An Afro-Brazilian Theory of the Creative Process

An Essay in Anthropological Symmetrization

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Abstract: Starting with the axiom that, for anthropology, the only relevant epistemologies and ontologies are those offered by the peoples we work with, this article offers a sketch of the current debate around the once famous ideas of 'fetish' and 'fetishism'. Focusing on the way that this debate has been extended in studies of Afro-Brazilian religions, the argument employs fieldwork and bibliographic data from one of these religions, *candomblé*, in order to present a native theory of the creative process underlying what has been baptized with the strange names 'fetish' and 'fetishism'. In short, this native theory holds that the creative process consists more in the actualization of already existing virtualities contained in beings and objects in the world than in the model of *ex nihilo* production, which is characteristic of our dominant Judeo-Christian and capitalist cosmologies.

Keywords: agency, Afro-Brazilian religions, *candomblé*, fetishism, process of creation, ritual

As a mixture of mistaken knowledge or ideology, illusory reality, and ethnographic peculiarity, fetishism is always situated at the confluence of three fields: epistemology, ontology, and anthropology. The word itself consists, as is well known, in an elaboration of the term 'fetish', coined in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Portuguese and Dutch sailors and merchants who traveled the west coast of Africa. It was a term used to designate material objects that 'the Africans' made and then, having strangely imbued them with supposedly mystical or religious properties, went on to worship. The first theoretical use of the term was by Charles de Brosses in 1760, when he characterized it as the "first religion of humanity." From the nineteenth century onward, the term follows a curious path. It was used as a central concept by some of the

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principal founders of the modern social sciences—Comte, Marx, and Freud, to name just a few. But it was also almost unanimously considered by ethnographers and anthropologists to be nothing more than an incorrect gloss of several varied and heterogeneous ideas and objects.

It seems that a series of three articles that William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988) dedicated to the subject—published in the journal *Res* under the title "The Problem of the Fetish"—rekindled a certain interest in the ethnographic and historical aspects of the theme, if not in its dimension as a general concept. Pietz painstakingly traces the history of this "unique problem-idea." In order to do so, he considers it necessary to refute several different kinds of arguments, which, according to him, are simultaneously or alternately employed in order to exclude the possibility of using the term 'fetish'. He remains unconvinced by "universalistic" arguments (which reduce fetishism to a particular instance of universal forms of symbolism or logical error); "historical" arguments (which turn the concept into an ethnocentric projection of Western discourse); and "particularist" arguments (which condemn the concept as bad ethnography, the result of superficial and prejudiced texts written by travelers and merchants).

If fetishism was initially conceived as a kind of false physics in which the principle of causality was incorrectly applied by attributing to inanimate beings a power that they do not possess, this conception ended up being substituted or supplemented by one of fetishism as a sort of false sociology, which, according to Pietz, located social agency where it "certainly" was not. And although in both cases these sciences apparently guarantee what is real and therefore also assure the possibility of denouncing illusion, in the latter there is a sort of duplication of the critical process, as it proposes itself as a 'true' sociology, which claims not only to denounce a 'false' one, but to explain it, too. Here we should expand upon Gell's (1998: 101) observations concerning magic. Just as fetishism is not an alternative or false theory of physics but rather one that functions in the absence of a theory of physics and that is grounded in a certain type of experience, neither is it a false theory of sociology but rather a knowledge that functions in the absence of (and not because of a lack of) a sociology, that is, in the absence of the very idea of society. In the same way that the notion of causality is not the exclusive property of physics, neither is the notion of sociality that of sociology.[1]

However, this is not the central point of Pietz's text. Certainly, his objectives are not those that anthropologists in general pursue. Despite this, he touches on a question that has hung over anthropology for some time now: are we capable of saying something interesting about other ways of thinking and other forms of sociality in terms of what is different about them in relation to our own? Or are we limited to descriptions of that which resembles us and which we define as 'common' to both us and others?[2] Apparently adopting this latter position, Pietz's historical critique soon becomes mired in what Latour (1996: 29n11) considers an excessive tolerance for Freudian and especially Marxist uses of the notion of fetishism.[3] It is as if some sort of 'epistemological break' could be established between the false musings of de Brosses or the Enlightenment thinkers and the truly scientific theories attained by Marx and Freud.

Ultimately, the consequences of Pietz's method should intrigue anthropologists. However erudite his texts might be, it is difficult for us not to ask if, in the case of fetishism, the African peoples involved in this story really had no "model or truth previous or external to their own 'archive,'" or at least if they were really not party to the "series of its particular usages" (Pietz ????: ???, ???). More precisely, it is difficult not to ask what they would have to say on the subject and to venture that what they indubitably would have to say should at the minimum be included in the record.

Fetishism Today

It was in reaction to this absence in Pietz's text, which was actually intentional and explicit, that anthropologist David Graeber (2005: 410–411) recently complained: "In what follows, I will first consider Pietz's story of the origin of the fetish, then try to supplement his account (drawn almost exclusively from Western sources) with some that might give insight into what the African characters in the story might have thought was going on." Graeber's protest, however, ends up sounding slightly timid when we observe that, throughout his text, his notions about what Africans might have concluded was going on are limited to some ritual practices and generic cosmological speculations, alongside a theory on social order that the author peculiarly assimilates to European contractualism (ibid.: 414–415). In other words, the discourse about fetishes—or rather, those aspects of these discourses that do not resemble our ways of thinking or defining reality—continue to be silenced in favor of what Euro-Americans, whether merchants or anthropologists, consider fundamental.

Furthermore, in an immense effort to save the Marxist conception of fetishism, Graeber (2005: 425) concludes that fetishes constitute "objects which seem to take on human qualities which are, ultimately, really derived from the actors themselves." The mistake of the natives arises only, the author informs us, from the "extraordinary complexity" of the processes of creation, which inhibits the perception of a social totality, leading to the understandable illusion that one is not responsible for what one merely co-authors (ibid.: 428). Graeber remarks, generously, that from this Marxist point of view, African fetishes are particularly under-fetishized (or hardly fetishist), since their socially fabricated nature could not but be apparent to actors who are as interested in social relations as the Africans are. In fact, it is the Europeans, obsessed not with social relations but with objects of value, who project their own fetishism onto the Africans (ibid.: 432). From the African point of view, continues Graeber, "a fetish is a god under the process of construction" (ibid.: 47), and at least this pre-capitalist fetishism can be salvaged as a form of "social creativity." "The danger," concludes the author (ibid.: 431), "comes when fetishism gives way to theology, the absolute assurance that the gods are real"—excluding the commodity, of course.

