

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two main sections which serve to situate *Religious Objects and Performance: Testing the Role of Materiality* within a lively and ongoing academic debate. The first section of this chapter, 2.1 surveys academic discourses on materiality while the second half, 2.2 addresses literature pertaining to objects and agency, animism and fetishism. Among those who examine materiality are social theorists, folklorists, archaeologists, anthropologists and scholars of the study of religions, as well as others such as material scientists. While the paths of these disciplines meet at points and are mutually influential, they often have different expected outcomes and are framed against different backdrops. Differences in approach are important because they highlight a significant problem that creates the underpinnings of this research: that the dominant academic discourses surrounding materiality have largely ignored the value of examining ‘the sacred’ and the materiality found in vernacular religion within Western European cultures. They have, instead, favored explorations of either 1) the social lives of ‘everyday’ things (where humans commoditize objects that are circulated and exchanged, and discuss them as representational means to the expected ends of social constructions and engagements), or 2) religious objects of the religious practices of the *Other*, i.e. other cultures, other identities, and the practices and beliefs of other *non-Westerners*.

As it will be demonstrated in this chapter, scholars in the study of religions are currently helping to address this gap by recognizing significant roles that religious materiality play ‘officially’ as well as in the ‘ordinary’ lives and religiosities of Western devotees and believers. Although it draws on the works of those examining material culture studies generally, this is

where *Religious Objects and Performance: Testing the Role of Materiality* makes its contribution, i.e. to the contemporary study of religions. The most significant works of the core theoretical literature relating to materiality that is introduced here are more fully engaged with, using case study findings as supporting material, in the theoretical chapters 6 and 7. Also, literature specific to Pagan and Catholic case studies is addressed in the relevant case study chapters.

2.1 Academic Discourses on Materiality

2.1a The Study of Religions

The study of materiality is relatively new to the discipline of religious studies although Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* (1915) paved the way for such explorations nearly a century ago. According to Bell, since before the 1960's, religious studies was largely a 'text', 'meaning' and 'belief' based discipline (1998: 206). Although 'day to day' religious action in Western and other discourses involve actively engaging materiality, Johnson writes, 'We [scholars of religion] have been less attentive...to the workings of objects in our own societies' (2000: 246). This can be attributed the divisions that separate spirit versus matter and/or the sacred and the profane that have typically influenced our understandings of relationships with religious materiality. However, this, as Bell noted, has been changing for the last few decades (1998: 206). Now, ritual and ceremony are also thought to be essential modes of action to follow in understanding the 'workings' of everyday religion, and are coupled with and complementary to text based studies. This, according to Bell, comes after centuries (from the Enlightenment onwards) of theories being produced that acknowledge the cognitive aspects of religion (1998: 205). This part of the

literature review outlines some of the works done by scholars in the study of religions with regards to materiality.

McDannell's book *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (1995) is vital in helping to understand the role that materiality plays in Christian religions. McDannell says, 'Unfortunately, the material dimension of Christianity has also been of marginal interest to scholars of religion (1995: 4). Addressing this, McDannell's work offers a rich, comprehensive approach to the popular material forms found in Catholic and Protestant American Christianities. She writes,

From the 1970's to the 1990's, significant theoretical and practical research has been directed toward understanding what it means to live in a world made up not only of ideas but of things. My explorations of material Christianity extends this research trend. It shares with historians, archeologists, folklorists, art and architecture specialists, and social scientists the goal of understanding American religious practice and thought through a close examination of the physical, sensual, corporeal, and phenomenal world (1995:2).

McDannell's exploration of Christianity's material forms involves addressing issues of touch, seeing, hearing and reading, piety, art, fashion, relationships, kitsch, families, women, children, Protestants, Marian devotion, souvenirs, decorations, meanings, the Bible, cemeteries, landscape, *ex votos*, shrines, garments, and consumerism.

Morgan (2005) uses different religious traditions to examine how 'the divine' is communicated with and 'seen' cross culturally. He suggests that visual culture serves as an approach that bridges belief and materiality. He proposes that images and statues mediate

between belief and the material world. Morgan says that visual religion informs us as to the character of religion as it is lived in everyday life. He says,

People make their worlds from anything at hand, so if we wish to understand the architecture of their lives, we must consider everything they use to build it and keep it in working order (2008: 229).

According to Morgan, this mediating approach is useful when lived religion is not isolated from, but coupled with, religious doctrines and creeds. Further, Morgan (2008) suggests that scholars think about religious materiality and its relationships to words and actions. Here, argues Morgan, there will be no return to a purely object/artifact based model where modern classifications take precedence over other key aspects of more holistic engagements. He writes, ‘The context for understanding things, in other words, is practice. But practice understood as the cultivation of embedded or embodied ways of knowing’ (2008: 228). Reflecting the importance of the study of ritual and performance (discussed below), this ‘pro-materiality’ approach demonstrates the value of studying material religion and its vernacular uses, i.e. it is here where ‘embodied ways of knowing’ take place.

Relics and Value

Although I do not engage relics in the ethnographic accounts of this thesis, a quick examination of ‘relic’ as a critical term in the study of religions is significant to this thesis because as objects, they have a unique stance in relation to agency, personhood, and value. Housed on, in, or even ‘as’ altars, the most holy centers of churches, objects became center points of directed emotion and faith whereby the sick could be cured, or where ceremonies and various rites were performed and legitimated. Chidester tells us that relics were not used necessarily for sanctifying an altar,

but for other things such as oath swearing, healing rituals, and other votive acts that brought pilgrims great distances ‘to be in the presence of a holy patron’ (2000:218). Holy relics were made to serve as witnesses to those events and rites of passage of the living. Relics were so important in medieval Western European Christianity and that, according to Chidester, by the ninth century ‘a church council in Carthage ruled that altars lacking relics had to be destroyed and re-consecrated with the physical remains of saints’ (2000: 218). The Church used this value as a transformative aid. Value went from being simultaneously immanent and holy, to also being economic. Stallybrass (2000) says that as a ‘state religion, Christianity developed its own powerful economics’ through the use of the cult of relics

...that is, around a priceless/valueless fingernail a reliquary of gold and precious stones would be made; around the reliquary, a cathedral would be built; around the cathedral, an urban economy would develop; around that economy, new road systems would emerge that would pull large numbers of people and large amounts of money and goods along the pilgrimage routes of Europe. The priceless/valueless fingernail, provided it was not stolen or proved a forgery (and even if it was), produced economic value (Stallybrass, 2000: 3).

By ‘value-less and priceless’ Stallybrass is not saying that relics, for example, have no value, but that they have the same kind of value as a ‘priceless’ painting would have. However, the value discussed by Stallybrass both encompasses and goes beyond economic value and into the realms of unknowable value where objects are imbued with power or contain mystical or mysterious properties capable in aiding not only ultimately in salvation, but more immediately in the woes and trials brought on by worldly concerns. The ‘priceless’ relic imbued with other-worldly, curative, or protective value is transformed into something that can be of economic lure and

value for the Church. The value of relics, then, is relationally capable of being religious, other-worldly, and/or economic simultaneously.

Patrick Geary (1986) also addresses relics in terms of value. He says that in medieval civilization, relics were circulated as commodities capable of renewing their own value during circumstances of removal or discovery. He argues that since relics were once part of humans, they can be considered in much the same way that a slave commodity is considered. Here the ideas of commodities and personhood are taken to new levels of understanding because relics are both persons and commodities. Due to the uniqueness of the bones of martyrs and saints and the power and spiritual value attributed to them, normative ideas of that which constitutes economic value is traversed, indeed, trampled upon. Here, ‘the boundaries between object and subject are culturally induced and semipermeable’ (Geary 1986:188).

Through comparing Christian and Buddhist relics, Schopen (1998) looks at how relics are housed, treated and related to. He tells us that ‘The Protestant reformers were, for example, no friends of relics’ (1998: 257). He says relics were perceived by Reformers to be, ‘frivolities,’ and ‘absurdities’, with many references being made to ‘superstition’, ‘corrupt practice’, and ‘the excessive zeal of rude and ignorant men or old women’ (1998: 257). Yet his research has found that both Christians and Buddhists consider relics ‘to be or contain the holy person: “He who lives is present in his relics,” and “When relics are present the Buddha is present”’. He writes,

The centre [where the relics ‘live’] is culturally alive, and it is permanently and architecturally located – it does not move. Its life is transmittable by contact, closeness, and shadow (1998: 266).

