Re-enchanting worlds: Approaching other-than-human agency through spiritual animacy[1]

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Abstract

The concept of agency has long been a focal point of research in the social sciences, which have been mainly anthropocentric. Discussions about Performing Christianities remind us about the importance of thinking about agencies and performativities beyond the human realm. However, the question remains on whether non-anthropocentric approaches are truly engaging with a de/postcolonial engagement to pluralize and diversify theorization on agency and performativity. This chapter introduces a framework for comprehending the agency of spiritual beings in a way that further contributes to decolonizing gazes on spirituality and secularisation, the sacred and the unworldly. Drawing from a relational understanding of animacy, this framework reveals performativities that engage with and are of spiritual or unworldly beings that cannot be simply equated with god. Instead these beings are complex and account for diverse agencies that shape and influence social interactions and coexist, among others, with Christian performativities. The chapter reflects on the implications of re-enchantment through animacy and its potential to provide fresh insights to expand our interpretative and theoretical competences.

Key-Words

Animacy, Re-Enchantment, Spiritual Beings, Agency, Ajayu, Relationality, Pluriverse

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1. Introduction

The question about agency has provoked extended research and discussion in social sciences for decades. Its importance lies in the fact that having agency means identifying actors and the qualities that are recognized to be effective or to have an impact in the world, causing significant changes (Coole 2013: 456). In general, social sciences have focused their attention on the relationship between agency and structure for a considerable time (Carlsnaes 1992, Clark 1998, Wendt 1987, Wight 1999, 2006). Later on, critical approaches have diversified our understanding on agency by moving forward or away from the classical agency-structure debate, identifying – among other – other voices and the power relations behind the traditional ideas of who can act or can be considered a relevant actor, and how these logics operate (Spivak 1988, Doty 1997, Suganami 1999).

However, these approaches are mainly anthropocentric, assuming that humans are the only species capable of language and reason and therefore exceptional. During the Enlightment, (some) humans basically replaced God on Earth. This assumption of human exceptionalism has been a generic feature of Modernity that can be traced back to the thought of Kant and Descartes. Consequently, a specific idea of the "human" as we know it today is the result of colonial expansion. This assumption has gained importance once again amidst the Anthropocene as the current "epoque" that puts us humans and all other beings to face a planetary crisis that threats life as we know it. The Anthropocene represents a temporal rupture/opportunity because it unsettles important colonial assumptions like the separation between nature and culture, which pushes scholars to think planetary politics in different terms (Rothe 2020: 145). In the Anthropocene we must consider the impact that humans, but also other-than-humans have in social, political, and economic institutions (Müller 2021).

While it is already accepted that some actors are full agents of world politics like the state, corporations, individuals, the agency of other-than-human entities, such as natural or animal beings or objects (cyborgs, robots or matter), is just recently being considered (Chandler et al. 2021). Posthuman and New Materialist approaches have contributed to "undoing" Modernity by contesting important binaries like the difference between society and nature, or subjects and objects, mind and matter. New Materialism and Posthumanism offer an ontology of becoming rather than of being (Coole 2013). Consequently, they shift the way we can understand agency, allowing richer, relational, and fluid notions that involve other-than-human as part

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of the complex network of political actors (Cudworth et al. 2018, Chandler et al. 2021) composed of "other agencies" or "agencies otherwise".

However, even if there are now many varied arguments that contest human exceptionalism[2], there is still resistance to accept it. This has to do with the fact that asking about other-than-human agency, as non-anthropocentric approaches suggest, directly affects the ontological premises upon which our reality is built (Chaplin 2017), leaving many communities and their worlds outside those premises.

Moreover, as this chapter argues, these groundbreaking approaches have an important shortcoming that has not been contested: they see theorization of agency and as a secular matter and privilege Western science to account for it. The recognition of agency is a political decision based on ontological assumptions. Posthuman and New Materialist approaches do not consider the spiritual dimension and, by preferring more scientific and secular approaches of the agency of other-than-humans, do not fully escape from western/modern colonial frameworks. As a result, they lack in-depth engagement with sacred, sentient, and spiritual accounts of and experiences with other-than-human worlds (Gergan 2015). In other words, they leave an important binary uncontested, namely the dichotomy between secular and religious. Consequently, spiritual accounts of non-western agency have been silenced by two versions of the same colonizing movement: Christianity and secularism. Though Christianism (as religion) and secularism are normally seen as opposites, for colonized people both have served the same purpose of denying other spiritual dimensions as important for political and social order (Shilliam 2015, 2017). Consequently, as Pasha powerfully argues, the Anthropocene "repudiates theological or religious orientations towards life, the cosmos, or humanity. At its core, the Anthropocene completes the project of disenchantment" (Pasha 2020). Or, as Rothe affirms, "revealing the Western theological roots of the Anthropocene and planet politics is essential if the emerging literature on the Anthropocene wants to live up to its promise of pluralizing and decolonizing IR" (Rothe 2020: 144).

