many contemporary people who are intimately engaged in gaining their subsistence from local ecosystems continue to approach their non-human environments through what is now being called a ‘relational’ stance. Entities such as plants or even rocks may be approached as communicated subjects rather than the inert objects perceived by modernists (Hornborg, 2006: 22).

Relationality, as introduced previously, is the concept that is capable of ensuring that a fair and distributed importance is given to religious objects outside of modern, dualistic confines such as object and subject.

Thus it is not the intention of this thesis to engage with an ongoing polemic about modernity and take on the epic feat of disproving it. Latour (1993), and others have successfully questioned modernity and decided that it is seriously lacking as a culturally descriptive tool capable of accounting for that which takes place between here and there, subject and object, or mind and

matter. What this chapter contributes to the modernity debate is the suggestion animism and fetishism as critical discourses can aid in the *expansion* of inherited ideas about modernity so that it might include more relational possibilities. As Hornborg (2006: 22) suggests, the ‘relational stance’ is now a common approach to the environment in anthropology. With the use of an animist (and fetishist) discourse, religious objects such as statues and offerings can also be included in this position. This means that the features of modernity that we are so familiar with do not need to be negated, but rather they must be enlarged to include that which takes place between and beyond dualistic constructs. Thus, incorporating and expanding upon the limitations of modernity’s abstract dualisms helps to get the most out of relational theories, i.e. relationality sometimes *includes* modern dualisms. Hence, this thesis does not assert that dualisms do not exist, but it *does* assert that dualisms are not sufficient. Centuries’ worth of culturally embedded dualities cannot be theoretically unraveled in a single thesis. These dualities can, however, be added to, and the whole discourse can be enlarged to include dualities.

Objects and Things

Many of the scholars engaged within the literature review refer to objects as ‘things’. Hence, it is important to first clarify the difference and use of two terms. Leach makes an attempt to define the difference between them. He says “‘Objects’ are fitted into cultural contexts, while ‘things’ are often discussed as the necessary material backdrop to the workings of society’ (2007: 67). While not completely adequate as a definition, it has become apparent that ‘things’ is the term more commonly chosen by social theorists. As Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, (eds.) (2007) write in the introduction to *Thinking Through Things*, ‘The advantage of ‘things’ as a term is that, unlike ‘objects’, ‘artifacts’ and ‘materiality’, it carries minimal theoretical baggage’ (2007: 5). This is supported by the use of ‘things’ by Latour and Weibel (eds) *Making Things Public*

(2004). Although ‘objects’ and ‘things’ can be used interchangeably – after all ‘everyday’ objects are as relational as religious objects, sometimes even *becoming* religious objects (especially in the cases of offerings) – the terms ‘objects’ and ‘things’ can be used here as a form of gentle differentiation between references to things that originate from exchange situations, i.e. commodities, and discussions of objects in religious contexts. This differentiation is necessary at points when discussing many of the debates surrounding materiality which, as mentioned before, often ignore the sacred. It is not the intention of this thesis to imply that ‘everyday’ objects and ‘religious’ objects should be separated and made into further dualities. As the discussion of sentimental objects in Chapter 7 reveals, everyday objects and religious objects are better understood as forming part of a continuum, a factor which plays key importance in understanding the transformative roles of objects.

Synopsis of the Thesis

Following this introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 introduces the literature upon which this thesis is based. Divided into two sections, it surveys, a) the works of scholars in the study of religions, folklorists, and those working within material culture studies so that the currency and significance of the materiality debate can be highlighted, and b) relevant works surrounding agency, animism, and fetishism. Chapter 3 addresses the methods used in conducting fieldwork, while Chapters 4 and 5 provide the ethnographic accounts of the Virgin of Alcala and Our Lady of Glastonbury that serve as contextual, supporting reference points to the following theoretical Chapters 6 and 7. Broadly, Chapter 6 addresses statue devotion through the concept of relationality and animism, while Chapter 7, aided by the discourse of the fetish, discusses the value and materiality of offerings and their various transformational and facilitating roles. The

conclusion gives a synopsis of that which has been encountered in the entirety of the thesis and points toward future possibilities in terms of furthering this thesis' research.