FOR THE GODDESS’ SAKE

Pagan Goddess worship and environmental practices in Glastonbury

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Goddess worship shapes the everyday lives of Glastonbury Pagans and how it contributes to their environmental practices. Through DeLanda’s assemblage thinking, linked with the notion of subjectivity, I will illustrate how worship forms a larger network that consists of multiple, interacting components. Moreover, building on de Certeau’s idea of strategies and tactics, I will elaborate on the appropriated, constitutive elements of this network across the everyday and show how seemingly mundane affairs of life appear sacred to the Pagan believers. In particular, I focus on environmental practices as a form of worship within this larger network by demonstrating how religious and environmental practices mutually contribute to each other and constitute ways of honoring Goddess. Nevertheless, the elements of this network are not linked together in a stable and consistent flow; this instability, I argue, enables people to “pick and choose” among the components, which allows them to prioritize convenience over environmental matters and craft a religious practice that is potentially inconsistent with their beliefs.
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When I first came to Amsterdam about a year ago to start this Master’s programme, I did not know what would await me – I was in a new city, at a new university with new people around me. The only thing I knew was that I had somehow felt called to come here and that there would be a reason for it. Looking back, every step, every up and down that I have experienced and that has led towards this final moment of presenting this thesis was exactly what “She”, Goddess, has brought me here for. I am beyond grateful for every little piece that has been part of this puzzle would like to thank some of the humans (and other-than-humans) that have been involved in it.

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Appendix
1. Introduction

Whether it is Gandalf, the druidic wizard of “Lord of the Rings”, “Sabrina – The Teenage Witch”, or, more recently, folkloric handfasting ceremonies in the TV-series “Game of Thrones”, adoptions of Pagan beliefs and practices have become increasingly visible, fashionable even in the past years (Moreton 2009). While for some, these are merely a source of entertainment in the form of a “Primetime Paganism” (Saunders 2015), for others – including myself – they represent a way of life.

Today, it is estimated that at least 200,000 people identify as Pagan in the UK, although the national Pagan Federation has even claimed a number of 360,000 believers in 2009 (Moreton 2009). Thus, far from being a literary or cinematic invention, Paganism is an umbrella term for a rapidly growing, diverse set of earth-based beliefs in the West. As such, it is characterized by an emphasis on the sacrality of nature and a reverence for “life force and its cycles of life, death and regeneration” (Rountree 2006: 96). Furthermore, this “life force” is also referred to as “Goddess”¹, “the Feminine” (Rountree 1999: 156) and “cosmic dance of existence” (Spretnak 1982: xvii), whose veneration forms the very basis of Pagan practices.

However, although – as often depicted in “Primetime Paganism” – ritual celebrations of the seasons, moon phases and diverse rites of passage indeed constitute important elements in these practices, honoring Goddess isn’t limited to “standing in a ceremonial circle”, as Glastonbury Pagan Bear² would say; as a “religion at home on Earth”, Paganism does not denigrate “the ordinary, mundane, everyday facts of life. It celebrates these things and, in doing so, intersects with many of the most vital interests of the contemporary world” (Harvey 1997: vii).

For instance, as followers of a “[n]ature religion” (Rountree 2006: 96), Pagans usually not only express concerns about ecology but also feel responsible to act on them, both in the form of activism and in their daily lives (Rountree 2006: 96; Letcher 2003; Ezzy

¹ I use capital ‘G’ when referring to Goddess in order to highlight my respect for my participants’ beliefs as well as my own.
² Bear was one of my participants. For privacy reasons, I have changed all my participants’ names either according to their preferences or based on my personal association with them.
2006). This leads to the question: is there a connection between everyday acts of Goddess worship and environmental practices? Do they overlap or even embrace one another?

In this thesis, based on three months of fieldwork in Glastonbury, the UK, I seek to explore the links between Pagan Goddess worship, environmental practices and everyday life. More specifically, through people’s stories, I will illustrate how worship forms a larger network that entangles religiosity and environment and that shapes their daily lives in multiple ways.

Problem statement and relevance: religion and ecology

Coming from a Pagan background myself, I have often witnessed how, for example, changes in consumption patterns were religiously motivated among my Pagan friends and family members. However, I have also experienced that many Pagans did not appear to act as environmentally consciously as their beliefs might have demanded. This made me wonder, what are the links between Pagan and environmental practices? What are the potentials and limitations of Goddess worship in its contribution to environmentally friendly ways of living?

Questions like these have equally shaped the research incentives of other scholars. In the past years, connections between religion and ecology have increasingly received attention in academia. On the one hand, today’s massive human-induced environmental devastation has confronted major religions’ attitudes towards nature (Gottlieb 2006: 5). As Gardner (2002:10) and Gottlieb (2006: 6) explain, these attitudes have often been deeply anthropocentric, rather orientated towards a transcendence of the material/physical world and, therefore, are considered to be at least partly complicit in the current situation of ecological crisis.

On the other hand, emerging discourses that stress on the need for alternative models of human-environmental relations call for a “cognitive and spiritual revolution” (Macy in Escobar 2015: 453); they argue that the present challenges “represent both a deep obligation for religious responses and an important opportunity for a specifically religious contribution” (Gottlieb 2006: 14).

Nevertheless, past studies on religion and ecology have almost exclusively focused on major world religions and narrowed their discussions to the environmental ethics within theological discourses (Gottlieb 2006). Although some have highlighted collaborations
between religious and environmentalist groups (Gardner 2002) or even pointed to environmental activism among communities of faith (Ezzy 2006), connections between religious and environmental practices in the everyday have either been confined to indigenous groups or neglected (Gardner 2002: 35).

Therefore, with this study, I hope to broaden this scope by not only introducing Paganism – and specifically Goddess worship – into the discussion, but to also shift the attention from environmental ethics within religious discourses towards environmental practices as (everyday) religious acts.

To be clear, I define “environmental practices” as the intentional means and actions that contribute to the protection and promotion of biodiversity, such as the reduction of CO₂ emissions, responsible waste and resource management, consumption patterns as well as organic gardening, permaculture, beekeeping, environmental activism and/or teachings (see e.g. Ezzy 2006). Moreover, I use this definition in distinction to the more commonly employed term of “sustainability”. In doing so, I seek to highlight some of the political implications attached to these terms. As Dunlap & Fairhead (2014: 947-949) explain, the idea of “sustainable development” is in fact closely tied to market mechanisms, which abstract and construct nature as a tradable commodity to be exploited in order to “save it”. Hence, as also Morton (2016) points out, the term “sustainability” implies that nature is not preserved for itself (or in Pagan terms, “herself”) but for industry.

Although my participants have usually used the words “sustainability” or “sustainable living” in order to refer to their environmental practices, their approaches to these practices reflected my understandings and demonstrated that they took into account larger socio-political and environmental issues. Therefore, with these dynamics in mind, throughout this thesis, I will work with the term “environmental practices”.

**Contemporary Paganism**

I have indicated in the beginning that Paganism is an umbrella term for a diverse set of earth-based beliefs and, as we will see in the next chapter, my participants identify themselves with different paths within this spectrum. Nevertheless, before turning to their specific orientations and how these find expression in their daily lives and environmental practices, it is necessary to outline some of the more general characteristics of contemporary Paganism first.
First of all, Pagans usually claim to be carrying on, or recreating, indigenous European traditions prior to their Christianization (Klassen 2006: 18). However, scholars argue that most forms of contemporary Paganism are not exclusively rooted in pre-Christian forms of worship (Davies 2011). Rather, they have emerged under the influence of Celtic Revival movements, theosophy, occultism and esotericism in the 19th and 20th century (Klassen 2006: 22-23; Bowie 2009: 162).

This mixture of influences has contributed to the emergence of a variety of Pagan paths of which some are more hierarchical and institutionalized than others (Klassen 2009: 26; 28; Bowman 2009: 162). Although there are believers who exclusively associate themselves with a specific Pagan path or community, others, including most of my participants, practice more individualized forms of Paganism and sometimes even combine different traditions (Rountree 2006: 96). Whereas this eclecticism⁴ as well as the absence of a central canon⁵ makes it difficult to elaborate a unified definition of “Paganism”, many authors argue that this very pluralism and diversity is characteristic for its contemporary version(s) (Hume 1998: 311; Klassen 2006: 15-16; Letcher 2003: 67). Moreover, as we will see later, this pluralism is further reflected by how loosely Goddess worship is defined and how diversely Pagans approach environmental practices.

Nevertheless, Pagan and non-Pagan researchers alike agree that all Pagan paths can be described as earth-based and, as such, are characterized by an emphasis on the sacrality of nature and the celebration of the Wheel of the Year (Rountree 2006: 96; Murray 2002: 1-4; Klassen 2006: 15-18; Letcher 2003: 67). The Wheel of the Year is a ritual calendar that honors the cycles of lightening and darkening, life, death and regeneration in the seasons and local landscapes. It follows pre-Christian festivals that were created in response to local ecologies⁶ and, as such, their celebration connects a multitude of different elements, just like the web of life itself: For example, since nature brings forth different plants, animals etc. at different stages of the year, each season is associated with its corresponding, diverse expressions in the natural environment. Therefore, e.g. specific flowers, fruits and colors

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³ People usually refer to themselves as ‘eclectics’ (Rountree 2006: 96).
⁴ Klassen even identifies a “suspicion of unified beliefs” (2006: 15-16) as a central characteristic of contemporary Paganism. However, many of those, who practice Wicca - a form of Pagan witchcraft - trace their religious practices back to the writings of Gerald Gardner of the 1950s (Klassen 2006: 19-26; Murray 2002: 8-15).
⁵ Although details can vary locally, the Wheel of the Year constitutes of the festivals of Samhain (31.10./01.11.), Yule (21.12.), Imbolc (1./2.2.), Eostre (21.3.), Beltane (1.5.), Litha (21.6.), Lammas (1.8.) and Mabon (21.9.)
gain religious meanings during a specific time of the year and become central to the ritual celebrations of the seasons among Pagans.

While in the Anthropology of Religion these ritual practices have been of major interest to a number of ethnographic studies (e.g. Rountree 2002; Greenwood 2000, Luhrmann 1989), the realm of the everyday and the supposedly mundane has been neglected. However, as we will explore in this thesis, the multitude of elements that constitutes the celebrations of the Wheel of the Year equally configures and represents people’s ways of honoring

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6 Source: https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/138978338474000167/?utm_campaign=rtpinrecs&e_t=a14a56456cce42279575e1b13db521b1&utm_content=138978338474000167&utm_source=31&utm_term=3&utm_medium=2004
Goddess in everyday life. These elements form a larger network of constantly generating and regenerating relationships that come together in the form of an assemblage. This assemblage, I argue, shapes people’s daily lives and contributes to their environmental practices.

**Thesis Outline**

The structure of this thesis seeks to reflect this argument. First, I will contextualize my research with a section on the local background and its relevance for my subject. Subsequently, I will briefly outline my entrance to the field, my methods and share some reflections on the research process. Moreover, I will introduce my participants and clarify some of the key terms of this research.

Then, after having sketched my first steps into the field, each chapter will examine different components of the worship network and how their qualities configure it. In chapter 3, drawing from Taylor’s notion of *social imaginaries*, I will first address how my participants envision Goddess, how they relate with her and how this shapes their understandings and acts of worship. Then, using an example of the Ostara celebrations, I will introduce DeLanda’s assemblage thinking, linked with the notion of subjectivity, in order to outline the workings of the network and its constituting elements. Furthermore, I will build on de Certeau’s idea of *strategies* and *tactics* to show how these elements are appropriated in the everyday. Along the three main themes that emerged in my fieldwork – (1) deliberately crafting moments of worship, (2) responding to the presence of Goddess and (3) “awareness” – I will elaborate how seemingly mundane affairs of life become sacred.

Next, in chapter 4, I will focus on how environmental practices become a form of worship within the larger network. Here, I will first examine how environmental practices become intentional religious acts and point to the types of environmental practices my participants are committed to. In addition, I will demonstrate how the performative dimensions of these practices bring about Goddess worship. Along three themes – (1) small-scale changes, (2) activism and (3) “achieving something vs. the feel-good of it” – I will further highlight people’s contrasting perceptions of what it means to be environmentally friendly and, therefore, consistent with their beliefs.
In chapter 5, I will then turn to people’s narratives of a Pagan ‘other’, whose practices seem to contradict her/his earth-based beliefs. I will explore how the dynamics of the worship assemblage enables people to craft practices that are possibly inconsistent with their religious orientation. Furthermore, I will link this back to the notion of “awareness” as well as to the religious make-up and general demographics of my research site.