Schopen notes that all of this ‘would seem to fly in the face of formal doctrine, both Buddhist and Christian’ (1998: 266).

Statues and ‘Idols’

From the contestability of the word ‘idolatry’ to the less contestable ‘object use and engagement’, speaking and writing about ‘idols’, ‘objects’ and ‘things’ is indicative of how academics in the study of religions are dealing with materiality’s problematic nature. Whether through scrupulous avoidance or through direct engagement, the word ‘idolatry’ is problematic. Outside of theological literature, works engaging the term ‘idolatry’ in contemporary discourses are sparse. Gell (1998) writes,

The literature of idol-worship is, in the main, profoundly unsympathetic to this practice; it is almost as if learning to read and write disqualifies one from engaging in this practice with any enthusiasm. This rather supports the notion that there is a ‘great divide’ between the essentially non-sensuous mode of literate thinking and the sensuous, participatory mode of pre-literate thinking (115).

He goes on to say that there has been a reaction against this kind of thinking in recent years, and now many ‘educated’ people are seen to venerate idols made of wood and stone (1998: 115).

Gell is, however, referring to statues found in Hinduism. When he refers to European statues and images, they are ‘art indexes’, for Gell does not see much difference in the way that appreciators of art pay homage to statues and images to the way that religious devotees do.

The animation of religious statues occurs in many different cultures. Examining the ways in which Catholic statues perform for their devotees in Malta, Mitchell (2009) proposes that

Catholicism is a material religion of local and universal beliefs and that statues and objects have a combination of ‘presence’ and power. Mitchell says that saints are ‘hybrids: part historical, part mythological; part everyday, part transcendental; part natural, part supernatural. Statues of saints both communicate and resolve this duality (Mitchell, 2009: 265). Further, tells us that statues are dangerous and talismanic as well as capable of containing the presence of the saint, i.e. he is implying that statues have the power to act of their own accord. He writes

As James has argued of Byzantine Constantinople, “statues were perceived on both the popular and the intellectual level as animated, dangerous and talismanic” (James 1996: 15)–animated by the presence of the saint; dangerous because they had the power to protect themselves against attack, as in the image of the Virgin that retaliated against a man who threw a stone at her by crushing his head; and talismanic because they also had the power to protect those devoted to them (2009: 265-266).

This work is valuable in that it recognizes the agency and power attributed to statues as both universal and specific to locale and helps in understanding the roles that the statues discussed in this thesis play within their religiosities, particularly within Catholicism. Schieffelin (2005) says that performance creates presences. He writes,

Performances, whether ritual or dramatic, create and make present realities vivid enough to beguile, amuse or terrify. And through these presences, they alter moods, social relations, bodily dispositions and states of mind (Schieffelin, 2005: 125).

If performance generates presences, then presence, as discussed by Mitchell about the statue of the Virgin in Malta (2009), must also inspire and inform rituals and other performances.

Ritual and Performance

Ritual and performance, two critical terms in the study of religions, have proven problematic to contemporary scholars as they both point toward and address the problematic nature of materiality. Ritual and Performance are relevant to my approach to materiality because they focus on relating to the divine through corporeal experiences (contrasted with doctrinal, or text based interpretations of what experience ‘should’ be). The scholars discussed in this section aid in my examination of statue devotion/veneration because they treat religious practices and performances as dynamic and fully relational. Beginning with the term ‘ritual’, Smith tells us that, ‘Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention’ (2005: 33). Protestantism’s insistence that ritual is empty (Smith, 2005: 32), or an active representational masking instead of an embodied devotion, reflects the modern and Protestant fear of the potential significances of matter. This can be identified in the academy and in the discomfort and uneasiness scholars feel when observing the physical performances of touching and kissing relics and statues (as suggested by Stallybrass, 2000). Ritual Studies scholar Bell (1992) says

Theoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths (1992: 19).

Further,

In arguing how categories of ritual practice have been used to define objects and methods of theoretical practice, I raise questions about the dynamics of theoretical practice as such (1992: 5).

This emphasis on concept and theoretical description takes attention away from the tools often used in ritual performances. In Western cultural discourses, modes of being and doing often conflict with ways of believing, just as materiality forms the world around us but generally goes

unnoticed in terms of conscious recognition. For example, ‘ritual and belief’ according to Harvey (2005a), ‘are often contrasted in religions and wider cultures as well as in academic discourse and theory’. He continues:

The contrast seems simple: doing something is not the same as thinking it. Having ideas is not the same as acting on them. The arrangement of ceremonies or of valued objects is not the same as their meanings (2005a:1).

However, as Harvey tells us, these distinctions have been oversimplified. Ritual, materiality and belief are intimately linked and are mutually influential in a myriad of complex ways (2005a: 2). Ritual is performed by actors in relational encounters with one another and for/with objects, things and space around them. Smith (2005) says ‘A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way’ (33). Further, sacrality is situational and, as Smith says, it is ‘above all, a category of emplacement’ (2005: 33). Ritual ‘things’ stand in contrast to the objects discussed by Miller (2005) (addressed further on) that are important because they blend so readily into our lives that they go unnoticed (2005: 3).

As previously mentioned, from the 1960’s onwards, scholars have become more concerned with the performative action of religion, or religious performance. The adoption of ‘performance’ as a critical term reflects those changes and has aided in widening the methodological approaches to religious studies (Bell, 1998: 206). Bell marks the progression of the terms that lead up to ‘performance’ by placing ‘liturgy’ first, then ‘worship’, then ‘ritual’. She expounds on the notion that all of these performative actions reflect self-conscious devotion that takes place in active, religious practices. Bell writes,

With this repertoire of meanings [theatrical performances, or musical recitals, for example], religious studies uses the language of performance to stress the execution of a

pre existing script for activity (as in conducting a traditional church service) or the explicitly unscripted dimensions of an activity in process (as in the spirit or quality of service).

She explains:

Overall, usage remains diverse and ambiguous: To speak of ritual performances or the performance of worship can imply a tradition-oriented execution of established codes of behavior, an action-oriented perspective focused on the doing itself, or both (1998: 205-6).

Yet with each generation of both students and practitioners come different understandings and relationships, which keep performances, even if marginally, open to change and renewal. This, according to Bell, brings into question how the scholar's own position plays a role in the performance approach 'articulating postmodernist concerns for reflexivity, critiquing claims to simple objectivity, and sometimes systematically deconstructing the whole scholarly stance' (1998: 210). Like ritual, performance in religion is embodied action that illustrates continued, creative, cultural renewals where humans are actors in relational encounters with each other and with materiality. 'Performance' recognizes tradition, yet allows for the creative adaptations that occur when new actors and/or generations emerge. It can be suggested that performance is the fuel that keeps religion *in motion*, and its ambiguity means that it can be applied to a wide reaching number of activities that involve humans, other than humans, and combinations of both. Performance is relationality embodied and acted out.

Grimes (2002) also discusses performance in terms of it being intimately entangled with religion. He argues that performance, or action – right action – when ‘deeply’ embodied are currency and that they have the ability to ‘save the world’. He refers to performances as currency ‘only if they are deep-world performances, and they are deep-world performances only if their metaphors are embodied – radically, to the bone, to the quick’ (2002: 153). To explain, Grimes says

To dance the peacock or play the snake, you must become the peacock, be the snake. A deep-world performance is one in which performers are so drastically identified with the objects of their performance that there is no difference even though everybody knows animals and humans are different (2002: 53).

If we follow Grime’s argument, then deeply embodied performances of devotion serve as forms of thoughtful, sincere currency that has the ability to ‘blur’ the lines between that which constitutes subjects and objects. Performances are, after all, volatile. They point toward the verb-like, performative nature of the reality of religion as it is *done*.

2.1b Folklore Studies (and Altars)

Complementary to (and not separate from) anthropology and the study of religions, folklore studies draw attention to cultural expressions such as art, communication and oral tradition. Klein (2001) tells us that folklore ‘denotes oral narration, rituals, crafts, and other forms of vernacular expressive culture’, ‘names an academic discipline devoted to the study of such phenomena’, and that ‘in everyday usage, folklore sometimes describes colorful ‘folkloric’

phenomena linked to the music, tourist, and fashion industries' (2001: 5711). As with anthropology, folklore studies acknowledge objects and their meanings in a wide range of cultural contexts. It can be suggested the folklore studies is 'grassroots anthropology'. As part of their field of investigation, folklorists have been examining vernacular religious materiality since the mid to late 19th century. Exemplifying this, the journal *Folk-lore* was first established in Britain in 1878 followed by *The Journal for American Folklore* (American Folklore Society) in 1888. During this era, the study of religions was more concerned with the science of religion and transcendence than objects 'on the ground'. Although this has now changed, i.e. scholars in the study of religions are focusing more on the material dimensions of religion, folklore as a discipline offers much to the study of religions.

