

Chapter 6

Relationships, Relating, Relationality

While the next and final chapter discusses the roles that offerings play in the shrine of the Virgin and the temple of the Goddess, this chapter discusses the roles that statues play through the concept of ‘relationality’. Following animist discourses, it examines the ontological possibilities that emerge when persons (human persons and statue persons) enter into relationships with one another. In other words, *the relationships are the ontologies*. This assertion is vital to the theoretical position of the thesis and does two things: First, supported by the ways in which the Virgin and the Goddess are treated and engaged in the ethnographic accounts, it expands on questions of objects, potential agency, subjecthood and personhood through applying it to statues of the Virgin and the Goddess (and other religious objects) in the religiosities discussed here. Secondly, by engaging and expanding on the concept of statue focused representation, relationality builds on and complements the theoretical propositions made by advocates of the new animism such as Harvey (2005b), and others who have adopted relational stances such as Vivieros de Castro’s ‘ontological perspectives’ (2004), Gell’s exploration into the roles of ‘idols’ (1998), Scott’s ‘ontological emergence’ (2006), and Ingold’s idea of the meshwork (2011).

The challenge of this chapter is not to establish that objects have agency in terms of a ‘social life’ (Appadurai, 1986) where human relationships are facilitated by some form of exchange. As we have seen in the literature review, scholars have already done this. Nor is it to assert that ‘statues’ are animated and living all the time, at least not in the sense that biological beings are. Agency is not always representational of human intentionality (although sometimes it is). The challenge of this chapter is to establish how animism works in terms of objects/statues having

agency in moments of active, relational engagement, a fact that both incorporates and challenges ideas such as representation. Incorporating all objects, whether religious or ‘everyday’, animism approached in this way can be applied across a broad spectrum of contexts, cultures and worldviews, or better yet ‘worlds’. That is religious objects are capable of demonstrating the exaggerated roles of objects due to how they are perceived, engaged, valued, and what they ‘represent’ to their devotees.

The Problem of Duality

The ways in which devotees of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess engage their statues challenge the ideal types of that which constitutes modernity, theology, and canonized scholarly categorizations which are often based on commonly accepted dualistic constructs. Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are theoretically/doctrinally perceived by scholars and theologians as being representations of the divine instead of, for example, being recognized and received as the tangible, embodied, relational participants in ceremony and ritual that they are (at least for the practitioners that enter into relationships and negotiations with them). Questions pertaining to issues of transcendence and immanence, i.e. whether or not images/statues are capable of housing the divine, being present in the divine (even if momentarily), actually *being* the divine, symbolizing or representing the divine underpin the problem of religious materiality specifically. Yet as suggested in the introduction, the problem of materiality is better understood when referred to as the ‘problem of duality’.

When the practices and beliefs that accompany everyday religion are examined, the observation can be made that what are generally considered fixed dualistic categories, subjects and objects, mind and matter, symbolic action and ‘real’ action, and the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’

are not fixed statuses at all. In addition to modernity, Ingold notes ‘culture is conceived to hover over the material world but not permeate it’ (2000:240). ‘Culture’, ‘modernity’, ‘ritual and belief’, even ‘materiality’ are elitist constructs that only partially bear resemblances to that which happens in the lived reality of everyday practices and interactions. Typically, rituals are understood to be public affairs while beliefs are private and personal (Harvey, 2005a: 1). Yet as illustrated in the literature review, ritual and belief, bound by the embodiment of performed action, yet often set on separate trajectories, are mutually informative and cannot be divorced from one another. Harvey writes ‘What people do and why they do it (their motivations and their sincerity) are linked (2005a: 1). The stasis extracted from making dualistic distinctions is abstract and illusory and not capable of containing, sustaining (or controlling) the volition of relational engagement, or *matter*. Solutions to the ‘problem of duality’ can, however, be found in the unique, volatile, diverse relationships that take place in religious *living* contexts, not only in Western European religiosities such as in the cases of the Virgin and the Goddess, but in other cultures where religious foci take center stage and are engaged and/or venerated such as, for example, in the similar cases of Hindu *murtis*, statues of the Buddha, or Santeria altars that ‘house’ gods. As this chapter reveals, the roles that religious matter play are not so problematic once the limitations to which they have been generally relegated are broadened to accept further, more relational possibilities.

Relationality

Relationality is dependent on three things: relationships, performances, and the moment. It is a practice, a *co-inspired form of active, mutual relating* that emerges from the unique, personal, even intimate relationships that take place between human and other than human beings rather than a religious label, an ethic, or a worldview. Relationality is animist in both theory and

encounter. It asserts that moments of active relating contain the possibility of bringing ‘persons’ into ‘liveliness’ or *being* insofar as we are relating with them, not before, not after (which also extends to temporal relating). In other words, ontologies emerge in moments of active, relational engagement. This is built on both Harvey’s (2005b) ‘new’ version of animism and Scott’s (2006) idea of ontological emergence which will now be addressed.

According to Harvey, this new version is about recognising that the world is full of persons, some of which are human, others of which are not. It is not so much concerned with how persons come into being as it with how those persons are to be behaved toward (2005b: xi). Personhood is a status that depends on relational engagement. Further, inferred human likeness is not a prerequisite for animism and/or personhood. Harvey says that the new animism is ‘less about attributing life and/or human-likeness, than it is about seeking better forms of personhood in relationships’ (2005b: 16). How, then, do we know when something is a person or an object (who is a potential person)? In using the example of stones, Harvey says,

If not all stones are alive ‘but some are’, how does someone encountering a stone tell the difference? It certainly makes a difference, not only grammatically and in other speech acts, but also in the way a stone is treated. People are spoken with and acted towards differently than objects (2005: 36).

Thus, we can distinguish between persons and objects through the ways in which objects are treated. Like materiality generally, the idea of personhood is problematic for academics and modernist observers. A general modern assumption is that for something to be alive, it must do something or have some kind of behaviour, but this is not precisely true. From an animist perspective, all something needs to be ‘alive’ is for someone to relate to it, have a relationship

with it, or treat it particular ways that point toward subjecthood instead of ‘objecthood’. Harvey says,

The seductive mistake throughout these debates is to think of bounded subjects, individuals and nominative linguistic constructions as central. If anacondas can sometimes act as shamans, and if the animation of rocks remains only theoretical until particular rocks and particular humans (or particular Thunderers) relate with them, kettles could also be considered persons when they do whatever it would take kettles to do to demonstrate liveliness – and all it might take is for someone to address the kettle as “Thou” rather than an “it” (2005b: 111).

Personhood can therefore be achieved through how a so called object is addressed. As will be discussed later on, this is one of the many ways in which treatment exemplifies the relational quality of animism.