However generous his position, Graeber (2005) leaves us a little confused. In the first instance, this is because his attempt to rescue the Africans is conducted in spite of themselves (ibid.: 430):

> Of course it would also be going too far to say that the fetishistic view is simply true: Lunkanka cannot really tie anyone's intestines into knots; Ravololona cannot really prevent hail from falling on anyone's crops. As I have remarked elsewhere … ultimately we are probably just dealing here with the paradox of power, power being something which exists only if other people think it does; a paradox that I have also argued lies also at the core of magic, which always seems to be surrounded by an aura of fraud, showmanship, and chicanery. But one could argue it is not just the paradox of power. It is also the paradox of creativity.

What is difficult to understand is why the author feels it necessary to limit native knowledge in a text that is intended to apprehend the African perspective of the problem of the fetish. What is also hard to understand is how the conversion of fetishism into power, or even "social creativity," could be illuminating rather than pacificatory. To maintain that "a fetish is a god under the process of construction" may be very charitable, but it is highly unlikely that this pronouncement as such would be acceptable to those directly interested in the subject (I will return to this point). And although, as Sansi-Roca (2007: 27) points out, it may be difficult to determine at what point *fetisso* became a creole word or if it remained only an expression in pidgin, which is Pietz's position (1985: 5), I would risk suggesting that the term was used by the Africans fundamentally to try to explain to the Europeans something that they could not imagine them being able to understand.[4]

Secondly, Graeber's attempt to save Marx starts with what is most problematic and least original in Marxism, namely, the scientism that he shares with most thinkers of his century. For it is only from this position that one can imagine achieving such a privileged view of the totality of social systems to which only a few have access, condemning all the fetishists, with their limited individual points of view, to glimpses of only a part of this whole. As François Châtelet (1975: 31–32) observed, what is most interesting in Marx is certainly not this type of positivist scientism, but a perspectivism that opens up several other possibilities. *Das Kapital,* Châtelet maintains, constitutes above all an ethnographic and historical description of the capitalist system as seen from the point of view of the proletariat and not the bourgeoisie. That this point of view has been considered even more totalizing, and consequently even more true or scientific, only contributes to Marxism's theoretical and political disgrace, and should be used neither as an analytic strategy, nor as a political posture intended to save it.

Finally, in order to rescue the Africans (and Marxism), Graeber seems to believe it necessary to condemn the Europeans (or at least the capitalists). They are really the only ones who have deceived themselves with respect to the nature of collective life, imagining what is in truth merely the objectification of social relations to be the origin of these same relations. In a sense, the only true fetishism is that of the commodity, and the only true fetishist is one who denounces the fetishism of others.

The evidently vicious character of this type of affirmation did not escape Bruno Latour (1996) in his short but fundamental book dedicated to fetishism.

Furthermore, in a manner very different from that of Graeber, Latour does not pretend to save the Africans or their fetishism. On the contrary, African fetishism is exactly what will rescue the Europeans from their anti-fetishism, that is, the strange notion which claims that 'modernity' has freed them from the phantom that haunts all pre-modern social formations—the phantom of belief (ibid.: 9–10, 15, 29n11, 33–35, 55).

Latour's (1996) argument is complex and sophisticated, and I will consider only one of its points here, whereby the author clarifies that his interest in the theme concerns his own society exclusively: "It was only for me, clearly, that I was interested, or rather, for these unfortunate whites who want to deprive themselves of their anthropology, locking themselves into their modern destiny as ante-fetishists" (ibid.: 96). Latour intends to demonstrate that, along with everyone else, the European is also "slightly surpassed by that which he constructs" (ibid.: 43); that between Pasteur and the fetishists, the difference is only one of degree, not of nature, since neither one nor the other is entirely realist or entirely constructivist; that it is possible to affirm that both Pasteur's lactic acid and the fetishist's fetishes were simultaneously discovered and produced. The only problem, from an anthropological point of view, is that this endeavor demands that Latour explicitly excludes what the fetishists have to say about what they do, concentrating exclusively on their "practices" (ibid.: 85–89).

This point is crucial, as it is here that Latour locates what he considers to be the fundamental difficulty of anthropology. It also probably explains the fact that from 1991 his work progressively moved away from 'symmetrical anthropology' toward a 'sociology of associations'. Thus, a few years later, Latour (2005: 41) would write that in order for sociology to "finally become as good as anthropology," it would be necessary "to allow the members of contemporary society to have as much leeway in defining themselves as that offered by ethnographers." This final apparent homage, however, paves the way for open criticism, for it seems that sociology is not merely "as good as" anthropology, but indeed better: "For better or for worse, sociology, contrary to its sister anthropology, can never be content with a plurality of metaphysics; it also needs to tackle the ontological question of the unity of this common world" (ibid.: 259). A prisoner to "culturalism" and "exoticism," anthropology is not capable of crossing "another Rubicon, the one leading from metaphysics to ontology" (ibid.: 117). Reducing the metaphysics it discovers to representations, it appeals to cultural relativism, which ultimately results in the assumption of the unity of a single world that is explicable only by science. The point is not then to try to discover the "coherence of a system of thought" (ibid.: 90). As Latour puts it, "I find more precision in my lactic acid ferment if I illuminate it with the light of the *candomblé* divinities. In the common world of comparative anthropology, the illuminations cross each other. Differences do not exist to be respected, ignored, or subsumed but to serve as a decoy for the senses, as food for thought" (ibid.: 102–103).

In studying scientists, Latour has adopted as method a privileged, if not exclusive, attention to their practice. Insofar as we give science the right to define 'reality', it is easy to understand why Latour has paid more attention to the

scientists' practices than to their discourse. However, this is not the case when we listen to a fetishist or an adept of *candomblé*. Their discourses, unlike those of scientists, are normally considered to be false or are seen as enunciating a truth that is not ours. In this sense, they have the potential to destabilize our modes of thought and to define realities that, I believe, it is up to anthropologists to study. This means that the symmetry between the analysis of scientific practices and African or *candomblé* ones can be obtained only by introducing a compensating asymmetry that is destined to correct the initial asymmetry of the situation. More—or less—than a symmetrical anthropology, the matter at hand is to establish anthropological symmetrizations.

As we saw with Pietz—and up to a certain point with Graeber—the difficulties experienced by at least some anthropologists when faced with Latour seem to derive from their solidarity with the point of view of the observer, which is how many years ago Lévi-Strauss ([1954] 1958: 397) defined sociology in opposition to anthropology.[5] In fact, in their conceptualizations concerning the fetish and fetishism, all three authors (i.e., Pietz, Graeber, and Latour), each with his own motive and for different reasons, avoid a careful analysis of native theories on the subject. This is a result of the hypothesis, implicit or explicit, that only 'the unity of a common world' can guarantee the possibility of, or be the foundation for, an interest in other societies and other modes of thought.