Finally, drawing together the analysis that I have elaborated throughout these chapters, I will end this thesis with some concluding remarks and thoughts.⁷

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⁷ I have decided to refrain from ending this thesis with a separate section on “notes from an engaged anthropologist”. Having conducted this research from the point of a Pagan believer, I have already been engaged through my motivation for this study and the research process itself, as you will be able to see throughout this thesis.
2. Stepping into the field

Let me take you along to Glastonbury, my research site. First, I will reveal its relevance to those, who have shared their stories with me and how this relevance became the driving force of this thesis. Moreover, I will outline my entrance to the field, my methods and share some reflections on the research process. Finally, I will introduce my participants and clarify some of the key terms of this research.

2.1. Glastonbury

“Glastonbury has something to suit every taste. There are ancient fertility rituals and a Neolithic spiral maze. (...) There are self-styled magicians, weirdo warlocks, masochist meditators and reincarnations of everything from Queen Guinevere to the latest version of the New Christ. It’s all good fun, a bit of a circus and living here ... has been aptly described as living in the middle of a pack of tarot cards.” (Howard-Gordon cited in Ivakhiv 2001: 63)

Although Howard-Gordon’s description certainly has a mocking tone to it, the picture she paints is not necessarily an exaggeration. Glastonbury indeed isn’t a place like any other. At first glance a small, unspectacular town in Somerset, England’s rural south-west, with no more than 9000 inhabitants, it quickly reveals itself to be “a bustling and colourful enclave of ... counterculturalists ... and [spiritual seekers], attracted to Glastonbury for its history, myths ... and its undefinable ‘energy’ and mystique” (Ivakhiv 2001: 65).

While some believe the place to be a site for neolithic Goddess worship, others contend it had been a Pagan ritual center before the region’s Christianization (Wylie 2002: 443). As a pilgrimage destination with ancient ceremonial centers, the mysterious Tor\(^8\) and the nearby Stonehenge and Avebury the town welcomes thousands of Pagans every year (Bowman 2009: 161). In addition to its proximity to pre-Christian sacred sites, the area’s abundance in bodies of water, flora and fauna has made Glastonbury a focal point for Pagans and their practices in Europe, in particular for Goddess worship (Howard-Gordon 2010: 155). Since 1996, the town even presents an annual Goddess Conference and opened

\(^8\) Glastonbury is famous for the Tor, its “curiously contoured” (Bowman 2009: 162), sacred hill and landmark, which can be seen from miles around. It is associated with a number of myths and legends. In particular, it is believed to be the entrance to Annwn, the Celtic Otherworld (Howard-Gordon 2010: 7-17).
its first Goddess Temple in 2002, a concept that has recently been extended to include a Goddess House and Goddess Hall⁹.

However, it should be pointed out that Glastonbury is more than a Pagan haven. In fact, the town’s religious demographics couldn’t be more diverse, harboring more than 70 different practising beliefs, including a variety of Christian groups, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist communities (Pilgrim Reception Glastonbury 2018). Above all, it is referred to as the “epicentre of New Age in England” (Bowman 2009: 162) with its numerous esoteric bookstores agglomerated on the small High Street, various shops selling crystals, healing services, spiritual workshops and divination. While this commodification of faith is met critically by many residents, including most of my participants, the town’s potpourri of religious orientations as well as a general celebration of “alternative lifestyle” reflect Glastonbury’s unique character. Wherever I went, people dressed in rainbow-colored clothing, leopard-print boots or extravagant, feathered hats walked by and I would instantly be greeted by a whiff of incense and essential oils when they passed. Countless organic cafés and community living areas are squeezed between the esoteric stores and there is always a raspy-voiced street musician adding a soundtrack to the scene.

Nevertheless, the fact that Glastonbury has not always been such a hub for alternative lifestyles is still at the root of some of the local dynamics and tensions. Pagans and non-Pagans alike stressed that, in Glastonbury, one would only find two groups of people: the “spirituals” and the “rednecks”/“conservatives” – or, if I asked someone more conservative, the “hippies”/“crazy people” and the “normal” ones. As Howard-Gordon writes (2010: 143), from the 1970s onward, the town experienced an influx of young people, travellers, artists and spiritual seekers, attracted by Glastonbury’s myths and legends¹⁰, who brought with them ideas and visions that contrasted those of the more conservative locals. While back then, “hippies” were fiercely discriminated against and only

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⁹ The Goddess House provides a space for healing, worship, workshops and study with its own small library and reading room. Whereas the Goddess Temple is redecorated every six weeks in accordance with the changing seasons of the local Wheel of the Year, the Goddess House allows each room to be dedicated to a particular Goddess. The Goddess Hall, on the other hand, serves as a place for ceremonies, workshops and conferences.

¹⁰ While, within the word limit of this thesis, it is not possible to elaborate on this point, I can only mention that Glastonbury is linked with the Arthurian Legends, the Isle of Avalon, the holy grail and Anwnn, the Celtic Otherworld. For further reading, I suggest: “Glastonbury. Maker of Myths” (2010) by Frances Howard-Gordon.
constituted a minority, since the millennium they are representing more than half of the population and have “conquered” the town’s center, often leaving the old “Glastonians” feeling marginalized.

Although I first believed people’s comments on the town’s demographics to be an exaggeration, the recent neighbourhood survey\textsuperscript{11} indeed revealed that residents’ wishes for Glastonbury’s future development oscillated between either promoting “more holistic healing centres and art cafés” or calling for “less hippie shit”. Thus, people’s descriptions of Glastonbury’s make-up were by no means an outdated generalization but reflected that, to a certain extent, the population is still fairly divided. This, now and again, also leads to hostilities between some of the religious groups and the more conservative locals. Especially the Goddess Temple community is often still made unwelcome by the older “Glastonians”: Shortly before I arrived, one of the statues in front of the Goddess House was demolished and soon after, the doors were vandalized.

Nevertheless, as a focal point for Pagan Goddess worship in Europe, Glastonbury proofed to be an ideal research site for my subject. Moreover, what I have described above not only shaped how I experienced this rather unique place but the aspects I mentioned will reappear in people’s stories and become relevant for my argument(s) throughout this thesis.

2.2. Entrance to the field & methods

Although I had been to Glastonbury before in 2015 and 2016 and was lucky enough to be able to build on two previously established contacts, connecting with people against the backdrop of research revealed itself to be more difficult than I had imagined. Against my – slightly naïve – expectation that I would meet and bond with a number of possible participants the minute I arrived, entering the field was a gradual process that unfolded day by day.

In the beginning, I often impatiently strolled through town and approached people in Glastonbury’s countless esoteric stores, at the White Spring\textsuperscript{12}, the Goddess House and

\textsuperscript{11} The results of this survey have not been published yet; I obtained access to this information by helping one of my participants to evaluate the survey.

\textsuperscript{12} The White Spring is one of Glastonbury’s natural springs, with water rich in calcium and a well house, which, since the 1970s, is functioning as a temple dedicated to the spring (Howard-Gordon 2010: 58). Besides being a ritual location for some of the Pagan seasonal festivals, people come here every day to fill up their water supplies and have a chat.
Goddess Shop. While some of the acquaintances that I made indeed became my participants (and sometimes friends) over the course of my fieldwork, the majority of Pagans that I met either had no time to spare or, to my disappointment, did not get back to me after our first email exchanges.

Additionally, during this first phase of my fieldwork, I visited the Goddess Temple on an almost daily basis. However, since the temple was a silent place of worship – except for special occasions – I primarily observed the scene and rarely interacted with the other visitors. Therefore, besides attending a number of Goddess-related talks and events, I decided to post my research interest on the online Glastonbury notice board and contacted various local Pagan Facebook groups. Although some of the people, who responded to my inquiry were non-Pagans and were merely interested in the Spanish classes that I offered in exchange for a “chat about Goddess and eco-friendly living”, others fit the research profile and later became key participants in this study. Moreover, always having “the Oracle”, Glastonbury’s event calendar, at hand, I attended various Pagan rituals and ceremonies and connected with people through participant observation. In this way, I was able to gradually build a growing network of Pagan and non-Pagan participants alike that helped me to explore my subject from different angles.

Nevertheless, during this first phase in particular, I have often struggled with how to present myself as both a Pagan and a researcher. Since previous studies by non-Pagans have often misrepresented or even actively ridiculed Pagan communities (Vincett 2003: 37; Luhrmann 1989), I expected people to be wary and was worried to be labelled as “yet another sceptic”. In every encounter, I felt the need to immediately clarify my own religious background and sometimes to even offer a “proof” by sharing some of my personal accounts. I am still not sure, however, if this was something these situations actually demanded or if I simply wanted to make my participants, and myself, feel more at ease in our exchange.

Furthermore, I was aware that my “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988) as a Pagan researcher could be both challenging and enriching for this study. As Haraway explains, points of view are embodied and, therefore, can never be dissociated from who we are. On the one hand, the fact that knowledges, hence, are always placed within a context makes them partial and limited. Thus, as I was researching Goddess worship from a Pagan perspective, I was often concerned to be insufficiently probing in my data collection, to
take things for granted and to be unable to see beyond my own situatedness. On the other hand, my Pagan background has allowed me to have an in-depth understanding of the context that I was researching and facilitated my data collection; for example, due to my “situated knowledge” I was able to notice specific details in my participants’ practices, such as the colors of their clothes or the shape of their jewellery when it corresponded with the respective season of the year.

Moreover, two people indeed would have not agreed to participate in this study, if I had been a non-Pagan researcher. Nevertheless, although my religious background certainly aided me in making connections and establishing relationships through mutual interests and shared religious understandings, these relationships, too, only grew step by step and over time. Since my research focused on Goddess worship in everyday life and I did not expect people to immediately invite me into their privacy and daily routines, I let our encounters evolve gradually.

Therefore, in the beginning, I predominantly engaged with people through casual conversations and interviews and explored their perceptions of and relationships with Goddess. Additionally, I handed them disposable cameras\(^\text{13}\) and invited them to document their moments of worship in everyday life. By doing so, I intended to make them imagine differently and to actively reflect on their religious practices. This, in turn, enriched our interviews and informal chats. Moreover, by using a visual method, I hoped to further establish a bond with them and to obtain insight into everyday acts of worship without being physically present.

Once we grew closer, I was able to not only talk with them about their daily lives but was also welcomed to participate in it: I visited people at work, at their volunteer jobs, did the shopping with them and spent a lot of time in their homes as well as out and about in Glastonbury and its surroundings. Since many of my participants, as I will outline in the next section, were priests and priestesses in the Goddess Temple community, these growing relationships have also allowed me to participate in the Temple’s organizational meetings and to assist in preparing ceremonies and other events.

\(^{13}\) I decided to work with analogue cameras instead of asking people to use their phones in order to shift their attention even more explicitly towards their practices. As I assumed that people might be overly used to dealing with their phones throughout their daily lives, I hoped that using a different device would make them more aware of their acts. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that, in chapter 4, one of the photos taken by my participants will form part of my argument and, therefore, will appear in the text. Additionally, two photos, which I will refer to in chapter 3 and 4, can be found as illustrations in the Appendix.
Furthermore, as with most of my participants I not only developed relationships/friendships off- but also online, I quickly noticed that their Facebook histories and posts provided an additional window into their moments with Goddess in the everyday and, therefore, emerged as another valuable source of data.

Ultimately, engaging with my participants, gaining insight into their relationships with deity and witnessing their inspiring commitment to environmental practices has also made me reflect back on my own ways of honoring Goddess. Especially with regard to environmental issues the fieldwork experience, as well as the data analysis and writing process, have made me question my own investment; am I really trying my best to be environmentally friendly? What is it that I can and need to improve in my behavior? And why hadn’t I been committed beforehand to some of the changes I have now made in response to these reflections? My encounters in the field in particular – with humans and non-humans alike – have sensitized and encouraged me significantly to be yet more attentive to what I buy, to re-check the brands that I’m using and to adjust my choices where possible.

Moreover, this research has made me re-evaluate the role Goddess and my faith play in my life in general. Connecting with the people and natural landscape in my field brought me to realize how much more I wish to integrate and prioritize it in my everyday life as well. This has further been highlighted by the struggles I often had to find ways of honoring Goddess by moving along with the seasons and the “flow of life” while being faced with deadlines, writing pressure and having to work mostly indoors.