Turner's *Beautiful Necessity* (1999), Magliocco's work *Neo-Pagan Sacred Art and Altars: Making Things Whole* (2001), and Thompson's work *Face of the Gods: The Artists and Their Altars* (1995), discuss the relationships that people have with materiality, the actual materiality used on altars, and the creativity that goes into putting them together. These scholars do, however, discuss objects largely in terms of 'symbols', 'meanings', 'metaphor, and 'representations' the choppy dualistic waters around which this work is attempting to navigate.

Turner's (1999) work is a visually stimulating book that displays images of women's personal altars in their homes. The altars illustrated in the book are from many different religiosities, such as Goddess, Celtic, Catholic, Afro-Caribbean, Voodoo, Greek Orthodox, Hindu, and more. Turner discusses the creativity involved in making personal altars, along with other altar-related issues such as embodiment, altar economies, ritual, healing, aesthetic value, and the power of the relationships that their creators have with them. Turner says,

The home altar exists at a point of intersection between art and religion where the sacred is apprehended in a woman's *imagined* relationship with the Divine (1999: 27).

Tight parallels can be drawn between Turner's work and my own which also emphasizes the importance of relationship, relational encounters with statues and objects, and femininity, yet the emphasis of my work exists within public, not private, spaces, and within different theoretical parameters that engage current theorists within the materiality debate. Throughout *Beautiful Necessity*, Turner interchangeably treats icons and images as symbolic, representational, and embodied; yet in her chapter, 'The Power of Images: Embodiment and identification', she writes

Sacred icons are unique in their ability to mediate the difference between the human and the Divine by proposing a similarity between the human body and the divine body. This has resulted in a dilemma, the problem of idolatry, which has confounded religious philosophy for centuries. Can a material image be said to come alive with the potency of divine power? That women have answered this question affirmatively is at the heart of the home altar (1999: 113).

Turner nearly appears convinced by the end of this chapter that 'When a woman fully turns to beloved sacred images, she crosses a space between representation and reality' (1999: 127). Maintaining a scholarly distance, she never states directly that, 'images of the divine are not representational, but immanent'.

Similar to Turner, Magliocco (2001) discusses the details of Neo-Pagan Altars and the artistic processes by which they are created and made sacred. Magliocco's book contains descriptions of the materiality used to create Pagan altars which are useful in understanding the processes by

which creative ‘new’ religiosities are expressed. She tells us that Pagan altars are not fixed, that they are ephemeral pieces of sacred art. She writes, ‘Since Pagans believe deity is immanent, an altar can be made anywhere – on the ground, in a natural place, at the base of a tree, even in an office or hotel room’. She then says,

The altar is an important focal point for energy. It holds ritual tools, such as salt, water, candles, and representations of deities... (2001: 9).

This last bears a commonly reproduced contradiction that I have uncovered on countless occasions during the course of this work: when discussing Western religious materiality, figures of the divine are discussed in terms of representation, while other types of ‘unknowable’ relationships are indicated simultaneously but not addressed.

Thompson (1995) ‘presented approximately eighteen altars composed of more than 100 African and African-American artworks’ in an exhibition that was taken around several museums in the United States and in Europe. Thompson displayed the Yoruba Gods who are recognizable on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, Altars were made to Oju Oxala: Afro-Brazilian Altar to the Yoruba Creator God, Obatala’s Warriors, a Tree Altar was made to the Ancestors, Flag Altars were also made to the Ancestors, and an Altar was made to the Spirit Sarabanda Rompe Monte. According to Thompson, ‘Afro-Atlantic altars often form a locus of healing and moral reckoning’ (1995: 59). Arguably, the altars displayed in Thompson’s work can be understood to invoke the deities and ancestors they are ‘representing’ in the museum context which means that the Gods took up residence at their Altars and inside the museums where they were being displayed. The exhibitions challenged notions of that which makes an art exhibition and explored ‘the contested borders between authenticity and inauthenticity, art and belief’

(1995: 50). These boundaries were explored in how the identities of the objects displayed were transformative. Many of the altar objects on display were religious objects, but according to Thompson, they took on a ‘second life’ when they became museum objects. Others were museum objects which, in turn, became religious objects (1995: 50).

2.1c Material Culture Studies

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, material culture studies have largely overlooked religious materiality in many Western discourses. As one of the aims of this thesis is to demonstrate how material culture studies can inform the study of religions, and to situate this thesis among the relevant debates with regards to objects and agency, some of the more significant moments in the biography of material culture studies must be addressed. Both Buchli (2007) and Hicks (2007) follow the historical and contemporary changes that have taken place in material culture studies. Buchli (2007), in the introduction to *The Material Culture Reader*, summarizes the history of material culture studies, saying

Material culture as we understand it is a direct consequence of the collecting traditions of the nineteenth century, liberal Enlightenment era notions of universality, colonial expansion, industrialization and the birth of consumerism (2007: 12).

This brief historical summary is expanded upon in great detail by Hicks (2010) in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*. He introduces his chapter ‘The Material-Cultural Turn’, saying ‘This chapter explores how the ideas of “material culture” and ‘material culture studies’ are themselves artifacts of particular disciplinary conceptions of ‘the social’ (Hicks, 2010: 27). Hick’s chapter is, however, worth further engagement. Much of the information he provides with

regards to the cultural roles of objects as they have been (and are being) debated by the more influential scholars in the field serves as a foundation to the concerns of this thesis.

Starting from the ‘Museum Period’, Hicks ‘excavates’ material culture studies by taking the reader through an historical journey through its many phases of development to its contemporary manifestation. He tells us that it was during the ‘Museum Period’ which took place in ‘the last third of the nineteenth century from earlier Western colonial and antiquarian collecting practices’, archaeology and anthropology studied human technology (Hicks, 2010: 30). Compared with ‘Earlier European collections of objects’ which ‘sought to gather the curiosities of the world, both natural and manmade, in the cabinets of the curious’ (Buchli, 2007: 4), the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford presented artifacts in a typological, linear model that systematically and scientifically documented the evolution of technological and social change (Hicks, 2010: 31). Hicks says, ‘The museum made a connection between human technology and Edward Tylor’s notion of ‘culture’, as set out in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871)’ (2010: 31). Tylor saw the potential inherent in the study of objects (‘object-lessons’) in that he saw ‘the curation and study of objects: as not only documenting the past or understanding the present, but also envisioning the future’ (Hicks, 2010: 34). This ‘connection’ between ‘human technology’ and Tylor’s notion of ‘culture’ ultimately paved the way to a more humanistic side to material culture studies, but at the price of a scholarly ‘dematerialization’ of anthropology. In reference to this, Pels writes

The subsumption of the “fetish” under “animism” in the work of Edward Tylor can be read as marking a certain transcendence of the sociocultural over the material (Pels, 1998: 94), so that, despite the evolutionists’ heavy focus on the museum object, their “dematerializing” thought can also be seen as having prepared the way for the

marginalization of material culture studies in early twentieth-century anthropology (cf. Stocking 1985: 114: see below) (Pels, 2008: 266).

According to Buchli (2007),

Transitional figures such as Boas became disillusioned with museum based work, becoming more interested instead in the social process which structured material culture (Boas 1907). The end result was an emphasis on kinship and social structure, the cornerstones of twentieth century social anthropology (Buchli, 2007: 7).

Mauss' *The Gift* in 1923 (2006 [1990]) reflected this interest in 'the social' over 'the material' by examining the processes by which gifts and things were exchanged amongst the peoples of Polynesia. He applied these engagements, expectations, social relationships, agency, etc. to his own culture in an attempt to better understand the deeper realities of the social implications occurring when things, or 'gifts' are given and/or exchanged/reciprocated. According to Douglas (2006), the significance of Mauss' gift was so revolutionary and significant to understanding social processes that anthropology would never be the same again (2006: xix). Mauss analyzed the social rules, coupled with the unknown factor of *Hau*. Although gift exchange appears to be free and disinterested, it is, in fact, loaded with an array of meanings, forces (*Hau*), contracts, and expectations that point toward relations and kinship issues.

