D I S K U S

**Gift Giving and Power Perspectives:
Testing the role of statue devotion in England and Spain**

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ABSTRACT:
>   This paper addresses the problematic nature of religious materiality in Western discourses, illustrated by its typical relegation to being representational instead of sensual, embodied or tangible. Two ethnographic accounts highlight the prominent role that materiality plays in vernacular religious contexts in contemporary England and Spain. With a focus on offerings and gift giving, the practices and performances that take place in relation to statue forms of Our Lady of Avalon (the Glastonbury Goddess) in her temple, and the Virgin of Alcala de los Gazules, Andalusia, in her shrine, exemplify an aspect of the lived, everyday reality of religion. In these contexts, in tension with religious doctrine, the relationships that take place between statues and devotees show that instead of being mere objects, statues of the Goddess and Virgin are subjective, relational participants in ceremony, rites and ritual, and they play central roles in how human relationships with the divine are maintained and negotiated. Using the discourses of animism and fetishism to test the role of materiality, this paper further considers how making offerings to statues exemplifies a form of Western animism where objects and subjects bring each other into co-inspired, co-relational being through encounters. Here, 'subjecthood' is achieved through relationships and relational encounters, and a multiplicity of ontological possibilities emerge which challenge commonly accepted modern dualisms, i.e. subject/object, mind/matter.

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For the past five years I have been examining the roles of two forms of the divine feminine in statue form, the Glastonbury Goddess in England and the Virgin of Alcala in Andalusia, Spain. Focusing on both statues and offerings, specifically how offerings facilitate relationships with statues, I have tested the role that materiality plays in these two distinct religions by questioning whether statues, who are treated as persons of a high and honourable standing by their devotees, can be considered objects at all. Concluding that their roles are far more complex than first meets the eye, and through seeking more accurate ways in which to better understand the relationships that take place between statues and devotees, this paper introduces the concept of 'relationality'. Following animist discourses, relationality asserts that ontological possibilities emerge when persons (human persons and statue persons) enter into relationships with one another. In other words, *relationships, i.e. moments of active relating, are the ontologies that are examined.* Research conducted has

shown that instead of being *mere objects* the Spanish Virgin and the English Goddess (who will now be introduced) are relational participants in ceremonies and rituals and they play central roles in how relationships with the divine are maintained and negotiated.

I will begin with a discussion of the Virgin of Alcala de los Gazules who resides in La Sierra, Andalusia, Spain.

The votive focal point of one of Spain's numerous Marian cults, this 'statue' of the Virgin is particularly famous for being miraculous. She was coronated in the early 1990s and as I was told by the shrine steward, called the *Santero,* several of the other more significant statues of the Virgin from the province of Cadiz were literally brought into this Virgin's presence to witness her crowning. Her shrine is isolated and sits on its own land nearly five kilometers from the village of Alcala.

Further, the Virgin of Alcala is the owner of these acres of olive groves and farm land that surround her shrine. Her name is literally on the deeds and she is managed by

members of her cult called the *hermandad*, which means a kind of fraternity or brotherhood.

In comparative contrast, and arising from a contemporary Pagan religion, the second case study focuses on one of the aspects of the Glastonbury Goddess. This is the form she took about a month ago during the last procession, but these forms change with this religion's ritual year.

The Glastonbury Goddess Temple is said to be the first 'indigenous temple' dedicated to the Goddess of the land surrounding Glastonbury, indeed, in the whole of the British Isles, in over 1,500 years.

The temple is in daily use. People come in, sit, pray, meditate, make offerings, or may ask to be 'smudged' (a form of ritual purification that involves smoke from sage or sweet grass) by the temple caretakers. The Goddess Temple also hosts ceremonies, rituals, temple dressings, healing events, and an annual procession. As in the case of the Virgin, devotees attribute miracles to the Goddess and pay homage to her statue.

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

For example, the centrality of *healing* found in each religion indicates similarities in terms of expectations, reliance, and interdependence within relationships. There are also similarities between the Goddess and the Virgin in terms of physical properties. Although they differ in design and decoration, both statues are made from wood. The Virgin is made from cedar while the Goddess is made from willow which has been locally sourced from the Glastonbury area. The gifts offered to each statue also share similarities in that they encompass a wide range of materials. Although each thing that becomes an offering is influenced by the particularities of each religion, in each case offerings are sometimes economically viable, such as silver or gold, and they are sometimes 'crude', such as hospital bandages or hair. Whatever the material, the offerings found in each context are relationally capable of delivering the intentionality of the devotee. Their aesthetic can inspire and inform, and they have the power to further creative modes of devotion.