As Chaplin has suggested, asking whether or not other-than-humans have agency does not necessarily unsettle the fundamental premises of modern Western thought (Chaplin 2017). Hence, instead of further asking on whether other-than-humans have agency, I take here the political and ontological position that fully accepts their agency. Spiritual beings per-

2 See also Kipnis 2015, Cudworth et al. 2018, Holbraad 2011, Latour 2013, Barad 2003, Barad 2014 and Zanotti 2019.

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form, live, and affect human worlds in a variety of ways. I show that a relational approach to agency through animacy contributes to a different kind of conversation about of other-than-human beings, one that includes spiritual ways of understanding agency in transformation and becoming (Trownsell et al. 2019). Furthermore, I argue that agency as transmutation and differentiation (Viveiros de Castro 2007) ultimately implies that spiritual beings belong to a pluriverse of societies in which their agencies, will and performativities are not previously fixed. To illustrate this, I analyse agency through Andean notions of *camaq* (creating animating force) and *Ajayu* (spirit).

The arguments developed in the following sections contribute at least in three ways. First, they offer a distinctive approach to agency that goes not only beyond the classic agent-structure dichotomy, but also brings forward other ways of thinking other-than-human agency through animacy. Second, it contributes the wider conversation regarding the "postsecular turn" showing the deep interconnections between secularization (Chakrabarty 2000), spirituality and politics.[3] Third, by drawing from deep relational cosmologies, it contributes to the discussion on how to ontologically pluralize our political thinking about agency and performativities further decolonizing them.

The chapter is structured as follows: in the first, I refer to Jane Bennett's work on New Materialism to show some of its shortcomings and at the same time opportunities to think of animacy and re-enchantment. The second section analyses animacy as a relational way of addressing agency that allows us to engage with the agency of spiritual beings. The third section illustrates the argument with the use of Andean notions of *camaq* and *ajayu*. The fourth section suggests re-enchanting to enrich the discussion about other-than-human agency in a more plural and nuanced way.

2. Non-anthropocentric approaches to agency and their limits

Agency has been defined broadly as the capacity to act and make choices, taking into consideration intention and purpose. It is "to be active and make a difference" (Braun et al. 2019: 789). In Modernity, the category of the human gains its characteristic specific features from its association with agency, associations which have a theological origin (Kurki 2020). As

3 See also Snyder 2011, Paipais 2020, Pasha 2020, Rothe 2020 and Shani 2021.

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Reddekop argues, modern thinking entrenches certain themes: an understanding of the human being as willful and free, atomistically closed off within himself, and the autonomous author of his own actions; a human that is rational and created in the image of God, over and against the rest of Creation as his dominion. "For if humanity has both freedom and reason, the other beasts of nature have neither; it is humanity who, grasping the plan of the world, is able to complete Creation by directing it to rational ends" (Reddekop 2014: 118).

Accordingly, as God's creation in His own image, humans have the capacity to abstract themselves from their environment and observe it as constituted as independent entities or agents, to act and affect their surroundings at will. This atomistic ontology is central in Modern thinking (Latour 1993, Escobar 2010).

Particularly relevant and illustrative of the importance of non-human agency are studies from post-humanist approaches to IR[4], Actor Network Theory (Kipnis 2015, Latour 2013, 1996), Assemblage Theory (Carter/Harris 2020) and New Materialism (Barad 2014, Bennett 2010, Connolly 2013). By pointing to realities constituted not of pre-existing units but rather of complex entanglements, processes and relations, relational approaches in general contest the binaries that support anthropocentric approaches to agency, but also the atomistic idea of the human as an individual with fixed and given properties, which is the hallmark of atomistic metaphysics (Barad 2003).

Relatedly, indigenous cosmologies (Reddekop 2014, Watts 2013), critical anthropology (Viveiros de Castro 2004) and critical geography (Larsen et al. 2017, Gergan 2015, Thrift 2008) and other relational approaches (Trownsell et al. 2020) have also enriched the complexity of other-than-human agency by addressing its changing forms in relation to the existence of interconnected worlds or pluriverse (Querejazu 2016, Escobar 2010). All these perspectives show that agency cannot be considered as a set of fixed capacities or properties of the pre-existing subject, but that being and action are a result of relations.

While interesting opportunities to think agency differently have then been opened, I suggest that there are still some limits that need to be questioned, like the absence of spiritual sources of agency. For illustrative purposes I focus on Bennett's work on vibrant matter and "thing power". In

4 See also Kurki 2020, Cudworth/Hobden 2018, Kavalski/Zolkos 2016 and Cudworth/Hobden 2021.

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general, New Materialism draws from rethinking the philosophy of natural science that challenges the old materialist assumption of an inert matter. For New Materialism matter is not passive and "out there" but "vibrant", in a sense, it is active and alive, contesting the modern dichotomy between mind and matter (Bennett 2010).

Consequently, there is no real difference between natural and social agencies, and the world is made of entanglements (Barad 2007). Agential competence derives from performance instead of being posited in advance of the action (Bennett 2010, viii). Therefore, practices, which are plural, uncertain, and continuous and can sometimes come as energy or vital force and take epistemological and ontological precedence over abstractions (Zanotti 2019: 75). For Bennett, non-humans have vitality, the capacity of things not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own. Bennett uses the term "thing-power" to refer to "the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence and aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience" (Bennett 2010: xvi). Accordingly, "objects" can become vibrant things and have certain independence from the effects they provoke in us (words, images, feelings). This vibrant matter expressed in thing-power is a "liveliness intrinsic to the materiality of the thing formerly known as an object" (Bennett 2010: xvi).