Contrary to this, I intend to adopt a different or even opposite hypothesis to that of 'worlds in common', namely, that the value of any dialogue with other forms of thinking and living resides exactly in what there is that is *different*. The next sections of this text will therefore be dedicated to outlining the analysis of a fetishist problematic based on what those who have been referred to as such have to say on the matter. This analysis not only looks to understand better the phenomenon in question, but also may even make its illuminating effect about us more interesting, establishing connections that are richer than those to which we limit ourselves when we appeal to the necessity of a common world. In short, it follows the proposal put forward by Marilyn Strathern (1996: 521): "In anthropologizing some of these issues, however, I do not make appeals to other cultural realities simply because I wish to dismiss the power of the Euro-American concepts … The point is, rather, to extend them with social imagination. That includes seeing how they are put to work in their indigenous context, as well as how they might in an exogenous one."

Candomblé Today

In his book, Latour (1996) deals with an example from a short ethnography about *candomblé* and a novel by an Indian author. More precisely, what caught his attention in *candomblé*—one of the many Brazilian religions that display elements of African origins and also embody, to different degrees, elements of Native American cosmologies, Catholicism, and European Spiritualism—was that its deities (*orixás, voduns,* or *inquices,* depending on the 'nation' of the *terreiro*, that is, 'temple' or 'cult house') are 'made' in the process of initiation,

at the same time as the persons that they will possess are made. This complex ritual of initiation is known as 'making the saint' or 'making the head' (see Goldman 1984, 1985).

The matter in question—divinities produced by humans—seems tailor-made for Latour's theses. The problem is that passing too quickly over the subtleties of any conceptual world runs the risk of missing something essential. So if you were to ask an adept of *candomblé* if he is the one who makes the divinities, the reply would certainly be negative.[6] However, if you were to ask if this or that divinity was made by someone, the answer would be positive. This is because the divinities, like people, already exist before being made—although, of course, not in exactly the same way. The crucial point, to simplify hugely, is the distinction between the 'general *orixás*' (Iansan, Ogum, Omolu), which exist as a finite number, and the intensive multiplicity of individual or personal *orixás* (the Iansan of this person, the Ogum of that person, 'my Omolu') (see Goldman 2005: 9). Only these latter could be described as having been made, the former having existed forever, since mythical times. From birth, each one of us 'belongs to' a general *orixá*. But only some of us will be called to initiation, and only in this moment will we receive 'our' personal *orixá*. This difference is generally marked by the exclusive use of the Portuguese term *santo* (saint) to designate the outcome of the process. One would say that one 'made the saint', not that one 'made the *orixá*'—even if these words, in different contexts, can be used as synonyms (see Sansi-Roca 2005: 152; Serra 1978: 59–60; 1995: 266–270).

As Serra (1978: 60) demonstrated, the saint and the *filha-de-santo* (saint-daughter) are born from a union of the *orixá* and the initiate. What is meant by 'to make the saint' or 'to make the head' is not so much to make gods; rather, in this case human beings and *orixás* make up a saint and a person. I say 'in this case' because it is not only humans who 'belong to' different *orixás*, but everything that exists and can exist in the universe: social groups, animals, plants, flowers, food, stones, places, days, years, colors, flavors, smells. All beings belong to determined *orixás*, and at the same time some must or can be consecrated, prepared, or made for them.

Scholars of *candomblé* have always been confused by this sort of ontology. Thus, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, in the first study on the theme (with the revealing title "The Fetishist Animism of the Bahian Negros"), Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1900) encountered difficulties in deciding whether *candomblé* should be considered fetishism or 'diffuse animism'—that is, whether it has to do with the attribution of life to inanimate beings or simply the selection of certain objects as the material but momentary residence of a spiritual being. Furthermore, in the eyes of the author (an expert in medical autopsy and psychiatry), the religion of *orixás* also appeared to be a sort of confused polytheism, since the divinities seemed simultaneously to exist in themselves, to be merely represented by objects or images, and to be 'fixed' in inanimate objects. Thus, in asking, with an ulterior motive, "an African if Ogum was not a simple iron object," the reply was "yes, a simple piece of that tram track over there *is or can be Ogum, but only after the saint-father has prepared it*" (Nina Rodrigues 1900: 59; emphasis added).

The point here, of course, is not to apply this or that theory, or this or that critique, of fetishism to *candomblé*, but rather to trace a comparison between these theories and critiques and those existing in *candomblé* itself. Thus, more than a century after Nina Rodrigues's work, and more than a half-century after this theme was abandoned (for being ethnocentric or exoticizing), a new interest in the material objects of *candomblé* has provoked a return to the topics formerly grouped under the confused and certainly accusatory rubric of fetishism. A series of recent studies seems to have reintroduced, implicitly or explicitly, and to a greater or lesser degree, what we could call the problem of the fetish (or of fetishism) in *candomblé* (see, among others, Anjos 1995, 2001; Halloy 2005; Opipari 2004; Sansi-Roca 2003, 2005, 2007).

"The making of the saint," wrote Nina Rodrigues (1900: 75), "consists of two distinct operations that complete each other: the preparation of the fetish and the initiation or the consecration of its owner." The *orixá* is 'fixed' or 'planted' simultaneously in the head of the saint-daughter and in an assortment of objects arranged on a kind of dish. These objects vary greatly, but the *ferramenta* (symbolic tool) of the *orixá*, some coins, and at least one stone are encountered in almost all cases. The name *assentamento* (seat) is given to this assortment. It is viewed as a 'double' of the saint-daughter, who will have to care for it (periodically cleaning it and offering it sacrifices) for the rest of her life. At the saint-daughter's death, the *assentamento* will be dispatched, along with her spirit.

It was exactly the *assentamento* that removed any doubt in the first studies of *candomblé* that this religion was a form of fetishism, the *assentamento*s being the fetishes. And it is curious that of all the items that compose an *assentamento*, the stones (*otás*, *otãs*, or *itás*) always received the most attention, as if it was somehow more scandalous to attribute life to these inanimate objects. It is also intriguing to observe that, in one way or another, the more recent studies of the theme also concentrate on the stones, which constitute only one of the elements that make up an *assentamento*. Even if these stones are one of the best examples of this process, during which something becomes what it already is, maybe there is (if you will allow me the expression) a certain fixation with them that explains why we seem to continue with the same difficulty that plagued Nina Rodrigues more than 100 years ago.