Although the cultural, epistemological and ontological specifics of these religiosities are important in understanding how materiality works, they will not be discussed here in great detail. What we are concerned with here is how research among these groups has shown that objects achieve the status of subjects. This status, here called 'relational status', is called such because it depends on the personal, intimate relationships that devotees have with statues of the Goddess figures in their temple setting. This idea is based on current theories of animism and forms the foundation of two assertions: First, supported by the ways in which the Virgin and the Goddess are treated and engaged in the ethnographic accounts, it proposes that the identities of the Virgin and the Goddess are not fixed, but are volatile. This points toward the non-dualistic nature of religion as it is lived, and expands on questions of objects, potential agency, subjecthood and personhood in the religiosities discussed here. Second, by engaging and expanding on the concept of statue focused representation, relationality builds on and complements the theoretical propositions made by advocates of the new animism such as Harvey (2005b), and others who have adopted relational stances such as Vivieros de Castro's "ontological perspectives" (2004a), Gell's exploration into the roles of "idols" (1998), Scott's "ontological emergence" (2006), and Ingold's idea of the "meshwork" (2011a). But before we go any further, it is necessary to further — but briefly — explore the problematic nature of materiality in order to better understand why the idea of 'subjecthood' (compared with that of 'objecthood') raises issues.

Addressing the 'problem of materiality', the assertions raised in this paper are problematic due to the fact that religious studies and related disciplines have largely and theoretically relegated religious materiality to being representational. Apart from being the source of endless polemics throughout history, the more recent discourses of Protestantism and modernity have generally dismissed object use and veneration in the West as the stuff of superstition and ignorance, or of a pagan past or primitive alterity. Yet being human inevitably indicates entering into and having relationships with material culture, or the things that surround us and form our visible and tactile environments — whether those things are 'marked off', 'sacred' or ordinary. In terms of understanding the roles of religious materiality, this is problematic due to the fact that embedded in our Western cultural understandings of ourselves and the world around us is the idea that we are disembodied minds. This dualism, reflected in the commonly accepted separations between immanence and transcendence, subjects and objects, spirit from matter, and the sacred and the profane, has deep historical roots, but the more recognizable origins of these more recent incarnations of duality is found in Enlightenment thinking and rationality. This way of thinking often leads us to deny our own materiality, much of which is done in exchange for 'what's out there in the ether', and we end up dealing in abstractions while not being fully aware of the relationships, indeed the interdependence, that we have on the objects and the

things around us — objects that we generally, if not unconsciously, assume to dominate due to our anthrocentricity. This is the nature of being subjects of the project of modernity. As Latour (1993) and others have indicated, modernity is an idea that does not and cannot be used to adequately describe who we are and what we do, especially in terms of the lived reality of religion.

Objects and their potential agency is something that is being discussed currently by social and cultural theorists. For that matter, it has been in discussion for quite a few years now. The problem is that most social theorists are happy to recognize the derived social lives of things, i.e. things play social roles as representations or commodities that arise between humans. This relegates the idea of 'subjecthood' to mere metaphor — a status which cannot help but to enforce ideas of representation and consequently negate the relational status of objects. 'Subjecthood' can, however, be applied to things generally in Western culture, yet it is through the roles of religious objects that their potentialities are tested to their full relational capacities. Religious materiality specifically deals with personal, private, creative and intimate relationships that take place with the tangible divine. In these instances, the concept of 'duality' *is* merely metaphorical. Therefore, instead of referring to the problem of materiality (especially in terms of religion), I propose that we should more appropriately be referring to the problem of duality.

To reiterate the argument so far, in the case studies discussed in this paper, the problem of duality presents itself when one examines not only the roles that statues of the Virgin and the Goddess play, but how they are engaged by devotees. This is because statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are theoretically/doctrinally perceived by scholars and theologians as being representations of the divine instead of, for example, being recognized and received as the tangible, embodied, relational participants in ceremony and ritual that they are (at least for the practitioners that enter into relationships and negotiations with them). Thus, solutions to the 'problem of duality' can be found in the unique, volatile, diverse relationships that take place in religious *living* contexts, not only in Western European religiosities such as in the cases of the Virgin and the Goddess, but in other cultures where religious foci take center stage and are engaged and/or venerated such as, for example, in the similar cases of Hindu *murtis,* statues of the Buddha, or Santeria altars that 'house' gods. As this paper reveals, the roles that religious matter play are not so problematic once commonly accepted parameters are broadened to include more relational possibilities.