Humans cease to be the universal measurement of capacity and action because they are also constituted by relations, and their agency, as well as other-than-humans are also contingent on circumstances of time, space, and relations. To that, we could also add power relations and ethics, which involve reciprocal relations with other beings[5] and performative practices.

These arguments highlight agency as being relational, fluid and in transformation. Yet, there are differences in how theorization develops. For instance, Cudworth and Hobden have critized Bennett's account of thing power as being too general, leading to an over-comparison of the liveliness of beings that minimizes the important differentiations of species and other things. Instead, they highlight a situated and differentiated notion of agency that understands the ability of creatures (Cudworth/Hobden 2018: 45-47). Although this criticism is pertinent, as the next section illustrates, this lack

5 Subjects are not endowed with fundamental qualities. Consequently, agency becomes evident in practices of reciprocity and communication and is circumstantial, only becomes evident through prehensions of its impact, it cannot be prehended as such.

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of distinction is not limited only to species, and Cudworth and Hobden also omit other ways of conceiving lifely beings derived from spiritual dimensions.

Shilliam has demonstrated the implications of bringing the spirits into the "human" political realms, showing their agency and influences as part of a larger social and political community. This because colonial science not only separates people form their lands and their pasts but also from spirits and other agencies. One of the clearest consequence of the logics of separation made by colonial science is the attempt to make the spiritual realm disappear (Shilliam 2017, 2015). With coloniality, science and enchantment become opposites, and this permeates how we approach matters of life and has important consequences in what we can and cannot explain and how we do it.

Latour has analysed the process of disenchantment of sciences, natural and social. He affirms that social scientists have learned to develop their work "as" science, because it is a privileged language in the knowledge production:

> Not only did social scientists care wholeheartedly about science, but it was also their only treasure left after the cruel disenchantment of modernism had struck down all the older ideals. Beyond objectivity, universality, and scientificity, there was nothing worth clinging to. Their only hope was to become full-fledged scientists (Latour 2013: 14)[6].

While Latour does not advocate this scientism, he shows how it has affected many branches of social science as well as natural science to the point of recognising an aversion to efforts to engage with "non-scientific", "fetishist", pagan "beliefs" about agency. While acknowledging this challenge, Latour does not directly address it: while calling attention to it his work has not engaged the non-scientific, the spiritual per se.

There is a reluctance to be associated with these epistemologies even in new-materialist perspectives. This is explicitly evident in the case of Bennett. Although Bennett advocates for a re-enchantment, her argument is clear when it comes to vitality associated with spirituality or religiosity:

> Mine is not a vitalism in the traditional sense; I equate affect with materiality, rather than posit a separate force that can enter and animate

6 For Latour the problem is that science has come to be seen as it was abstract and objective when it is not, the belief in an objective and universal science is for human fetishism.

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> a physical body. My aim, again, is to theorize a vitality intrinsic to materiality as such, and to detach materiality from the figures of passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance. This vibrant matter is not the raw material for the creative activity of humans or God… I also consider, but ultimately eschew, the alternative view that the vibrancy I posit in matter is best attributed to a nonmaterial source, to an animating spirit or "soul" (Bennett 2010: xiii).

To those that draw vitality from the spirit or the soul, Bennett refers to as "naïve" vitalists, because of their immunity to any scientific or experimental inquiry. However, it should be noted that Bennett's concern about spiritual forces draws from her association of the spiritual dimension to Christianity[7] and she is right to affirm that soul vitalism is, in short, more anthropocentric and hierarchical than critical vitalism:

> Its cosmos is a morally ranked Creation at the top of which God has placed his most vital creature, Man. Man is the most vital in the sense of being the most animate or alive and thus powerful. Likewise, human life is not only higher in rank than non- human organisms but qualitatively different from it, that is, ensouled (Bennett 2010: 63).

Bennet's own reasoning for dismissing "ensouled" vitalists as naïve, seems to still invoke an implicit dichotomy that is not only uncontested (secular-scientific/ensouled-religious) nor is her reasoning compelling, since both can be part of the same colonizing logic of approaching spirituality as religion (Anidjar 2006, Asad 1993), which is also a modern assumption derived from Judaeo-Christian tradition (Shani 2021). Additionally, she generalizes a Judeo-Christian conception of soul or spirit. This privileging of secular scientific knowledges becomes an important obstacle to discussing other non-western, non-Christian or non-religious accounts of spirituality. Instead, projections of "secularization" and "secular" cannot be seen as pure, fixed categoriesas such (Asad 2003). Anidjar argues that is the "Western" version of Christianity incarnated in secularism (Anidjar 2006).

Clearly, theorizing agency means taking decisions that are political in nature. Whereas some venture into the realms of hybrids, cyborgs and virtual reality, most post-humanist and materialist work has neglected an obvious site of inquiry into nonhuman/more-than-human agency. These perspectives have definitely expanded approaches on agency by highlight-

7 Although it should be noted that Christianism has historically been plural, she refers to it as a general overaching term.