Although many of the foundational scholars upon which much of current material culture studies are based are not reviewed here, they must at least be acknowledged. Levi-Strauss and his study of 'Saussurean linguistics (de Saussure 1959 [1916])' primitive art, and social culture, Geertz's (1973) 'focus upon interpretation and the study of meaning and social practice' which was 'paralleled by new Durkheimian accounts of the anthropology of ritual performance and

‘symbolic action’ (Turner 1975: 159; see Turner 1967) (Hicks, 2010: 44), and a Marxist study of material culture are relevant to this thesis because they ‘saw the re-evaluation of the material within symbolic systems’ (Buchli, 2007: 10). This was the start of the ‘Material Cultural Turn’ as it is recognized today, which

problematized the study of the socio-cultural and the material in isolation from each other. Its solution was to document how they were ‘related’, so as ‘to transcend subject-object dualities’ (Miller and Tilley 1996: 7) created by the modern world. Material culture studies documented, to use the standard parlance, ‘relational’ processes (Miller 2007: 25): that is, it was concerned with the relationships between objects and people (Hicks, 2010: 60).

In the 1980’s this ‘turn’ in material culture studies had several different ‘trajectories’. It came from the fields of, ‘ethnoarchaeology’, ‘symbolic and structural archaeology’ and ‘economic anthropology’ (Hicks, 2010: 61) out which Miller’s work *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987) originated. Miller’s ‘material culture studies’ became ‘a social anthropology of consumption’ (Hicks, 2010: 61). It

developed through the structuralist and semiotic treatment by Roland Barthes (1972 [1957], 1977) and Jean Baudrillard (1983), and especially the anthropological consumption studies developed in Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood’s *The World of Goods* (1979)’ (Hicks, 2010: 60).

In this last, Douglas (1979) changes the suppositions surrounding ‘goods’ by suggesting that they be understood ‘for making visible and stable the categories of culture’ (1996 [1979]: 38). Then,

Forget that commodities are good for eating, clothing, and shelter; forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking; treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty (1996 [1979]: 40).

Hicks tells us that ‘These scholars, particularly Douglas and Miller, helped initiate the ‘cultural turn’ in British archaeology and social anthropology during the 1980s and 1990s’ (Hicks, 2010: 60).

Douglas’ work was ‘paralleled by that of other anthropologist such as Arjun Appadurai and Pierre Bourdieu’ (Buchli, 2007: 10). In the introduction to *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, Appadurai argues that ‘commodities, like persons, have social lives’ (1986: 3). This opening statement immediately disarms the secularist assumption that commodities are only capable of having exchange, or economic, value. He begins by saying that ‘Commodities can provisionally be defined as objects of economic value’, then asserts that objects are political and continually breach existing frameworks of prices and other forms of negotiation through their insistence on not representing the same values among those agents involved in their exchange. This is due to economic value being prescribed in accordance with how they are judged by those subjects and agents responsible for their exchange and circulation (1986:3). Appadurai suggests that we look away from the theoretical issues that lead us to see things as representations formed from human transactions and imposed meanings and look toward a social discourse of things where they are enlivened by their contexts, i.e. their uses and trajectories. This allows things a sociability where their status is negotiable, an idea that goes beyond the dualist binary model proposed by Appadurai’s anthropological predecessors. However, although his theory does not acknowledge (nor does it attempt to) the full relational

capacity of objects across a broader spectrum, this approach challenges the subject/object divide.

He says,

Ever since Marx and the early political economists, there has not been much mystery about the relationship between politics and production. We are now in a better position to demystify the demand side of economic life (1986: 58).

The economics (social, ‘mysterious’ and physical) of gift exchange are exemplary of how objects have (or are permitted to have) operative agencies in anthropological discourses.

Locating the ‘gift’ theme at the ‘centre of current discussions of deconstruction, gender, ethics, philosophy, anthropology, and economics’, Schrift (1997: 3) discusses the ‘gift related’ writings of more recent scholars such as Sahlins, Bourdieu, and Strathern. As discussed previously, Mauss pioneered attempts at understanding gift exchange, or the exchange of objects, outside the realm of Western normative economic discourses. However, Harvey (2005b) says that Europeans misunderstood the fact that the Maori ideas of the social are different from their own (2005b: 13). He writes,

In short, *hau* fits Mauss’ gift theory much better when it is understood not as a mystical force but as a social one, and this can only be so if the category of persons is understood to apply not only to humans (2005b: 14).

Bourdieu also addresses the practices involved in gift exchange and argues that ultimately, the gift is political (1997:204). He raises important issues with regard to how materiality is circulated and exchanged through his ideas that the distinguishing lines between what is economic and non-economic are blurred, and that objects are ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1997: 215). Bourdieu says that the gift

makes room for time, or more precisely, for the time lag between gift and counter-gift, and for uncertainty; it brings in a theory of the agent and of action that makes the dispositions constituting the *habitus*, rather than consciousness or intention, the basis of practices; and it relates gift exchange to a quite specific logic, that of the economy of symbolic goods and the specific belief (*illusio*) that underlies it (1997: 231).

Bourdieu argues that his theory addresses a theoretical gap not recognized by Levi-Strauss and Mauss. This gap is the space that exists when a gift is en route between giver and recipient. It is this relational zone where transformations take place. This idea furthers his argument proposing that by breaking away from the nature of economics, we can consider the durable relationships that come from gift exchange (1997: 237). The relationships that are created during moments of exchange are at the foundation of symbolic capital. Schrift says, ‘Bourdieu develops the notion of ‘symbolic capital’ as capital whose social value is recognized by virtue of its material value having been misrecognized’ (1997: 14). This theory of agency complements the works of Douglas, Mauss and Appadurai.

Bourdieu’s (1977) term *habitus* ‘is a very old one, of Aristotelian and scholastic origins, but Bourdieu uses it in a distinctive and quite specific way’ (2008: 12). Employing the term *habitus* to identify how and where systems of classification emerge, Bourdieu tells us that *habitus* is produced through the ‘principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations’ which are ‘collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor’ (1977: 72). In other words, *habitus* is set in motion by unconscious, collective, culturally embedded ways of producing information and attitudes about the world which is inherited generation to generation. However, *habitus* is not a fixed condition, but adapts as culture changes. Bourdieu calls it the ‘installed generative principle of regulated

improvisations' (1977: 78). Bourdieu says that actors, or 'subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know' (1977: 79).

Strathern (1997) examines the relationships that become evident during gift giving when people (relations) become objects capable of transmitting agencies in Melanesian contexts. She compares Melanesian contexts of exchange with the Euro-American consumerist cultural construct of 'free-standing' relationships. Strathern uses examples of Western reproductive technologies to demonstrate her point.

Melanesian gifts on the other hand presuppose two kinds of persons, partners divided by their transaction: paternal from maternal kin, fetus from placenta, clansmen from the ground they cultivate, descendents from ancestors (1997: 307).

This way of being where partnerships and relationships endure, according to Strathern, prompts the question:

whether gift-giving in a consumer culture contests the coercive nature of this relationship or is another example of it (1997:307).

This sheds light on the differences (and similarities) between the Euro-American, 'free-standing' consumers, and how consumption and gift exchange affect relationships and ties between Melanesians (a culture where gift exchange creates long lasting partners, or enduring relations). In the West, when money is involved in exchange, the exchange is seen to be complete. In the manner of what can be considered an ideal type of detachable economics, money affords Westerners the ability to walk away (e.g. prostitution), yet they cannot be completely detached from the things that they purchase in a so-called 'free-standing' way.

Kopytoff (1986) applies the use of the social biography to things saying that one would use the same ‘rules’ with things as would be used for the biography as a person. This method points toward a form of animism where objects are treated as human-persons. For example, questions would be asked such as

What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in the objects “status” and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized “ages” or periods in the thing’s “life”, and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing’s use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? (1986:66).

These questions are useful in examining not only the ‘social life of things’ but can be applied broadly to all objects that exist in any cultural context. These questions are also useful when examining the life of the religious ‘thing’, relics, statues, images, fetishes, or any other object that is religiously contextual.

The Journal of Material Culture (Sage) further testifies to materiality’s current popularity with its focus on the relationships between artifacts and social relations and culture. It is not the aim of this work, however, to discuss objects in terms of ‘artifacts’ nor how they affect social relations, but to discuss and question the roles of objects as social and other relations.