The Theory
The concept of relationality fuses three things: relationships, performances, and the moment. It is a practice, a co-inspired form of active, mutual relating that emerges from the unique, personal, even intimate relationships that take place between human and other than human beings rather than a religious label, an ethic, or a worldview. Relationality is animist in both theory and encounter. It asserts that moments of active relating contain the possibility of bringing 'persons' into 'liveliness' or being insofar as we are relating with them, not before, not after (which also extends to temporal relating). In other words, ontologies emerge in moments of active, relational engagement. This is built on both Harvey's (2005b) 'new' version of animism and Scott's (2006) idea of ontological emergence which will now be addressed.

According to Harvey, this new version is about recognising that the world is full of persons, some of which are human, others of which are not. It is not so much concerned with how persons come into being as it with how those persons are to be behaved toward (2005b: xi). Personhood is a status that depends on relational

engagement. Further, inferred human likeness is not a prerequisite for animism and/or personhood. Harvey says that the new animism is "less about attributing life and/or human-likeness, than it is about seeking better forms of personhood in relationships" (2005b: 16). How, then, do we know when something is a person or an object (who is a potential person)? In using the example of stones, Harvey says,

> If not all stones are alive 'but some are', how does someone encountering a stone tell the difference? It certainly makes a difference, not only grammatically and in other speech acts, but also in the way a stone is treated. People are spoken with and acted towards differently than objects (2005b: 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. This is one of the many ways in which treatment exemplifies the relational quality of animism.

Let us look at some of the ways that animism is evidenced in the case studies. A commonality in these two distinct religiosities is the fact that devotees of both case studies attribute animate qualities to the statues in moments of relating. Devotees to both the Goddess and the Virgin say that the faces of the statues shift, move and change expressions. According to members of an elite group of eight women within the cult of the Virgin who are responsible for washing, and changing the Virgin and the baby Jesus about four to five time a year — the Virgin has emotions. These *camaristas* — or chamber maids — say that during this very intimate and feminine process, they sing devotional songs to her, and the Virgin responds their emotions by having tears in her eyes. I have only spoken with three of them, but they all said that they go into a trance like state when they are bathing the Virgin's body. When the camaristas are changing the robes and washing the 'body' of the Virgin, they speak to her saying things like, 'aren't you beautiful today', and they playfully tell the statue of the baby Jesus to hold still and stop squirming so that they can change him, too. The Santero, or shrine steward, told me that the Virgin punishes him and her face looks angry when he does something as simple as killing a mosquito. Similarly, an informant from the Goddess temple told me that the faces of the statues can look either 'pissy' (her words) or content and happy. This informant also told me that the Goddess makes things move around in the temple. Here, not only is subjecthood exemplified in the ways in which devotees refer to, address and treat statues, but statues are said to contain a certain amount of power — power that can be turned on the devotees if they do not do what they are meant to do. Personal, animist encounters inhabit the relational zones that exist between ideas of 'subject' and 'object', and subjecthood, or 'personhood', become evident in these moments of active relating.

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

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

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

Relationality can also be considered an aspect of Western specific animism because it is a modern response to being in the presence of statues despite doctrine or other theoretical implications. In its flexibility, it is a deliberate occurrence that cuts into both Catholic shrine and Goddess Temple experiences. That is, people act differently in the presence of statues and when they are participating in relational temple/shrine encounters than when they are, say, at home or going about 'ordinary' life. To further illustrate the concept of relationality, an example is offered that demonstrates how ontologies emerge. I may live with a small statue of the Buddha that is placed on my personal altar inside my house. Arguably, that object is not 'living' until I have picked it up and engaged with it in some way. Consequently, from the perspective of the statue maybe I am not living until I pick it up. Engaging with it in ways such as cleaning, admiring, or changing its location can potentially 'activate' the statue so that it can be used in ritual or meditation. I can speculate that when I am not using it, it is dormant, or sleeping. Yet the perspective of this Buddha statue is unknown to me. Here, what we need to know is that subjecthood, is achieved when objects and subjects (human and other than human) both become subjects by bringing each other into a unique form of co-inspired, co-relational being. In this view, representation can only ever be partial. So whereas Tylor (1913 [1871]) argued that animism is a belief in spiritual beings and that within animistic practices, life and spirits are attributed to objects which make them animate (1913 [1871], I: 426-9) it is argued here that if we engage in real encounters, or relationships, with objects, then the *act* of relating becomes the animating quality, i.e. through the acts of speaking, touching, or simply being in the presence of. Mitchell writes,

> Statues are not merely artifacts, but are substantive embodiments of saintly presence, which are both conduits of spiritual power and agents of such power in and of themselves. They are agents, in the sense understood by Gell (1988), endowed with the capacity to act, and their presence is confirmed both through being performed with, and through their own performances. As

> such, they combine *praesentia* and potential-presence and power-to unite
> transcendence and immanence (2009: 275).