Scott’s (2006) idea of ontological emergence shares many similarities with the new animism and serves as a further foundation upon which the concept of relationality has been built. Scott writes,

The attribution of life to the non-living is not what occurs in a world perceived as so many different modalities of life, of emergence. In such a world, figurative practice is rather to understand the differences among beings in the world as variations on the underlying themes of life in community. For my Cree interlocutors, the world is a place of deep vitality, sometimes restful, sometimes dynamic; pregnant with possibility; a place of emergent, often orderly, sometimes surprising phenomena. Life in this sense, *pimaatsiwin*, was translated to me as ‘the continuous birthing of the world’ (Scott, 2006: 61).

The Cree idea of ‘the continuous birthing of the world’ shares similarities with Ingold’s (2011: 28) ‘world-in-formation’ (discussed in greater detail below) and also reflects the nature of animist relationality. Reliant upon relational engagement, Scott’s ontological emergence indicates a *simultaneous* coming into being of persons and things. While this idea of simultaneous coming into being supports the concept of relationality, relationships with the Virgin and the Goddess also indicate cases of *deliberate* coming into being. This is demonstrated through the intentionality involved in performances and other venerative acts which take place in shrine and temple settings. Relational engagement is intentional, not a spontaneous inevitability. Although the presence of human-like features on statues of the Virgin and the Goddess might affect the ways in which they are automatically perceived, the attribution of ‘liveliness’ cannot be assumed as each relational encounter is unique to what persons ‘bring’ to encounters.

Relationality is an aspect of Western animism because it is a modern response to being in the presence of statues despite doctrine or other theoretical implications. In its flexibility, it is a deliberate occurrence that cuts into both Catholic shrine and Goddess Temple experiences. That is, people act differently in the presence of statues and when they are participating in relational temple/shrine encounters than when they are, say, at home or going about ‘ordinary’ life. This understanding results in opening up a kind of ontological relationality that gives fair and distributed importance to human persons and object persons within cultural discourses that often view object persons in direct contrast with human persons, i.e. what it means to be a human being is directly opposed to what it means to be an object.

To further illustrate the concept of relationality, an example is offered that demonstrates how ontologies emerge. I may live with a small statue of the Buddha that is placed on my personal altar inside my house. Arguably, that object is not ‘living’ until I have picked it up and engaged

with it in some way. Consequently, from the perspective of the statue maybe I am not living until I pick it up, too. Engaging with it in ways such as cleaning, admiring, or changing its location can potentially ‘activate’ the statue so that it can be used in ritual or meditation. I can speculate that when I am not using it, it is dormant, or sleeping. Yet the perspective of this Buddha statue is unknown to me. Here, what we need to know is that subjecthood, is achieved when objects and subjects (human and other than human) both become subjects by bringing each other into a unique form of co-inspired, co-relational being. In this view, representation can only ever be partial. So whereas Tylor (1913 [1871]) argued that animism is a belief in spiritual beings and that within animistic practices, life and spirits are attributed to objects which make them animate (1913 [1871], I: 426-9) it is argued here that if we engage in real encounters, or relationships, with objects, then the *act* of relating becomes the animating quality, i.e. through the acts of speaking, touching, or simply being in the presence of. Mitchell writes,

Statues are not merely artifacts, but are substantive embodiments of saintly presence, which are both conduits of spiritual power and agents of such power in and of themselves. They are agents, in the sense understood by Gell (1988), endowed with the capacity to act, and their presence is confirmed both through being performed with, and through their own performances. As such, they combine *praesentia* and potential-presence and power-to unite transcendence and immanence (2009: 275).

Ingold’s (2011) meshwork can further be applied to the actions that take place in shrine and temple settings through the fluid, relational lines of SPIDER. Ingold says, ‘Every such line describes a flow of material substance in a space that is topologically fluid’ (2011: 64). Whereas ‘actor network theory’ (Latour, 2005) implies straight, rigid lines of connectivity which

emphasize the actors, i.e. the people or things that are connected, SPIDER's meshwork emphasizes the acts of connection and relationship, the actual relating. 'Meshwork is the 'web of life', not a network of connected points, but a meshwork of interwoven lines' (Ingold, 2011: 63).

Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess can take on their own animated qualities, not only through the expectations that devotees bring to them, but through historical contexts, their display, the offerings that are visible supporting testimonials to their power, and their presences within their shrine and temple settings. These lines on the web of SPIDER are contextual lines, i.e. these things (offerings, statues, stories) are interwoven into moments of active relating. Like caring for a newly planted sapling, the 'liveliness' of the Goddess and the Virgin emerges with the momentary nourishment of relationships and devotion. Ingold writes

It has been conventional to describe animism as a system of belief that imputes life to inert objects. But... such imputation is more typical of people in western societies who dream of finding life on other planets than of indigenous peoples to whom the label of animism has been generally applied. These peoples are united not in their belief but in a way of being that is alive and open to a world in continuous birth. In this animic ontology, beings do not propel themselves across a ready-made world but rather issue forth through a world-in-formation, along the lines of their relationships (Ingold, 2011: 66).

As mentioned before, this 'world-in-formation' discussion of Ingold's reflects the nature of relationality, i.e. if relationality is about ontological emergence in moments of active relating, then the implication is that relationality is in constant process of being and becoming. Relationality continually re-invents itself with each individual encounter. This also bears the

implication that the concept of agency is also regenerative and dependent upon active relational encounter. Ingold refers to agency thus:

the material world can only be brought back to life in the dreams of theorists by conjuring a magical mind-dust that, sprinkled among its constituents, is supposed to set them physically in motion (2011: 28).

This is because theorists cannot actually define the meaning of ‘agency’. Due to its relational, volatile nature it remains mystified and mysterious. Attributing this kind of ‘fairy dust’ agency to beings who are non-organisms, i.e. who do not have skill and who do not grow (2011: 94) may appear illogical to Ingold. Yet the case of statues is different. As Gell suggests, the agency that puts statues on the move is *religious* (1998: 99). From a modernist perspective, this could be equalled to sprinkling the fairy dust of agency on statues, but to devotees of religious statues, maintaining relationships is a significant factor in their faith (and who can argue with faith?).

So how is this concept of relationality applied to the case studies? Due to the impact of modernity and the nature of Enlightenment rationality, epistemologies and ontologies often complement, conflict, and collide. Devotees know that they venerate a ‘devotional’, a ‘statue’, ‘*un imagen*’, or what is meant to be a ‘representation’, yet this appears to be of little importance to the actual relationships they have with their statues. It is within this complex zone of relationality where solutions can be found that help broaden the concept of ‘representation’. Viveiros de Castro criticizes ‘representation’, saying

my problem with the concept of representation is the ontological poverty it implies — a poverty characteristic of modernity. The Cartesian break with medieval scholasticism produced a radical simplification of European ontology by positing only two principles or substances: unextended thought and extended matter. Modern thought began with that

simplification; and its massive conversion of ontological into epistemological questions (questions of representation) is still with us, a conversion prompted by the fact that every mode of being not assimilable to obdurate ‘matter’ had to be swallowed up by ‘mind’ (2004a: 482).