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ing the epistemic power of affect, embodied experiences, the inclusion of emotion, but they have done it in a way that sidesteps the deeper challenge of spiritual animacy. Indeed, for instance acknowledging litter or electricity as lively, but dismissing of people's insistence on a mountain's sentience or the agency of other worldly spirits (Gergan 2015: 262) keeps the secular/spiritual dichotomy uncontested. Therefore, there is still the need to explore how spiritual sources of agency and spiritual beings fit in the conversation. Indigenous approaches do engage with this more fully, but their arguments are often still associated to the cultural and not scientific forms of knowing, and spirituality is associated to religion they are dismissed or relegated to cultural difference as myths and beliefs (Latour 2010, Law 2011, Chakrabarty 2000).

From a pluriversal point of view, the omission of spiritual forms of agency is problematic and it is not necessary. Indigenous, relational cosmologies and certain pagan ways of life, I argue below, can expand the relational and non-anthropocentric approaches to agency beyond the new-materialist and post-humanist approaches. Agency is relational and its relationality is not only between humans, animals and plants, or matter, but also with spirits, ghosts, ancestors, and deities as part of the community in the cosmos (Viveiros de Castro 2007). Spiritual, or more broadly unworldly beings-are actors who also determine and participate in the constitution of the political, social, and economic orders and they also engage in relations of power (Shilliam 2017), which are not conditioned by humans but take place with or without humans.

Hence excluding spiritual dimensions of agency, or spirits as agents, has political consequences like supressing epistemic and ontological difference (Blaney/Tickner 2017). These political decisions – taken conscious or unconsciously – feed fiction to the point where we naturalize it. From a substantialist and Cartesian logic, we transfer our animacy to reason and thus we believe that we are rid of ancestral atavisms that remind us that we are not so different from other beings. The making of other-than-human beings an object is a result of political decision based on a – once religious – belief that we have power over nature that secularism did not contest. The mandate contained in the Bible: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Gen. 1, 28), prescribed early Christian performativities. This was transformed in modern anthropocentric, yet not secular, performativities, which were upheld in Modernity by thinkers like

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John Locke. Mitchell refers to some of these processes as "anthro-instrumentalism": "an ethical orientation that reduces the value of non-humans to their instrumental usefulness to humans" (Mitchell 2014: 8).

By disrupting the dichotomy between facts and beliefs and showing how facts are constructed from beliefs Latour argues a scientific fact produced by a modern scientist in a laboratory, it not that different from a non-modern fetishist who fabricates their divinities. His argument is that we are formed by forces that go beyond us as human, "it hardly matters whether they are called divinities, genes, neurons, economies, societies or affects" (Latour 2010: 21). Secularism and the idea of science as detached from atavic beliefs is a fiction and a belief. Modern epistemological premises give rise to certain ways of partitioning phenomena such that only certain kinds of beings can count properly as beings (Reddekop 2014: 199) affecting how reality is shaped and how political and social orders are constructed. Through processes of disenchantment, the Anthropocene indeed operates as a framework that perpetuates the "coloniality of nature" (Alimonda 2011) as an inert object/resource, but also the "coloniality of spirit" by assigning it specific definitions and exiling it from reality. Whereas post-humanists and neo-materialists contest the former, they do not compromise the latter. Secularism and the constructions of scientific truths have worked on us as a powerful spell we believe in, and "[t]o break strong spells, strong antidotes are required" (Rose 2017: 504). It is to this that I now turn.

3. Relational agency through animacy

In the very earliest time
when both people and animals lived on earth,
a person could become an animal if he wanted to
and an animal could become a human being.
Sometimes they were people
and sometimes animals and there was no difference.
All spoke the same language.
That was the time when words were like magic.
The human mind had mysterious powers.
A word spoken by chance might have strange consequences.
It would suddenly come alive and what people wanted to happen could happen

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all you had to do was say it.
Nobody could explain this: That's the way it was.[8]

This story refers to a past when there was no difference between human and other-than-human beings and that it was possible to become or transform into other beings. This possibility of "changing clothes" (Viveiros de Castro 2004) or inhabiting different bodies (human or not) is present in many cosmologies throughout the world.[9] The capacity of becoming a different kind of being has been explained from different approaches, but relational ontologies and the idea of animism offer important insights to how to understand this "transubstantiation" and becoming in terms of agency, that go beyond vitality or vibrant matter. It also illustrates the role of humans as part of a broader community of beings without being exceptional. I will illustrate this in the next section. But first, in this section I draw from deep relational commitments to engage with animist agency to contribute to a more plural discussion about agency in a way that takes into consideration its spiritual dimensions.

3.1. Animism

Analytically, animism points towards a liveliness that transcends the human sphere, an ontology where entities are not only alive but can be understood as persons, beings with interests, desires, having their own ways of life. "A strong form of animism articulates the connectivities among the varied entourage of persons in the mode of kinship" (Rose 2017: 535, see also Wall Kimmerer 2013 and Watts 2013). According to Harvey (2006), animism is a useful academic term that does not imply superstition or beliefs but means that the world is full of persons – only some of them are human – and that "life" is always lived in relationships with others. Relationally speaking, here persons are beings in completion, not in the modern individual sense. Persons can be human or not, and their being can be completed by other energies or relations (feminine, masculine, immaterial)[10].