Ingold's (2011b) idea of the 'meshwork' can further be applied to the actions that take place in shrine and temple settings through the fluid, relational lines of what he refers to theoretically as SPIDER. Ingold metaphorically likens the lines that connect all things in life to those of a spider's web, i.e. they are creative, imperfect, spontaneous, fluid and relationally volatile. Ingold says, "Every such line describes a flow of material substance in a space that is topologically fluid" (2011b: 64). Ingold creates the idea of SPIDER's meshwork in order to challenge Latour's 'actor network theory' (Latour, 2005). Whereas 'actor network theory' implies straight, fixed, rigid lines of connectivity which emphasize the actors, i.e. the agents, SPIDER's meshwork emphasizes the acts of connecting all that is in life as it occurs, or happens. "Meshwork is the 'web of life', not a network of connected points, but a meshwork of interwoven lines" (Ingold, 2011b: 63) and its emphasis, like animist relationality, is the spontaneity of being which comes about through active relating.

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

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

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

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

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

How then is the concept of relationality applied to the case studies? Due to the impact of modernity and the nature of Enlightenment rationality, epistemologies and

ontologies often complement, conflict, and collide. Devotees know that they venerate a 'devotional', a 'statue', *un imagen*', or what is meant to be a 'representation', yet this appears to be of little importance to the actual relationships they have with their statues. It is within this complex zone of relationality where solutions can be found that help broaden the concept of 'representation'. Viveiros de Castro criticizes 'representation', saying

> my problem with the concept of representation is the ontological poverty it implies — a poverty characteristic of modernity. The Cartesian break with medieval scholasticism produced a radical simplification of European ontology by positing only two principles or substances: unextended thought and extended matter. Modern thought began with that simplification; and its massive conversion of ontological into epistemological questions (questions of representation) is still with us, a conversion prompted by the fact that every mode of being not assimilable to obdurate 'matter' had to be swallowed up by 'mind' (2004a: 482).

As Viveiros de Castro says, questions of representation are still with us. They are highly influential in how religious objects such as images and statues are understood. This is where relationality makes an advance. As mentioned previously, in the classic, Tylorean (1913 [1871]) understandings of animism, alien spirits take up residence in things of nature and matter. For modernists, the concept of 'agency' serves a similar purpose. In contrast, Western animist relationality depends on relational encounters. It is not restricted to the theoretical confines of 'agency', or 'spirits' and matter, subjects and objects, or other dualisms, yet theoretically, it is capable of including these distinctions and more. Due to the epistemological nature of Catholicism and Goddess Paganism where statues and images are often referred to and theologically understood to be representations, Western animist relationality is so relational that sometimes Tylor's (1913 [1871]) animism may better account for the ways in which statues are related to and interacted with than the 'new animism' does. 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. 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 my journey as a researcher, the fetish has managed to emerge time and time again. Yet the concept of the fetish betrays itself. It does exactly what it should not do. In one word it neatly packages the messiness that classifications such as 'object/subject' and 'spirit/matter' do not adequately survey. Applied to statues of the Virgin and the Goddess, this new kind of fetishism emerges as a sub-species of animism and it pushes animist relationality to its limits: statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are so relational that they can be inherently/independently powerful or merely representational, or both simultaneously. This assertion depends not only on the fact that statues are relational, but on *the manner in which* they are related to, i.e. through attributing and/or acknowledging the power of the Virgin and the Goddess, devotees become, in some sense, subordinate to the statues. This distinction indicates a 'fetishist relationality' which occurs when devotees relate to objects/statues as inherently powerful. Defined as such, the fetish further broadens the parameters of relational engagement to include the possibility of statues can have their own powerful agenda. Hence, the relationships and performances that take place in relation to the Virgin and the Goddess inform us about the powerful personhood of matter/statues. This idea advances understandings by highlighting two things: First, relating to statues as powerful, subjective participants in communities and rituals is a sophisticated, modern,

Western mode of being religious that goes beyond mere symbolism. Second, the new fetishism highlights an historical mistake: the stuff of fetishists, i.e. performances, valuing, and treatment of materiality, while traditionally attributed to Africans and other non-Western nations and cultures (and used as an excuse for their domination and sometimes demise), has been happening in Western religious contexts all along.