As Viveiros de Castro says, questions of representation are still with us. They are highly influential in how religious objects such as images and statues are understood. This is where relationality makes an advance. As mentioned previously, in the classic, Tylorean (1913 [1871]) understandings of animism, alien spirits take up residence in things of nature and matter. In contrast, Western animist relationality depends on relational encounters. It is not restricted to the theoretical confines of ‘spirits’ and matter, subjects and objects, or other dualisms, yet theoretically, it is capable of including these distinctions and more. Due to the epistemological nature of Catholicism and Goddess Paganism where statues and images are often referred to and theologically understood to be representations, Western animist relationality is so relational that sometimes Tylor’s (1913 [1871]) animism might be more appropriate than the new version to account for the ways in which statues are related to and interacted with. Although I engage the term ‘embodiment’ to indicate either the location of spirits/deities in matter where statues embody power in contrast to statues being referents to or ‘representations’ of power, they are both fluid and contextual terms, dependent on the quality of the moment. This understanding forms a core aspect of the concept of relationality and has inspired a ‘new’ definition of fetishism.

Similarly as I argue with regards to animism, it appears that there is not much room for discussing the transformative roles of matter without returning to the fetish. More than it being sought out by the researcher on her journey, the fetish has managed to find the researcher time

and time again. Yet the concept of the fetish betrays itself. It does exactly what it should not do. In one word it neatly packages the messiness that classifications such as ‘object/subject’ and ‘spirit/matter’ do not adequately survey. Applied to statues of the Virgin and the Goddess, this new kind of fetishism emerges as a sub-species of animism and it pushes animist relationality to its limits: statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are so relational that they can be inherently/independently powerful, representational, or both simultaneously. This assertion depends not only on the fact that statues are relational, but on *the manner in which* they are related to, i.e. through attributing and/or acknowledging the power of the Virgin and the Goddess, devotees become, in some sense, subordinate. This distinction indicates a ‘fetishist relationality’ which occurs when devotees relate to objects/statues as inherently powerful. Hence, the relationships and performances that take place in relation to the Virgin and the Goddess inform us about the powerful personhood of matter/statues. Defined as such, the fetish further broadens the parameters of relational engagement to include the possibility of matter having its own powerful agenda.

Vernacular Catholicism (or the *lived* reality of Catholicism) is usually a combination of popular piety and doctrinal protocol which means the way in which materiality is engaged varies from place to place. While popular piety and doctrinal protocol are on a continuum, i.e. they are separate but complementary, interwoven and mutually informative. This makes the kinds of devotions that take place not only unknowable to outsiders, but also unpredictable. For example, the Virgin of Alcala is embodied when she is being engaged, addressed and treated as a living, breathing woman. This is ‘unofficial’. To attribute power to a statue is, officially, idolatry. In these moments can also be that which she is doctrinally said to represent, i.e. the ‘universal Mary’. She can also be engaged as if she only representation. This depends on who or what is

doing the relating. Thus, the status of the Virgin is relational, making her changeable with each personal, devotional encounter within her overriding roles as universal divine mother and intercessor.

The *thealogy* surrounding Goddess worship is more flexible than Catholic theology. In theory, the Glastonbury Goddess is more relational than the Virgin of Alcala. For example, Glastonbury Goddess Pagans discuss their statues in terms of both embodiment *and* representation without fear of theological repercussions. Georgina said the Goddess embodies the figures in the temple, while others said that the figures are representations of the Goddess. Further, as we have seen in the ethnographic accounts, the Goddess is ‘called into the temple’ so that she may take up residence daily. Then, she is ritually dismissed, or ‘let go’, in the evening to ‘rest’. The Goddess is also said to ‘hover’ above Glastonbury and be present in the land simultaneously. The transcendent, hovering Goddess is ritually controlled as to how and when she enters the temple, ‘bides’ as devotees say, and is embodied in the statues (or not, depending on who or what is doing the relating). In moments of active relating, the case of the Glastonbury Goddess is one of Pels’ animistic ‘spirit *in* matter’ (1998: 91), i.e. the spirit or deity is in the land, but also hovering above it, ritually brought in to inhabit the temple and the statues, is said to move through the physical forms of the statues, then let go of the evening. This flexibility of spirit/the divine taking up residence in matter is one of *theological* freedom where monotheism and polytheism are interchangeable.

Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are treated as gods (or goddesses or virgins as the case may be). Ideally, this would be true of the Glastonbury Goddess religion. Yet due to her existence in a predominantly Protestant country, research found that the Goddess is referred to more often as a representation than embodied. Contrasted with the Virgin of Alcala, the *Santero*

told me that this particular statue of the Virgin has power (*'ella tiene el poder'*). I found that his belief reflects a common understanding of the statue. Although devotees know that the statue is a statue and a supposed representation of the universal Virgin Mary, her local, vernacular form is treated and addressed otherwise. As Holbraad said about the powder of Cuban diviners *being* power (2007), in this case the statue *is* power. If fetishism is defined as a discourse with which to understand the power of matter (acknowledging that Catholic devotees of the Virgin of Alcala do not self-identify as fetishists), then the role of matter in this case is fetishistic. The *Santero* said that the Virgin grants miracles, and if she does not want to grant a petition or request, then she will not do it. Theologically, Mary is intercessor. Because of her role as the mother of Christ, she only has the power to petition Christ, who then will petition God on behalf of his mother (who hears the pleas and prayers of devotees). This attributes power to the actual statue deity rather than to God. If the Virgin has power of her accord (independent of Jesus or God), then this exemplifies the case of Pels' fetishistic 'spirit of matter' (1998: 91) and further brings into question the power relations that take place between devotees and statues, a matter of which will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Relationality is such that it also extends to temporality. Although this thesis is mainly focused on what happens when devotees are in the presence of the Goddess or the Virgin of Alcala, what happens temporally and when devotees are not in the presence of the statues must also be addressed. The personal, intimate relationships that devotees have while they are in the presence of the Virgin and Goddess figures might take on different qualities to those that occur when devotees are at distances from the shrine and temple. For example, when a person thinks about the Virgin and the Goddess and crosses him or herself or makes an offering, does that remembrance and action activate the object person and help them come into being? Specifically,

do the souvenirs that are bought from the shrine or temple that bear the images of the statues have the same power as the statues themselves, or are these replicas of replicas? Although these objects can be bought at the shrine and temple, they will certainly bear personal, intimate meanings for those who have visited the shrine or Temple and carried them away. Their presence and the fact they are bought, sold, and given as gifts, can, however, be understood as other forms of active, temporal relating that help maintain relationships with the Virgin and the Goddess.

Statue persons

Building on Harvey's animism (2005b), persons are made and/or brought into being in several different ways, all of which aid in the emergence of ontological possibilities found in relational engagement. Personhood is a process. Persons emerge through treatment, the ways in which they are addressed, and through the relationships that ensue accordingly. This is how statues become subjective, relational participants in ritual, ceremony and everyday religious activities.