At the same time, and contrary to older interpretations that supposed the entirely fortuitous nature of the selection of the stone that was to be included in someone's *assentamento*,[7] Sansi-Roca (2005) has astutely observed that even though there is a casual air around the discovery of the stone, this discovery is simultaneously a type of encounter—"a *hasard objectif*, to use the surrealist expression" (ibid.: 143)—that is determined in part by the desire of the stone itself. It is the stone that, in some way, 'asks' the future saint-daughter to find it; however, the stone can do this only because it shares something with the person whose *assentamento* it will be part of—namely, both belong to the same *orixá*. Different *orixás* demand different stones: dark and ferrous for Ogum, porous for Omolu, double-faced for Xangô, and so on: "There is recognition of the agency embodied in the stones before their consecration,

although this agency is only recognizable at the right moment and by the right person—it comes out as a gift of the object to this person" (ibid.).

In his monograph about *candomblé* in Recife (northeast Brazil), Arnaud Halloy (2005) emphasizes the native distinction between a *cheche* (common) stone and an *otá* properly speaking, that is, a stone "that is an *orixá*" (ibid.: 515). In relation to this, "there is no doubt: '*the otá is an orixá*'" (ibid.: 514).[8] However, at the same time "the participants of the cult" say that "the *otá* represents the *orixá*" and that the *otá* is "the dwelling place of the *orixá*" (ibid.: 515). It is the divinatory game of cowries that determines "the ontological status" of the stones (ibid.: 531), a status that, nevertheless, is only actualized in the *assentamento* ceremony—"the investiture that establishes the passage of the ordinary object to that of a cultural one" (ibid.: 518). In other words, the stone, which becomes an *orixá* only after the *assentamento*, is the *orixá* from the beginning. Thus, all the stones of the world are divided into three apparently distinct ontological possibilities: common stones that will never be anything other than what they are, special stones that could become *orixás*, and stones that are *orixás*. This is a merely relative distinction, since all stones, even common ones, belong to specific *orixás*, and since the gap between being able to become an *orixá* and actually being an *orixá* is one that can be ritually overcome (see also Anjos 1995: 141, 145).

In this sense, we are all like stones. We too can be either common or destined for initiation, and if we are the latter, we too can become partially divine. As Valdina Pinto (1997: 54) suggested, using as an example the religion of a Bantu-speaking people, it could well be that a certain 'vitalism', rather than an 'animism', is at the heart of *candomblé*. This generalized vitalism could perhaps be likened to the 'Dakota model' (Gell 1998: 247–248), which Lévi-Strauss (1962: 144–145) identified with the creative evolution of Bergson[9] and which Gell (1998) applied to works of art.[10] In *candomblé*, modulations of a single force called *axé* (similar to other anthropologically familiar notions such as *mana* and *orenda*) make up everything in the universe according to a process of differentiation and individuation. The unity of this force guarantees that everything participates in everything else, but its modulations are such that there exist levels of participation.[11] In a more contemporary vocabulary, we could say that if we are all like stones, it is because humans, stones, and everything else are "distributed persons" (Gell 1998: chap. 7), made from reciprocal "partial connections" (Strathern [1991] 2005). Contrary to the options presented by Donna Haraway (1991: 181), a saint-daughter does not have to choose between being a goddess or a cyborg: she is both at the same time.

In her monograph on *candomblé* in São Paulo (southeast Brazil), Carmen Opipari proposes that we use the Deleuzian concepts of 'virtual' and 'actual' in order to describe this "ontology of variable geometry" (Latour 1991: 116; 1996: 78). Opipari (2004: 276) concludes: "In summary, the ritual of the 'making' could be considered a process in which the *orixá*, existing as a virtuality, actualizes. This actualization does not presuppose an individualization in the Western sense of the individual, that is, the unification of the being, but a singularization and a personalization. In the place of an identification by an

actor-adept to an *orixá*-character, we see this being substituted by an indissoluble entity, adept-saint, which, through a mutual movement of 'becoming', appears in a performance in which the gesture is recognized by the group."[12] The only problem, it seems to me, is that the author does not emphasize the fact that, in Deleuzian thought, the pair 'virtual-actual' is opposed to the pair 'possible-real'. This is characteristic of a certain type of Kantianism, which in anthropology was developed by Lévi-Strauss. Even when not actualized, the virtual mode of existence is not that of mere possibility but instead, in its own way, that of reality. I will return to this point since, as I have already observed in passing, what appears to occur with all the beings that feature in *candomblé* is that in one way or another they already are that which they could or must become. Furthermore, it must already be clear to the reader that there is no dialectic involved in this process: the virtual is not a 'negative' whose gradual work transforms things according to their own internal contradictions. On the contrary, it is a pure positivity that has not yet been actualized.

An Afro-Brazilian Theory of the Creative Process

Before some concluding remarks, I would like to make all of this a bit more concrete. At the same time, I would like to add something to this discussion that over recent years has been moving toward a deeper understanding of the complexity involved in the ways in which *candomblé* is perceived and lived. In order to do this, I need some help from my friends from the Terreiro Matamba Tombenci Neto in Ilhéus, a medium-sized town in the south of Bahia, in northeast Brazil, where for a long time I have been conducting my fieldwork.[13]

In 1999 I bought an African bracelet as a present for Gilmar, one of my friends from the *terreiro*. I have completely forgotten the exact origin of the bracelet, but I do remember that it did not come from any of the African peoples where *candomblé* originated. I chose it because, apart from being extremely beautiful, it was made from beads that were white and red, the emblematic colors of Xangô, Gilmar's *orixá*. Some time afterwards, Gilmar told me that he was "preparing the bracelet," that is, ritually treating it with herbs, so that it could become a means of protection.

I then remembered something that I had bought when I had already started researching *candomblé*, but before starting my work in Tombenci. In 1982, when visiting one of the markets in the city of Salvador (the capital of Bahia, considered the largest center of Afro-Brazilian culture), I decided to buy a little statue of Exu. Exu is a very special divinity, the messenger of the other *orixás*—the "Mercury of *candomblé*," as Bastide ([1958] 2000) describes him. With some difficulty, since there did not seem to be many statues of Exu among the rest, I managed to find one about 15 cm long, made of iron, and, as is commonly the case, extremely phallic. I took the statue home, where it ended up in the living room of my apartment.

