

Chapter 5

Relationships, Relating, Relationality

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Divided into three parts, this chapter is mainly theoretical. Part I introduces the concept of relationality and situates it within Harvey's (2005b) new animism research, Scott's (2006) 'ontological emergence', and the *Thinking Through Things* (Henare et al, 2007) methodological approach. It examines the ontological possibilities that emerge when persons (human persons and statue persons) enter into relationships with one another. Bringing relationality into conversation with 'representation', as well as theories of 'agency', 'thing theories', 'personhood', 'networks' and 'the meshwork', Part II engages the works of Viveiros de Castro (2000), Gell (1998), Latour (2005), and Ingold (2011) and provides a theoretical framework from which to understand the different ways in which material objects/persons can be understood, especially within religious contexts. Expanding on the theoretical positions in Parts I and II, Part III of this chapter, builds on the work of Pels (1998) and offers a new definition of the fetish which is capable of accounting for the powerful roles of matter. This further tests the roles of personhood as it emerges in religious statues such as the Virgin and the Goddess.

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, 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. The 'aliveness' of statues – or any other object - is not necessarily dependent on human intentionality (although sometimes it is). As with new animism debates, it is necessary to ask new questions, redirecting attention away from defining life and towards asking about personhood. Relationality, as an approach, is capable of widening the dualities found in modern, religious discourses which often restrict the roles of statues within theoretical confines. As it will be demonstrated in this and the following chapters, animism approached in this way can be applied across a broad spectrum of contexts, cultures and worldviews, or better yet 'worlds'.

Part I

Relationality

When the practices and beliefs that accompany everyday religion are examined, such as those that take place in relation to the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess, the observation can be made that what are generally considered fixed dualistic categories, subjects and objects, mind and matter, symbolic action and 'real' action, the 'sacred' and 'profane', and 'culture' and 'nature' are not fixed statuses at all. They are, in actuality, abstract and their meanings are fluid. 'Culture', 'modernity', 'ritual and belief', even 'materiality', are elitist terms and constructs that only partially bear resemblances to that which happens in the lived reality of religious practices and interactions. Different concepts are needed that addresses these 'spaces in between'. Emerging alongside others, relationality

is one such concept. Radicalised and applied to religious statues specifically, relationality forms the core and central premise of this book.

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’ (exemplified through statue persons specifically) into ‘liveliness’ or *being* insofar as we are relating with them, not before, not after (which also extends to temporal relating). What happens when we are not engaging statues and other objects is unknown to us. In other words, ontologies emerge in moments of active, relational engagement. This idea is not ‘human centred’. It asserts that a fair and distributed importance should be afforded objects, artefacts, and other potential *beings* who make up the ‘living world’. Thus this discussion is centred on ‘personhood’, and the ways in which it emerges. Harvey’s (2005b) ‘new’ animism, Scott’s (2006) idea of ‘ontological emergence’, and the *Thinking Through Things* methodological approach (Henare, et al, 2007) which allows ‘things’ to inspire a ‘plurality of ontologies’, will now be addressed, along with a discussion of Viveiros de Castro’s (2000) ‘perspectives’ and how it relates to and informs ‘relationality’.

The ‘new animism’

According to Harvey (2005b), the new version of animism 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). Animism has a long history within the academy. Found in Europe’s Christian and colonial pasts, terms such as 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. Tylor’s (1913 [1871]) idea of animism asserted 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). This dualistic 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. Borrowing from both

Harvey (2005b) and Hallowell (1960), the relational approach adopted in this book has fully engaged the term 'personhood' to describe and help understand how objects become subjects.

Indicating the changing nature of animist discourses, 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 begun 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, subject versus object, or nature versus culture. Subjecthood is achieved through relationships. Thus personhood is a status that depends on active, relational engagement.

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 in the following chapter, this is one of the many ways in which treatment exemplifies the relational quality of animism with regards to religious statues.

Ontological emergence

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. 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). Further, Scott views personhood thus:

The idea that relationships of sharing and mutual responsiveness between human and other-than-human aspects of the environment constitute ‘personhood,’ I think, is fundamental both ontologically and epistemologically’ (2006: 53).