Nevertheless, thankfully, working on this project has also allowed me to bring Goddess into my daily life in an intense and unique way. At the same time, however, conducting this research from the point of a Pagan believer has also made this process a particularly challenging one. On the one hand, as a researcher, I often worried to be read and labelled as “too much of a believer” and not to be taken seriously. This made me hesitant to fully embrace my Pagan background and initially led me to create and uphold a certain distance to it in both my writing as well as in how much I allowed myself to truly engage with my participants. On the other hand, since my Pagan perspective inevitably permeated every stage of this research, I frequently had to step back to assure myself I was thinking thoroughly analytically.
Finally, as a predominantly solitary Pagan practitioner, my fieldwork has also allowed me to experience and express my faith within a larger Pagan community for the first time. I have not only come to recognize myself in many of my participants’ practices, but having seen them openly and proudly engage in these, despite facing ridicule by non-Pagans, has made me more confident in my own self-representations as a Pagan – and, eventually, more transparent in my writing. In the context of this research, I have come to understand my religious background as both a challenging and enriching tool and, hopefully, have managed to neither hide Goddess and my beliefs from this thesis nor to let them dominate it. It is my wish that by embracing my own Pagan background in my writing I will be better able to do justice to people’s stories and provide an in-depth understanding of their practices.

2.3. Research group and key terms

Even though a number of Pagans and non-Pagans became my participants throughout my fieldwork in informal conversations or due to their presence at crucial events, I consider ten people as my main participants: Bee, Timothy, Brigid, Irene, Bear and Magdalene are members of the Goddess Temple community, whereas Sulis, Orianna, Aradia and Herne are not or rarely involved with them. All of these ten people identify as Pagan, are White, cis-gender (three men and seven women), and, except for two individuals in their late twenties and mid-thirties, middle-age and middle-class. Additionally, three non-Pagans – Krissy, Francesca and Phyllis – will appear in this thesis.

The Goddess Temple community: priest/esses in the Avalonian tradition

Although my main participants are all Pagan, they associate themselves with different paths within the Pagan spectrum. Those, who are members of the Goddess Temple community, usually refer to their orientation as the Avalonian tradition or path. This Goddess-centered form originated in the British Goddess Movement of the 1970s and 80s and emerged in dialogue with second-wave feminist and environmentalist agendas (Ivakhiv

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14 This can also be traced back to the town’s general demographics. According to UK National Statistics, in 2016, 97.8% of the population has been marked as White, with the majority being between 40 and 70 years of age.
2001: 116-117; Maya 2016: 3). Among others, Monica Sjöö and Kathy Jones (1991; 2007) have been leading voices in weaving together Celtic myth, landscape features and research on ancient goddess religion from a feminist perspective (Ivakhiv ibid.), that shapes followers’ beliefs and practices until today\(^{15}\).

Furthermore, Bee, Timothy, Brigid, Irene, Bear and Magdalene are all priests and priestesses in this community. As such, they have undergone a three-year initiation process, have ceremonially dedicated their lives to Goddess, organize and lead rituals, look after and dress the Temple seasonally etc. It was important to them to stress that being a priest/ess didn’t make them “more special than anybody else”, as Bee phrased it, but was simply about “being in service to Goddess”; while some of them worked as “full-time priest/esses”, making a living\(^{16}\) from conducting e.g. Pagan weddings, funerals and teaching their ceremonial skills in workshops and presentations to other aspiring priest/esses in- and outside of the Temple community, other members did so on an irregular and donation basis only.

**Druidry, Wicca and Reclaiming**  
Moreover, before their involvement with the Avalonian tradition, Bear and Timothy had been part of Wiccan communities, Irene was a member of a Reclaiming coven and Bee explicitly identifies as a Druid and remains an active member in her grove.\(^{17}\) Likewise, Sulis is a Druid, Herne and Aradia form a Wiccan couple and only Orianna refers to her belief as simply “Goddess-centered Paganism”. As these orientations differ from each other and some of their basic characteristics will become relevant for my larger argument, it is worth highlighting these beforehand.

\(^{15}\) I agree with Maya’s (2016: 5) observation that today, not all “Goddess followers” in Glastonbury identify as “feminists”, as many of them equal “feminism” with its second-wave ideology, to which they attribute an implicit patriarchal bias that expects women to live by male standards. Nevertheless, all share an explicit advocacy for “women’s empowerment”, many, however without taking into account factors such as race, class, dis/ability etc.

\(^{16}\) It should be added that those, who do so can only afford to because they are retired and receive a pension.

\(^{17}\) Except for Bee, all of them prioritized their affinity with the Avalonian path.
According to Druids\textsuperscript{18} Bee and Sulis, in distinction to Wicca and the Avalonian tradition, Druidry is said to be explicitly focused on “earth guardianship” and the worship of trees, as I will further discuss in chapter 4. Furthermore, whereas Druids might be more commonly associated with the archetype of the wizard, Wicca, also known as “the Craft”, is considered to be the path of the witches and is primarily defined as a fertility cult\textsuperscript{19}. Therefore, although in this thesis I will be focusing exclusively on Goddess worship in Pagan practices, it should be mentioned that most Wiccans, including Herne and Aradia, work with the concept of Goddess \textit{and} God.

Furthermore, the practice of witchcraft, or “magick”\textsuperscript{20}, is central to all Wiccans. Irene, for instance, has been influenced by Reclaiming witchcraft, a Goddess-centered form that seeks to combine religion with political activism. As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, these characteristics shape people’s ways of honoring Goddess, in particular with regard to their environmental practices. Thus, although within the word limit of this thesis it is not possible to further elaborate on the principles of and differences between people’s specific orientations, the aspects mentioned above should be kept in mind when engaging with my participants’ stories.

Finally, looking back at these first steps into the field, it has become clear that this research has been a process, in which a number of different factors and elements have been involved. From the local background, over method and theory, to my participants’ and my own position – all have, in some way, influenced each other and, finally, not only brought forth this thesis but also changes within myself. To some extent, the dynamics of this process also resemble my approach to the very subject of this thesis; in the following, let us begin to look at how also Goddess worship is constituted by multiple, interacting elements and how it shapes the everyday lives of the believers.

\textsuperscript{18} Both Bee and Sulis are OBOD Druids, which stands for the “Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids” and constitutes one of the major groups of contemporary Druidry.

\textsuperscript{19} Wicca was coined by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s, who attempted to reconstruct and preserve British cunning folk magic (Murray 2002: 10-12).

\textsuperscript{20} Starhawk (1979) describes the practice of magick as “to weave the unseen forces into form; to soar beyond sight; to explore the uncharted dream realm of the hidden reality.” Moreover, Wiccans often spell “magick” with an additional “k” to emphasize its religious meaning and to distinguish it from “magic” as a form of entertainment.
3. From the temple door to the kitchen floor - Goddess imaginaries and their everyday expressions

“Wherever I am, I can connect with her, you know. I don’t have to be in the temple. I can be shopping at Morrison’s [supermarket] basically”, Timothy, a priest in the Temple community, told me. He sat back, his eyes wandered around and he took a deep breath as if to inhale the presence of Goddess in this café we were sitting in, undisturbed by the rattling of cups and spoons around us. But who is this Goddess? And how exactly do people connect with her – whether in the temple, the supermarket or a café?

In this chapter, I seek to follow these questions. First, I will explain how Timothy and my other participants envision Goddess, how they relate with her and how this shapes their everyday lives in acts of worship. Drawing from Taylor’s notion of social imaginaries, I will first outline people’s conceptualizations of deity and how they define “worship”. Then, I will look at how these ideas find expression in their practices.

Here, I will begin with an account of the seasonal celebrations at the Goddess Temple in order to show how worship forms a larger network. I will introduce DeLanda’s assemblage thinking and link it with the notion of subjectivity to identify its constituting elements and to outline the basic workings of this network.

Furthermore, building on de Certeau’s idea of place, space and tactics, I will examine how these elements are appropriated in the everyday. Along the three main themes that emerged in my fieldwork – (1) deliberately crafting moments of worship, (2) responding to the presence of Goddess and (3) “awareness” – I will elaborate how seemingly mundane affairs of life become sacred.

In the following section, I will focus on the diverse ways Goddess is imagined, how my participants understand their relationship with deity and how this is reflected in their approaches to worship.
3.1. “Who is She who calls me?”

“Okay, so before we start, I would like to invite you to just close your eyes, sit back, relax, and just feel the energy of it”, Brigid began. She had just lit a candle and carefully placed it on the small table next to her, after introducing herself as a priestess of the Goddess Temple and welcoming the audience to her talk “Who is She who calls me?”. Glastonbury’s Town Hall looked and felt different than the last time I was here, in 2016. Back then, during my trip in late summer, the Town Hall had hosted the “Witch’s Market”, a popular artisan bazaar, bustling with sellers and visitors. Tonight, on a wintry January evening, with most of the people sluggish and the town still in hibernation mode, the room was emptied of all the buzz of the activities. Now, that there suddenly was so much space available, Brigid looked almost lost in the vastness of the room. Only a small table and three scatteredly filled seating rows were set up in front of her and the three Goddess paintings she had brought, hanging behind here, went almost unnoticed.

Following Brigid’s invitation to “just feel”, the other attendees and I shifted around on our seats and closed our eyes in anticipation. Meanwhile, Brigid started to play a serene song\(^\text{21}\), that soon filled the room with a gentle vibe that rose the hairs on my skin. Once the tune had filled the place and encircled everyone, with her deep and clear voice, she began to read:

> *Hear now the words of Goddess, the dust of whose feet are the hosts of heaven, whose body encircles the universe:*

> I am the beauty of the green earth, and the white moon among stars.  
> I call upon your souls ‘arise and come unto me’. For I am the soul of nature, that gives life to the universe.  
> I am Mother of all living, and my love is poured out upon the Earth.  
> From me all things proceed, and unto me they shall return.  
> I give the knowledge of the spirit eternal; and beyond death, I give peace, freedom, and reunion with those who have gone before.

\(^{21}\) Click on “song” or on this link to join in and listen to Jennifer Berezan’s “Returning”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zD_6ywDFr5g
Let my worship be in the heart that rejoices, for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.

My law is love unto all beings

Mine is the ecstasy of the spirit

And mine is joy on earth.

May you sing, dance, feast, make music and love, all in my praise,

As I am beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you.

And you who seek to know me, know that you’re seeking and yearning shall avail thee not, unless you know the mystery; for if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without.

For behold, I have been with you from the beginning; and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.”

I became calm and serene, and for a moment, it felt as if not only my lips but all the cells in my body were smiling. I opened my eyes and when I looked around, the faces around me, too, had softened, eyes brightened, and here and there, the song faded into gentle sighs of affection.

Brigid had decided to begin her talk with this song and poem, stimulating our senses, because to her, the key to getting to know Goddess is to experience her. She chose to read a shortened version of Doreen Valiente’s “Charge of the Goddess”, which is one of the most quoted poems among Pagans of different paths and my participants in particular. It gives insight into how they understand Goddess and offers an initial glimpse into their religious imaginaries, parallel to what Taylor suggests in the form of “social imaginaries” (2002).

By “social imaginaries”, Taylor means “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, ... the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (2002: 106). In his article, he uses this concept primarily in order to explain how the theoretical reconceptualizations of a premodern moral order have become the hegemonic mindset of entire societies. However, I will broaden his approach to imaginaries by applying religious imaginaries to the ways that my participants imagine their religious existence. Since a unified Pagan canon does not
exist, I will use the notion of religious imaginaries to refer to how people envision and relate with Goddess based on their experiences rather than a given textual basis.

As Taylor notes, these imaginaries are usually closely linked with “expectations ... and normative notions” (ibid.). In a religious context, they underlie people’s perceptions of what it means to act in accordance with one’s beliefs. This will become particularly highlighted in chapter 4 and 5, where I will explore how this is connected to how my participants approach environmental practices.

Furthermore, religious imaginaries are “carried in images [and] stories” (ibid.), such as Valiente’s poem, Brigid’s talk and people’s general narratives of Goddess. While some characteristics of these imaginaries are shared and are represented as a “common understanding” of deity (ibid.: 106), like the frequently quoted “Charge of the Goddess” among my participants, others differentiate significantly.

**Within or without?**

As Brigid explained later during her talk, she imagined the world mainly in terms of “energy”, which she defined as “that what happens between the molecules”. She further made sense of this by seeing the world in the form of a five-dimensional system: the first dimension for her would be simply “energy”, “the great, ethereal Mystery of all that is”, as she phrased it. The second one is “the Divine”. This level is still formless and beyond thought or dualities, whereas on the third level, Goddess finally becomes crystallized. On this dimension, she explained, Goddess still is “energy” and part of “the Divine”, yet she becomes more tangible, as with each level the energy becomes denser, taking more shape.

I began to see her model as a five-levelled, water running fountain, with each platform slightly changing the water’s aggregate state from the finest vapour to the hardest ice. On the fourth level, then, Goddesses in their singularized aspects, as specific deities, appear, such as the Goddess Brighde, who was depicted on the three paintings hanging on the wall behind Brigid that evening.