Haber understands animism as spirituality in relationality, or as a deep way to understand different types of relationships amongst beings. It medi-

8 Inuit woman interviewed by ethnologist Knud Rasmussen early in the twentieth century cited in Abram 1997: 59.
9 See also Ingold 2006, Inoue 2018, Watts 2013 and Blaser 2018.
10 See Viveiros de Castro 2007 and the quichua term Runa (Reddekop in Trownsell et al. 2020).

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ates the sacred, but it is not only religious. Animism illustrates complex networks of relationships present in the act of caring and nurturing. One needs the eye of faith to see this (Haber 2009). Therefore, this is "a view that changes our relations to things and other-than-human and as such, it can have moral, legal, and political implications" (Inoue et al. 2019: 5). In fact, religiosity plays a role, and even more so if it is interpreted via the Latin original: *re-ligare* or reconnect. In this specific sense, religion refers to the relations between humans and other-than-humans, and not exclusively to the belief in particular gods or deities. We cannot understand the relationality that inhabits us and that we inhabit unless we enchant the world in these broader terms (Harvey 2013: 118).

Sullivan seeks to reclaim modern animist ontologies and fights the attempts to dismiss them as religious in a godly sense. To do so, Sullivan forwards the epistemological and ontological move of "becoming-animist" (Sullivan in Gergan 2015: 267)[11]. He points out that the Euro-Western tradition of a transcendent God, as beyond the material world, is in contradiction to the animist view of the sacred as immanent and accessible to everyone. That is why the association between spiritual and religious is not necessarily universal and only contributes to the coloniality of spirit, that means that even the spirit is subjected to colonial and modern conditions of existence.

The animic worlds are in perpetual flux, as the beings that participate in them go their various ways, refusing to be trapped in fixed or dichotomic categories. According to Ingold, animism or being animated is the

> condition of being alive to the world, characterized by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is always in flux, never the same from one moment to the next. Animacy, then, is not a property of persons imaginatively projected onto the things with which they perceive themselves to be surrounded. Rather… it is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence. The animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation (2006: 10).

11 Johnson and Murton echo this in their argument for a "re/placement of modern Native voices within constructions of nature" as a way to "heal[ing]" (in Gergan 2015: 267).

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Animism then, refers to the nuances silenced by specific and reductionist forms of maintaining the dichotomy religious/secular and opens space for a spiritual dimension that is *in between* (Andalzúa 1987), a third relational option or an interstice, highlighting the fact that there is a living energy that connects us all animating us differently, according to context and relations This relates to an attitude or disposition intimated by Haraway as "response-ability". For Haraway making kin is a form of agency; it is that sense of responsibility for both humans and non-human actors as the ability to respond (Haraway 2016). To see the mark of a non-human person's agentive action is nothing other than to see it doing what it does: e. g. the sun shining and giving orientation to the trees; the winds moving boughs; the thunder thundering (Reddekop 2014, Holbraad 2007).

This is not an act of conversion that insists that we all embrace animism, but an invitation to imagine an animated and enchanted world of worlds. Deep relational approaches (Trownsell et al. 2020) to plurality provide with a more complex set of tools to understand the nuances of the relations that intertwine different entities, understanding for example that animals are not only animals or humans not only humans, but also the transfigurations will depend on their relations, as the Inuit story quoted above illustrates. As a consequence, this is not only about providing new theorizations or new/better ways of theorizing agency, but rather to highlight the need to pay more careful attention to how we build relations. There are still some uncontested assumptions about what human and non-human means which we need to open.

For many communities, the spiritual dimension is part of every aspect of life, and spiritual beings are part of the society. Furthermore, this also can mean that agency has nothing to do with the human, or at least not exclusively; instead, human agency derives from the same interconnections and interactions among beings. "Humans and nonhumans can be persons, and so can 'spirits', for lack of a better word" (Tallbear 2019: 66), in fact, as Watts affirms, "if we think of agency as being tied to spirit, and spirit exists in all things, then all things possess agency" (Watts 2013: 30). If all living things are trespassed by spirit, then this extends beyond complex structures within an ecosystem of nature and society. It means that non-human beings choose how they reside, interact, and develop relationships with others (Viveiros de Castro 2007), which make these interactions even more political, because they can be unpredictable and uncertain. This agency is not limited to innate action or causal relationships (Watts 2013: 23), nor to specific features of belonging to a definite "species". It is a spirited animated

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coexistence where life of all is contingent on the ability of being able to understand other beings' will, intention and sometimes caprice. It would be useful to think in Thoreau's terms: "what we call nature is a civilization other than our own" (in Burdon 2011), meaning that other-than-human worlds are deeply entangled and interrelated with human worlds, but they also have their own trajectories (Tallbear 2019). The challenge is to see how this works. In fact, when discussing the constitution of relational beings, it would be important to take Ingold's advice:

> If you don't know whether some-thing is alive (animated) or not, it is a better bet to assume that it is and reckon with the consequences. The costs of getting it wrong in some instances are outweighed by the benefits of getting it right in others. Thus, we have all evolved to be closet animists without of course realizing it. Intuitive non- animists have been selected out, due to unfortunate encounters with things that turned out to be more alive than anticipated (2006: 11).