Employing Hallowell's (1960) idea of personhood, the Virgin and the Goddess can be considered *statue persons*. The raw materials used in the actual making of statues/statue persons will now be considered as a significant factor in the process of testing the role that materiality plays in the shrine of the Virgin and the Goddess temple. The actual composition of statues and some of the ways in which they literally become persons, indeed, communal and private relations, will now be addressed.

In the cases studies, all the physical forms of the deities started as wood that was then shaped into human-like figures. The potentiality of personhood was already present in their 'raw material' form. How is it that human made 'things', or artefacts, created from wood become

sacred focuses of adoration? What are the 'steps to sacrality' that raw materials must undergo? How is the wood chosen? How do carved and woven forms achieve statuses that make them worthy of either embodying or representing the divine (or both), or even having their own power? According to Ingold (2011), we must look to their properties to see their 'stories', not what humans attribute to them. He writes

Thus the properties of materials, regarded as constituents of an environment, cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational. They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced. In that sense, every property is a condensed story. To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate (2011: 30).

Materials are specifically chosen in both of the case studies because their properties contain spiritual significance. Yet arguably, the question must be asked as to whether or not it was the materials that choose the creators of the statues, the creators that choose the materials, or a relational combination of both? I suggest the latter. The properties of materials, and their place within the meshwork, choose the creators of objects just as much as the creators (who also form part of the meshwork) choose them.

In terms of materials, the statue of the Virgin of Alcala is made from cedar and then painted. Cedar is used in the creation of many Catholic statues not only because of its durable, hard qualities, but also because it is mentioned several times throughout the Bible, usually in reference to the most famous Cedar of Lebanon. Cedar is also an expensive wood. The quality of the wood reflects the preciousness of the statue. The Goddess figures are continually created by a

woman artist who is a Glastonbury Goddess devotee. I called her once to arrange an interview for when she was back in Glastonbury. I left her my phone number but she never returned my call. It was important for me to reach this artist so that I could better understand the ways in which the statues are made, i.e. like the painter of the Lady of Avalon, does this artist go into a trance-like state during the creative process, or does she perform any kind of ritual in preparation for sourcing the willow? Whether or not these things occur would have been useful to this thesis in terms of understanding how raw materials are transformed into objects of devotion. I do know, however, Georgina that the Goddess figures are woven from willow that is sourced locally from the Somerset levels and that it has a 'powerful connection with water'. This is important for this group as the land surrounding Glastonbury is the Goddess. Therefore, it is speculated here, that the willow used to make the figures is part of 'her'. When people relate to the figures in the Temple, they are relating to a physical aspect of the Goddess. Georgina expressed her belief that this use of indigenous materials helps promote the indigenous 'feeling' of the whole religiosity. I suggest that using locally sourced materials also helps promote vernacular re-territorialization of the Goddess religion in Glastonbury.

The creation of statues, or the literal making of gods, is, as Graeber might say, 'pure social creativity' (2005: 411). Through different processes, these wooden figures became valuable to the communities within which they were situated. Indeed they began to receive devotion, veneration, and gifts. The Glastonbury Goddess statues and the statue of the Virgin of Alcala are/were made, in theory, as copies of envisaged otherworldly prototypes, yet they are treated physically as divine royalty. Once constructed, they are thought to contain supernatural power. Statues of the Goddess and Virgin are said to protect, to heal, to perform miracles, or to help, for example, provide claims to lands lost to historical disruptions, and one can negotiate with them.

Somehow, these figures began to inspire reverence and respect, and hold positions of spiritual governance and dominion over their locales. Further, when religious statue persons are made, so are, in some respects, relations. Although statue persons are worshipped, they also occupy social roles and central positions in their respective religious communities. They are created and used in ways that might be responsible for the consequent formation of social relations amongst human persons, and they are also things that become significant to their communities through their making, position, and the repetitive actions that people have with them thereafter. If we once again trust the etymology of the fetish, i.e. ‘that which is made’ (Johnson, 2000: 229), and consider the possibility that statues are ‘fetishized’ in the Marxist sense, a helpful pattern emerges. Graeber (2005) writes,

We create things, and then, because we don’t understand how we did it, we end up treating our own creations as if they had power over us. We fall down and worship that which we ourselves have made (2005: 411).

Cedar statues of Mary and willow figures of the Goddess have fetishistic value in the Marxist sense where statues bear qualities, or essences, of their creators. As the creator of the painting in the Goddess Temple indicated, she has a relationship with her own divinely inspired creation and that relationship originates from the essences and peculiarities of her labour. In the case of the Virgin of Alcala, the statue has relationally taken on power that is both external and alien (theological Mary), and internalized (the statue *is* power). The intentions of each individual who encounter the Goddess or the Virgin in moments of active relating can be understood to outweigh, replace and alienate the intentions of the non-present creators of the statues. This is not to say that the essence of a statue maker cannot be present in a statue, but when a religious

object is fashioned so that it may be a copy of a prototype, the rules must change. The intentionality of religious statue creation must involve a certain amount of intentional alienation so that, as we have seen in the account of Caroline, the creator of the Goddess painting, the deity can settle into his or her physical form. Artists and creators of religious objects must step back and away from their creation in order to make them deity-worthy.

Physical characteristics

It has already been mentioned that for something to have personhood, the presence of human characteristics are not necessary. Yet human features such as eyes, hands, mouths, countenances, and gendered form are clearly present physical aspects of the Virgin and the Goddess. Arguably, these iconic features, uniquely local, carved and created, affect presence, agency and relationships within the contexts of each religiosity. Gell considers ‘externalist’ and ‘internalist’ theories of agency to account for those idols *who have eyes*. Apart from the animacy attributed to them by human persons, religious statues are capable of a reflexive type of ‘interiority’ which signifies ‘the possession of mind and intentionality’ (1998: 136). This provides Harvey’s idea of personhood with a different angle. If personhood works with stones and other non anthropoid objects in other indigenous contexts, it works particularly well when applied to anthropoid statues in Western religious indigenous contexts.

It might take quite a leap to come to terms with the fact that stones can be persons. It is, however, less of a leap to consider how anthropoid statue persons can be persons. Devotees treat, respond to, dress, adorn, address, and generally relate to statues of the divine (in Western Europe) as if they are persons/people in the biological sense. They are given jewelry made for

humans and dressed in different sized versions of human-like clothes. Gell (1998) writes in relation to images and icons:

The basic thesis of this work, to recapitulate, is that works of art, images, icons, and the like have to be treated, in the context of an *anthropological* theory, as person-like; that is, sources of, and targets for, social agency. In this context, image-worship has a central place, since nowhere are images more obviously treated as human persons than in the context of worship and ceremonies (1998: 6).

It has been demonstrate through the ethnographic accounts that the Virgin and the Goddess are spoken about, directly to, and treated as if they embody female deities. These actions (bathing, dressing, singing to) go beyond symbolism and into ‘real action’. It is not symbolic. It is not ‘pretend’ or, as Gell says, ‘make believe’ (1998: 134). In relation to what he calls ‘problem of idolatry (1998: 135), he writes

The essence of idolatry is that it permits *real physical interactions* to take place between persons and divinities. To treat such interactions as ‘symbolic’ is to miss the point (1998: 135).