Finally, at the last stage, the “water” takes actual form in trees, rocks, animals, humans and the earth herself, so that, for Brigid, “Goddess is in everything”. Therefore, to her, Goddess can appear “within and without” simultaneously.

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22 For Brigid, Goddess appears in distinction to but not in separation from a male God. Rather, she thinks of them in the form of a vesica piscis, intertwined yet individual.
However, many of my participants, in contrast, made it clear to me that they do not perceive Goddess as dwelling within all that is. Rather, they see her as an “external entity” and “energy” to interact with. When I asked Timothy on his way to the Goddess House, he added:

“She’s there, you know, she’s in the land, she’s all around. Wherever you go, she’s with you and she can be inside you for certain moments.”

Thus, to him, Goddess exists without, in the natural surroundings, and can only be invoked temporarily. By stressing this, he distances himself from the idea that Goddess is immanent and rather envisions her as an external being to be called upon.

The one or the many?
Like Brigid, most of my participants thought of Goddess as being one yet many deities at the same time, each representing another facet of the greater One. On a walk in Glastonbury’s nearby forest, Bear, 28, a former Wiccan and Avalonian priest since 2011, explained this to me with the help of a simple metaphor:

“Look at the word ‘Love’, right? You love your mother in a different way you love your dog, right? You love your favorite dress in a different way than you love your…lover, right? It’s still love, the energy is different based on associations and how we direct it or where we get it from.”

The concept of Goddess(es), to him, works in a similar way. Like love, he understands deity as an “energy” that can take on different forms and that “is changed … depending on the associations” one puts to it.

Nevertheless, some of my participants explicitly disagreed with this idea. When I met Bee, a 54-year-old Druid and Temple Priestess, in her office in the Goddess House, she clarified that she does not believe in one greater deity. Instead, to her, Goddesses exist as individual entities that she distinguishes through her senses: “There’re definitely very…different flavours of Goddess…it’s almost like, you know, this is a cherry flavoured lollipop and this is a lemon flavour.”

Furthermore, she explained that these “flavors” remained the same every time she worked with particular Goddesses, which, to her, was “evidence that they are their own…individual aspects” and cannot be subsumed under a greater one.
The Soul of the Land

Finally, whereas for Brigid, the differentiation between earth and Goddess only exists in the in their respective “aggregate state” of “energy”, a more common theme among my participants was to understand Goddess as the animating principle or spirit in nature, many describing her as “the soul of the land”. Timothy, for example, explained:

“She is a nature Goddess, that’s maybe a better word for it. She is in the land...and this land is her body to us. Yeah, she is lying in the land, so you walk her hills you know, on her belly or her breast or her leg or wherever.”

However, interestingly, most of my participants had never actually thought about how they conceptualize Goddess, earth and nature, whether these are equivalent or differentiating categories and if so, how. To them, Goddess was just “obvious”, which reflected their religious experiences and the perceptions of deity they had formed based on these.

It can be summarized that people’s religious imaginaries shared a common ground but diverged in certain aspects: Although everyone associated Goddess with “nature” and referred to her in terms of “energy”, some people understood her as an external entity, as the “soul of the land”. Conversely, according to other Pagans, deity dwells within all that is and, thus, can exist in- and outside of humans and non-humans at the same time. Lastly, whereas many imagined Goddess as one greater deity with multiple facets, some thought of these as being individual, separate entities.

Nevertheless, following Taylor, these religious imaginaries are not merely sets of ideas but enable the practices of a group of people, in this context, religious acts among Glastonbury Pagans (2002: 91). However, given the complexities of how Goddess is perceived, the practices that arise from people’s imaginaries are diverse and find expression in the more general ways of honoring Goddess, such as in celebrations of seasonal festivities, as well as in people’s everyday lives.

Furthermore, as I will turn to in the following, these acts also contribute to the constitution of religious, in this case, Pagan subjectivities.

Driving with Goddess

The first time I met Bear, he immediately reminded me of a character of the Harry Potter movies. He might not have been as old as Hagrid, the half-giant wizard, but he looked just
as tall, big and bearded, always having his muddy worker boots firmly on the ground. Although I have never been to his home, I imagined he would probably be most happy living in a desolate hut at the edge of a forest, chopping wood, watching wild animals and drinking beer.

Despite him being one of the few meat-eating Pagans I met in Glastonbury, today, with the English rain pouring outside and his vegetarian priest-friend Timothy on his way to join us, we went to the “Lazy Gecko”, one of the town’s many meat-free cafés. After a first tea and Timothy’s arrival, when I asked Bear what “honoring Goddess” means to him, he explained: “It’s about…seeking those opportunities when, you know, you’re just…conscious she’s there. It’s a conscious intent of what you’re doing but also the awareness of while you’re doing it, she’s doing it with you.”

Whereas Timothy was a rather quiet man, yet continuously nodding, occasionally agreeing with a few “yeahs” to what his friend said, Bear was definitely one of the more expressive participants. Without hesitation, he continued: “Ehm…I’m quite lucky in my time at work, I do a lot of driving and I do a lot of irregular shifts. That’s why I’m often driving home in the dark, right? So, I have, you know, several hours a day where I’m basically: me and the car and the moon, right? (...) The image that it creates for me is...moon, moonlight, white lights…and you see the whole world in darkness but it’s just bathed in her light, it’s...and I know the Goddess is also the sun as well and there are different associations but...to me that’s how I see it, you know. (...) And, I’m often driving very quickly, right? Often driving well above what I should be driving on a particular road I’m driving on”, he laughed. “And...quite often I will be driving ‘round corners, where I know when I come around that corner and there will be a tractor, that will be the end of me, you know. So I do often drive with the Goddess quite a lot. And it’s not just the concept of ‘I hope I’ll be ok’, right? But I drive to the point where...I expect her to tell me to slow down.”

My eyes must have widened in surprise. I do have faith in Goddess but wouldn’t place all responsibility into her hands merely for the fun of speedy driving. Timothy, on the other hand, sitting across from me, was chuckling, his long, white hair swinging along. Bear, amused, brushed it off, telling us, “yeah, and there’s been times where I’ve gone screaming into a blind corner and I’ve braked really hard for no apparent reason. So I come ‘round the corner, right? And there’s some guy cutting a hedge!!! You know, and there’s been loaaaads

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and loads of those moments. But that’s me having a very small but very intentful ceremony in the car!”

Bear’s story is a telling example of how we need to look at Pagan subjectivities. As the prominent works of Foucault (1982) and Butler (1990), as well as their adoptions in the Anthropology of religion (Furey 2010: 11-14; 18-19) have highlighted, religious acts contribute to the constitution of religious subjectivities. Subjects can be defined as the culturally and historically situated, shaped and organized modes of perception, thinking, feeling etc. that animate acting subjects (Luhrmann 2006: 346-347). Moreover, they are fluid, hybrid and continuously formed and manifested through praxis, such as worship (Bazzul 2016: 8; Mantin 2004: 159).

Bear’s example, despite the excessive speed he is driving with, is performed with the “awareness of while [he’s] doing it, she’s doing it with [him]”. As such, his act constitutes a religious practice that he engages in with “conscious intent”. Meanwhile, the moonlight, evoking a sense of awe and connection with Goddess, assures him of her guiding and protective presence. It makes him unafraid to – almost literally – hand over the wheel to her.

This further reveals the affective and intimate bond Bear shares with Goddess. He has such firm faith in her that he even dissolves his own agency towards deity and downplays the risk of the situation in his narration afterwards. Thus, his “ceremony”, the act of “driving with Goddess” – with her moonlight, in complete trust, with intention and awareness of her presence – exemplifies an enactment of his Pagan subjectivity. It as an expression of his religiously situated, shaped and organized modes of perception, thinking, feeling etc. (Luhrmann ibid.) as well as his religious imaginaries. At the same time, this subjectivity is continuously formed and crafted each time he gives into the urge of “brak[ing] for no apparent reason” and finds his faith reaffirmed when encountering a possibly dangerous obstacle. Hence, as a religious subject, Bear is in a constant state of becoming when engaging in these practices.

Throughout this thesis, I will refer to these religious acts in terms of worship. However, since these are underpinned by people’s understandings of and relationships

23 By “intentful” Bear means to say “doing it with awareness/intention”
with Goddess, even the very ways my participants defined “worship” reflected their religious imaginaries.

“I don’t worship anything”

“I don’t worship anything”, Bee vehemently clarified with an unfamiliar, almost stern look in her eyes. I must have hit a nerve there, I thought. Or was I really that far off? Before I could even start to feel uncomfortable on the small black couch in her office in the Goddess House, a little gentler, she explained: “I work in unison?! And in synergy with my Goddess?! And she has my devotion...I mean, I honor her for sure every day, and she honors me. It’s a reciprocal relationship, yeah? Worshipping has this touch of...it’s too Catholic for me.”

What I didn’t yet know at that time was that none of my participants actually thought of honoring Goddess in terms of “worship”. As a native German speaker, I was familiar with both terms but didn’t think that equating worship and honoring could possibly raise eyebrows among Pagans in Glastonbury. All of my participants associated “worship” with a hierarchical relationship with deity and instead, explicitly preferred the terms “honoring”, “being devoted to”, “working with” or “standing in the presence of” Goddess. They considered deity as an equal, sometimes referring to her as a “colleague”, that they choose to interact with rather than “bow down” to, as they phrased it.

Nevertheless, despite their refusal of the term “worship”, their narratives clearly demonstrated their faith in and devotion to Goddess as a divine point of reference. In order to highlight their commitments to maintaining a relationship with her through mutual interactions, I will continue to work with the term worship yet define it through my participants’ suggested alternatives. These are rooted in the very ways they relate with Goddess and can roughly be outlined in the themes of reciprocity, equality and gratitude. As Bee, for instance, framed it: “it’s a friendship...you’re calling to her. It’s a bit like me saying ‘good morning darling, I love you’ to my husband; ‘good morning Goddess’, you know.”

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24 Likewise, it should be noted that many Pagans equally dislike to be referred to as “believers”; instead, they emphasize that they connect with Goddess “through the moon, the stars, ... the earth, ... through other human beings, through [themselves]” (Starhawk 1979). Nevertheless, I decided to use the term “believer” in this thesis to highlight how my participants subscribe to a larger set of religious understandings.
Moreover, as I will return to more extensively in the chapter on environmental practices, everyone stressed that an essential part of their relationship with deity is to give back to and care for her. Timothy, for example, explained:

“She deepens that connection with the seasons, and that, to me gives you sort of that caring and connection with her; you want to be there for her and she is there for you. ‘Cause she gives so much!”

Hence, keeping these themes and metaphors in mind, when working with the term worship, I will be using it in my participants’ sense of “honoring”, “being devoted to”, “working with” and “standing in the presence of” Goddess. In this way, “worship”, is not bound to any defined forms of ritual but is crafted in the everyday, ranging from “making a home with Goddess”, over conversing with her in a café to environmental practices.

Before turning to how people honor Goddess in their everyday lives, let us look at an example of Pagan seasonal festivities as a more general element of Goddess worship.

### 3.2. Ostara celebrations

Finally, it was a warm, sunny morning! Just two days ago, Glastonbury, again, was covered in snow, leaving the first daffodils that had already heralded the arrival of spring buried under its white cloak. Now, just in time for Ostara, the spring equinox, the Winter Goddess was bid farewell and the land was green again, eagerly soaking up the warm rays of sunshine, just like myself on my way to the Goddess Temple this morning to start off the community’s Open Day. In honor of spring, the return of warmth and rising saps in nature, they had organized a variety of activities, talks and ceremonies in the Temple, Goddess House and Hall, free and open for the public.

As today was also market day in Glastonbury, the streets, too, were bustling with life and, at least to me, a sense of excitement and celebration was palpable in the air. I swiftly made my way up the wooden staircase to the temple and was greeted by another rush of green when I entered: “Yes”, I thought, remembering what Bear once said: “It’s more than purple carpet. It vibes.”
The three altars had all been carefully redecorated to welcome the new season: wooden hares, red eggs and spring flowers, nestled in grass-colored fabric, and a human-sized painting of the Goddess Artha drew the most attention, so radiant in tones of green that the temple’s underlying theme of purple in the cushions, floor and walls faded into the background. As always, the air was thick with incense and prickling with the place’s beaming energy.