There is a need to discuss animacy and revisit animism not only as a decolonial path that allows other cosmologies to exist and display fully on their own terms, which include spiritual dimensions, but also to contest the "coloniality of spirit" providing with diverse ways of understanding spirit non-derived from Judeo-Christian assumptions. This is another way to consider spirit as agency and humans as co-becoming with others, as embedded in a broader network of relations, as members of a larger more complex society.

4. Ajayu, Camaq and the enchanted and animated beings in the Andes

Andean cosmologies (Aymara and Quichua among others) are relational, meaning that everything is constituted, conditioned and transformed by relations. Some of the most important ontological principles are a complementarity of opposites and reciprocity (*ayni*).[12] These relations are interconnected and correspond through energy or vital force (*camaq*). They constitute an animated reality where the life of entities is acquired, transformed, and lost by the presence or absence of the *camaq*.

12 See Platt 1987, Trownsell et al. 2020, Reddekop/Trownsell 2021.

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Camaq (camay as verb) is the force that animates the universe, doing with the universe what the soul does with the body (Bugallo/Vilca 2011: 4). This vital energy can "catch", "blow" or "animate" the spirit (ajayu) of everything that exists, human or not. Consequently, every "thing" with a purpose is animated so that their purposes and tasks can be fulfilled (mountains, rivers, food, stones, even the human) (Arnold 2017: 32). These relational ways of being do not understand humans as lonely or isolated or at the mercy of the elements: they are in constant conversation with their surroundings, and it is the conversation what feeds the *camay* of everything that exists. Through this reciprocal interpellation, the Andean is also observed and questioned by other entities whose faces are changing and ambiguous and can transmute. Sometimes they ask to be fed and nurtured, showing that they have dignity and act with intentionality. They may also possess the capacity to heal or cause disease (everything always occurs in duality; beings are always ambivalent). But the agency varies according to the type or relation being engaged in a particular context.[13] It is through complementarity of opposites that something becomes whole. It is precisely this tension of opposites what generates the *camay*. Only through complementary completeness beings achieve personhood or become persons (Reddekop/Trownsell 2021).

These mutual relations are about nurturing and establishing a relationship between deeds and services. A person (human or not) is the being that engages relationships (interaction, transformation, and reciprocity), and can fulfil responsibilities and obligations, for example providing food), therefore "the vital force is not an additional ingredient, but something put into circulation through common force" (Arnold 2017: 32). Consequently, the agency (power, willingness, qualities) of beings is contingent firstly on the capacities they have or the purpose they fulfill, but also to just being able to not want to do what is expected from them. Agency is also a form of inaction. In the example of the jar, it can depend on a mood or a decision. These – sometimes sudden – changes in the desires, will and interests of other-than-human cannot be explained with notions of thing-power or intra-action.

13 Reddekop has analysed that the thorns of the rose have agency because they fulfil the purpose of "defending" the flower, but that agency is not present in those cases where the thorns are not "capable" to act as defence, for example in the event of a strong hail (Reddekop 2014).

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One of the predominant forms of interpellation of these powerful alterities consists of affecting the human spiritual dimension by passing on the vital force *camaq* that gives animacy or the "spirit" (*animu/ajayu*). The life-energy that animates beings is called *animu* (in Quechua) or *ajayu* in Aymara. As Burman explains: "One cannot speak of 'being' in the Andes without speaking of *ajayu*" (2016: 141). The *ajayu* is a prerequisite and a requirement for all varieties of being. Where there is life, agency and subjectivity, there is *ajayu*. There is rather a gradual transition from spirit to body and vice versa in which *ajayu* could be understood as the most intangible degree of body, and body could be understood as the materially most palpable degree of *ajayu*, they are part of the same corresponding relation, that through interaction generates more *camay*. In other words, while body and spirit are distinct, they do not exist in dichotomy, they are not mutually exclusive opposites; there is something of spirit in body, just as there is something imperceptible of body in spirit. There is a relational distinction between body and spirit, but int their interaction they one is not subsumed in the other, they coexist. Hence *ajayu* as a form of "spirit" it is not a substantialist translation, which according to Burman would imply a "ghost in the machine" where spirit and body are different (2017: 926), therefore one should be careful in how *animu* or *ajayu* are translated into the word "spirit".

This is not a mechanical liveliness (as in vibrant matter). When one says everything is alive, in relationality, there is also the vulnerability of having a weak or absent *ajayu* or being inhabited by more than one spirit (which is also true to Mayan cosmologies). The strength of the *ajayu* affects the agency of beings, their capacity to act, their will and mood, therefore no agency is fixed, but in constant play. There are beings more vulnerable to lose it, like children, whose *ajayus* are not firmly connected to their bodies (Burman 2016: 142) which makes it easier for other entities (like forests) to take it. Losing the *ajayu* causes an imbalance which brings illness and, if the equilibrium of forces (relations) is not restored, ultimately death. The *ajayu* must be called back and blown back into the corporeality so that the being can still be alive. Accordingly, everything is alive (textiles, music, stones, even the stars) and life is boosted by constant interaction in moments of work, joy, rest, divination, healing, creation, and scares or sadness. This relational approach to *ajayu* as being a force that connects more than a "ghost in the machine", allows to think of agency as fluid and *both* in *and* out the body and as a spiritual manifestation that is not reduced to the divine.