I decided therefore to ask Gilmar also to 'prepare' my Exu, so that he would protect me. I sent my statue to Ilhéus, and when I returned to the field, I met

Gilmar, who advised me that the work was almost finished and that now we needed to 'baptize' the Exu. "By the way," he asked, "how are you going to keep him in your apartment?" Faced with my perplexed look, he explained that once prepared or baptized, the Exu would require periodic offerings to be made: palm oil, alcoholic beverage, honey, and especially the blood of an animal from time to time. How was I going to offer these things living in an apartment? It would be much better, Gilmar concluded, to keep him in the House of Exu at the *terreiro*, where every once in a while Gilmar could "feed him." As well as being the main sacrificer, Gilmar is in charge of the House of Exu at Tombenci. I realized that the Exu was becoming something very different from what he had been up until then.

As Exu is the messenger of the *orixás*, each *orixá*—and consequently each saint-daughter—has her own Exu, which must remain somewhere separate from her *orixá*. This is why every *candomblé terreiro* has a House of Exu, where all the Exus (of those in initiation or already initiated) are 'seated' or planted. We proceeded then to the ritual, during which the Exu received the requisite offerings, including the blood of a chicken that had been decapitated above the statue. Alongside this, the Exu received a name, which I cannot reveal, for should anyone discover it, they could use it against me. The name is known only by Gilmar, the saint-mother of the *terreiro*, and myself, and I can invoke it only in situations in which help is essential. Of course, if this were to occur, I would have to repay the succor with new offerings and sacrifices.

I therefore lost an almost ornamental Exu, but gained my own protector Exu. From a simple iron icon, it was transformed into a personal divinity—a fetish, as it would have been called until the nineteenth century. But was this exactly what had happened? Or, better, is this the best way to describe what had happened? The desire to buy the Exu, the difficulty I experienced and the persistence required of me in Salvador, the idea 15 years later to ask that it be 'prepared'—would not all of this suggest that, since the beginning, there was something more than iron in that statue? Could it be that there was a life therein that, in some way, had to be entwined with mine? "Even iron can put forth, even iron," as D. H. Lawrence wrote.

In this way, the preparation of the Exu liberated something that was already contained within it. The native theory of initiation maintains that no one is initiated into *candomblé* 'because they want to be', but because their initiation is demanded by their *orixá*. The *orixá* usually sends signs, which range from small unusual events and sounds to violent personal crises. On consulting the cowries, it is discovered that the person must be initiated. One of the most common forms by which the *orixá* demonstrates his desire for someone to be initiated has become known in the Afro-Brazilian literature as *santo bruto* (brute saint, which followers call *bolar no santo*). In theory, this could happen at any moment, but as a rule it occurs during a public ritual, and generally when the adept hears the music of her divinity. On doing so, she suffers such a violent possession that she rolls about in all directions on the floor of the *terreiro*, until finally she comes to a halt, lying on the floor on her back, completely rigid, and in an apparently catatonic state. She is revived with the appropriate ritual

procedures and is then advised that she must start preparing for her initiation. In extreme cases, she immediately undergoes the making of the saint, and it is only when she awakens that she discovers that she has just been initiated.

One of the functions of the making of the saint is exactly the domestication of these violent and savage trances that precede initiation. As Nina Rodrigues (1900) noticed, however, "such cases are not rare … in which the saint reveals itself even before initiation. It is what is called a *brute* saint, as yet unmade" (ibid.: 118).[14] Since this observation, practically all the scholars of Afro-Brazilian religions have taken up the idea that the trances preceding initiation are 'brute' (violent) because the saint is still not made (that is, constructed). The model of a savage or formless nature that must be conquered, domesticated, and organized by a productive or creative culture seems to underlie all of the descriptions and analyses of the phenomenon. I think, however, that both the adjective 'brute' and the verb 'to make' could mean something else. Three other ethnographic episodes and a more or less native theory will serve to point us in the direction of this other meaning.

In January 2006, while watching one of the beautiful choreographies of Iansan danced by a granddaughter of Dona Ilza (the saint-mother of Tombenci), I could not help commenting on how well she danced, even though she had not yet been initiated. Dona Ilza replied that, in fact, "she is almost ready, there is hardly anything left to do." In February 2007, I accompanied Dona Ilza to a ceremony at another *terreiro* in Ilhéus. Well after the ritual had begun, a man about 30 years old, badly dressed and looking unkempt and dirty, entered the *terreiro*. As it is generally common for beggars and other street-dwellers to wander into the *candomblé* parties looking for some food, drink, and entertainment, I thought little of it. However, when the drums began to play for Oxumarê (the *orixá* that is the snake with two heads, as well as being the rainbow that provides the essential link between the earth and the sky), the man became possessed and performed one of the most beautiful dances that I have had the pleasure of watching, coiling his body until it almost touched the ground and then quickly and sinuously stretching upwards, in a movement that perfectly evoked that of a serpent. I remarked on it the following day to Dona Ilza. Certain that the dancer had not been initiated, she replied that it had indeed been very beautiful, that he had danced very well, but that it was still necessary "to *lapidar* a little" (*lapidação* in Portuguese being the word that describes the process of gem cutting or lapidary).

Matamba Tombenci Neto is a very old *terreiro*. It was founded in 1885 by the maternal grandmother of the current saint-mother. Its organization is based on her 14 children and their respective parentage, and includes the initiates and many friends. One of these friends is Jamilton Santana (known to all as Jaco), an artist who dedicates himself to the crafting of very beautiful and ecological 'rustic furniture'. He was born in Caravelas, a small town in the very south of Bahia, and moved to Ilhéus in 1996. He soon involved himself with Tombenci, using his skill to help in the building of various different objects. The most impressive of these without doubt is the 'throne' that he made for the saint-mother of the *terreiro*. This throne was shaped with a chainsaw out of

the trunk of an ancient jackfruit tree that had been cut down when the region started to undergo urbanization. For many years before this, the jackfruit tree had been used as a sacrifice site, its roots absorbing the vital force of all the animals slaughtered on the ground above. After it was cut down, Dona Ilza insisted on keeping the trunk, which was finally transformed by Jaco into the throne on which she now sits during the public parties at Tombenci. The off-cuts of wood left over from the crafting of the throne were distributed by the saint-mother to members of the *terreiro*; they contained a great deal of *axé* and consequently would help those who kept them in their houses.

Jaco Santana has a very detailed theory about the nature of his craft. He explained to me that when he starts on a project, he has only a very vague idea as to what he wants to do. As he does not use industrially produced wood or chop down trees, he starts by looking in the forest for what he needs, collecting each piece of wood that he thinks looks promising. Over time, these pieces start fitting together as the artist establishes a dialogue with his material. Jaco maintains that it is about discovering and giving back to the wood the form that its current state is hiding.