This idea shares characteristics with those of Hallowell’s (1960) idea of personhood. Of course Hallowell, Harvey, and Scott are writing/have written about different Amerindian perspectives, i.e. Ojibwe and Cree. The fact that these perspectives are not ‘Western’ in terms of culture makes them all the more valuable in terms of offering different ideas that highlight the areas where dualisms such as ‘subject’ and ‘object’ do not necessarily work.

Let us explore this further. Scott’s idea of ontological emergence and personhood is simultaneous and relevant to place, time and location. 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’ reflects the nature of animist relationality. Reliant upon relational engagement, Scott’s ontological emergence indicates a *simultaneous* coming into being of persons and things. 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 suggest that the attribution of personhood comes *after* the engagement with the tree, i.e. after epistemological value has already been attributed. In contrast, he argues that engagement and response are simultaneous, immanent ‘and mutually reinforcing in our experience of the world’ (2006: 61). While this idea of simultaneous coming into being supports the concept of relationality, relationships with the Virgin and the Goddess can also indicate cases of *deliberate* coming into being where epistemologies are indeed present. Ideas/ beliefs, as well as material ‘protocol’ (such as what is the ‘norm’ in terms of an offering), often accompany and inform venerative performances. Relational engagement with statues is mostly intentional. It is not a spontaneous inevitability. This is not to say that the ‘lives’ of religious statues are solely dependent upon human intentionality; nor is it to say that relational engagement cannot, in fact, be spontaneous. The volatile nature of animist relationality suggests that sometimes the relationships that emerge as a result of encounter *surprise* those involved in the encounter. I have seen this happen twice while conducting fieldwork at the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala. On two separate occasions, once during the day, and once at night, English tourists were visiting the shrine for the first time. Both women, with their husbands, were not Catholic, nor had they any relationship with the Virgin, the village, or the area. I had the privilege of witnessing two *first encounters*. In both instances, the women stopped suddenly in front of the statue, their eyes welled up with tears, and they began to cry. These were cases of spontaneous relational engagement. It can be suggested here that animist relationality forms part of a modern response to being in the presence of religious statues as much as it equally forms part of a ‘religious’ or votive response. It is an 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.

Relationality therefore operates from the basic assumption that all persons, human persons, statue persons, plant and animal persons, etc. are equal and equally capable of drawing one another into being in moments of active relating, and from the unique properties/perspectives of their ‘bodies’, whether deliberate, spontaneous, or immanent. It is not ‘human centred’ in nature. It is a complete package.

Thinking Through Things

A concept that is capable of addressing the full range of relational potentialities present in and of religious and other objects can be found in the approach offered by the *Thinking Through Things* (2007) methodology (introduced in Chapter 2). Published the same year that my studies in material religion began, this approach has been heavily influential in my learning how to ‘think through things’. Instead of explaining away ethnographic accounts of the engagement with ‘things’, the *Thinking Through Things* project renders both researchers and things capable of producing a multiplicity of creative theories, novel ideas and concepts where “the ‘things’ themselves dictate a *plurality* of ontologies” (Henare, et al., 2007:7). This moves toward

the absolute productivity of non-definition – towards a new impulse within anthropology to move beyond the development of evermore nuanced filters through

which to pass phenomena, through to engagements with things as conduits for concept production (Henare, et al., 2007: 7).

Certainly 'relationality' is one such thing-inspired concept. However, as stated before, relationality implies a fair and distributed importance be given to the ontological possibilities present between human persons. Relationality, as a stance, is, as suggested here, a 'non-definition'. Shamefully situated within the confines a word, relationality implies action, and active, volatile, relationships occur on continuums. They are not fixed.