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For all of this, the balance based on the reciprocity becomes the order of things in the Andean world. The equilibrium of life and the capacity of "keeping the peace as keeping the tension of opposites" with reciprocal nurture and care among beings is the main purpose of behaviour because it guarantees the *camay*. Reciprocity, which is the relational form of co-constitution must be nurtured, and the dignity of all beings be respected, developing an ethics that transcends the human realm, where reciprocity is maintained through conversations and acts of greeting, thanking and asking for permission (Bugallo/Vilca 2011: 5).

At a first glimpse there are similarities between new materialism and *camay* in the sense that they recognize the vitality of force. But there are important aspects that differ and have to do with enchantment. Trownsell has analysed the difference between animist *camay* and neo materialist vitality. According to Trownsell, it is precisely the attempt to avoid discussing the immaterial that demonstrated the logic of separation either/or (Trownsell 2021). Connolly distinguishes that in new materialism this "vitality" is different from "vitalism" in which a divinity invests vitality in material processes (Connolly 2013). While Bennet´s argument avoids referring to "vitalism", the *camay* engages unproblematically and fluidly both vitality and vitalism, for vitality as *camay* is the source of life, *ajayu* as "vitalism" is what can explain the changing in human and other-than-human agency, in the recognition of deities and of humans, who can "blow" the vital force on "objects" transforming them into beings. All this makes visible a spiritual and metaphysical world denied or made invisible by the modern colonial gaze (Bugallo/Vilca 2011, Arnold 2017).

5. Re-enchanting worlds: implications for Social Sciences

Humans have historically developed special relations with their surroundings. This relational and animated way of life is not only or exclusively an indigenous feature. The way we interact with artificial intelligence, AI, cyborgs and robots, and the virtual realities created for example in video games show our entanglements with other-than-human-entities and worlds. The approaches to agency analyzed here share this feature as the backdrop to challenge the ontological assumptions and to break with anthropocentrism. Whereas it is true that one writes and analyzes the world according to what is most familiar and closer to our ways of life, this contribution shows that when it comes to questioning human exception-

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alism or superiority and challenging the separation between nature and society, there is a preference for western, "scientific", secular approaches to other-than-human agency. Consequently, this leaves out important dimensions of other-than-human agency that engage with the spiritual sources or relations to agency, limiting the analysis to "animal", "natural" or "matter" as having agency.

This raises the difficult challenge of honoring and engaging with multiple ontologies without treating them simply as "resources for disciplinary self-renewal" (Salmond 2013: 1) or without infantilizing humans of the past. And yet there is a form of longing or "nostalgia" for a reenchanted approach for a deeper connection not only with nature but with the cosmos that allows for other forms of agency based on caring, nurturing and correspondence. From deep ecologists (Macy/Brown 2014), phenomenology (Abram 1997), postcolonial arguments (Pasha 2020) or other thinkers (Ingold 2021, Haraway 2016), there is a need to reconnect broken relations and re-enchanting is a form of reconnection.

Taking animacy seriously does not mean that we all become animists, but it does require us to think of realities in a more enchanted way, of being more alive than we would recognize them to be. In the previous sections I illustrated how an animating notion of spirit provides with a different approach to agency, showing that it is not only not necessarily immanent or intrinsic to all objects or beings (it can come and go), but also that this approach provides with different tools to understand variation and nuance to agency in forms of character that are not fixed but also would explain why if every human is unique, so is every other animated being, because of the different spirits that inhabit them.

This brings the possibility of thinking enchantment differently as well, as recognizing both liveliness and the unknowable. Can enchantment be seen as a way of living? As enchanting everyday life? Reenchanting should lead us beyond reductionist discussions about God and beliefs, or the duality "you believe/we know". It is because relationality teaches us that we cannot "know" for sure or for ever that some knowledges only are acquired through leaps of faith (Harvey 2013: 148).[14] But when this becomes too much of a challenge, re-enchantment may come first as an exercise of imagination as an emancipative tool (Haraway 2016). Imagining animacy opens possible routes of theorizing. This is not an act of conversion, but

14 For Harvey a modern leap of faith is a hypothesis, in relational terms faith is more related to "trust" than to knowledge. See Haber 2009.

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of transformation. Re-enchantment allows us to expand our imaginary towards what we do not know or cannot understand given our epistemic limits. Re-animating the "western" tradition of thought means recovering the sense of astonishment banished from official science (Ingold 2006). It is both about charms, spells and attitudes, dispositions, and reconnection, because these rituals are languages, ways of performing relations with other worlds and contain specific ways of capturing and passing along knowledge, stories, and wisdom.As humans become more scientifically "literate", they lose their basic Earth literacy (Silova 2020) and then stones fall silent, trees become mute, other animals dumb, and "the ancient stories lose their Dreaming power" (Abram 1997: 177).