Take for example, the *Santero*’s reference to the Virgin as *ella* (she). Like Harvey’s kettles, statues of the Goddess and the Virgin of Alcala are spoken to and about in ways which are similar to how humans speak to or about other humans. The act of dressing the Virgin is also indicative of a kind of gender specific anthropomorphized animacy. The Virgin of Alcala has female undergarments made especially for her small frame. When she is being dressed she is made aware of the next movements, as doctors might make patients continually aware of their

intentions. The *camaristas* say, ‘Now we are going to move your arms so that we can put this over you’. Further, because the Virgin is a *virgin*, they protect her modesty when she is being bathed. Yolanda (one of the *camaristas*) said that during the act of bathing, some of the women hold a sheet up so that the statue does not feel vulnerable while she is naked. The women who hold up the sheet look away respectfully and do not watch the others who are doing the bathing. This is so that so many eyes are not on the Virgin’s ‘naked’ form at the same time. When asked about this, the *camaristas* said that they treat her like a woman would want to be treated, and they know this from their own experiences as women. These objects are treated, dressed and performed for in female gendered ways. There must have been a point when the material of statues went from being ‘it’ gender neutral to being ‘she’ gender specific. Perhaps ‘she’ (the Goddesses or the Virgin) began to emerge as a feminine statue-person when the willow or cedar used in the statue’s creations began to take on human-like characteristics. Yet her full ‘being’ might not have emerged until ‘she’ was situated in context in her shrine or temple and began to receive veneration. This will never be known to anyone, but it will suffice to say that when statue persons come into being, it is a processional, creative occurrence founded on the active and temporal relationships between those who create and love them and the statues themselves.

Further, when, as stated in the ethnographic account, the Virgin of Alcala is being bathed and dressed by the *camaristas*, they speak to her saying, ‘Aren’t you beautiful today’. They also make a fuss when changing the small statue of the baby Jesus that the Virgin holds, saying ‘Hold still and stop squirming, son!’ They speak to him like they would a baby of human flesh. This change in language forms a significant part of this project as it not only expresses animacy through relational language patterns with statues and objects, but it informs us as to the nature of our own modern consciousness and how we relate with objects in Western religious discourses.

Applicable to the venerative practices that take place around the Virgin and Goddess, in relation to Hindu *murti* statue devotion, Gell says

It is surely irrational, or at least strange, to speak to, offer food to, dress and bathe a mere piece of sculpture, rather than a living breathing human being. And so it is: those who do these things are just as aware of the ‘strangeness’ of their behavior as we are, but they also hold, which we do not, that the cult of the idol is religiously efficacious, and will result in beneficial consequences for themselves and the masters they serve in their capacity as priests (1998: 122).

This kind of reflexive understanding referred by Gell is commonplace among devotees found in both religiosities discussed in this thesis. Although this is not a thesis founded on psychological or cognitive theories, I am proposing that Western animism now be considered as two things: first, it is a mutual response between devotees and statues which is aided by the statues’ human characteristics. Second, and as a departure from Piaget’s (1929) animism where children are thought to be naturally animistic until they grow into a more sophisticated knowledge about the world, I argue that animism is a self conscious choice in light of adult or mature understandings of the world. So if Guthrie (1993) argues that animism is a form of projection that occurs naturally, or spontaneously, instead of a conscious choice to see the world animistically, I am arguing that in the cases of the Goddess and the Virgin devotees of these statues choose to be devotees. It is not the same as when humans encounter animals and anthropomorphize, or when they speak about their cars as being able to perform animal like sounds. In moments of statue devotion, devotees both animate and anthropomorphize simultaneously. Likewise, if statues are

persons (albeit divine and powerful) and are treated accordingly, then they, too, must have choices in their responses to devotees. They must have their own perspectives.

Perspectives

Persons have what Viveiros de Castro (2000, 2004a) calls ‘perspectives’. The vast amount of ontological possibilities present in Viveiros de Castro’s ‘perspectives’ encompass a large area where continuums of kinship and relations are possible. Based on the Amerindian conception, ontological perspectivism asserts ‘a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity’ (2000: 470). Gell tells us that ‘Idols, in other words, are not depictions, not portraits, but (artefactual) *bodies*’ (1998: 98). Comparing European discourses with Amerindian cosmologies, Viveiros de Castro asserts that every creature, plant, object and stone (or lots of different bodies) have ‘perspectives’, and that humans and other than humans have perspectives from the points of view of the unique compositions of their bodies. He writes,

Thus, what I call ‘body’ is not a synonym for distinctive substance or fixed shape; it is an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus*. Between the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms, there is thus an intermediate plane which is occupied by the body as a bundle of affects and capacities and which is the origin of perspectives (2004a: 475).

Yet he says that for something to have a ‘perspective’ or a ‘point of view’, it must have a ‘soul’ (2004a: 482). Ontological perspectivism is not the same as ontological emergence. Statues do not have ‘souls’ in the same way that human persons and non-human persons (such as animals) have souls. Yet this conception is here expanded upon to include statue persons who do have a type of *body*. Spiritual unity is found within the religious cultures of devotees of the Virgin and the

Goddess, and corporeal diversity is found in both the bodies *and cultures* of devotees and statues. Because statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are treated as persons capable of either housing, embodying, or representing the otherworldly, or the divine, then they can also potentially have a point of view.

Viveiros de Castro's reference to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* illustrates that the component parts of the whole, although seemingly unrelated, reflect a generated interrelatedness beings, bodies, things, experiences, even beliefs, which are structured from inherited notions of perception. *Habitus* has a broad potentiality of understandings that can be applied to statues in their temple/shrine environment and their learned behavior as such, i.e. statues are influenced by the materiality in their environment as well as the ensuing performances that take place there. They therefore come to expect certain behaviors from their devotees as well as to have their environment kept in a particular way, especially once they have been resident there for centuries, such as is the case with the Virgin of Alcala. In its theoretical agility, *habitus* can also be considered an active and creative response-like relationship between people and their ontologies/worlds, always in the process of being and becoming as actors (and devotees) are subject to a range of different experiences, circumstances and relationships which would presumably allow for ontological possibilities to emerge.

It must be noted here that perspectives are not relativistic. This is a departure from Rowlands' (2005: 73) relativistic materiality which indicates that objects should not be automatically afforded their own constitutions when divorced from the processes that created them. Building on Viveiros de Castro's idea that 'perspectives' are not relative to plants, animals, objects and other persons, relativism implies that there is an objective, core, central, culturally agreed upon ideology to which all things, actions, and persons must be relative. In the case studies, identities

of the Goddess and the Virgin are not fixed. These statues are subjects capable of participating in co-relational activities and exchanges. Although human persons often relate to statues as social relations (because human persons and statue persons share culture in terms of religion), the perspective of being ‘social’ belongs to human persons. Statue persons form a part of human person social networks, and they also belong to other ways of being that are unknown to us because they have different points of view located within their ‘statue-bodies’. We can therefore only speculate as to the extent of their sociability in terms the relationships that human persons have with them (and the accounts given accordingly while conducting research). As the relational methodology used in this thesis indicates, statue persons are capable of being sociable while maintaining their own ontologies if that is what relationships with human persons require. This exemplifies how relationality is not relativism because religious statues such as the Goddess and the Virgin do not always share the idea of that which they should be relative to.