Among the ten visitors, whom I saw for the first time, I discovered and greeted Irene, a member of the Temple community, dressed in the color of the day and I too had brought a green shawl to wrap around me. I sat down next to them and Dawn, another priestess, seated in front of the main altar, began to explain what all the rabbits, green and eggs were about: “Here in Glastonbury, we are now honoring the season of spring, Eostre or Ostara, which starts today with the equinox. In our Wheel of the Year, this is the time of Artha, Goddess of Fire, who brings back warmth and life! It really is the time of renewal, of rebirth and while nature is coming back to life we can now also feel how we are coming back to life – because we are not separate from nature!” Nodding, and a bit restless, she looked around in people’s faces for agreement. “So, in ancient times, people celebrated this and it was custom to gift each other painted eggs, as a symbol of fertility, of the Feminine, of the earth, yeah? Also, now we begin to see that the hares here in this region become a lot more active again...everything comes back to life! So in our community, we honor the different seasons, we honor the different faces of Goddess and just as the land is becoming green again now, so is our temple!”, she explained excitedly. “So, if you have ever asked yourself, where the word ‘Easter’ comes from and why we have all these bunnies and chocolate eggs on a Christian Holiday, now you know, haha!”

Dawn’s explanation highlights that the celebration of seasonal festivals not only constitutes a central aspect of Goddess worship in Pagan practices but that there are different elements, which, contributing to each other, represent how Goddess is honored. In particular, looking around in the temple and listening to her talk, certain material elements stand out: green fabric, eggs, hares, spring flowers and, of course, the green and warmth of spring.

In the Ostara celebration, these elements are given meaning and, therefore, find a material life, or materiality, that socializes Pagan practices and people’s ways of communing with Goddess. Although I am aware of the debates surrounding the term and
conceptualizations of “materiality” (Ingold 2012), I will refrain from entering this discussion; rather, I seek to highlight that the meanings these material elements obtain are not fixed but fluid as they only exist in relation with the factor of time.

However, the priestess’s explanation highlights how these material elements, placed within a specific time frame, represent only one component in the veneration of Goddess: the eggs, hares, daffodils etc. also hold a symbolic quality, representing fertility and the arrival of spring, and this season is further associated with a particular deity. In Goddess worship all these elements are set in relation, contributing to each other and forming a larger composition.

Therefore, drawing from DeLanda (2006; 2011), I will follow humans and non-humans, movements, ups and downs of Pagan subjectivities and oscillations of life in a worship assemblage. Assemblage thinking was formulated as a loose theory in Deleuze’s & Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus (1980), yet DeLanda’s adoption attempts to develop a social ontology that seeks to understand complex social structures and their dynamics along each other. According to him (2006; 2011), assemblages can be understood as processual compositions that are made up of multiple, interacting components, irreducible to their parts. These parts, however, are not fused into larger wholes but remain sovereign and capable of entering into other networks (De Landa 2006: 10; 18; DeLanda 2011; Harman 2008: 367). The single elements in the Ostara celebration, such as the fabric, rabbits and equinox date, exist independently from each other and could form part of other compositions. Goddess worship, however, is constituted precisely in their interaction.

Only during this specific time of the year, around the spring equinox, eggs find their way into worship. As symbols of fertility and rebirth, they convey religious meanings alongside their material presence. Their red color is further associated with the life-giving aspect of Goddess and is a reminder of menstrual blood. It represents the flow of life through the (Earth Mother’s) womb and signalizes the (re)rising saps in nature, humans and non-humans alike.

In worship, the Pagan believer links together all these components and the different elements – in this case time, materials, symbolic presence and deity – mutually contribute to each other, forming a larger composition. Hence, the very act of entangling the components is a religious practice. As such, it is not only an expression of people’s religious
imaginaries but it continuously crafts and manifests their Pagan subjectivities, sustaining worship as an assemblage.

Nevertheless, this assemblage is not only “active” during Pagan festivities but also shapes people’s everyday lives – in their homes, at their work and in their environmental practices.

3.3. Goddess in the everyday

“You know, people need to understand that...you don’t need to be in that space [in the temple and participating in ceremonies] to have that spiritual moment, you know. It just works, she’s always with you, whatever you’re doing in your life...opening the temple or...cleaning the kitchen!”, Timothy said laughingly before he returned to the Goddess House, ready to take out his gloves and sponges to do his bit as one of the caretakers.

As Timothy stressed, Goddess worship isn’t confined to ritual practices and time spent in the temple. Instead, seemingly mundane affairs of life can become sacred by reaffirming and assuming “she’s always with you”. I will continue exploring the different elements that constitute Goddess worship and add how place, space and tactics configure this assemblage. Moreover, I will show how these dynamics shape people’s everyday lives and will elaborate this along the three main themes that emerged in my fieldwork: deliberately crafting moments of worship, responding to the presence of Goddess and, lastly, “awareness”.

3.3.1. Deliberately crafting moments of worship

Making a home with Goddess

“Wait a second”, I interrupted our conversation and looked around. Orianna’s black cat Ralf was still lounging on my lap, yawning, and indifferent to my sudden thoughts and movements. “Didn’t you have a red sofa just a week ago?” I looked at the blue couch we were sitting on in disbelief, somewhat doubting my observation skills. “Haha, yes! But we didn’t change the sofa, we just changed the covers”, Orianna answered. “We always do that, you know, when the Wheel turns, around the equinoxes, we change the covers!” Her moon-shaped nose piercing always moved when she laughed, glistening in the afternoon sun. “Oh, okay! But isn’t red more a color of ...”, “yeah, it’s more a spring/summer,
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banality

(Shields

2002).

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2003:

1962),

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New

Age

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Glastonbury,

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rethink

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sacred/profane

divide.

He

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Goddess

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sacred”

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Moreover,

Holloway

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below,
Holloway focuses solely on a spatiotemporal dimension and does not address how material elements, like sofa covers, can form part of religious acts.

Moreover, Orianna’s example, again, highlights how in Goddess worship various elements are at play, always interacting with each other: The couch covers display a material presence, which manifests itself via the chosen colors; additionally, these colors symbolize particular Goddesses and their characteristics. Following DeLanda, this further illustrates how certain components in an assemblage differ in their capacities, such as in having material and/or expressive roles (DeLanda 2006: 14; 121-126). In this case, the covers assert a material capacity by anchoring worship in spatiality. At the same time, they demonstrate a representational quality in the religious meanings they exhibit. Whereas their red color, again, is associated with the life-giving aspect of Goddess, blue is a reminder of the element/Goddess of water, which Orianna describes as having a soothing effect on her.

Orianna changes the covers every year at a specific time and links all these components together. To her, this mundane act is not only religiously motivated, but it is a form of worship. It is an expression that confirms the given and circulated religious imaginaries and the way she envisions and relates with Goddess.

Finally, her home becomes sanctified through the deliberate invocation of Goddess(es) into it, transforming her living place into a sacred space. In order to examine the dynamics of spatiality more closely, let us return to Bear’s example of “driving with Goddess”.

In the car with Goddess

As Bear explained in his – slightly frightening – story, as a professional driver, he frequently had to work in night shifts. This allowed him to have a “ceremony” in his car by “driving with Goddess” – with her moonlight, with conscious intent and awareness of her presence and in absolute reliance on her guidance when exceeding the speed limit.

Despite the fact that he assigned a certain responsibility to deity, for him, this was a way of working together with her – he did the driving, she the guiding. As such, it constituted a form of worship in the sense of mutual interaction and devotion. Again, in this act, Bear drew together different elements: the material and symbolic presence of the
moon, night time and its (aesthetic) effect of enhancing the presence of Goddess he sensed, and his car.

Building on de Certeau (1984), his “ceremony” further exemplifies how a place is transformed into a sacred space. In his work, The Practice of Everyday Life, de Certeau uses the concept of place to refer to the discernible material aspects of a particular site (1984: 117), such as the interior design of Bear’s car. In turn, he defines space as “a practiced place” (ibid.), meaning how these given structures are appropriated and used, as for acts of worship, for example.

Furthermore, these acts of “practicing a place” are closely linked with the notion of tactics, the very procedures of using a place in a self-determined manner (ibid.: 26-27; 32). De Certeau conceptualizes these in opposition to strategies, which can be understood as the means employed by e.g. institutions and subjects of “will and power” (ibid.: 36). In doing so, he draws attention to the underlying power dynamics in the managements of place and space (ibid.: xiv-xv; 34-36; 38). Building on Foucault’s Discipline and Punish, places and strategies can be thought of as dispositifs, as micro-mechanisms through which institutional power is exercised, forming a “grid of discipline” that produces docile bodies (ibid.: xiv; 96).

Tactis, on the other hand, hence, are subversive – they are “clandestine forms taken by ... groups or individuals”, “elud[ing] discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised” (ibid.: 96). Bear, “caught in the net of discipline” (ibid.), had to conform to imposed structures by following a night shift schedule and working as a driver in a particularly designed car. However, he appropriated these given structures in a self-determined manner by “driving with Goddess”.

Nevertheless, as his story demonstrated, it was not only his car as a place that was transformed into a ceremonial space through his tactics. Likewise, the element of (night)time, the material presence of moonlight – or, as we have seen in Orianna’s example, something as simple as sofa covers – and even the act of driving itself were utilized in an individualized way. Tactics, thus, as the very practices of linking together the elements in the assemblage, can be understood as enactments of Pagan subjectivities. Therefore, I suggest that in the context of my research the notion of tactics needs to be extended to include not only spatial practices but also cosmic temporality and material dimensions.
Furthermore, as I will explain in chapter 4, even environmental practices can be appropriated in/as acts of worship.

As the previous examples have shown, seemingly ordinary times, such as the equinox date or late night hours, can be tactically used for religious purposes. Likewise, diverse materials, ranging from moonlight over sofa covers, form part of everyday worship in a highly personalized manner. This striking level of individualization also points to what DeLanda calls a *deterritorializing* parameter in the assemblage (DeLanda 2006: 15-16; 19; 28; 2011). Elements such as temporality, spatiality and materiality exercise destabilizing capacities that have the effect of making worship flexible and fluidly defined. There are no set schemes or boundaries to where, when and how Goddess is honored – whether in the temple, at home or in the car. However, as I will further explore in chapter 4 and 5, this fluidity also has the potential to attribute a somewhat random character to Goddess worship. This makes it difficult to determine what it means to act in/consistently with one’s Pagan beliefs, in particular with regard to environmental practices.

Nevertheless, as I will examine in the following, there are other elements in the assemblage that contribute to its stabilization.

### 3.3.2. Responding to the presence of Goddess

“As sitting in the Cerridwen room at Goddess House this afternoon having a good natter when suddenly the earth moved, and the whole house swayed. Everything [made of] glass rattled, and I turned to Cerridwen on the wall and said ‘what are you up to now?’ Everyone started laughing. Panic over. Apparently Swansea was worst hit. Mmmmmhnjj what is going on?”

-Bee, Facebook post, February 17 2018

As Bee’s reaction to the unusual tremor we experienced in Glastonbury already suggests, honoring Goddess in everyday life is not only characterized by intentionally created moments of worship. Another theme that emerged during my fieldwork was that (and how) my participants responded to the presence of Goddess they sensed in seemingly mundane instants.

**Goddess in my coffee**

“Oh look! I should definitely take a picture of this!”, Aradia declared joyfully, shifting around on her chair. There was always a childlike sense of wonder in her way of looking at
the world that I admired. She immediately took the small disposable camera that I had just given her to capture her “moments with Goddess in everyday life”. She then zoomed in on the mocha in front of her, adorned with a five-pointed star made of chocolate powder: “So beautiful, it’s a pentacle!”, she said admiringly and the camera clicked. “Goddess sometimes has the sweetest ways to talk to you, literally, haha!” (see Appendix)

For Aradia, as a Wiccan, the pentacle was the most central symbol in her Pagan path. It represents the five elements – earth, water, air, fire and space – and as such, is a symbol of Goddess herself. At the same time, she told me, she also saw in it a simplified shape of both the life giving aspect of Goddess, a woman parting her legs for either sex or birth, as well as her aspect of death and regeneration, an abstracted Sheela na gig25, who holds open her vulva for the journey back into the Earth Mother’s womb. Aradia mainly used this symbol in her ritual practices as a way to honor Goddess and to ask for her protection, but her close relationship with it and its sudden appearance in her coffee immediately evoked endearment. To her, the pentagram in her coffee was a sign sent from Goddess: “That’s just her way of saying ‘hello’, ‘I am with you’ sometimes, you know."

Aradia sensed the presence of Goddess in that moment, who, for her, became tangible through the interacting material and symbolic quality of the chocolate pentacle. Symbols, such as the pentacle, or the eggs and hares on the Spring Equinox Open Day, are specific to people’s religious imaginaries and, as such, hold a code that can only be deciphered with a Pagan understanding. I repeatedly became aware of this coding quality in conversations with my non-Pagan house mate Phyllis.