This is disruptive in the sense that breaks silences and brings back living beings from "dead matter". In fact, if the idea of "dead matter" was not so strong, the assertion of liveliness in connectivities would be unnecessary, perhaps even "faintly ridiculous" (Rose 2017: 495). In this context, animism should be understood as an attitude that nurtures other dispositions and changes our behaviors towards other-than-human beings. Just by imagining that "nature" or "other species" are alive and have agency, changes how we interact with them in a more attentive and respectful manner (Macy/Brown 2014) affecting the logic of political negotiation and coexistence with other-than-human worlds, but also the dynamics of human communities.

This is a stance to consider the plurality and the disruptive agency of others (see Stengers 2015) an agency that challenges dominant paradigms of thinking and being. This is not anti-science, anti-modern or anti-western, this is about considering interactions and another kind of reasoning that should open our minds to make more plural, and possibly pluriversal social sciences. Andean cosmologies are not exceptional in engaging with spiritual dimensions of animacy, in fact this is a key element for understanding Voodoo, Orishas and Santería (Cros-Sandoval 2006), and other worlds or cosmologies throughout the planet (Shani 2008, Watts 2013) and pagan ways of engaging everyday life (Harvey 2013). This means to direct our gaze "not only toward the moon, but also toward lactic acid ferment, divinities, black holes, tangled genes, apparitions of the Virgin, and so on. What do we have to lose? What are we afraid of? That the world might be too populated?"(Latour 2010: 43). If we flip our assumptions and shift our starting point accepting that other-than-humans have agencies, these questions and anxieties are dramatically transformed, because all those beings are already there.

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Re-enchantment is about ways of being alive, to remember the amazement of what being alive means, and how fragile life is without connections and vital force. (Re)enchantment allows a "planet politics multiple" that enables other worlds towards an "Anthropocene pluriverse", a notion of planet politics that can be a means for pluralizing IR more broadly (Rothe 2020: 163). This begins with small actions, or what Tsing calls "arts of noticing": it refers to the attentiveness towards other-than-human as means of learning to sense and participate with our surrounding worlds in fuller, more complex an engaged ways (Tsing 2015). It is about seeing a "landscape" not as empty or dead but as inhabited by multiple ways of being and multiple beings. If we see them as "dead" we force other beings to dwell in the zone of non-being: "the being who is not there, the lifeworlds that are not allowed to be, that are censored by the coloniality of reality" (Burman 2017: 932). This cultivates awareness that tunes up our sense of belonging.

Here are some examples that expand political though on the matter. Shilliam's analysis on the Haitian revolution is a great illustration of what we gain in terms of comprehending and learning from this engagement (Shilliam 2017) Tickner and Querejazu's work on weaving to explain not only relationality but the spiritual importance of the practices of weaving and of textiles as spirited beings as well as pluriversal diplomacy is another example (Tickner/Querejazu 2021), and efforts to understand trees and forest behavior, connection and importance by engaging with their spirits expands the repertoire and register (Kindred 2019). In the case of climate change, approaches based on the rights of nature are becoming an interesting trend throughout the world. Specifically rivers like the Ganges and Yamuna in India, Whanganui in New Zealand, and Vilcabamba in Ecuador have been recognized as subjects of rights, not only as ecosystems or as cultural and natural heritage, but because of their spirits as a feature of their being and their spiritual importance (Iorns Magallanes 2019).

Amidst a planetary crisis relational and pluriversal approaches that take into consideration spiritual dimensions are key to rethink performativities, agencies and political projects of governance but also its implications involving the interaction of different worlds or ontologies (Youatt 2020, De la Cadena 2010, Salmond 2019). Enchantment is becoming an important means for alternative thinking and action, this is evident in many social movements in Latin America (Federici 2020, Escobar 2017). In the "West" and the North it is notably how pagan spiritualities are widely practiced. Notably the spiritual dimensions and animacy have played a key role in the peace negotiations with indigenous peoples in the Colombia peace

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agreement for their land restitution, and it has been key to understand the Sioux tribe's protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline transport of oil through the sacred land of Standing Rock in the United States. Finally, the COP-26 climate change marginal gatherings activities, as well as the largest march so far that took place in Glasgow in 2021 show how alternatives emerge from enchanted ways of thinking about nature. These are just a few examples that are part of the agenda or IR.

6. Conclusions

This chapter has illustrated that approaching agency through animacy can add important insights as to how we can further decolonize and de-center social sciences, political thought, agencies and performativities, disrupting anthropocentrism in the Anthropocene. Through animated agency we can explain not only the relational processes of co-constitution and co-becoming, but how agency transmutes, that is, constitutes an important source of transformation in what appear to be the same beings (human as human, stone as stone, tree as tree, animated matter). This relational approach is a-non secular, but also a non-religious way of seeing agency. In other words, the fact that agency is determinant and a constitutive force of beings who do not exist prior to a context or a situation makes of relational agency something hard to pin down and predict (and to control); yet being contextual and relational, this agency is also highly situated.

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