In my own experiences with the Virgin I have participated in more than one private encounter where I have placed my head under her mantle and asked for a miracle. Although I do not have the same perspective as a devotee, I was emotionally moved by the experiences. Here, a type of relational ontology emerged between us. I am asserting that the Virgin was brought into a form of *being* in the moment when I had an emotional response within the encounter. For that matter, it can be argued that we both entered into relational engagement where we were both transformed into subjects of one another. The Virgin went from being an ‘object’ of my study to a relational being, while I went from being a researcher to a momentary devotee. Further, the *Santero* claims that I was brought to that particular shrine by the power of that particular Virgin. He said that she ‘called me’ there. So if I am to take the idea of relational engagements and co-inspired responsiveness seriously, then the proposition that the Virgin called me to her shrine is

also a possibility. If the Virgin called me to her shrine, then it can be suggested that it was not only the theological, ‘universal’ Mary that did so, but this particular, local Virgin from her particular, bodily, ‘powerful’ perspective. The relationship I now have with the Virgin, either temporally while I sit here writing about my experiences with her (thus imagining her and her shrine), or while I am in her physical presence, point to the fact that ontological possibilities are as varied and unique as the persons entering into such engagements.

‘To fetish’

In understanding this thesis’ relational perspective, we can also employ Johnson’s (2000) suggestion that we reinstate the fetish as a ‘fluid, mediating term, an idea about objects, not an object itself – a mode of action, “to fetish”’ (2000: 260) as a way to discuss forms of performance driven devotion. He says,

Fetish may be best viewed as a mode of action rather than a kind of object itself. It is a condensation of social powers onto an object in order to reconfigure them. "To fetish" would therefore be more apt than "fetish." Viewed in this broad sense, it is a structuring technique of human consciousness in time, not an evolutionary stage of the false attribution of power to objects, a stage now surpassed (2000: 249).

This thesis holds that the attribution of power to objects is one of many sophisticated and complex forms of relationally engaging the world and religion, the idea of using the fetish in verb-form, i.e. ‘to fetish’ implies motive action, i.e. repeatedly creatively inventing and reinventing ties with the divine. Here the outcome would be similar to that which is proposed of animism, i.e. ‘to fetish’ implies an active form of co-relationality between statues and devotees. For example, the Virgin is intimately linked to her territory, and (according to both the *Santero* and Father Marco) to remove her, even if it is for a short period of time, distresses devotees.

When the statue is taken out of her shrine, the relationships that people have with her are placed under a certain amount of strain which indicates that the *whole* of this vernacular religiosity is fundamentally based on the statue being present in her shrine where she can physically be seen and/or accessed. Unlike the cyclical nature of the Glastonbury Goddess religion, the nature of Catholicism is one that denotes a ‘linear faith’. It is based on an absolute beginning and end. The care with which the Catholic statue undergoes maintenance and restoration is indicative of its value to devotees. As mentioned in the chapter of the Virgin, I was told that the *camaristas* are currently taking a restoration course together so that ‘their Virgin’ does not have to leave her shrine. The preservation and continuation of the physical statue of the Virgin is of the utmost importance in maintaining relationships and the figures relational status.

When statues of the Goddess begin to deteriorate, instead of undergoing a restoration process as the Virgin does, the willow figures are ceremonially burned to make way for new statues, as suits their religiosity’s focus on continual transformation and seasonal renewal. The painting of the Goddess that holds the centre of the temple together is the only static object there, i.e. it is the only object that is not moved around, changed, dressed and re-dressed. The artist of the painting also mused over the fact that her painting will be there long after she herself is dead if it is preserved properly.

Further, time is an important factor in establishing relational status among devotees of both the Goddess and Virgin, i.e. the longer the statue has been around, the more significance it seems to have. Here, time and continuation through the preservation of rituals and customs have made this statue a relation among her community. Caroline (the woman who created the central painting of the Goddess Temple) told me that in time, this image will grow more powerful, i.e. the more people who worship and pay homage to this image of the Goddess, the more powerful

it/she becomes. These are prime examples of what it means ‘to fetish’ things. So religion, like relationality, in its flexibility is not only a mutual response between devotees and statues, but it is also a mode of action.

Performing Statues

If how we treat statues is indicative of one of the ways in which their animacy and relational statuses are exemplified, then how they treat devotees is also an indication of their animacy and potential relational perspectives. How might this work? Although statues are physically passive in terms of motility, they are active in other ways. Pels (2003) has noted that

People perform objects . . . but these objects also perform people by constraining their movements and by suggesting particular encounters between them and others’. Similarly, in various ways, amulets, mascots and charms influenced the ways in which people behaved in certain situations, directly affecting how they experienced and navigated the world (2003: 13).

From what Pels argues, it can be suggested that religious experiences with performing ‘objects’ are co-created. The expectations that devotees have of them creates the reciprocal means through which statues perform and relate back. The Goddess and the Virgin are said to grant wishes and miracles, they empathize, they care, they protect against drought, they cure infertility, they heal, and they do numerous other things through influencing powers ‘out there in the ether’. Devotees perform for them in order to receive blessings and gifts of a supernatural or mystical quality and these performances are based on relationships and faith. Accounts given by Goddess and Virgin devotees relay experiences of animation and movement. For example, statues of the Virgin Mary are notorious for producing tears. Warner says,

In medieval miracle stories, statues and paintings, in accordance with iconodule belief, are constantly coming to life. In many the Virgin weeps, as she did in 1953 in Syracuse and elsewhere more recently; in one, a Saracen is converted when her breasts become flesh and flow with oil (1978: 293)

Tear production is one of the ways in which statues perform for devotees. For example, Caroline (the creator of the painting in the Goddess Temple) says that when she stands under the painting and looks up, the eyes of the Goddess will become tearful with empathy for whatever it is that the artist is feeling or ‘taking to her’ in terms of problems. According to the *camaristas* the Virgin has emotions. Paqui told me that she has seen tears on the statue’s face during the intimate, ‘very feminine’ process of bathing and changing the Virgin.

Other ways in which statues perform are through changes in facial expressions. The three *camaristas* I interviewed said that they have seen the statue’s facial expression change. The *Santero* said that he has seen ‘his Virgin’ as he calls her, go from angry, to sad, to joyous. The Virgin punishes him and her face looks angry when he does something as simple as killing a mosquito. The Nine Morgens have plaster cast faces that have also been said to ‘smile’ or ‘be pissy’. Here, too, facial expressions change when the statues are participating in relational encounters with devotee.