A significant factor of this approach (one that I have tried to employ throughout this work) rests on the suggestion that the term 'worlds' is adopted in the place of 'worldview'. The use of the word 'worlds' implies a respectful distance that allows for the possibility of being a good guest researcher and thereby *not* understanding (or trying to understand) everything about the relationships that people have with statues and offerings. In many instances it is not appropriate to intrude upon the personal and intimate relationships that people have with their divine focus, i.e. many of the performances and interactions that take place between devotees and statues of the Goddess and Virgin are done (as the case studies demonstrate) in matters of need, and these can be private matters. Further, from an etic perspective, even if I were to try to seek out 'meanings' from the evidence, i.e. the statues, I cannot assume to know the statues of the Virgin or the Goddess with the same intimacy or passion that their devotees know them. Vivieros de Castro says,

[A]nthropology is practiced as if its paramount task were to explain how it comes to know (to represent) its object – an object also defined as knowledge (or representation). Is it possible to know it? It is decent to know it? Do we really know it, or do we see it (and ourselves) through a glass, darkly? (2004: 483)

The Thinking Through Things project inspires hope. In proposing that a plurality of ontologies can be 'born' from things as they are, and by acknowledging that we do not have to know everything about a subject/object, i.e. it does not have to be 'explained away', we can perhaps more readily, indeed more openly, engage with people who live in different worlds. In researching and discussing religious materiality we are engaging both with epistemology (what people believe about the world) and ontology or, more adequately, *ontologies*.

Relationality illustrated

To illustrate the concept of relationality further, an example is offered that demonstrates how ontologies can emerge from relational encounters with objects. I have a small wooden statue of Ganesh that I am particularly fond of. He rests on the mantel piece over my fireplace, and I sometimes leave milk in a cup for him as an offering (Ganesh supposedly likes milk). Ganesh is, after all, handy when it comes to removing obstacles of any kind. Arguably, this statue is not 'living' until I have engaged with him in some way such as speaking with him, or leaving him milk. Consequently, from the perspective of the statue perhaps I am not living until I engage with him, too. It can be suggested that there is a tension between the properties of the wood with its own course of being, and the religious identity of Ganesh which has, in a sense,

been superimposed on the wood through its crafting, who might also have a deliberate, prescribed course of being. This tension might suggest that my Ganesh statue can be considered hybridic (part wood, part Ganesh identity, part person to me, part person in his own right). Beings (human beings, object beings) are *who they are*. Let us break this down further.

The statue, before it was a statue, was a piece of wood. As a piece of wood, it would have once formed part of a tree, grown from the earth. The earth, the tree, and humans, share commonalities – we all have material compositions, some of which share properties. The wood material was, in essence, transformed into something recognizable to me as a Hindu deity and therefore became, in some sense, special, or ‘sacred’, i.e. Ganesh (although trees are also recognizable to me and are equally ‘sacred’). The tree from whence Ganesh came, and the earth to which we all shall someday return in some fashion, ultimately form part of the same ‘thing’. I honour the wood from which Ganesh came as much as I honour Ganesh as a remover of obstacles. Although I recognise their component parts, they are one thing.

In terms of engagement specifically, I may decide to incorporate my Ganesh into, for example, a daily meditation. I can speculate that when I am not using him, he is dormant, or sleeping. In reality, I can bring what I choose to the encounter in terms of beliefs/ideas/speculations. Yet I acknowledge that the unique perspective of this Ganesh statue is unknown to me. His biography, his previous life as part of a tree, and the steps involved in his creation, provide him with a unique perspective. In cases such as these, although I acknowledge Ganesh’s physical properties, the significance lies in the fact that personhood is achieved through acts, whether these acts result from ‘everyday’ relating, or relating in more elaborate ways such as through ritual or procession. Personhood is, in fact, a verb. This idea of personhood is non-exclusive and like that of relationality, emphasises emergence. If we follow on from Smith’s (2005) idea that, ‘Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention’ (2005: 33), then personhood can also be achieved through acts of paying attention. Acts of attention bring emerging personhood into focus. Mitchell writes,

Statues are not merely objects, they are objects that are engaged with, and interacted with, particularly on ritual occasions, and it is through the performance of ritual that their power and presence are confirmed (Mitchell, 2009: 266).