This formulation is extremely common among sculptors, be they Bahian, Inuit, or Renaissance. Always more entranced by painting than by sculpture, anthropology does not seem to have paid much attention to what is, without question, an alternative theory of creation. More than 100 years ago, however, Freud ([1904] 1972: 260–261) referred to "the greatest possible antithesis … which, in regard to the fine arts, the great Leonardo da Vinci summed up in the formulas: *per via di porre* and *per via di levare*. Painting, says Leonardo, works *per via di porre* for it applies a substance—particles of color—where there was nothing before, on the colorless canvas; sculpture, however, proceeds *per via di levare*, since it takes away from the block of stone all that hides the surface of the statue contained in it."[15]

Not even Alfred Gell, who deals with three-dimensional objects in *Art and Agency* (1998), managed to escape the pictorial model that seems to dominate the anthropology of art. However interesting or original his theory of agency might be, it does not incorporate this crucial dimension of arts that operate through subtraction rather than addition. On the other hand, the distinction that da Vinci makes does not seem to me to be associated with a purely material operation but, above all, speaks of a process of creation that is first and foremost conceptual. Thus, as Deleuze (1984: 57) writes: "[A] series of things that you could call 'clichés' already occupy the canvas before the beginning … It is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface … The painter has many things in his head … Now everything he has in his head or around him is already in the canvas, more or less virtually, more or less actually, before he begins his work. They are all present in the canvas as so many images, actual or virtual, so that the painter does not have to cover a blank surface, but rather would have to empty it out, clear it, clean it" (Deleuze 1984: 57). In other words, *porre* and *levare* are not types, but two possible attitudes toward the process of creation.

Certainly, as Sansi-Roca (2005: 142) has observed, *candomblé*, too, is an art form—not only because it demands special talents and gifts, but also because

it creates objects, persons, and gods. However, it is necessary to add that it is a very particular art form, since all of these entities already exist before being created, which means that the process of creation involved can be understood only as a revelation of virtualities that the present actualizations 'contain'—in both senses of the word. If we wanted to lend even more of a Nietzschean air to this (already Dionysian) religion, we could say that it is a question of becoming what one 'is'—without implying any notion of a material identity to be discovered, or an original identity to which to return. In an aesthetic or more directly anthropological formulation, we might say that it is a question of the creation of new beings that are 'cut out' of a complete world in which nothing is lacking—a world where, on the contrary, everything is in excess. As Serra (1978: 310–312) demonstrated, the problem of initiation in *candomblé* lies exactly in the control and channeling of incredibly powerful forces into cult objects without reducing their potency.

Conclusion

Trying to demonstrate the potential novelty in the notion of fetishism in the second of three essays dedicated to the subject, Pietz (1987: 36–37) maintains that the genealogy of the concept is not the same as that of idolatry. Furthermore, the difficulty, as opposed to medieval Christian models, derives from the fact that fetishism does not conform to any of the three models of production of beings and things recognized by theology. Neither the notion of (always divine) creation nor that of (human) generation serves to explain its genesis. Likewise, the other way in which humans generate things, manufacture, is not applicable either, as the fetish is distinct from idols, that is, from the manufacture of representations of false divinities. Saint Augustine did recognize that human acts that are solely dependent on free will approximate acts of creation (ibid.: 27–28), but this clearly cannot be the case with fetishes, which are made by people who are denied precisely such free will.

If, on the other hand, we listen more closely than Pietz, Latour, or Graeber to those formerly accused of fetishism, we could perhaps learn from them other ways to think about this process of creation and agency in general and gain access to other ontological modalities.[16] But to what extent are we actually capable of listening to what a fetishist, or any other 'native', has to say? The only reply, as Latour (2005: 48) observes, is "as far as possible"; that is, until we are "put into motion by the informants."[17] In fact, they should not be looked on as 'informants' but as actors endowed with their own reflexivity, as theoreticians with whom we should talk and from whom we can learn. The capability to uphold the voice of the native, to take it seriously and allow it to propel anthropological reflection to its limits, seems to me the only criterion of quality relevant to our discipline—a quality that evidently is infinite and endlessly imperfect.

In the elegant text that he dedicated to the fetish in the Lusophone Atlantic, Roger Sansi-Roca (2007: 32–33) seems to reach a conclusion similar to my own: "The event in which the fetish is 'found' is not perceived by the person

as arbitrary, but necessary. The value found in the object is not randomly attributed by the person, but it is seen as an immanent value of the object, something inchoate that was always there waiting for this particular person, something that he/she recognizes. It is as if the thing was offering itself to the person: as if they always belonged together. In this sense, this is a process of mediated exchange, between the person and a hidden value that is giving itself to the person." This notwithstanding, there are some important differences in our respective positions. First, Sansi-Roca (ibid.: 32) seems to suppose that there is something beyond the agent's perception, something that only the social scientist is capable of finding out: "Social actors perceive the conjuncture as a repeating traditional structures, when in fact, by repeating these structures, they change." Then, in another article, Sansi-Roca (2008: 27; emphasis added) states in the same vein:[18]

> It is clear, however, that to the historical subjects it is not always easy to *perceive* the historicity of events. In the case of *candomblé*, we see that the miracles or revelations are not *perceived* as innovations, but as rediscoveries of something forgotten or unrecognized. These revelations permit the past to be understood in different terms—more deeply, perhaps more authentically. This maybe is due to the *ideology* of mediated exchanges, of the gift, which is predominant in institutions like *candomblé*, and which takes innovation as reproduction. In this case, the function of anthropologists would be to *recognize* the historicity of these revelations, *to see* how they are *effectively* objectifications of categories with no precedents: *to see* how the desire to reproduce the traditional values of *candomblé* transforms it by incorporating the history of its country and its people.

Does this therefore signify that we have ended up back at one of the original meanings of the notion of fetishism that resides in the origin of the Marxist theory of ideology? Do social agents never know what they do, leaving it up to the social scientists to reveal it? Sansi-Roca can therefore maintain that despite what those involved think, the central characteristic of the fetish is its historicity—and it is in this sense that he concludes that "practices, objects and supposedly 'syncretic' spirits are only transpositions of personal and collective histories, incorporated into the practices of *candomblé*. The syncretism is nothing more than history" (Sansi-Roca 2008: 3).[19]

Thus, even reduced to a sort of necessary minimum, the native illusion remains. And it remains the task of social scientists to clarify it. The strategy that I have tried to follow is slightly different. Like Latour (1996), I do not think that these differences "exist to be respected, ignored or subsumed" (ibid.: 102–103); but, unlike Latour, I do not believe that it is enough to define these differences as a "decoy for the feelings" or "food for thought" (ibid.). Fetishist discourse and practice, for example, should serve essentially to destabilize our thoughts (and ultimately also our feelings). This destabilization affects our dominant forms of thought, while allowing new connections to be made with the minority forces inside all of us. In this way, if we listen carefully

to what the fetishists say, we could articulate their discourse, for example, by making use of the problematization that Deleuze and Guattari subject history to, instead of trying to explain it in terms of a history that only we know and that they are unconscious of.