A final example of one of the ways in which statues perform comes from the account given by the *Santero* on our first encounter in the spring of 2007. He said at the event of her coronation in the early 1990’s, statues of the Virgin from villages in the surrounding province of Cadiz were brought to the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala to witness her crowning. The *Santero* said she was recognized as being more ‘queenly’ than other statues of the Virgin. Here, statues performed for

other statues. As such it can be suggested that the Virgin of Alcala is thought capable of recognizing her own status, position and sovereignty over other statues. These performances are the results of co-inspired, mutual, personal, private encounters with the divine. These, too, are some of the ways in which relationality/Western animism/relationality works and how statues are relational, subjective participants in performances with devotees.

Display and relational aesthetic

As a final point to this chapter, but not least in importance, relational aesthetics play an important, visible role in statue devotion. The ways in which statues are displayed and whether or not they are physically accessible is a significant factor in understanding how performance inspires and promotes relationality, perspectives, ontological emergence. Whether or not a statue can be touched and physically interacted with has an impact on the role that 'it' as materiality plays contextually. Aesthetics also promote inspiration for further creative modes of religious material expression that therefore promote survival and continuation of further practices. Further (and as will be discussed in great detail in the following Chapter 7) the aesthetics and economy of offerings that occur in relation to the Goddess and the Virgin are sometimes tangible, experiential, sensual, and rely on relational encounters. These component parts create the whole of shrine, temple and altar experiences.

A statue that is touched frequently, such as the Virgin of Alcala, might play a more animated, fetishistic role to her devotees than one who is not. Touch aids in fostering relationships. If statues 'embody' the Goddess or the Virgin, or if they are seen as the bodies of the Virgin and the Goddess, then it is no surprise that devotees feel the urge to touch them. Turner says, 'By personifying the sacred bodily image a woman transforms it – transubstantiates it – into a living

presence' (1999: 115). As an example, Turner writes about a female devotee of Mary who features a statue of the Virgin on her private altar:

“Most of us look at a statue or a picture and we know it's just that , but we don't want it to be just that. It's our link. Even though it's made out of stone, it's not just stone – it's spirit... With Mary, I hope that she will someday envelop me physically, and take me in her robes” (Turner, 1999: 115).

The importance of being able to touch a statue of devotion influences the strength of interactions with that statue. The Virgin of Alcala is deliberately accessible and displayed in such a way as to fill the senses and promote passionate, tangible involvement. She can be touched, smelled and felt. Her mantle is a point of interaction, and prayer requests in the form of little notes can be seen under her feet. This inspires closeness and intimacy. More so, when one is underneath the back of the heavy protective mantle, the cloth hangs down over one's body to the extent that everything goes dark. This is the closest and most intimate that devotees can physically get with the statue and figures of both case studies.

In contrast, the Goddess figures appear to be designed to play more of an aesthetic role. One can sit directly at their feet or at the altar on sheepskin rugs and light candles, pray, meditate, or leave written petitions and prayers in a basket on the altar. The willow with which they are made is rough. The wicker figures are not solid, but appear to be 'flimsy', tall and slim. The fabrics that hang from the figures of the Goddess are positioned in deliberate ways which are immovable, and therefore, in contrast to the Virgin, reflect inaccessibility. The Goddess statues sit against the temple wall as would a vase or a decoration, facing outward. Further, there are few actions or thing that one can 'do' with her. Sometimes things (such as jewelry or photos) are seen

pinned on the body of the Goddess, but there is no set protocol where the figures of the Goddess can be interacted with such as in the case of ‘the mantle’ of the Virgin. When I first met the *camaristas*, for example, one of the first questions they asked me was (and I paraphrase) ‘Have you been to the shrine? Did you go beneath the mantle?’ ‘Going beneath the mantle’ can be considered, apart from tugging on the penis of the fertility Jesus, the main thing ‘to do’ in the shrine of the Virgin. An equivalence of this might be sitting or lying in the centre of the protective circle of the Morgens when in the Goddess Temple, yet still there is very little contact with the figures themselves. It must be noted that, however, if the Santero does not want someone to enter the chamber of the Virgin, or if he is mistrustful of a person, he will not allow that person entry. This is, he told me, because of the amount of gold that the Virgin wears.

Another example of positioning and display can be found in a Catholic statue of Mary, Our Lady of Glastonbury. This English statue receives very little by way of passionate displays of physical touch and affection. She is displayed in such a way as to not be accessible to devotees that go into the shrine to see her. She stands on a tall, lean pedestal (at least seven feet high) at the back wall of the shrine, and further, behind red velvet ropes strategically placed to keep people out. I personally found the display of this statue to be impersonal. Indicative of never physically realized courtly love, it can be suggested that her devotees remain caught in a tension imposed by reform and modernity, where their failing needs for physicality with the object of their devotion are barely, if ever, realized. This creates an interesting contrast. If the focus of this thesis is about materiality and relationships, then what we have here is a case of relating to from afar. Hence, the findings of this case study complex reflect the importance (or non importance) of touch in religious material encounters.

As argued in Chapter 4, the reason for the acceptability of these close encounters rests on the fact that southern Spanish Catholicism has suffered few, minor disruptions throughout its more recent religious history. What disruptions it has encountered were not the same as the direct assaults on Catholicism, and thus on religious materiality which resulted from the Protestant Reformation. In terms of the Goddess religiosity, the Protestant Reformation, coupled with the particular effects that the Enlightenment had on modernity in England, has affected how materiality is used, engaged and reproduced in various British religiosities. For example, and as previously mentioned, the Glastonbury Goddess figures are designed mainly for aesthetic purposes, not necessarily to be touched. While touch of the actual figures is not forbidden, it is not encouraged. This can be attributed to the wider effects of both modernity and the Protestant Reformation, both movements of which, due to the focus on transcendence, discourage physical, active relating with materiality for fear of it being seen to point toward common ignorance, a pagan past, or primitive alterity. Hence, aesthetics, arrangement and display play an important role in relational encounters with statues.

Altar, temple and shrine aesthetics inform display and display informs modes of devotion. Turner says ‘Women’s altars promote an *aesthetic of relationship*’ (1999: 95) where power is activated. The important role that the aesthetics that these ‘other objects’ play is apparent in how the ‘stage is set’ for performers, or would be actors in relational encounters with objects, to perform acts of devotion at altars and with statues. For example, the aesthetics found in the Glastonbury Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala, especially in terms of color, follow patterns in accordance with the liturgical and ritual years. In this sense of changing aesthetics, and in terms of the temple dressings and the changing of the Virgin’s mantles, there are similarities. There are, however, also notable differences. In the Catholic case study, the

statue is the focus of liturgical and aesthetic change. The colors of her mantles reflect the time of year, and her ritual bathing and dressing are the main events that take place around her. The shrine aesthetic with the *ex votos* and other permanent fixtures remain unchanged. In contrast, the whole of the materiality in the Goddess Temple is subject to change with the ritual year. Not only are the Goddess figures dressed and changed, but the whole of the temple aesthetic is overhauled in a flurry of mass creativity and materiality. The use of colors, the offerings, the smells of flowers, the candles, and incense, all have the ability to tie the whole of religious experience together for the performers to come ‘on stage’, the stage set for devotion, and perform.