Although personhood is a potentiality both when religious statues are not taking part in ritual and when they are, it is during times of ritual when their personhood becomes more obvious. In moments of relational engagement the boundaries that separate subjects from objects, or the sacred from the profane, become fluid concepts, and conditions become fertile for humans and other than humans to be brought into unique forms of co-inspired, co-relational being. In this view, representation, as well as human intentionality, can only ever be partial. These encounters are ‘complete’ occurrences. They are not necessarily reliant on religious ideas or doctrine, although they may be informed thus. 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 such as my Ganesh,

then the *act* of relating becomes the animating quality, i.e. through the acts of speaking, touching, or simply being in the presence of.

Perspectives

This example of relational encounters with Ganesh leads to a discussion about the multi-perspectival quality of relationality. This is where Viveiros de Castro makes a valuable contribution to this book. Comparing the impoverished nature of the conceptual dichotomies found in Western cultural heritage (immanence/transcendence, ‘representation’, nature/culture) with those ‘operating in Amerindian perspectivist cosmologies’ (2000: 470), he criticizes the impact that accepted Cartesian dualities have on anthropology and related disciplines, saying that they have led academics toward the desire to resolve dualities through the idea that creating one unifying principle will solve these problems. He 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).

Viveiros de Castro says ‘the Amerindian conception would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity’ (2000: 470). He 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).

Within this ‘corporeal diversity’ one can find ‘perspectivism’, which, according to Viveiros de Castro, is ‘reminiscent of the notion of ‘animism’ (2000: 472). Defining 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), Viveiros de Castro, like Harvey, Scott, and Ingold, addresses the relational status of *being*, how being is perceived, and the knowledges that emerge through becoming. The ways of being in one’s body – or *any body* – are not fixed, but changeable with encounter.

Although animist relationality is a conceptual term, it is not an attempt to create a ‘unifying principle’. By its nature it implies plurality and alterity. This is not, however, the same as relativism, which might suggest that there is one reality to which all people, things, objects must adhere. Relativism implies that there is an objective, core, central, *social*, culturally agreed upon *reality* to which all things, actions, and persons must be relative. Patrick Curry said ‘Relativism denies that reality can be accessed. (Consequently, all discourse about reality is merely cultural and/or socially constructed)’ (personal communication). In the case studies discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, 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 as well as their lived realities of religion), the perspective of being ‘social’ belongs to human persons. Inevitably, religious statue persons form parts of human person social networks, but 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'. They might, for example, relate to other statues differently from the ways in which they relate to humans. We can therefore only speculate as to the extent of their sociability in terms of the relationships that human persons have with them (and the accounts given accordingly while conducting research). This is a departure from Viveiros de Castro's perspectives that maintains that in order to have a perspective, one must have a 'soul' (2004a: 482), and leads us neatly into a discussion of 'agency'.

Part II

Agency

Addressing 'location' or the complications that arise when seeking to locate the animating qualities of objects within Western cultural discourses specifically leads us to a discussion of 'agency'. Therefore, I will begin this section with an assertion. Agency, as it is understood most commonly in the social sciences, that is as 'exclusively an attribute of [human] persons' (Pickering, 2010 : 194), is unlikely to account for the ontological potentialities of religious statues such as the Virgin and Goddess. This is not to say that agency does not have a 'place' within Western culture – in fact the concept of agency can be a very useful tool, especially in terms of understanding the roles that humans play in gift relations, the roles of commodities and exchange situations. It simply might need re-thinking to include further, 'not so human centred' relational possibilities. Although Barad (2007) is doing this (grounded in quantum physics), understanding 'agency' as relational is not the norm – yet. As it stands, agency – as commonly understood – is conceptually incomplete in terms of accounting for the roles of religious objects specifically because the weight of its emphasis relies upon human intentionality. And as demonstrated in the ethnographic accounts, the statues of the Virgin and the Goddess might well, at times, have their own agendas. Thus this section examines 'agency', the different ways it is understood and critiqued, and how the roles of religious statues specifically can aid in its 'rethinking' and expansion. Gell (1998) is one of the more influential scholars who has produced ideas about agency. He addresses the roles of art objects specifically, saying "social agents" can be drawn from categories which are as different as chalk and cheese'. 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)