Vernacular Catholicism (or the *lived* reality of Catholicism) is usually a combination of popular piety and doctrinal protocol. Therefore the way in which materiality is engaged varies from place to place. Popular piety and doctrinal protocol are on a continuum, i.e. they are separate but complementary, interwoven and mutually informative. This makes the kinds of devotions that take place not only unknowable to outsiders, but also unpredictable. For example, the Virgin of Alcala is embodied when she is being engaged, addressed and treated as a living, breathing woman. This is 'unofficial'. To attribute power to a statue is, officially, idolatry. In these moments that which she is said to doctrinally represent is the 'universal Mary'. For this reason she can also be engaged as if she were representational. This depends on who is doing the relating. This is yet another way in which the status of the Virgin is relational, making her changeable with each personal, devotional encounter within her overriding roles as universal divine mother and intercessor.

The *thealogy* surrounding Goddess worship is more flexible than Catholic theology. In theory, the Glastonbury Goddess is more relational than the Virgin of Alcala. For example, Glastonbury Goddess Pagans discuss their statues in terms of both embodiment *and* representation without fear of theological repercussions. An informant, a Priestess of the Glastonbury Goddess, said the Goddess embodies the figures in the temple, while others said that the figures are representations of the Goddess. Further, 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). 'Spirit in matter' indicates that a spirit or deity is transcendent. This is similar to Tylor's (1913 [1871]) spirits taking up residence in matter, or the agency that attributed to things when no other explanation can be provided (Ingold, 2011a: 28). In this case, the 'spirit' of the Goddess in the land, but she is also hovering above it. She is then 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 *thea*logical freedom where monotheism and polytheism are interchangeable.

Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are treated as deities. 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. In contrast with the Goddess, the *Santero* told me that the Virgin of Alcala has her own power (*ella tiene el poder*). I found that his belief reflects a common understanding of the statue. Although devotees know that the statue is a statue and a supposed representation of the universal Virgin Mary, her local, vernacular form is treated and addressed otherwise. As Holbraad said about the powder of Cuban diviners *being* power (2007), in this case the statue *is* power. If fetishism is defined as a discourse with which to understand the power of matter (acknowledging that Catholic devotees of the Virgin of Alcala do not self-identify as fetishists), then the role of matter in this case is fetishistic. The *Santero* said that the

Virgin of Alcala grants miracles, and if she does not want to grant a petition or request, then she will not do it. This indicates that power is attributed to the actual statue rather than to the 'universal Mary'. If the Virgin has power of her own accord (independent of Jesus or God), then this exemplifies the case of Pels' fetishistic 'spirit *of* matter' (1998: 91) where power is present and inherent in the statue. This brings into question the power relations that take place between devotees and statues, a matter of which will now be addressed.

The fact that so called objects are given to other so called objects, who are actually subjects of devotion, is also demonstrative of the relational status of the Goddess and the Virgin. Here, offerings facilitate relationships, performances and negotiations with statues. For example, the Goddess is made offerings of silver and gold, but this is less common than the offering of materials such as wood, bone and stone. Offerings are made to the Goddess with promises, in celebration of her, pledges and in requests for things such as healing and money. Yet an informant told me that she dare not ever 'negotiate' with the Goddess out of fear for making her angry.

For similar reasons the Virgin is made offerings of gold on a regular basis — the parish priest told me that they have enough gold in the treasure store that if it were to be melted down, she could be bathed in it.

The Santero changes the Virgin's rings, necklaces and bracelets on a weekly basis so that all of the offerings will have a chance to be on the 'body' of the statue. This helps maintain close relations with the Virgin.