In this way, it is clear that the discovery of the fetish, the finding of the stone, and the determining of the *orixá* can all be understood as events when considered from a historical point of view. But these events can also be seen as the pure actualization, in historical time and in an extensive, molar world, of intensive and molecular virtualities in perpetual becoming. "[H]istory," note Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 537), "only translates in succession a co-existence of becomings." Because of this, history is always taken as a change in perspective in relation to a fixed reference with regard to which only the point of view changes. "[T]here is only the history of perception," Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 428) assert, whereas "that from which history is made is first and foremost the matter of a becoming, not of a history" (ibid.). It is for this same reason that 'internalism' and 'externalism'—the two perspectives to which studies of Afro-Brazilian religions are accustomed to resorting—are equally insufficient. If from a historical, or molar, point of view everything is in some way external or internal, then, from the perspective of the bundle of virtualities that make up the molecular dimension of existence, one could talk of neither the one nor the other. Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 536) state that "everything co-exists, in perpetual interaction," and it is necessary to "take into account the co-existence of elements" (ibid.).

Similar to Sansi-Roca, after closely following the native discourse on initiation in *candomblé*, Opipari (2004) feels obliged to emphasize the distance between this discourse and hers: "Far from being considered in its essentialist or ontological aspect as an 'interior force' that the adept of *candomblé* would acquire and that would increase as his development in ritual practice does so, this creative potential *evidently* must be seen from a *material,* socio-historical point of view, as a motor of social and symbolic fabrication of human relations" (ibid.: 368–369; emphasis added). Given the Deleuzian perspective adopted by Opipari, this all seems to indicate that she shares with François Zourabichvilli (2004a) the hypothesis that it is not possible to speak of ontology in Deleuze's thought, since his "fundamental orientation" is the "extinction of being in favor of relation (or of becoming)" (ibid.: ???). In other words, it is in fact possible to oppose ontology and history (Opipari) or ontology and becoming (Zourabichvilli). But this is possible only when we define the first, à la Latour, as unity of world or of being, that is, in an extensive mode. If, on the contrary, by 'ontology' we understand precisely the intensive multiplicity of all virtualities, then, as Deleuze (????: ???) writes, "becoming is being … becoming and being are the same affirmation."[20] As I believe that one of the central dimensions of the conceptual world of *candomblé* is exactly a universe where being and becoming are not opposed to each other, it has been in this sense—albeit somewhat crudely—that I have used the term 'ontology' and its derivatives throughout this text.

Dona Ilza told me that initiation within *candomblé* is more a problem of gem cutting than one of production. She also said that the relation between

saint-daughter and *orixá* is one of mutual participation, not of property—even if she does refer to her saint as "my Iansan," and to herself as "belonging to Iansan." Likewise, it should already be clear that the expression 'brute saint', used to denote the *orixá* before initiation, cannot be understood as a 'violent' saint manifesting itself in a passive person, but rather should be perceived, as the English expression has it, as a saint 'in the rough'. Before initiation, saint and person are more like 'uncut diamonds' waiting to be discovered and 'cut', rather than wild force and inert matter awaiting animation.[21] Thus, this indicates a way of thinking about the creative process that is distinct from that which centers around a model of production and property—a model that, as Strathern demonstrated (1988: 18–19; 1996: 518), constitutes the 'root metaphor' that underpins our ways of thinking and establishing relations.

Worlds are determined by theories and practices involved in the creation of beings, persons, and gods that already exist. But this is not done according to a Judeo-Christian model of creation *ex nihilo*, in which creator is necessarily superior to created. In fact, these theories and practices seem to resonate rather with concepts such as that of "desiring-production" (Deleuze and Guattari 1972), which posits production as an uninterrupted process of cuts in fluxes, rather than as modeling of content; or with the construction of the person in Melanesia, as analyzed by Strathern (1988), where one proceeds more by subtraction than by addition; or, further, with Latour's (1996) maxim, according to which we are always "slightly surpassed" by what we create.

I do not think that these (and other) connections, even if necessarily partial, are arbitrary or forced. For these theories and practices, be they philosophical, anthropological or native, are the consequence of perspectives that refute the image of a universe where things and beings are created from nothing, and where, however much you produce, emptiness and lack are inescapable. On the contrary, these theories and practices take as their starting point the principle that we are dealing with a full world, where the fact that nothing is lacking does not mean there is nothing to do—quite the contrary.

— Translated by Antonia Walford

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Notes

1. I am extending here to sociology a procedure adopted by Viveiros de Castro (2009), which makes use of Gell's observation about magic and physics but in the area of kinship and biology. Viveiros de Castro (ibid.: ???) states: "Gell's point can be transposed analogically to 'kinship' … Kinship is what you get when you proceed without a biological theory of relationality." In this sense, Viveiros de Castro concludes, kinship and magic are in fact parts, aspects, or dimensions of the same conceptual worlds.
2. As Bob Scholte (1984: 963) points out, if it is true that anthropology always looks to undermine the certainty that Western reason has of its superiority compared with that of others, no less so is the fact that it always tends to forget that "we are the ones who define what the other is or is not."
3. In his third article in the series, Pietz (1988: 109n8) states: "Here and throughout this work I am approaching the history of theories of fetishism from the standpoint of what I understand to be dialectical materialism."
4. This incidentally seems to be Joseph Dupuis' position. Writing in 1824 about his experience among the Ashanti, he maintains that "fetish is evidently a corrupt relic of the Portuguese, introduced to the country, probably, by the original explorers of that nation, and adopted by the Africans to accommodate to the understanding of their visitors, such things connected with religion, law, or superstition, as could not be explained by the ordinary use of a few common-place expressions, and that could not be interpreted by ocular demonstrations" (cited in Pietz 1988: 116n23).
5. Lévi-Strauss ([1954] 1958) wrote: "However, sociology is always closely linked with the observer … Sociology is concerned with the observer's society or a society of the same type. But the same applies to the other example—the comprehensive 'synthesis' or philosophical sociology. Here, admittedly, the sociologist extends his investigations to much wider ranges of human experience, and he can even seek to interpret human experience as a whole. The subject extends beyond the purview of the observer, but it is always *from the observer's point of view* that the sociologist tries to broaden it. In his attempt to interpret and assign meanings, he is always first of all concerned with explaining *his own society*; what he applies to the generality are his own logical classifications, his own background perspectives. If a French sociologist of the twentieth century works out a general theory of social life, it will inevitably, and quite legitimately, reveal itself as the work of a twentieth-century French sociologist; whereas the anthropologist undertaking the same task will endeavor instinctively and deliberately (although it is by no means certain that he will ever succeed), to formulate a theory applicable not only to his own fellow countrymen and contemporaries, but to the most distant native population. While sociology seeks to advance the social science of the observer, anthropology seeks to advance that of what is observed—either by endeavoring to reproduce, in its description

of strange and remote societies, the standpoint of the natives themselves, or by broadening its subject so as to cover the observer's society but at the same time trying to evolve a frame of reference based on ethnographical experience and independent both of the observer and what he is observing" (ibid.: 396–397; my translation).