Gell does not suggest or support ideas that things can have ontologies which are independent of human agency, and/or representation. To Gell, agency is human centred. In terms of 'religious art' specifically, Gell (1998) writes:. . . the 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 is true that religious objects stand out. They exist in marked off spaces, and are obvious. Like the clarity seen in a cloudless, rural night sky, the extent to which objects generally can be theorized is most perceivable in their religious material forms. Mitchell (2009) also applies Gell's idea of social agency to religious statues, saying 'If statues have the power to influence the world-through miraculous curative properties, for example – this suggests that they have agency: the capacity to act' (2009: 266). Indeed, it is also argued in this book that religious statues have the 'capacity to act'. But neither 'social agency', nor 'person-like' are terms/concepts capable of containing the full relational possibilities found in the 'personhood' that emerges from co-relational encounters with others. In effect, Gell's approach to 'social agency' emphasizes 'representation' (Leach, 2007), suggesting that art and other objects are important because of what they represent to their viewers; not because of the totality possible in who or what they are.

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 implication of Gell's and Mitchell's approach imposes the same subject/object dualities that many scholars are currently trying to move away from. Indeed, in misrecognizing the potentialities of matter, it both reflects and reinforces theological and modernist structures that relegate religious statues and other objects to being merely representational instead of the tangible, visible, persons that they are, or potentially can be. According to Ingold, although social theorists attribute the concept of agency to objects, they cannot actually define what it is. Because dualistic constructs remain operative both culturally and in the academy, 'agency' is used in ways that are similar to Tylor's (1913 [1871]) animism where spirit is attributed to matter. 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)

It can be suggested that the concept of agency, when applied to material objects, is a substitute for not being able to explain that which is actually occurring. Agency, like 'spirit', takes on mystical and mysterious qualities. Are, then, social theorists using still productive cosmological and dualistic structures when they apply 'agency' to objects? From Ingold's perspective, it would appear so. But as it will be addressed further along, the concept of 'agency', like 'spirit', is relational and not restricted to fixed, structural confines. Similar to Viveiros de Castro's account that 'souls' must be present in order for ontologies to emerge, Ingold argues that for agency to be present, nervous systems must be present. Attention must be paid for action to take place, and attentive movement/action is what should constitute agency. He writes, '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' (2011: 94). While it is agreed that it might be a stretch to consider

that ordinary things such as a coffee mug can have agency, if concepts of agency should consist of 'attentive movement', or 'skill', then certainly the Virgin and the Goddess have these. According to devotees, these statues can heal (which is a skill), answer petitions and take centre stage on procession days where they move about and greet their fans. Attention is certainly paid to statues in these moments, and their 'agency' (if we can indeed, call it such) is religious. So how flexible is the concept of agency? Attributing a kind of 'fairy dust' agency to beings who are non-organisms, that is who do not have skill and who do not grow' (2011: 94) may appear illogical to Ingold, yet as demonstrated in the case studies, sometimes devotees attribute spirit to matter. In these cases the 'agency' that puts statues on the move is motivated by the particularities of their religious contexts (Gell, 1998 : 99). 'Religious agency' can be social, or not, and it is just as relational as the statues or other objects who receive its 'magical dust'. Barad (2007) suggests 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). The possibilities that are present in agency, then, may only be restricted by an understanding of agency that is human centred. Agency, like modernity, can be expounded upon to include more relational possibilities. It is not necessarily bound by 'having' or 'not having'. 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.