Upon my arrival in Glastonbury, Phyllis, a resolute woman in her seventies, immediately warned me that “people here are all a bit mad”. She had witnessed some of the seasonal celebrations, which, in Glastonbury, often include vibrant processions through town. Accompanied by song and dance, Pagans of all kinds get together and wear colourful robes, handmade headdresses with seasonal flowers and fruits and paint their bodies with symbols, such as spirals, moons and pentagrams. To Phyllis, however, this was merely “madness”. With a mix of aversion and pity in her voice, she asked me, “what must people miss in their lives to feel the need to dress up like that?”

____________________________________

25 An Irish Goddess, found in carvings throughout Ireland.
As a non-Pagan, Phyllis could not make sense of the festivity scene and the religious meanings the specific colors, flowers and signs conveyed. She could not access how, from a Pagan point of view, this was a way of celebrating life and the cycles of death and regeneration rather than masking or compensating a lack of it. This representational quality of particular symbols, like the pentacles, flowers, colors etc., thus, stabilizes Goddess worship as an assemblage, since it is difficult for actors outside of the composition to make sense of and appropriate it (DeLanda 2006: 15-16; 19; 28; 2011; Harman 2008: 370).

Likewise, in the everyday, symbols such as Aradia’s chocolate pentagram – or the color of Orianna’s sofa covers – only triggered a religious association in her as a Pagan and specifically Wiccan believer. Moreover, these coded meanings limit the assemblage to a certain extent as only particular signs – in interaction with materiality and other elements – evoke or reveal the presence of Goddess in the mundane.

3.3.3. “It isn’t [only] about pretty altars, hugging trees and wearing velvet”: themes of “awareness”

Honouring Goddess, as Bee wrote in one of her Facebook posts, “isn’t [only] about pretty altars, hugging trees and wearing velvet” (March 23 2018). To her, as well as to my other participants, Goddess worship extends beyond ritual practices in the temple, deliberately crafting moments of worship and responding to the presence of the divine. It is understood as an “awareness” that finds expression in every aspect of their lives and is often referred to as a “way of life” itself.

Herne, a Wiccan in his mid-thirties, described this “awareness” as a consciousness and attitude of gratitude. I was visiting his wife Aradia in the Library of Avalon, where she volunteered every Friday, when Herne came by to prepare for his talk about Gardnerian witchcraft the next morning. We were chatting about his upcoming presentation, when he explained: “If you love what nature is, if you’re grateful for the beauty of it, then that colors everything you do. It makes you behave in a conscious way...that attitude becomes the source of all your behaviour. So, of course you will recycle, of course you would help
someone in need, whether that being is a person, or an animal or a tree...it’s just that one simple attitude, it has a knock-on effect, you know.”

Thus, to him, Goddess worship extends into all areas of life as an attitude of gratitude. It feeds into his behaviour towards humans and non-humans alike and is the driving force behind all his actions. This, however, again, emphasizes how loosely the worship assemblage is defined. The “knock-on effect” Herne described has the potential to introduce a seemingly endless number of elements other than spatiality, temporality, symbolic presence etc. into the composition.

This was also echoed by Brigid when I asked her about her talk “Who is She who calls me?”. She stressed: “[Honoring Goddess] permeates everything really. It’s not like ‘oh, I switch into priestess mode’. It’s from full-on ceremony...to making a beautiful life. I get to do everything with her, for her, you know.”

Hence, honoring Goddess encompasses not only ritual practices but is understood as a constant “awareness” that informs all facets of life. In particular, as Herne already pointed out, it contributes to people’s environmental practices, which I will turn to in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, although Herne first described this “awareness” as a “conscious” behaviour, he later stated that “a lot if it happens sort of subconsciously”. He then further explained: “It’s just a part of my life, you know, part of my everyday sort of...thing. I don’t think about it as such. I don’t think ‘oh I must do this, I must do that’, I do things because that’s...what I do, if you see what I mean.” This, as I will continue exploring in the following section, suggests that even routines can represent a form of Goddess worship.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown how diversely my participants perceive Goddess and how their religious imaginaries find expression in their Pagan practices. These practices, I have argued, craft and manifest Pagan subjectivities and form a larger assemblage that shapes people’s everyday lives.

As an assemblage, Goddess worship is made up of multiple, interacting components, which can be outlined as time, material and symbolic presence, deity and spatiality. Moreover, these components have differing qualities that make this assemblage both rigidly and fluidly defined: On the one hand, symbols like pentacles, the moon or
Ostara eggs have a representational quality and, therefore, stabilize worship. On the other hand, elements such as time, material presence and spatiality are appropriated in highly individualized manners and make the composition more fluid. This also relates to the notion of tactics, the self-determined ways in which people link together these elements and enact their Pagan subjectivities in the everyday.

Finally, as I have shown, religious practices shape my participants’ daily lives and sacralize the seemingly mundane in three ways: through deliberately crafting moments of worship, in ways of responding to the presence of Goddess as well as in the form of an “awareness”. Deliberately crafted moments of worship are characterized by intentional acts whereas moments of responding to the divine are unplanned and intuitive. “Awareness”, on the other hand, has a “knock-on effect” on all areas of life.

In the following, building on this first block of analysis, I will now examine how even environmental practices form part of the larger assemblage of Goddess worship.
4. “Goddess *is* about sustainable living“ – Religious imaginaries and their expressions in environmental practices

“Looking after the gardens, for the House and the Hall, I started composting and recycling and stuff like that. But to me, it’s all part of...being a priest, you know. Composting and recycling is still priest work to me”, Timothy cheerfully told me, noticeably happy to return to this work after our chat, checking on the beehives and plants in the Goddess House’s backyard.

To him, as well as to all my other participants, environmental practices constitute a central aspect of Goddess worship. These, however, as I will explore in this chapter, are not always intentional acts but can also be routinized ways of honoring Goddess. Therefore, in the following, I will first begin with two stories that illustrate how environmental practices form part of Goddess worship as a larger assemblage. Then, building on my previous section, I will point to the performative dimensions of worship and the theme of “awareness”.

Moreover, I will look at some of the practices my participants are committed to more closely. Here, I will highlight their contrasting perceptions of what environmental practices are and how they imply honoring deity. Along the three main themes I encountered during my fieldwork – small-scale changes, activism and “achieving something vs. the feel-good of it” – I will examine what it means to my participants to be environmentally friendly and, therefore, consistent with their beliefs.

In the following sub-section, I will begin exploring environmental practices as another constitutive element in worship as a larger assemblage.
4.1. Environmental practices as worship

A “cuppa” for the Goddess’ sake

It was almost midnight when I left Bee’s house and, as always, eagerly tried to memorize every detail of our hours-long conversation. She had shared with me how, when she still lived in Wales, her neighbour had attempted to cut down the five poplars in front of their home; they were “blocking his view”, he argued, to which Bee immediately responded by climbing up and sitting in one of the threatened trees until the police cleared the situation. On my way home, her words still rang in my ear: “[And] that day, those trees stood. And it’s not ‘oh, look at me’, it’s...I am a priestess of the Goddess, I am a Druid, the earth is my mother...I cannot let somebody kill...I mean those are not just trees, they are my brothers and sisters!”

I came to know Bee as a fierce woman, who stood up for what she believed in, unafraid to call people out when they harmed what she held dear – both in her activism and her daily life. I also came to know her as the one who always took her neatly plaited basket to the grocery store to only buy as much as she really needed, as the one who rigorously researched everything she put on her shopping list and who even stopped eating yoghurt until it would be available in jars again.

She was also the one among my participants, who always showed the strongest emotional reaction towards environmental degradation, often becoming quiet and teary-eyed in our conversations or “cynical”, as she described herself. On this particular day, however, as she later documented as one of her “moments with Goddess”, she was uplifted for a particular reason.

“Look what I’ve got!”, Bee excitedly announced from upstairs at the Goddess House. I only heard a soft rattle until she came around the corner, looking beaming and holding up a package of tea with a bright smile on her face. However, this was not just any tea. Only last week, when I bumped into her at the local organic store, she was outraged about her recent discovery that most of Britain’s teabags contained plastic and was desperately looking for an alternative. In the following few days, the teabag-news spread like wildfire in town and around every corner, someone was lamenting their favourite English treat. “And I drink a lot of it!”, Bee had cried out.

Today, she proudly presented to me a package of loose tea: “I really had to look for it! Why the hell is it so hard to get? Especially here in Glastonbury! We used to have loose
tea in this country in the 1980s and back then, people didn’t even think of buying a teabag”, she shook her head annoyed. But her face lit up quickly again: “And guess what: the two friends of mine that came to visit last weekend, and they didn’t even know I was looking for one, they brought me a teapot! One of those with the little filter, so I can actually use it for the loose tea now! Such a synchronicity...but that’s just her ways!”

Later, ready to prepare herself a “cuppa”26, Bee photographed her new teapot next to a jar of loose tea as one of her “moments with Goddess” with the disposable camera I had given her. This demonstrates how entangled honoring Goddess and environmental practices are. Even more so, as famous Pagan writer Starhawk would phrase it, they can be understood as “the practical end of the earth being sacred” (Starhawk 2015) and, as Bee’s photo indicates, represent acts of worship themselves.

First of all, as a central aspect of her religious imaginaries, Bee honors the land as Goddess. As a Druid, she considers herself an “earth guardian” and a “sister of the trees”. Thus, she refers to nature in kinship terms, which points to the intimate bond she feels with

26 British colloquialism for “a cup of tea”
her. Consequently, building on Taylor, on a first layer to her “moment with Goddess”, her imaginaries give rise to practices that reflect this understanding and relationship, such as her decision to adjust her consumer choices, switching from tea bags to loose tea in honor of deity.

Furthermore, on a second layer, the fact that her friends unknowingly had gifted her a teapot that would suit her new habit, to her, was an example of “the ways of Goddess”, who, through divine intervention had contributed to this situation and revealed herself in the serendipity of the events.

Therefore, as Bee later explained, by adding a spoon and her new teapot besides the loose tea itself, not only buying but also preparing and drinking it became a form of Goddess worship for her. In their combination, they constituted both a reminder of and reflection on the eco-friendly consumption choices she committed to in honor of deity as well as of the “fated” moment she was given the teapot. Thus, as particularly the first layer to her “moment with Goddess” suggests, I argue that environmental practices represent another important element in the larger assemblage of Goddess worship.

A second example that illustrates this point perhaps more clearly is the “moment with Goddess” Orianna shared with me (see Appendix). With her disposable camera, Orianna captured her eco-friendly cleaning products that she explicitly uses “in honor of the Lady of the Land”. In an entry in a written journal that she composed for me on her photo, she further explained:

“My beliefs are earth-centred and celebrate the cycle of the seasons. I understand the divine to be immanent and so I try to be environmentally aware and mindful in my daily life. I bought some recycled kitchen sponges today – I couldn’t find any that are able to be recycled – but they are poor quality and I have to use more washing up liquid with them, so I think using non-recycled ones will be better as they will last much longer and use less washing up liquid. Buying recyclable household supplies is often difficult.”

Again, Orianna’s consumption choices, as well as the way she reflects on them, are intimately linked with her religious imaginaries. She perceives Goddess to be “immanent” and, more specifically, honors her as the “Lady of the Land”. This motivates her to act in an environmentally conscious way so that she invests in making informed consumer decisions based on the assessment which of her options would have the least damaging effect on the environment. Although she attempted to use recycled sponges to lower her environmental impact, she observed that these required more detergent, were not lasting and, thus,
produced more waste than non-recyclable sponges. So, she ultimately considered non-recyclable sponges to be more earth/Goddess-friendly and adjusted her consumer choices accordingly. In this way, as her photo and diary entry indicate, buying and using eco-friendly cleaning products constituted a form of Goddess worship for her.

Moreover, her practices, as outlined in chapter 3, can further be understood in terms of tactics (de Certeau 1984: 26-27; 32). Tactics, as the very practices of linking together the elements in the assemblage, are the individualized manners with which people appropriate given structures. In this case, Orianna navigates the limited availability of environmentally friendly cleaning products and makes a decision informed by her religiously motivated intentions. In addition, the consumption itself becomes an example of worship as an expression of her Pagan subjectivity.

By using these tactics, she subverts the strategies employed by the manufacturing companies as institutions of “will and power” (ibid.: 36) within market economy. These limit Orianna’s options as a consumer and steer her towards the purchase of particular products, e.g. by marketing recycled sponges as a “greener” alternative to non-recycled ones. They produce a set of structures, set up to direct her actions, yet Orianna appropriates it in a self-determined manner. She makes an informed decision based on which products would be the most likely to correspond with her Pagan beliefs. Finally, instead of using them merely for the act of cleaning, the consumption of eco-friendly products itself becomes a way of honoring Goddess for her.

Nevertheless, as my next story will show, not only environmentally conscious consumer choices but also bee-friendly gardening and activism represent a form of Goddess worship.