Material use and display (on altars or placed on statues) are capable of creating messages that contain cues for different types of religious experience and/or inspiration. According to Hall display and arrangement work ‘like a language’ (2003: 8). Apart from the ontological perspectives afforded objects whereby they are capable of supporting their own discourse, objects left on altars and statues can also be understood as experiential fusing agents. Similar to putting a plug in a socket which activates and transmits the before mentioned experiential cues, it can be suggested that the act of offering links not only the agent-devotee into their own individual experience, but other shrine and temple visitors who view the ‘setting’ and are potentially inspired by the votive offerings left by others. In these cases, aesthetics are not limited to superficial visibility. Offerings are also indicative of the types of relationships had between devotees and statues. In support of this, Kay Turner tells us that

Its [the altar’s] aesthetic of relationship urges acceptance of a religiously grounded paradox: this site of material accumulation serves the circulation of spiritual riches (Turner, 1999:109).

Certainly because of the accessible and tactile nature of the altar experience in the both the shrine of the Virgin and Goddess Temple relationships are promoted and strengthened, and the objects passed from devotees (agents of offerings) are capable of becoming the ‘shapers’ of religious experience. As with the stones discussed by Harvey (2005b), some objects found in the shrine and the temple are more relational than others, yet most have relational possibilities. For example (and as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7), the relational status of offerings given to statues of the Goddess and Virgin and of those left at altars and in the temple and shrine have mediating qualities, some of which are capable of containing their own discourses, power, and/or the essences of their givers, others of which are *mere objects*. Further, there are several other objects that are resident within the temple and shrine, some of whom are persons and others of which are not. Identities and statuses of other temple objects shift in accordance with placement and use. Many of the objects in the Goddess Temple, for example, are moved around, and therefore their position, status and potentiality of personhood constantly change with the creative ebb and flow of the temple. Pieces of colored cloth will be used one season as a particular thing, while the next season it may be used to dress an aspect of the temple related to something entirely different. Many of the materials used in the temple, such as statues, stones and candles are used in temple dressings time and time again, but they are never used in the same way. Also in the Goddess Temple, many of the objects are stored in the attic where they are used and reused seasonally. They even intermingle seasonally. Yet how these objects, such as long pieces of shiny material, statues, bones, shells, candles, and stones, reincarnate, so to speak, indicates their relational status and personhood potentiality. Further, they have the opportunity to have relationships with the different objects next to whom/which they are displayed.

Combinations of objects on display also help shape the altar, shrine and temple experience. Turner says in relation to domestic altars, 'If the first aesthetic goal of an altar is to represent relationship, then the primary artistic move is to set potent images in relation to each other' (1999: 96). Altar objects might 'represent relationship', but they can also *be* in relationship with their arrangers. Once placed and arranged on altars, or at the feet of statues, identities of objects change according to who or what other object is nearby.

The altar displays discussed by Turner are, however, in context. They are in their domestic settings. They will not encounter the same issues as they might find if they were to be displayed in museums. Shrine and temple objects change because they become publically visible. In comparison with how museum objects are displayed, Yiao-hwei says,

Objects can mean different things when they are displayed or grouped with a different with a different collection of companions (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991: 100). That is to say, as the contextual placement of an object changes, so the significance of that object is transformed (2000: 116).

When objects are moved around in the Goddess Temple, their roles change depending on whom or what object 'companion' is next to them. A male Goddess devotee whom I encountered in the temple one day told me, 'some objects are more representational than others'. Never quite getting to the bottom of what this meant, I took it to mean that some objects carry heavier weight of some kind while others are less important. There are varying degrees of being, and being representational. Once placed and arranged on altars, or at the feet of statues, identities, purpose, and value of objects change. They go from being 'everyday things', commodities, or something

of sentimental value to being things that are devotionally valuable which is highly relational, yet they can also maintain their previous forms simultaneously.

Although there are no ‘rules’ in place about how offerings can or should be valued in terms of economic viability in either of the case studies discussed here, there *are* protocol and rubric involved in terms of the acceptability or unacceptability of offerings. The materiality found in the Goddess Temple is bright, colourful, often sparkling or shiny in some way. According to Turner,

A pleasing visual environment helps make the altar a desirable place, both for its creator and for her deities. Decorative materials enhance the altar’s possibilities for communication. Their texture, glitter, and bright colors – their visual vitality – provide an inducement for focusing on the power made available at the altar (1999: 104).

Although individually inspired creativity is valued in each case study, especially with regards to the Goddess religion, there are common rubrics that are adhered to in both Catholicism and Goddess Paganism. These rubrics create and perpetuate the aesthetic of the temple and the shrine. This acceptability or non-acceptability of offerings is rooted in the agreed upon vernacular shrine/temple aesthetics of the religiosities. They are also a combination of doctrine, popular devotion and what devotees think that their deity/saint will enjoy or find acceptable. This is because in both case studies, ‘she’ has certain expectations. As we have seen in the Goddess religion case study, a decorated mannequin head was left on the altar in the temple. This offering was quickly removed from the altar and thrown away (I was told with a certain amount of disgust on the part of the informant) so as not to ruin the carefully preserved temple aesthetic. In essence, ‘just any old thing’ will not do, although this alien offering might have carried with it a

wealth of devotional value and intentionality. This kind of decorative protocol affects how and what shrine and temple offerings are acceptable and therefore displayed. Therefore those who make offerings are not given total freedom of expression, which imposes limitations on the devotional imaginative process. So whereas the Protestant reformation and Enlightenment thinking might have had an effect on material engagement with statues (a fact which could simply be attributed to the ways in which the wicker figures are not particularly easy to touch), the effort and creativity that goes into decorating the Goddess Temple plays a significant factor in relational engagement with materiality more broadly.

Conclusion to Chapter 6

Bringing questions of agency into light, this chapter has proposed that relationships with statues serve as a testing ground for understanding the roles of matter in Western cultural discourses generally. It has found that the exaggerated roles of the religious objects discussed *in context* demonstrate their potential relationality. Here, statue persons are found to be active, relational subjects of devotion whose personhood emerges during moments of active relating. This is evidenced in how the Virgin and the Goddess are created, treated, addressed, displayed and given gifts (the latter being discussed in detail in Chapter 7). Following relational theoretical discourses, this chapter has surveyed the relational roles of the statues of the Glastonbury Goddess and the Virgin of Alcala. It has provided the reader with a relational framework from which to understand how ontological possibilities emerge when persons (human persons and statue persons) enter into relationships with one another. Complementary to this chapter, the next chapter surveys the use, value and roles of offerings given in the Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala. Second to statues, offerings are a significant part of relational devotion that exemplify the ever changing ways in which religion is performed.