This theory of matter and agency offers a real advance in current debates. It dissolves emphasis on binary opposites, and places it instead on action, active relating . Examined in this way, agency and relationality are complementary ways of understanding the world. This idea is supported by Pickering's (2010) assertion that 'Agency is emergent in the brute sense of being unknowable in advance of specific performances' (2010: 195). It is not restricted to fixed, static, dualistic confines. Now that it has been established that 'agency' is capable of being flexible, that is not only social, not only object centred, but flexible, the question must be asked: is 'agency' an adequate way of examining the roles of religious statues specifically? Do devotees interact with their statues as if they have agency? Do devotees see themselves as 'agents' of 'instrumental action'? In all probability, the answer is 'no'. Outside of the academy, 'agency' has little use. However, as material culture studies and the study of religions continue to intersect, agency might find a place more readily in future discussions in terms of the potentialities of 'power' and other discourses in the study of the material dimension of religion.

ANT and the 'meshwork'

This discussion would be incomplete without addressing 'actor network theory', or ANT, and Ingold's idea of the 'meshwork'. For that matter, they serve as interesting conceptual frameworks to help in understanding the complexity of how 'it all' works together. By 'it all'

I am referring to objects, humans, gifts, sociability, culture, nature, the environment, the physical properties that exist in everything, and the energy that fuses it all together to create our world. Latour (2005) says that even the most popular theories ‘are not sufficient to describe the many entanglements of humans and non-humans’ (2005: 84), ANT is one such theory. Latour describes it thus:

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).

The emphasis here is on ‘action’, and action forms the basis of both relationality and that which constitutes personhood. However, because of the ‘dematerializing biases’ (Pels 2008) found in the social sciences, terms such as ‘the social’ as it is commonly used when discussing ANT and ‘agency’ denote an anthropocentric bias. This, however, is not to say that Latour’s intention is thus. Patrick Curry suggests that agency is a function/effect of whole networks (which are frameworks for conceptualising, not ‘things out there’), ‘instead, as per old-style conceptions of agency, of actors in/of themselves. In ANT, actors are to speak nodes in networks, and there are no actors in/of themselves’. This means that ‘agency’ can be present anywhere in any network, and at any time, regardless of whether or not that agency involves, inhabits, engages, or prompts so called ‘inanimate’ objects (personal communication). From this view, networks are continually in states of becoming.

This idea of the network supports the assertion that we share the world with a ‘multi-verse’ of other beings, plants, animals, even objects (who also have lives and biographies). This view is inherently animist and relational. It supports the assertion that all things are potentially persons, depending on how we pay attention to them. When we are not paying attention to them, they are still persons, but in ways that simply might not be recognizable to us. More than a redistribution of the word personhood (Hicks, 2010: 78), relationality implies that the use of personhood is a way of thinking about the world that can potentially lead to more respectful engagements.

Ingold’s work *When ANT meets SPIDER: Social theory for Anthropods* (2011d) is a playful yet insightful continuation of this discussion 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’ (2011d: 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 (2011d: 91). Through this dialogue, Ingold suggests 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 [social] network (where humans are distinguished from non-humans) cannot be established (ibid, 2011d: 91).

However, the differences between ANT and the 'meshwork' could rest on simple language misinterpretations. Latour has observed in hindsight that when the French *acteur réseau* was translated to English, it took on significances that were never intended. The French *réseau* 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' (Ingold, 2007: 85). In essence, perhaps the difference in Latour's idea of how the network works, and Ingold's idea of how the meshwork works are not very different. It is possible that they have grounded their theories in differing, yet powerful, philosophical metaphors which have both highlighted and given shape to their conceptual and thus theoretical differences.

Worlds in formation

In the shrine of the Virgin and the temple of the Glastonbury Goddess, statues can take on their own animated qualities, not only through the expectations that devotees bring to them, but through their historical contexts, their display, the offerings that are visible supporting testimonials to their power, and their *presences*. The fluid, relational lines of SPIDER can further account for the relational statuses of the Virgin and the Goddess because SPIDER's meshwork emphasizes the acts of connection and relationship, the actual relating. Ingold says, 'Every such line describes a flow of material substance in a space that is topologically fluid' (2011b: 64). These lines on the web of SPIDER are contextual lines, i.e. these things (offerings, material statue persons, stories, devotees) are interwoven into moments of active relating. Like caring for a newly planted sapling, the personhoods of the Goddess and the Virgin *become* with the momentary nourishment of relationships and devotion. This is how ontologies emerge through relationships and relational encounters. Here, 'worlds are in formation'. Writing about 'indigenous' peoples who 'to whom the label of animism has been generally applied, Ingold writes

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, 2011c: 66).