The creative tension involved in negotiations with statues go beyond Mauss's (2006) ideas of reciprocity and into the realm of power relations where objects and subjects

shift and transform accordingly, and where one is said to have supernatural power over the other. Like Mauss' (2006) idea of gifts, the fetish is contractually constructed in order to help build social relations between two human persons. Yet the kinds of contracts that are made in the Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin take place between statue persons and human persons. It is an act of negotiation that depends on faith and belief. Offerings are often left before and/or after promises are made, and in some cases they testify to promises that have been kept. As demonstrated in the ethnographic accounts, promises are negotiations and contracts with the divine found in the example of words such as, 'If you do this for me, I will buy you a new roof for your shrine'. Here, offerings serve as contractual, mediating currency whereby the economy of gift giving is maintained and continued. This type of promise is conceptual instead of material, but it is current and contractual just the same. So what are the dynamics that take place when statues of the Goddess and Virgin are contracted for purposes of healing? Promises made in the form of offerings in return for healing are a commonality found in each case study. The *Santero* says about the Virgin in cases of healing, 'If she does not want it to happen, it will not happen'. Further studies might address what happens when the Virgin or the Goddess does not fulfill a promise. This might put an end to the promise of exchange and reciprocity. Might the devotee who enters into their bargain with the deity retract their offering, pledge or promise? This is a question leads me to the next phase of this article: power relations. Like the closing of an open ended circuit, paintings are commissioned for promises that have been 'completed' as they say in Spain. This is another important aspect of each of these case studies because it helps us see how the subject/object divide is once again obscured and how statues are not treated as merely representational. It is through the giving of offerings that we know we are dealing with a form of Western specific animism.

Conclusion
The accounts given of these Catholic and Goddess Pagan statues exemplify an aspect of the relational status of objects among us in Western religious contexts, and it is through relationships that we can see their roles. The concept of relationality is not, however, the same as that of Viveiros de Castro's ontological perspectivism, Harvey's animism, or Scott's ontological emergence. These theories have served as ways in which the dynamic relationality of objects can be tested.

Relationality is an aspect of Harvey's (2005b) animism which suggest that animals, objects and other persons are animated when they are in relationship with another person (as indicated by treatment and behaviour toward that person). Although the concept of relationality can be applied across a broad cultural spectrum and to many types of objects, here it has been radicalized in a) its application to the statue devotion that takes place in 'the West', specifically, England and Spain; and b) because it is *only in moments* of active relating that statue persons come into being. Dependent on what a devotee brings to the encounter in terms of epistemology, this form of radicalized animist relationality is so relational that Tylor's animism (1913 [1871]) might also be useful to account for that which takes place in momentary relationships with statues. Relationality is such that it allows statues to contain 'spirits', be embodied with divine presences, be representative of a divine presence, or be inert matter.

Scott's (2006) idea of ontological emergence describes that which occurs in moments of relational engagement with things of nature such as trees and different animals. Yet in addition to simultaneity, I am emphasizing that relational encounters with statues are deliberate, intentional and informed by the modalities that constitute the Goddess Paganism and vernacular Catholicism. The argument here is not that the personhood of statues is evident, everyday, all the time — the Virgin of Alcala

and the Glastonbury Goddess do not have fixed identities. They are, however, persons when they are being related to and engaged, which allows them a multiplicity of varied expression, terms of engagement and rich ontological possibilities. This 'personhood' is in fact demonstrated through the ways in which the figures are addressed, spoken with and treated.

Drawing on Viveiros de Castro's (2004a) ontological perspectivism where different worlds are known through corporeally diverse points of view, the bodily perspectives of statues have also been taken into consideration. Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess do not have 'souls' in the ways that animals or humans do, nor the centrality of a spiritual unity to which they belong and are diversified through their bodily differences. Their 'bodies' are, like the bodies of other persons, alive because their material properties form part of the meshwork (Ingold, 2011: 28).

Further, relationality is not a departure from Ingold's theory of meshwork, but an addition which, based on religious events in context, contributes an active relational dynamic to this theory. This means that the statues of the Virgin and the Goddess *and* their material components (cedar and willow) can be recognized as being a part of a living, fluid, relational schema because they form part of the whole, i.e. that which is in constant relationship with all that is, and that is always in process of being and becoming. From this perspective, statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are always 'living' in some respect, but their personhood is dormant until they being related to intimately, actively, and/or publically. In these cases, the unique encounters that take place between statues and devotees *are* the ontologies.

If these encounters and relationships are taken seriously, then they can be understood to provide a different way of 'thinking about things'. This line of inquiry offers a lateral position to the dualities often found in issues surrounding statue devotion that focus on representation, symbolism and meaning. This is useful way of looking at religious materiality because once removed from the Enlightenment thinking that confounds it, materiality is far less problematic. Lastly, the perspectives put forth by this article also aids in understanding religion as it is lived, that is — in its myriad of vernacular, unique forms; forms that shift and change with every encounter; forms that are continually in process of being, and becoming. Religion is, after all, volatile, performative, and verb like, and materiality provides the necessary clues to help understand its ever changing nature.

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