Bees, activism and “eco-magick”

Here I was, sitting in Sulis’ bathroom and questioning my own commitment to environmental practices as a Pagan: “This woman is so dedicated”, I thought, “even her toilet paper is waste-free.” I pulled off the last two sheets of the paper and looked at the cardboard roll, labelled with the witty brand name “Who Gives A Crap?”. The big blue letters were almost glaring at me, asking, “do you give a crap?” I felt somewhat guilty, wondering why I didn’t have this nice alternative to regular toilet tissue made from recycled paper.
I went back into the living room and handed her the empty cardboard roll: “You have eco-friendly loo rolls!” I said in an almost questioning tone, actually directed towards myself rather than her. “Yes, they’re really great! You have to order them, but they come boxed in paper instead of plastic”, she answered and pulled out a new roll wrapped in rainbow-colored packaging from her storage.

Even though I was intrigued by the detailed attention Sulis paid to her choices in daily life, on this day, I mainly came by to see her new garden and to talk to her about her environmental activism. After a few “guerrilla seed bombing tours”27 through town, as Bee always called them, Sulis, a sixty-year-old Druid, who had moved to Glastonbury only recently, had now also made her backyard bee-friendly. There was not much to look at yet as there were still weeks ahead until spring, but I could already see it buzzing with bees, butterflies and other pollinators, dancing in the luscious green and warm sunlight through the sparkle in her eyes.

On our way back inside, she explained: “I mean to me the Goddess is about sustainable living...she is the spirit of the land and...I sort of try and...walk in her path. I don’t think I would have been so desperate to change the garden...and some people would say, ‘why spend that much money’? But for me, I just couldn’t live with the way it was...and I suppose that’s because it’s not just an abstract idea, it’s something I hold sacred. And if you hold something sacred then you can’t...ignore it”

For Sulis, environmental practices, bee-friendly gardening in particular, constitute a central element in her Goddess worship. Even more so, she experiences her desire to honor deity as “the spirit of the land” as an urge and intense craving by stressing how “desperate” she was to make her garden more attractive to pollinators. The fact that, otherwise, she would not actively promote wildlife and biodiversity affected her to such an extent, that she could not bear to leave it unchanged. This highlights the strong emotional bond she shares with Goddess and the resulting need and responsibility she feels to care for her.

Making her garden bee-friendly, hence, becomes an enactment of her Pagan subjectivity. She links together the elements of spatiality, Goddess as the “spirit of the land”

27 Seed bombs are small, horticultural balls made from a combination of compost, clay and seeds, in this case of plants that will attract pollinators. “Guerrilla seed bombing” refers to the clandestine dispersal of these into areas that are legally inaccessible to the person dispersing them.
as well as the material presence of bee-friendly seeds and bulbs. In this way, cultivating a garden that encourages the presence of pollinators becomes a form of worship for Sulis.

However, not only bee-friendly gardening is part of her environmental practices as a way of honoring Goddess. As our conversation in her living-room revealed, environmental activism is another important component for her.

Gesturing towards the dozens of leaflets of past and future campaigns that were cluttered on her walls and couch table, she laughingly told me: “And all my activism, obviously, as you can see, is definitely part of my honor to the Goddess. So whether it’s writing an article or protesting...I can’t always do as much as I like and I know, [at my age] I’m physically not as capable anymore of sitting in a tent outside a fracking site but, ehm, I do sometimes offer people little prayers. I work with Frack Free Somerset and we went up north before Christmas, it was really, really tough actually...but outside each gate I did a blessing with some water. Also, around that time, there was another big campaign I was involved in and a friend who lived there, he also works very closely with the Goddess...there was a threat that a field near him would be drilled. And we did quite a few ceremonies up there...and the company actually backed out. And I often wonder, you know, whether the amount of magic energy, or Goddess, or whatever, did have a role...I think it did.”

For Sulis, environmental activism as a way of honoring Goddess can range from composing a written piece, over protesting at fracking sites to ritual action, often referred to as “eco-magick” 28 (Letcher 2003). “Eco-magick” can be defined as a ritualized way of “raising energy”, “performed so as to protect or empower both threatened land and those attempting to defend it” (Letcher 2003: 76). This, as Sulis highlights, encompasses ceremonies, prayers and elemental blessings and represents a particularly important kind of activism for her since she, as an elderly woman, feels increasingly challenged and physically restricted to participate in other forms of activism.

At the same time, similar to Bear’s example of “driving with Goddess” and Bee’s teapot-story, her narrative, again, highlights how people perceive deity and how they attribute agency to her. Sulis linked Goddess and the “magic energy” raised in their ritual action to the fact that the company, which threatened the land they attempted to protect, withdrew after their ceremonies. Thus, through her religious imaginaries, Goddess appears

28 A term used by my participants and the wider Pagan community.
as an agentive element in the worship assemblage that she co-creates her lived realities with. This contributes to and becomes apparent in her environmental practices in particular, such as her bee-friendly gardening and “magickal” activism.

Nevertheless, as my next account will show, these practices are not always performed with a conscious, deliberate intent but can also become routinized acts of worship.

4.2. "It’s second nature to me now": performative dimensions of Goddess worship

I have already pointed out at the end of the first chapter that honoring Goddess in everyday life extends beyond the creation of intentional moments of worship and ways of responding to her presence. It is also described as an “awareness” that has a “knock-on effect” on all areas and practices in people’s lives. Especially with respect to environmental practices, my participants have often explained these to me with reference to this “awareness”.

Herne explained how to him, again, it all comes down to the attitude of gratitude: One evening, when he and Aradia invited me for dinner to their small, distinguishably Wiccan attic flat, bursting with God and Goddess figurines, ceremonial cloaks and countless books on Gardnerian witchcraft, we were talking about the pictures that had surfaced of Eric and Donald Jr. Trump, showing them proudly holding a leopard they had just killed. Appalled, Herne contrasted what he saw as the motivating force behind their behavior with his Pagan perspective, saying: “It’s just an awareness...if you’re so grateful for the beautiful experience of seeing a stag or a lion...then why would you kill it? If you’re grateful for this wonderful nature, then why would you be destructive anyway? Why would you...drill, why would you hunt, why would you...waste?”

For Herne, “awareness” as an attitude of gratitude feeds into eco-friendly ways of living in particular; it contributes to being appreciative of nature instead of being destructive. This attitude, he further explained, encourages him to recycle, to eat primarily locally and seasonally grown foods and to exclusively buy second-hand clothes. Therefore, his “awareness”, the gratitude he feels towards nature, makes him committed to his environmental practices.
Likewise, Irene, a Temple priestess in her late thirties, shared with me a similar way of looking at environmental practices on an afternoon when we drove up to the woods, sitting down on a bench that allowed us to take in a stunning view over the Somerset levels: “I think it’s just that love for Goddess...when you come from the heart, you don’t want it to suffer, yeah? I think from that place of connection comes my awareness. Because...I mean look at this view! So of course I walk the land with awareness, of course I try not to use plastics and pick up rubbish when I see it...I can’t even really describe it. It’s an honoring, you know?”

For Irene, “awareness” arises from the emotional bond she feels with Goddess, a connection that she describes as coming “from the heart”. Similar to Herne, this sensitizes her to act responsibly towards nature and evokes in her the desire to protect her. Irene’s “love” and appreciation for the beauty of Goddess, thus, give rise to her environmental practices, such as litter picks and the reduction of plastics.

However, when I asked her if she always did these things with a deliberate intention, she stated: “It depends on what I’m doing...I mean, obviously, when I go to the recycling tip it’s just routine.” She then expressed how, when she first started to recycle in honor of Goddess, she did so with a conscious thought and intent. After a while, however, acts such as recycling, eating organic or having a vegetarian diet simply became automatisms for her: “It...just becomes part of your flesh and blood in a way...it’s second nature for me now.”

What this indicates is that Goddess worship is not only constituted through and represented by intentional acts of worship but also through routines, such as recycling and particular food choices. Therefore, I suggest to include the notion of performativity into the workings of the assemblage.

As explained in the beginning, subjectivity is formed and expressed through praxis, in this case acts of worship, linking together the components in the composition. Furthermore, praxis itself can be analytically distinguished into the modes of performance and performativity (Huarca 2015: 809-810). In a Butlerian sense, “[p]erformance ... implies a bounded act done by a subject who consciously performs, whereas performativity ... refers to the construction of the subject by the reiteration of norms” (ibid.).

Although my participants’ practices might not necessarily be understood as a “reiteration of norms” in the sense of embodying a disciplining, normative discourse, they
can be seen as a routinized enactment and constitution of a Pagan subjectivity. Hence, not only deliberate acts of worship but also routines can represent an honoring of Goddess and form part of the assemblage.

Nevertheless, although all my participants were highly committed to their environmental practices, as I will explore in the next section, there exist differing, sometimes even contrasting perceptions of what it means to them to be environmentally friendly and, hence, in/consistent with their Pagan beliefs.

4.3. “I don’t think there’s one way to be environmentally friendly“: perceptions of environmental practices

“You know, people are often shocked that some people, who are Pagan eat meat, or they’re shocked that some use aeroplanes, ‘cause aeroplanes pollute the air with all their fuel and this kind of stuff… but I don’t think there’s one way to be environmentally friendly?”, Aradia said, slicing off another thick piece of the chicken breast in front of her, while I was happy to stick with the veggies, which she and Herne served. Aradia, Bear and Orianna were the only meat-eating Pagans among my participants and some of the very few I met in town in general. Although all of them either bought their meat at the local butcher or drove out to organic farms nearby, explicitly refused battery-farmed food and preferred to order vegetarian options when eating outside, they didn’t see vegetarianism or veganism as an automatic consequence to their beliefs.

During my fieldwork, I increasingly noted not only a diversity in the environmental practices my participants were committed to; moreover, their very perceptions of what it means to be environmentally friendly and to act in accordance with their Pagan beliefs differed greatly. Likewise, in his study on contemporary Paganism, Harvey notes that this often varies among the believers, some “meditate[ing] for the good of the planet, some us[ing] the ‘energy’ raised in ritual drama to benefit rain forests … [and] some, [lying] in front of bulldozers” (1997: 126). In the following, along the three main themes that I encountered among my participants – small-scale changes, activism and “achieving something vs. the feel-good of it” – I will examine how environmental practices are understood and embedded in the larger context of my research.
“You have to look at the bigger picture” – Small-scale changes in the Temple community

Irene tied her boots with a triumphant look on her face when we were getting ready to leave the Goddess House after this early-morning Motherworld meeting. The Motherworld meetings are based on the Temple community’s vision of “Motherworld”, a society in which “love, care and support for each other, … for … Mother Earth and all Her creatures … are placed in the centre … rather than being left out on the periphery” (Goddess Temple, n.d.). In their weekly gatherings, the community members share and discuss their ideas on how to co-create such a society.

The town had still been cloaked in a misty veil when we had started today’s circle, now, just like Irene’s mood, it had been lifted and the sky looked unusually clear. For her, in these meetings the focus was all too often on “dreaming in change”, on visualizing and energetically “birthing” such a vision rather than actually bringing forth practically oriented projects to manifest it. But recently, – not only because she and Magdalene had just stepped forward to initiate a community litter pick – Irene started to note a shift towards more action in her community. With the air now being crispy-cold and the grass crackling beneath our feet, we spent the rest of the morning in the courtyard of the Goddess Temple, watching the town come to life.

“I think there’s definitely the move towards more…ecological responsibility, let’s say?”, Irene began to think out loud. She looked around, her gaze firmly moving between the temple upstairs and the Goddess shop to our right, proudly seizing the accomplishments that were made in the past months: solar panels had been installed on the temple roof, the ritual clothes sold in the shop were now exclusively made from natural fibres, they had changed to buying eco-friendly candles and step by step, were attempting to eliminate non-biodegradable materials in their community. “It’s really walking [our] talk!”, Irene cheerfully summed up.

However, similar to Orianna, she also pointed towards the difficulties the community encountered in sorting out which alternatives would be the least damaging to the environment. It irritated her how some community members did not thoroughly think through the options they proposed and missed to connect them with larger issues. Gradually losing the joy and mildness with which she had just been speaking, she told me:

“For example…with these organza bags that we are using for the incense…there was uproar in the House, we should be using something else. But people take them away and
they put their jewellery in them, so they are lasting! They are lasting bags that are being reused! And then somebody said, ‘look I’ve got a plant based bag!’ And Bee and I immediately went: have you researched where this is coming from? How many trees are we killing? Where is that plant material from? Who are they taking the water from? So yeah, it’s not that simple, you always have to look at the bigger picture.”