Glastonbury Goddess and Virgin of Alcala devotees are not the indigenous peoples to whom Ingold refers. However, their relationships with their statues are 'animic'. Ingold's 'world-in-formation' discussion echoes Scott's understanding of the Cree *pimaatsiwin*, translated as 'the continuous birthing of the world' (2006: 61), and 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 a constant process of being and becoming. Ontologies are regenerative, and exist along continually forming lines where they are re-invented with each individual encounter.

Representation

As mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 2, sensual religion (religious expressions that can be touched, felt, smelled, etc.) is problematic due to the fact that religion is often defined in terms of transcendence or metaphysics. Therefore ‘religious objects’ are often defined as symbols, referents, or representations. Due to the impact of modernity and the nature of Enlightenment rationality, epistemologies and ontologies often complement, conflict, and collide. Goddess and Virgin devotees, for example, 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. Applicable to the venerative practices that take place around the Virgin and Goddess, Gell, in reference to Hindu *murti* statue devotion, 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 to by Gell is commonplace among devotees found in both religiosities discussed in this book. Unlike the term ‘agency’, vernacular Catholics and Goddess pagans will have heard of, indeed, will commonly use, the word ‘representation’. The problematic lies in the fact that the tangible divine, such as statues, do not and cannot represent themselves. They are who they are. Yet depending on the quality of encounter, the statues may be required to signal a referent, or represent an otherworldly prototype. It is within this complex zone of interaction that 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/*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.

Part III

The fetish in animism

Similarly as I argue with regard 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 on this journey, the fetish has managed to work its way into my thinking 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. Thus 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 *fetichisme*, and for the first time, *fetishisme* 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 Tyloorean 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’ is not found here.

Locating Power

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 (Pels, 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 (1998: 91). From the significance found in this distinction, and applied to statues of the Virgin and the Goddess, a new kind of fetishism emerges as a sub-species of animism and it pushes animist relationality to its limits: fieldwork evidence has demonstrated that statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are so relational that they can be inherently/independently powerful, representational, neither, or both simultaneously. It is a matter that is dependent on *the manner in which* they are related to. Through attributing and/or acknowledging the power of the Virgin and the Goddess, devotees become, in some sense, subordinate. This kind of interaction is both valid and valuable. The relationships and performances that take place in relation to the Virgin and the Goddess inform us about the powerful potential in the 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. Thus sometimes, in its flexibility, relationality is 'fetishist', and in terms of theory, this occurs when devotees relate to objects/statues as inherently powerful.

How might this approach then be applied to the case studies discussed in Chapters 3 and 4? Vernacular Catholicism (or the *lived* reality of Catholicism) usually consists of 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. In the case of the Virgin of Alcala, it can be argued that the statue is 'embodied' when she is being engaged, addressed and treated as a living, breathing woman. To attribute power to a

religious 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 *theology* 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.

An example of how things can be powerful comes from Holbraad. He discusses *ache* (2007: 201) as a powdery 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. Similarly, as Holbraad said about the powder of Cuban diviners *being* power (2007), in the case of the Virgin, 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 chapters.

Conclusion to Chapter 5

Following theoretical discourses, this chapter has introduced the concept of relationality. Situating it within current debates about personhood, agency, 'networks', 'the meshwork' and representation, it has provided the reader with a framework from which to understand the different ways in which material persons such as statues of the Goddess and the Virgin can be understood, as well as the roles they play within their religiosities. Further, it introduced a new version of fetishism from which to better understand both the powerful roles of matter, and where power can be located accordingly. Complementary to this, Chapter 6 will ground the theory, i.e. the concept of relationality, into the fieldwork by demonstrating the many ways in which statues are/can become persons, i.e. through the materials used and creativity involved in their creation, and their treatment.

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