Stuart Hall (2003) is also a prominent figure in material culture studies, especially with regards to issues of ‘representation’, ‘meaning’ and ‘culture’. Hall refers to the ‘practices of representation’ to signify the symbolism which transmits meaning. He says,

It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them – how we represent them – that we give them a meaning. In part, we give objects, people and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation which we bring to them (2003: 3).

Further Hall suggests that representation, instead of being a ‘one way transmitter’, is better understood as dialogical. Hall’s approach is a useful way of thinking about representation because it implies a balance between the human centered application of ‘meaning’ and the ability of things to inspire new concepts and cultural modes of being. Yet according to Hall, the cultural contexts within which things reside (such as in museums) are subject to change. He writes,

What sustains this ‘dialogue’ is the presence of shared cultural codes, which cannot guarantee that meanings will remain stable forever – though attempting to fix meaning is exactly why power intervenes in *discourse* (2003: 10).

The *Thinking Through Things* (2007) project is helpful in clarifying debates surrounding the dominant discourses of materiality. This collaborative work sets forth a methodological approach that suggests that instead of seeking out ‘significance’ and ‘meaning’ we allow objects to inspire their own theories. The introduction of *Thinking Through Things* comprehensively surveys not only the more recent history underpinning this current ‘quiet [anthropological] revolution’ (Henare, et al., 2007:7), but also wider issues relating to ‘things’ in material culture, anthropology, and the problematic nature of the traditional models used in anthropological methodologies. Following the introduction there are nine essays written by contributors that introduce different and creative ethnographic accounts of their informants’ ‘concern with things’ (2007: 21). Not all of the contributors agree with every aspect of the editors’ proposed methodological approach of how to ‘think through things’ but all discuss the issues. In the

essays, the ‘things’ of concern include cigarettes in a Papua New Guinea prison, Mongolian ceremonial objects such as altars and shamanic costumes where one can come to *be* through things, the legal documents and the law in Swaziland, the role of Maori *taonga* in New Zealand in light of recent debates on property rights, what happens when the aim of co-creating and producing new forms of art through the joint collaborations of artists and scientists falter due to issues of ownership and how powder *is* power for Cuban diviners.

I have but one criticism of this work: it does not address the roles of religious objects in Europe, opting instead for Papau New Guinea, New Zealand, Swaziland, Cuba, and Mongolia. When ‘things’ are addressed in European discourses, they are discussed in terms of Leach’s understanding of Gell’s theoretical ideas of agency (1998), and Pearce’s ideas of museum practice in London (2007). Here, Pearce ‘highlights the psychology of collections and the particular manner in which meaning and value are inscribed in the relationships between Europeans and the material objects they collect’ (2007:93). As in many of the works of anthropologists discussed in this review, the roles of religious objects in the everyday lived reality of Western culture are ignored, yet they are addressed in the ‘religious’ practices of ‘others’.

In Miller’s edited volume *Materiality* (2005), accounts are used to discuss the fundamental roles objects play through examining a multitude of manifestations from ancient Egypt to Western economics and materialism. These accounts culminate in an argument that that which we (humans) create ends up shaping us, our cultural reflections of ourselves, and our humanity. Miller says that

For a discipline, such as anthropology, that is concerned with what it is to be human, we need to therefore start our discussion of this issue with an acknowledgment that the definition of humanity has often become almost synonymous with the position taken on the question of materiality (2005:2).

Miller explores important questions of relational placement, i.e. where the subject stops and the object begins. Where do objects belong? Miller says,

it will become evident that we can indeed resolve the dualism of subjects and objects through philosophy. But these “resolutions” are so dependent upon the abstract nature of philosophy that in and of themselves they may be of only limited benefit to anthropology (2005:3).

Miller’s human-centered approach can be compared with that of Martin Holbraad’s (2007) in his chapter “The Power of Powder: Multiplicity and motion in the divinatory cosmology of Cuban Ifa (or *mana*, again)”. Holbraad thinks through the thing *ache*, or *ashe*, which he refers to as the ‘Afro-Cuban cousin of *mana*’ (2007: 201). *Ache/ashe* is a word that is normally is taken to mean ‘grace’, magical power, and/or ‘all the powers, force, life, the secret of the earth’ (2007: 201). Holbraad tells us that elsewhere, *ache* appears as a ‘powder that belongs exclusively to a deity, or, yet more specifically, as ‘iyefa, the white powder full of virtues which is spread on to Orula’s divining board’ (2007: 201). Thus Holbraad discusses *ache* as a powder type of substance used by diviners in Cuba during séances. He uses this powdery ‘thing’ to exemplify how a ‘thing’ in normative modernist cultural discourse is not the same as a ‘thing’ in the discourse of Cuban diviners. To the diviners, the powder does not represent or signify power; the powder *is* power. Here, there is no distinction between concept and thing. The concept is the

thing. This is an atypical approach to anthropology and stands in contrast to Miller who might argue that power as power does not sufficiently emphasize the agents, or those people involved in physically utilizing the powder.

Demonstrating the versatility of materiality, Rowlands (2005) tells us that some things are more material than others (2005:73). Miller says, 'The implication of Rowlands' chapter is that we need to have much greater sensitivity to relative materiality' (2005: 18). From a materialist perspective, Rowlands says that it is impossible to fuse subject and object as Appadurai does by saying they have 'social lives'. What is in debate here is the argument that all 'things' should not automatically be given their own constitutions when divorced from the processes that created them. Rowlands says,

I include here all those approaches that see persons and things as mutually constitutive in some way and yet start from the premise that things as "social objects" have some a priori existence but do not constitute "a world out there" (2005: 73).

Further, Rowlands argues that the identity of things is 'constructed through their mediation in a socially constructed field' (2005: 73). This could be disputed by other theorists who argue that objects are capable of inspiring a multiplicity of theories, not all of which depend on human sociability.

2.2 Agency, Animism and Fetishism

I will begin this section with an assertion: Objects can potentially have agency. This is an important assertion because it goes to the heart of some of the most problematic issues in terms

of modernity, religion and materiality, and attempting to understand their agency is one of the greater challenges that this work undertakes. Are objects capable of supporting their own discourses? Can objects have agency only through the intentionality of the humans ‘in the neighborhood’ to use Gell’s analogy (1998: 123)? Can matter contain power – or better yet, depending on the context, can matter *be* power? Do objects represent power? Can objects be ‘living’? These questions are not new. Yet new angles on these questions begin to emerge when one begins to look at the project of modernity, as with other dualisms, as being flawed. For example, Latour’s work *We have never been modern* (1993) discusses how the project of modernity is more of a belief system than a reality, saying

The hypothesis of this essay is that the word ‘modern’ designates two sets of entirely different practices which much remain distinct if they are to remain effective, but have recently become confused. The first set of practices, by ‘translation,’ creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by ‘purification’, creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other (1993: 10-11).

The project of modernity has helped create a schism whereby humans deny their relationships with the world in exchange for favoring mind over matter. The effects of this have resulted in a type of anthropocentric dominance over the material world and consequently over the animal and plant worlds, too. Latour illustrates the dualist structures upon which our cultural identities influence the ways in which we deal with materiality. He says that

if we have never been modern – at least in the way criticism tells the story – the tortuous relations that we have maintained with the other nature-cultures would also be

transformed. Relativism, domination, imperialism, false consciousness, syncretism – all the problems that anthropologists summarize under the loose expression of ‘Great Divide’ – would be explained differently, thereby modifying comparative anthropology (1993: 12-13).

The problems summarized under the ‘Great Divide’ *are* being discussed. Meskell writes,

Recent writing on the specific contours of agentic objects or fetishes, as interlocutors between persons, things, and worlds, undermines the fixity of our imposed boundaries. Materiality represents a presence of power in realizing the world, crafting things from nothing, subjects from nonsubjects (2005: 51).

So far the debates establish that objects play dynamic, relational roles in the lived ontological realities. The theories being discussed currently by anthropologists, sociologists, and those who are work within material culture studies express deliberate shifts in understanding the nature of objectivity and subjectivity, fixed and non-fixed identities, and relationships with matter. As will now be addressed, scholars in the study of religions, anthropologists and sociologists such as Latour, Ingold, Harvey, Scott, Viveiros de Castro, Gell, Johnson, Pels, and Graeber have found relational ways of discussing agency through the subjects of ANT, ‘meshwork’ and animism and fetishism.