6. Thus, an important Bahian saint-mother assured Donald Pierson ([1942] 1971: 320) that "the African does not adore things made by human hands. He adores nature. What is a stone [fetish]? It's a mineral, isn't it? It wasn't made by human hands."
7. An extension, in fact, of what Pietz (1985: 8) calls the "theory of first encounter," which, since the sixteenth century, has maintained that African fetishes are found by chance, contingency, or caprice—features that are defined as characteristic of the African social order or personality.
8. In the same way, Martin Holbraad (2003: 51) argues that the "consecrated idol" received by Cuban diviners should be called "'idol-divinity', since the consecrated paraphernalia … is not seen as a 'representation' of divinity, but as divinity itself."
9. "Each thing in moving, from one moment to another, here and there, stops for a time … Thus, god stopped. The sun, so brilliant and magnificent, is where he stopped. The moon, the stars, the winds, is where he was. The trees, the animals, are all his points of stopping, and the Indian thinks on these places and directs his prayers to them, so that they reach the place where god stopped, and bring help and blessing" (George A. Dorsey, cited in Lévi-Strauss 1962: 144).
10. "What I am proposing, consequently, could be called a 'Dakota' model of an artist's work; each piece … is a place where agency 'stops' and assumes visible form" (Gell 1998: 250).
11. Roger Bastide ([1958] 2000: 295) explains that there are "a whole series of degrees of participation, from simple associations to identities."
12. See Anjos (2006) for an inspired exercise connecting Afro-Brazilian cosmology and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (see also Ochoa 2007).
13. After my fieldwork on *candomblé* in 1983, I returned to Ilhéus in 1996 to study politics (see Goldman 2006). From 2006 onward, I took up my investigation of *candomblé* again.
14. Arthur Ramos (1934: 61) also refers to the brute saint: "The making of the saint is the first function of the *babalaos*. As I have already pointed out, for the black fetishist any natural object can be adored or worshipped as an *orixá*, but it is necessary for the saint-father to prepare it. There are, it is true, spontaneous manifestations of a determined *orixá*, but these are cases, for the blacks, of the brute saint. It is necessary to prepare it."
15. It was Stengers and Chertok's ([1989] 1990: 57–59) interpretation that drew my attention to Freud's observation. For these authors, however, the relevant point is the use that psychoanalysis makes of this opposition in order to disqualify hypnosis techniques, which rely on suggestion (*per via di porre*), in favor of free association, which always relies on a process of extraction (*per via di levare*). But it was Ovídio de Abreu—to whom I am very grateful—who drew my attention to the properly conceptual dimension of the distinction. As Abreu notes (2003), Deleuze is referring to the painter Francis Bacon, but it is obvious that the isolated 'operation' is analogous to that in the theatre of Carmelo Bene, who wrote his plays by eliminating the dominant characters from an already existing play, an operation that Deleuze called 'minoration' or 'subtraction' (Deleuze and Bene 1979).
16. This is also, as far as I understand, the position of Alfred Gell. In the few pages directly devoted to the theme of the fetish, Gell (1998: 59–62) insists on the necessity of taking native theories into account in order to understand the phenomenon. Furthermore, he maintains that the agency of the fetish also depends on the fact that it has been made, that it is the patient of some other agency. The only problem, it seems to me, arises from a certain indecision as to whether to extend or transform the concept of social relations in order for it to include objects (and animals and spirits), or to reduce these beings to social relations existing between humans. Thus, objects appear directly either as "persons" (ibid.: 7) or as "substitute persons" (ibid.: 5) or "in the vicinity" of social relations (ibid.: 7). Likewise, Gell's theory of agency seems to oscillate between a conception of a

person as an "onion" (ibid.: 139–140), that is, as not possessing a material nucleus but made entirely of relations, and one that resembles what Stengers and Chertok ([1989] 1990: 268) call an "artichoke": under the various layers of social relations, you can always find a human nucleus. For this reason, I do not think that critics of Gell can insist that, by reformulating objects as social relations, he forfeits 'materiality'. The point, to the contrary, is to extend the notion of relations to objects. As Gabriel Tarde ([1893] 1999: 58) asserts: "[A]ny thing is a society, any phenomenon a social fact."

17. On this point, see also Favret-Saada (1990: 4–5).
18. This article also shares with mine some points in common. This is, I think, a proof of the possibilities opened up by the investigation of theories of world, agency, and the process of creation in Afro-Brazilian religions. As Sansi-Roca himself recently remarked, maybe it is possible to speak of a "small and humble 'paradigmatic shift' in Afro-Brazilian studies" (personal communication).
19. One of the pitfalls of the Western fetishist device, constituted historically from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onward, seems to be its ability to draw into itself the same things from which it, supposedly, seeks to be free. Thus, Wyatt MacGaffey's (1994) interesting criticism of Pietz starts by defending the necessity to analyze fetishism in light of "indigenous theories" (ibid.: 123), and then proceeds by reaffirming the conceptual character of native categories (ibid.: 128) and the inadequacy of Western categories to account for them (ibid.). Yet he concludes that "the ritual system as a whole thus bears a relationship to Kongo society similar to that which Marx supposed that 'political economy' bears to capitalism as its 'religion'" (ibid.: 130). He also holds that "fetishism is about relations among people, rather than about the objects that mediate and disguise those relations," "obliquely" expressing "real relations of power among the participants in ritual" (ibid.). Much ado about nothing.
20. Or, as Zourabichvilli (2003: ???) describes it, becoming is an affirmation of "multiplicity as original ontological coordinate" (see also Zourabichvilli 2004b).
21. As in the 'hylemorphic model', criticized by Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 457), such a view supposes an implausible exteriority between organized form and inert matter.

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