Agency

I will begin this discussion of agency with a discussion of Actor Network Theory: ANT. Latour’s (2005) assertion that even the most popular theories ‘are not sufficient to describe the many entanglements of humans and non-humans (2005: 84) can be extended to help in understanding

why popular or folk practices that involve engaging objects exist outside of doctrine. Latour says,

To put it very simply: A good ANT account is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don't just sit there. Instead of simply transporting effects without transforming them, each of the points in the new text may become a bifurcation, an event, or the origin of a new translation. As soon as actors are treated not as intermediaries but as mediators they render the movement of the social visible to the reader (2005:128).

ANT can be broadly interpreted and applied to almost any discipline. This does not, however, negate its usefulness. Hicks says, 'For ANT, relations are not simply bilateral: they are much more far-ranging networks that emerge through the actions of both humans and non-humans'. This implies that ANT works as a 'theory of agency' (Hicks, 2010: 75).

Through a collection of essays that work through the complex patterns of life, nature and change, Ingold's *Lines: A Brief History* (2007) shows how the 'lines', or relationships, between things, ideas, places and even time, are misrecognized as straight, linear concepts. Ingold's theory/philosophy/perspective is all encompassing in that it dissolves commonly accepted dualistic boundaries between 'things', placing them, instead, on relational continuums within their own generative processes. In this vein, Ingold challenges the concept of ANT, saying that,

much of its appeal comes from its promise to describe interactions among people (such as scientists and engineers) and the objects with which they deal (such as in the laboratory) in a way that does not concentrate mind or agency in human hands, but rather takes it to

be distributed around all the elements that are connected or mutually implicated in a field of action (2007: 85).

Ingold says the term ‘meshwork’ more adequately describes the relations between humans, their environments, and non-humans than ‘network’. Further, he tells us that Latour has observed in hindsight that when the French *acteur reséau* was translated to English, it took on significances that were never intended. The French *reséau* does not imply the same connectivity as a network, but

just as well netting...to woven fabric, the racery of lace, the plexus of the nervous system or the web of a spider. The lines of the spider’s web, for example, quite unlike those of the communications network, do not connect points or join things up. Secreted from the body of the spider as it moves, they are the lines *along* which it acts and perceives (2007: 85)

Ingold’s work *When ANT meets SPIDER: Social theory for Anthropods* (2008) is a continuation of this perception of the commonly accepted understanding of ANT. Here, ANT and SPIDER are in philosophical dialogue with one another about the nature of the ‘network’ and the nature of ‘meshwork’. In terms of materiality, the network comprises social relations, inclusive of ‘objects’, who are ‘not just passive objects. I [ANT] am bound up in relations with them, as I am with my fellow ants. They, too, are part of the network’ (2008: 91). SPIDER challenges this idea of ANT’s network, arguing that since ‘bits and pieces’ of things are ‘assembled so as to make things happen’, then ‘Every “relation” in the network, then, is a connection between one thing and another. As such the relation has no material presence’. SPIDER continues, arguing that the lines of her web are the lines through which she moves. She says that they are trails of herself as

she moves throughout her environment perceiving and acting in the world (2008: 91). Through this dialogue, Ingold is saying that the meshwork (SPIDER's web) foregrounds the network, i.e. without taking into account the complexity of the origins of the material presence of the objects within the meshwork, the connections that join up the network cannot be established. Yet here, objects are mediumistic. Ingold argues that for agency to be present, nervous systems must also be present. Attention must be paid for action to take place, and attentive movement/action is what *should* constitute agency. He says 'Our concept of agency must make allowance for the real complexity of living organisms, as opposed to inert matter'. Then, 'To attribute agency to objects that do not grow or develop, that consequently embody no skill, and whose movement is not therefore coupled to their perception, is ludicrous' (2008: 94).

In contrast to Ingold's perspective, Barad (2007) argues that 'matter and meaning are not separate elements. They are inextricably fused together, and no event, no matter how energetic, can tear them asunder' (2007: 3). Drawing on social science, feminist, philosophy, postcolonial, quantum physics and more, Barad sets out to found a 'new ontology, epistemology, and ethics, including a new understanding of the nature of scientific practices' (25). In doing this, Barad

demonstrates how and why we must understand in an *integral* way the roles of human and nonhuman, material and discursive, and natural and cultural factors in scientific and other practices', saying that a new approach is needed to help build 'meaningful conversations between the sciences and other areas of study (2007: 25).

In terms of agency and the question of human intentionality, Barad says that

the space of agency is not restricted to the possibilities for human action. But neither is it simply the case that agency should be granted to nonhumans as well as humans, or that

agency can be distributed over nonhuman and human forms. What is at issue, rather, are the possibilities for the iterative reconfiguring of the materiality of human, nonhuman, cyborgian, and other such forms. Holding the category “human” (“nonhuman”) fixed (or at least presuming tht one can) excludes an entire range of possibilities in advance, eliding important dimensions of the workings of agency (Barad, 2007: 178).

Then, crucial to the underpinnings of this thesis, Barad says,

agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. It cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such). It is not an attribute whatsoever. Agency is “doing” or “being” in its intra-activity. It is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices – iterative reconfiguring of topological manifolds of spacetime-matter relations – through the dynamics of intra-activity (Barad, 2007: 178).

This theory of matter and agency is complementary the new animism, as discussed by Harvey (2005b).

Animism

Animism has a long history within the academy. Found in Europe’s Christian and colonial pasts, terms such as in animism and fetishism have generally been applied to those practices and beliefs of ‘others’, whether those others are Catholic others, Pagan others, or colonized others.

Beginning with Tylor (1913 [1871]), his animism asserts that in animistic societies, matter contains spirits. These spirits are alien beings that come from outside of matter and take up residence in ‘dead’ objects (1913 [1871], I: 426), and this view of animism is still with us.

Harvey's (2005b) book *Animism: Respecting the Living World* offers a different perspective to the debate. Harvey introduces his work as follows:

The newer usage [of animism] refers to a concern with knowing how to behave appropriately towards persons, not all of whom are human. It refers to the widespread indigenous and increasingly popular 'alternative' understanding that humans share this world with a wide range of persons, only some of whom are human. While it may be important to know whether one is encountering a person or an object, the really significant question for animists of the 'new' kind is how persons are to be treated or acted towards (2005b: xi).

The idea of 'other-than-human persons' comes from Hallowell's (1960) interpretation of the Ojibwe 'world view' that 'persons' are all around us, some are human and others are other than human. The new animism proposes that in acknowledging the personhood of the world's many inhabitants, respectful ways of engagement can be learned. Harvey tells us that animism has carried two different meanings in the discussions of academics from many different disciplines. First, he tells us that it has been considered a 'label for an alleged mistake in which people confuse inanimate matter for living beings in some way' and that more recently it has began to be considered another label for 'a style of worldview that recognises the personhood of many beings with whom humans share this world' (2005b: 205). He writes,

Ojibwe-language speakers are animists at least on the grounds that they address some rocks and some weather systems as persons. Some plants and some human-made artefacts are persons. It is not that Ojibwe speakers attribute human-likeness to 'inanimate objects', but that they engage with a cosmos full of persons, only some of

whom are humans. Ojibwe animism does not experience everything as living (2005b: 35).

This is not to say that objects are ‘living’ all the time, every day. They are, however, ‘alive’ when they are participating in relationship, but not because spirits take up residence in matter. The relational nature of animism helps in dealing with materiality’s problematic nature because, in its flexibility, it both challenges and incorporates Western culturally inherited dualistic notions such as spirit versus matter, or subject versus object. Subjecthood is achieved through relationships.

In reference to the Cree understanding of the world, 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, but of emergence’ (2006:61). Scott’s idea of ontological emergence and personhood is simultaneous and relevant to place, time and location. Arguing for a relational epistemology, Scott uses Bird-David’s (1999) ‘discussion of Nayaka talking with trees’ to exemplify a point. Bird-David writes,

In the interaction of a human with a tree, intelligence lies not ‘inside the head of the human actor, let alone inside the fabric of the tree. Rather, it is immanent in the total system of perception and action constituted by the co-presence of the human and the tree within a wider environment (2006: 53).

However, according to Scott, both Bird-David and Ingold see the attribution of personhood as coming *after* the engagement with the tree, i.e. after epistemological value has already been attributed. He argues that engagement and response are simultaneous, immanent ‘and mutually reinforcing in our experience of the world’ (2006: 61).

Based on an ethnography of the Araweté, a Tupi-Guarani people of Eastern Amazonia, Viveiros de Castro's work *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society* (1992) describes and interprets 'Araweté cosmology, approached from the perspective of concepts about the person, death, Divinity, and systems of shamanism and warfare'. He tells us that 'the theme of divine cannibalism' is 'central to the Araweté definition of the human condition' (1992: xv). Further, 'the complex of relations between human beings and the gods is the most strategic avenue to understanding Araweté society'. For the Araweté, death is the transitional, 'productive event' where persons are 'actualized', neither death nor life being understood in opposition to one another (where one is positive and the other is negative). Araweté society is not 'dialectic' (1992: 4). From this study, Viveiros de Castro depicts 'a native anthropology where concepts of alterity and Becoming will emerge as the defining qualities and processes of human Being' (1992: xvi).

Drawing on the ethnography described in *The Enemy's Point of View* (1992), Viveiros de Castro's (2000) article 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism'

deals with that aspect of Amerindian thought which has been called its 'perspectival quality' (Århem 1993): the conception, common to many peoples of the continent, according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view (2000: 469).

In this article, Viveiros de Castro sets out to better understand the conceptual dichotomies found in Western cultural heritage through a comparison with those 'operating in Amerindian perspectivist cosmologies' (2000: 470). Acknowledging the difficulties in this task, Viveiros de Castro (2004b) questions what happens when 'Western' perspectives are compared with those of Amazonian/indigenous perspectives. He argues that translation of language

becomes an operation of differentiation – a production of difference – that connects the two discourses to the precise extent to which they are not saying the same thing, in so far as they point to discordant exteriorities beyond the equivocal homonyms between them (2004b: 20).

He first challenges what he calls ‘the classic distinction between Nature and Culture’ saying that they ‘cannot be used to describe domains internal to non-Western cosmologies without first undergoing a rigorous ethnographic critique’ (2000: 469). According to Viveiros de Castro, other sets of dualistic ‘conceptual schemes’ (2000: 470) fall under the headings of ‘Nature’ and ‘Culture’: ‘universal and particular, objective and subjective, physical and social, fact and value, the given and the instituted, necessity and spontaneity, immanence and transcendence, body and mind, animality and humanity, among many more’ (2000: 469-470). As a solution to these sets of dualities, Viveiros de Castro suggests the term ‘multi-naturalism’ to account for those qualities that constitute Amerindian thought, saying that ‘the Amerindian conception would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity’ (2000: 470). Humans are humans, but animals are also humans hiding behind animal masks. In sum,

‘the common point of reference all beings of nature is not humans as a species but rather humanity as a condition’ (Descola 1986: 120) (Viveiros de Castro, 2000: 472).

Within this ‘corporeal diversity’ one can find ‘perspectivism’, which, according to Viveiros de Castro, is ‘reminiscent of the notion of ‘animism’ (2000: 472). He defines animism as ‘an ontology which postulates the social character of relations between humans non-humans: the space between nature and society is itself social (2000: 473). What is considered a ‘person’ in Amerindian conception is also discussed here. Viveiros de Castro tells us that self-reference is avoided, i.e.

names are not spoken by the bearers nor in their presence; to name is to externalize, to separate (from) the subject. Thus self-references such as ‘people’ mean ‘person’, not ‘member of the human species’, and they are personal pronouns registering the point of view of the subject talking, not proper names. To say, then, that animals and spirits are people is to say that they are persons, and to attribute to non-humans the capacities of conscious intentionality and agency which define the position of the subject (2000: 476).

Further, Viveiros de Castro tells us that whatever has a soul can potentially have a ‘point of view’. Viveiros de Castro (2004a) writes,

Amerindian perspectivism can be seen as a kind of radical polytheism (or rather, henotheism) applied to a universe which recognises no ontological dualism between created matter and Creator Spirit (2004a: 482).

Viveiros de Castro criticizes Cartesian dualities saying that they have led academics toward the desire to resolve dualities through the idea that creating one unifying principle will solve these problems. Viveiros de Castro says,

Virtually all attacks on Cartesian and other dualisms consider that two is already too much – we need just one (one principle, one substance, one reality). As far as Amerindian cosmologies are concerned, it would appear that two is not enough (2004a: 482).

With this in mind, Viveiros de Castro promotes more diversified ontological awarenesses that go beyond the Western cultural dualisms so commonplace within anthropology and other academic disciplines. Viveiros de Castro further writes,

Personhood and ‘perspectivity’ – the capacity to occupy a point of view – is a question of degree and context, rather than an absolute, diacritical property of particular species...Artefacts have this interestingly ambiguous ontology: they are objects that necessarily point to a subject; as congealed actions, they are material embodiments of non-material intentionality (2004a: 470).

Work with the Araweté and Yawalapíti in the 1970s and 1980s where Viveiros de Castro ‘like any ethnographer...had to confront different indigenous notions about nonhuman agency and personhood’ (2007: 153) further inspired ideas addressed in ‘The Crystal Forest: Notes on the Ontology of Amazonian Spirits’ (2007). In this article, Viveiros de Castro presents a dialogue between Davi Kopenawa (Yanomami thinker and political leader) and Bruce Alpert (anthropologist) in relation to the *xapiripë*, ‘the animal ancestors’ or ‘shamanic spirits’ who interact with the shamans of his people’ (2007: 153). Through this dialogue, Viveiros de Castro wishes to

call attention to some recurrent features of the mode of existence and manifestation of spirits in indigenous Amazonia. In particular, I [Viveiros de Castro] take Kopenawa’s discourse as expressing a pan-Amazonian conception in which the notions we translate as ‘spirit’ denote an ontological mode of the ‘intensive virtual multiplicity’ type (2007: 155).

Viveiros de Castro further addresses the ways in which translations from indigenous languages reflect differences in ontological perceptivity. He tells us that the word *xapiripë*

designates *utupë*, image, vital principle, true interiority or essence (Kopenawa & Alpert 2003: 72 n. 28) of the animals and other beings of the forest, and at the same time the

immortal images of a first archaic humanity, composed of Yanomami with animal names that transformed into the animals of the present (2007: 155).

Humanity and animality are transitional cross-dimensions. Further, according to Viveiros de Castro, the word 'shaman' (becoming a shaman) is synonymous with 'spirit' (becoming a spirit). He tells us that

Amazonian concepts of 'spirit' do not designate a class or genus of nonhumans but a certain obscure vicinity between the human and the nonhuman, a secret communication which rather than passing through the redundancy between them (their 'community'), passes through their disparity (their 'incommunity') (2007: 160).

Using Gell's analogy of the Chinese diplomat in London 'who does not look like China, but in London, China looks like him' (1998: 98) to make his point, Viveiros de Castro says that the *xapiripë* 'do not look like animals, but in the mytho-shamanic context, animals do look like them' (2007: 160). This analogy helps us to better understand the nature of Amazonian cosmologies where agency is an 'event' or a heterogenic 'becoming' (an intensive superposition of states), not a 'process' of 'change' (an extensive transposition of homogenic states)' (2007: 157). These events must, for example, be captured by the agency of shamans (2007: 155).

Gell (1998), like Viveiros de Castro, works on the basis that personhood depends on context. Yet for Gell, in reference to objects, agency is representational of human interpretation. Gell says that 'social agents' can be drawn from categories which are as different as chalk and cheese' due to the fact that the term 'social agency' is not based on the agents who are being social as biological beings in the same sense that humans are. In other words, it does not matter whether a social agent is a thing or person. The importance lies in how that thing or person is being related

to. He writes, ‘All that may be necessary for stocks and stones to become ‘social agents’ in the sense that we require, is that there should be actual human persons/agents ‘in the neighbourhood’ of these inert objects, not that they should be biologically human persons themselves’ (Gell, 1998: 123).

Leach challenges Gell’s theory saying that it is too human centred and based on their representational status in the mind of their agents (2007: 183). This is comparable to both Vivieros de Castro’s (2004) idea of animism and to the potential ‘multiplicity’ of theories put forth by the *Thinking Through Things* (2007) project. Leach says that the implication of this human centered approach imposes the same subject/object dualities that many scholars are currently trying to move away from, i.e.

When all is said and done, we are left with the individual mind and its representations, and with the idea that non-humans can only be agents by proxy: There are real subjects, namely we ourselves, and then there are those second-class citizens of subject-dom (i.e. objects and the like) (Leach, 2007: 183).

The ‘human centeredness’ of Gell’s form of proposed agency, although used here at points, solves only part of the problem. Gell (1998) does not suggest or support ontologies of things independent of human agency, as suggested by Henare, et al. (2007) in *Thinking Through Things*, but is more concerned with art as ‘instrumental action’, i.e. the means by which creators of art influence the thoughts and actions of the people around them; and how people influence art. Human beings and their intentionality ‘in the neighborhood’ affect the status and agency of art objects. What Gell does not address are the potentialities of personhood inherent in art and other objects when humans are not present.

Fetish

Fetishism is interesting to this thesis because it is matter specific animism and issues of value and fetishism go hand in hand in similar ways to how issues of value and relics go hand in hand. Both fetishes and relics are known for their poetic, mysterious, and spiritual value while also being famous for their roles as negotiators and mediators, i.e. their simultaneous economic and/or exchange value. Further, it can be argued that both fetishes and relics are persons and things simultaneously. Relics have a particular kind of biography due to their human origins, and fetishes are extensions of fetishists, which give them yet another particular type of biography as the fetish can be either an external body part or an extension of the fetishist. Both of these particulars fall outside the framework of what constitutes the ‘normal’ or ‘everyday’ commodities discussed by Appadurai, and some of the more subtly present yet monumental everyday things discussed by Miller (2005).

The rise of contemporary literature about the fetish demonstrates some of roles that materiality can play when theoretical questions concerning objects and representation, and/or transcendence and immanence are posed. This discussion is best initiated with the etymology of the word. Johnson writes,

Fortunately, since it is a comparative term, the fetish has no etymological anchor heavier than “that which is made” and can always be spun in the opposite direction. Hence, James Clifford's revision: “we can return to them . . . their lost status as fetishes—not specimens of a deviant or exotic 'fetichism' but *our own* fetishes”. This tactic, necessarily personal, would accord to things in collections the power to fixate rather than simply the capacity to edify or inform. African and Oceanian artifacts could once again be *objets*

sauvages, sources of fascination with the power to disconcert. Seen in their resistance to classification they could remind us of our *lack* of self-possession, or the artifices we employ to gather a world around us (Johnson, 2000: 229).

Here we find that the root of word lies in creation and creativity. A fetish is something that is continually invented, destroyed, and reinvented with each relational encounter and it has the ability to make and undo worlds accordingly. Its relational status relates directly to space, time and territory. Johnson argues that the fetish should not be considered an object but a ‘cognitive and existential problem of location; it is about issues of relating the self to time and space. It is about territorialization’ (2000: 248). Johnson gives us a history of the fetish and tells us how it was marginalized in scholarly discourses for many decades. He writes,

Charles de Brosses's 1760 use of *fetiché*, and for the first time, *fetichisme* as a stage of human development was elaborated by Auguste Comte as a sub-area of his tripartite schema, and the rest of the story is a familiar one in the history of the study of religion. De Brosses's and Comte's "*fetichisme*" was replaced by "animism" under the Tylolean evolutionist paradigm and then by Marett's "pre-animism" before being dealt a final death blow, at least in its denotation of a particular religious mode, by Durkheim and Mauss (e.g., Durkheim: 203) (2000: 255).

Manning and Meneley (2008) observe the problematic nature of materiality in religion in the ‘untranscended materiality’ of the fetish, or that which was projected on to the African fetish by European traders and colonizers. According to Manning and Meneley, the fetish denoted a form of savage, primitive religious expression (2008: 289). Always set in contrast to transcended materiality, the fetish has remained something that conjures up ideas of sexual obsession,

African *juju*, withered dead animal feet, clay, cowrie shells, and old hair clippings. Compared with the term ‘idolatry’ (which points toward problematic issues of representation) the fetish unashamedly embodies. It is that which it represents. It is powerful. The same misunderstandings and polemics that haunt statues, images and idols as to whether or not the deity inhabits the ‘thing’ are not found here.

Manning and Menely (2008) suggest that anthropologists re examine the untranscended materiality of the fetish which differs from the equally problematic idol. The difference being that the idol is often understood as a representation of a god/deity, while the fetish remains in a state of non-representation.

That is, the idol is a material representation of that which does not exist while in the fetish the opposition between material sign and transcendent signifier is absent: ‘the fetish is precisely *not* a material signifier referring beyond itself’ (Pietz 1985: 15) (Manning and Menely, 2008: 293).

Pels suggests that the fetish’s untranscended materiality be at the foreground of the materiality debate because it beckons ‘its students to sojourn in the border zones that divide mind and matter, the animate and inanimate’ (1998: 91). The fetish, according to Pels, is ‘an object of *abnormal traffic*’ (1998: 94). He says,

The fetish foregrounds materiality because it is the most aggressive expression of the social life of things: not merely alive, it is an “animated entit[y] that can dominate persons” (Taussig 1980: 25). Fetishism is animism with vengeance. Its matter strikes back (1998: 91).

Addressing the difference between animism and fetishism, Pels says that animism is the spirit *in* matter, and that fetishism is the spirit *of* matter.

In the article “Materials Against Materiality” (2011: 28), Ingold makes a major contribution to the materiality debate, suggesting that we ‘direct our attention from the materiality of objects to the properties of materials’. He challenges Pels’ assertion that that animism is the spirit *in* matter, and the fetish is the spirit *of* matter (Pels, 1998: 91) by arguing that it is not life that is in matter, but matter, in all its complexities, that is in life (Ingold, 2007b: 12). He says Pels’ argument that ‘the fetish is an object that, by virtue of its sheer material presence, affects the course of affairs (1998: 94-95)’ is an important step in the right direction, but it only takes us halfway’. Ingold tells us that the fetish, on the one hand, recognizes that the materials found inherently in objects have power, but that as a discourse it ‘remains trapped’ in a dualistic construct which separates the mental from the material. The fetish, cannot, ‘therefore countenance the properties of materials save as aspects of the inherent materiality of objects’ (2011: 28). Ingold contributes to this debate, arguing that the ‘hybrid’ quality of Pels’ fetish misrecognizes the ‘active properties of materials as a power of the materiality of objects’. Instead, Ingold suggests, materials should be restored

to the generative fluxes of the world of materials in which they came into being and continue to subsist. This view, that things are in life rather than that life is in things, is diametrically opposed to the conventional anthropological understanding of animism, invoked by Pels (1998, 94) and harking back to the classic work of Edward Tylor, according to which it entails the attribution of life, spirit or agency to objects that are really inert (2011: 29).

Ingold's view of objects is that they are transformative. Their substances and *being* are not subject *only* to the agencies attributed by the mental activity of humans. He writes, 'As such, they are born and grow within the current of materials, and participate from within their further transformation' (2011: 29).

Graeber (2005), contributing to theories of social creativity to the debate, re imagines the fetish as a way of creating new relations (2005: 407). He tells us that the fetish is collaborative, creative project made in moments of contractual agreements between people who had very little in common. The fetish has the power to bind these agreements making any party who decided to break the contract punishable. Graeber also introduces the concept of the 'fetish zone'. The 'fetish zone' illustrates the zone, or spaces, that exist between, for example, subject and object, gift and giver. Graeber says that the 'fetish zone' is the place that, during the trade encounters between Europeans and Africans in the 1600's,

Europeans were trying to evacuate; [where] everything was social, nothing was fixed, therefore everything was both material and spiritual simultaneously (2005:432).

The fetish zone can be theoretically applied to the transformative mediatory spaces beyond dualistic constructs of the sacred and the profane, the material and the transcendent, and between concepts of mind, spirit and matter. For this reason, Graeber and his 'fetish zone' will receive further engagement in Chapters 6 and 7.

Conclusion to Literature Review

The works discussed in this review involve brief introductions to literature concerning some of the core theoretical literature produced by social theorists with regards to how materiality is current being theorized. It also involves many works of contemporary scholars that deal with

religious materiality specifically. A broad context is revealed where scholars are discussing materiality and agency generally. This review has found that questions surrounding the agency of Western religious ‘things’ in marked off, public, private, and/or sacred spaces remain largely, but not entirely, overlooked. There are gaps in understanding what happens beyond the established constructs of socialization, representation, meaning, and/or spirit, mind and matter in terms of religious objects and relational engagement. Also discussed here are critical relational discourses that actively facilitate the roles of religious objects such as ritual, performance, animism, and fetishism. All of these and more are engaged in further detail in Chapters 6 and 7, after the ethnographic accounts, and as the thesis unfolds to reach its conclusions.