Irene’s reflections (and emotional reaction) represent a common theme that I encountered among my participants. Nearly all of them warned me to not blindly “believe the hype” around some of the often praised “green” products, such as hemp bags or organic foods, to always research my choices and to see how they are linked to larger social, political and environmental issues. This perspective also reflects my initial considerations to use the term “environmental” instead of “sustainable practices” and demonstrates that most of my participants are aware of the implicit dynamics and take them into account when committing to eco-friendly small-scale changes both in their personal lives as well as on a collective level. “The bigger picture”, therefore is what determines eco-friendliness for most of them.

However, although for many members, the current changes in the Temple community signal an important step towards more community-based action, others would deem these as insufficient and, to a certain extent, as unnecessary.

“Where the hell are you at 3 o’clock in the morning?!” – Activism and earth guardianship
I was in the Goddess House’s library room, looking for Andrew Harvey’s “Sacred Activism”, a book suggested by Sulis, when Bee, normally working in the room next door, joined me for a chat and a cup of – of course – loose tea. Immediately triggered by the book’s title and the fact that the library didn’t have a copy, Bee’s comments on the community’s “move towards ecological responsibility”, as Irene put it, quickly turned into a fiery speech about what this, to her mind, should entail instead. With her tea still untouched and me blinking at her, both impressed and intimidated by her fierceness, she gave vent to some of her frustrations:

“It’s really, really important that you use your energy and your enthusiasm and your love for the land to open your mouth and say ‘not on my patch’! And whether that means…I mean I’ve seen people glue their arms into pipes, I know myself, badger patrol, Somerset, with my husband…and it’s not about ‘oh, look at you!’, it’s about...why wouldn’t everyone
that believes that they are connected with the land...where the hell are you at 3 o’clock in the morning, stopping people from killing our animal brothers and sisters?! (...) But there are certain people who will come to [Motherworld] meetings, saying we should stop using organza bags that are made out of plastic...but to me...and that’s just my opinion, that is a little bit piddly stuff...yeah? It’s really...what makes the big difference? The big difference is to go out there when you see something that is not right and put yourself on the line and be arrested, you know, and be threatened with a gun. (...) Stop talking, start doing! And I feel very strongly about that. And that’s where earth guardianship comes in, you know. As Druids, we are earth guardians, the standing brothers and sisters of the animals and trees. Once we are fiddling around some organza bag...I just think that...having another fifteen meetings...is...no. The meeting I wanna see is: they’re bloody killing badgers again, you, you and you, are you ready? Let’s go, in the car, and let’s stand there with our lamp and our chanting.”

As Bee’s emotional reaction shows, to her, as well as to some of my other participants, activism is the guiding premise in what environmental practices and, hence, honoring Goddess, should imply. Here, activism is not only perceived as a logical consequence of Pagan beliefs but, for Bee in particular, is linked with how she defines and lives her role as a Druid, as an “earth guardian”.

In this way, Bee’s and Irene’s reflections demonstrate how differently environmental practices are approached as well as how diversely Pagan subjectivities are finally enacted. This multiplicity of expectations and norms attached to how these practices as a way of honoring Goddess are understood can be traced back to the plethora of religious imaginaries that give rise to people’s practices. This may become yet clearer when juxtaposing Bee’s position with the view of some of my other participants, which contrasts her take on activism and the notion of earth guardianship in particular.

“Achieving something vs. the feel-good of it”

Although I don’t like the idea of destroying nature, I don’t like the idea of you know, animal cruelty, all this kind of stuff...I don’t have a huge issue about it because...even if the axes flip and there’s another ice age coming, she’ll deal with whatever we do”, Bear threw in, almost casually, taking another sip of his pale ale at the “Lazy Gecko”.

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I was a bit taken aback – did I really just hear a Pagan, a priest dedicated to Goddess, say that? As so often, before I even had the time to figure out how best to react in a professional way, in his quick-witted manner, he already continued: “What a lot of people don’t understand is that it’s not so much about protecting the earth. Because the planet is not going anywhere!”, he laughed. “It’s about working together with the planet so that we can survive?!”

Ok, admittedly, he did have a point there. It actually reminded me of Morton’s *Dark Ecology* and how nature herself is not in need of saving. I sat back to give his flow of thoughts and words a go, calmly uncrossing the arms in front of my chest. I also tried to scan Timothy’s face to see how he had reacted to his statement but he seemed unaffected, busy dissolving the sugar in his tea.

“A lot of people here defend against stuff not because of nature but because they don’t like change. Especially people in this community are often like ‘oh the grasses are nice and flat and sheep are floating around’ - it’s not natural, right? This is not a natural landscape! We humans have artificially messed with it…classic example is, say, look at Stonehenge, surrounded by huge grasses. It would have originally been forest, the whole south was forest. But our Pagan ancestors have evolved over thousands of years through deforestation! You know? Medieval man was not planting trees, was he?!”

I was going to say that the number of trees in the world had been significantly decimated since that time and that indeed, the global situation, as well as Pagan practices, had changed but, still, he also had a point. Neither Stonehenge nor Avebury had magically appeared and there is a certain irony in not only how the surrounding, artificially created landscape is often celebrated but also the fact that these sites themselves had required logging at some point and are being kept deforested for both agriculture and the thousands of Pagan pilgrims visiting every year.

“So that is one thing”, Bear continued. “And the other thing is, I’m a great believer of circle of influence. So, I influence in the circle, where I know I can have impact in. If I went to a fracking site and campaigned outside for a week, I know it’s not gonna have any effect…but again, a lot of people don’t see the balance between actually achieving something versus the feel-good of doing it. And a lot of people here do it for the circus of

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29 I have referred to Morton’s writing in my discussion of the terms “environmental practices” and “sustainability” in the introduction.
feel-good. And that then puts a very different...twist on it. Actually, then you’re driven by the need for short-term personal gain and...is that spiritual?“

Bear touches on two main issues here that have been brought up by some of my other participants as well: first of all, in contrast with Bee, Bear doesn’t associate himself with the idea of earth guardianship and does not see activism as a pivotal component of honoring Goddess/environmental practices. Secondly, besides pointing to some of the ironies or contradictions he observes in a Pagan ‘other’, as I will explore in my next chapter, Bear’s guiding rationale is not only to direct time and energy towards having a measurable impact but he also presupposes a selfless intention behind one’s actions. Otherwise, he suggests, these would not qualify as “spiritual” and, hence, as a way of honoring Goddess.

However, the fact that Bear’s perspective is so different from Bee’s and Irene’s approach reflects not only the diversity in their religious imaginaries and, ultimately, practices. It also points towards Goddess as an emergent property of worship. Building on DeLanda (2006: 5; 129; 2011), the worship assemblage, in its variations and diversity of appearances, brings forth emergent properties. These properties are embedded in their components – such as material and symbolic presence, time and, finally, environmental practices – but Godess(es) only emerge from their interactions; furthermore, those interactions are the very enactment that configure a Pagan subjectivity. Therefore, being more than the sum of all parts, Goddess can be seen as an agentive element inside this composition and as an emergent property of it.

This is also echoed by my participants’ understanding of deity as being both a divine force and an idea that is brought about through their religious practices. Timothy, for instance, noted that in none of the mythological stories he could think of Goddess had ever created an image of herself without human intervention: “It’s always...she’s inspired us to carve, she’s inspired us to paint...so we humans have created the cultural associations around her.”

To him and my other participants Goddess, thus, exists and is crafted. As an emergent property, deity is generated through all the different ways in which my participants honor her – through deliberately crafted moments of worship, responding to her presence and through routines, encompassing seasonal celebrations in the temple as much as environmental practices, ranging from individual and collective consumer choices, over composting, recycling, bee-friendly gardening to activism.
Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown how environmental practices form part of Goddess worship as a larger assemblage. As ways of honoring Goddess in everyday life, they include a wide variety of practices that contribute to the promotion and protection of biodiversity, such as bee-friendly gardening, recycling, composting and different forms of activism. Eco-friendly consumer choices and small-scale changes were particularly highlighted by my informants, both on a personal and community level.

Furthermore, this diversity in environmental practices demonstrates how differently Pagan subjectivities are enacted. This also relates to the notion of tactics, which are the highly individualized manners with which people connect the elements in the assemblage. Moreover, this very practice of entangling the components, reveals Goddess(es) as an emergent property. Being more than the sum of all parts yet only coming forth through their interaction, deity, thus, can be seen as both an element inside the composition of the worship assemblage and as its emergent property.

Lastly, not only people’s practices but their very perceptions of what it requires to be environmentally friendly vary as much as their religious imaginaries. While some lay emphasis on small-scale changes in the community and on the importance of making thoroughly informed consumer choices, embedding them in a larger socio-political and environmental context, for others, activism, having a measurable impact and/or a selfless intention are the guiding premise. In the following chapter, I will address how this diversity of practice and perception further highlights how loosely and firmly the worship assemblage is defined. Moreover, I will explore how this fluidity, to a certain extent, enables people to craft practices that are possibly inconsistent with their Pagan beliefs.
5. “It takes more than drumming to save the earth” – Inconsistencies and the Pagan ‘other’

“It just pissed me off that...everywhere you turned, there was all this stuff about worshipping mother earth, you know, let’s sing a song to mother earth, let’s do a prayer for mother earth, ‘oh, I’m wearing my Goddess dress and I’m drumming for mother earth’ and first I thought, oh brilliant, you love, you really respect nature...would you be interested in joining me? – ‘Oh no. I’m too busy’’, Krissy, a non-Pagan in her early forties, told me angrily. Her crying toddler Maria, meanwhile calling for her from the bathtub, didn’t help much to console her.

When Krissy had moved to Glastonbury about a year ago and founded the town’s only environmentalist group, she was shocked and disappointed by the lack of interest the many local spiritual groups, the Temple community in particular, demonstrated towards her idea. “You know, people say all this stuff and this town is supposed to be so spiritual and earth-friendly, but when it comes down to it, nobody actually does anything.”

Although my participants demonstrated an inspiring commitment to their environmental practices and, when talking to Krissy, I wasn’t yet aware of how differently they conceptualized these, over the course of my fieldwork, in the narratives of Pagans and non-Pagans alike, I increasingly stumbled over stories that indicated contradictions in the beliefs and practices of a Pagan ‘other’.

Here, drawing from three examples, I will first discuss how we should make sense of these inconsistencies. Then, with the help of a story by Bee, I will link this to the notion of “awareness”. Lastly, examining a conversation with Timothy and Bear, I will further trace this back to the religious make-up and demographics of my research site.
5.1. Tales of a Pagan ‘other’

I still remember the evening when I first met Sulis. It was another cold and dark January night, the streets of Glastonbury deserted and dipped in dim, yellowish streetlights, a fine drizzle slowly but consistently soaking into my coat and skin. I was on my way to the Library of Avalon, following Francesca’s invitation to join tonight’s meeting of the local environmentalist group. I had contacted their Facebook page, which she administered, and did so just in time to attend their first meeting of 2018.

Bee’s tea revelation, unsurprisingly, had also reached them, as, when I entered, everyone was already busy chatting about what to do with their remaining bags, since a “cuppa” always kicked off their discussions. Although I was the only new face in their round, the ten members all briefly introduced themselves, sharing why they were part of the group.

Donna, for example, was a young woman, who was finalizing her MA in Ecology and Spirituality at Schumacher College. Krissy, the founder, described herself as a “single mum who wants to save the planet but doesn’t know how” and lastly, there was Sulis, the only Pagan member. What had drawn her to join, however, was not only her preceding involvement with activism in honor of Goddess but the provocative slogan Krissy had used when she initiated the group a year ago, flyering the town with the words “it takes more than drumming to save the earth”.

I was genuinely surprised on that first evening I attended their meeting. I had expected to see familiar faces and it startled me that there was only this small circle of people who met regularly to discuss environmental issues and organize projects – and only one of them identified as Pagan. Where were all the Goddess-loving people I had met?

Moreover, Krissy’s slogan seemed to reflect the experiences and impressions of the other group members, as everyone enthusiastically agreed when Sulis and Francesca referred to it. Was it, in the end, all more talk – or drumming – than walk?

Although, as Sulis pointed out in one of her articles published in the Pagan Dawn, “invisibility [of Pagans in environmental activism] doesn’t mean absence” and, as I have shown in the previous chapter, people have differing views on what environmental practices should imply, she often noted contrasts between the beliefs and practices of some of her Pagan friends and acquaintances. When, after one of the meetings, I asked her how Krissy’s slogan resonated with her in particular, she said:
“I mean, it’s very true. There are people...they’re saying all this stuff but they’re not actually doing it.” She explained to me how in some of the Druid gatherings she attended, people wore synthetic fibres in their ritual robes. She considered this to be at odds with their Pagan beliefs since the production process of e.g. polyester and nylon is extremely harmful to the environment. Moreover, these materials are not readily biodegradable and produce long-term waste. Thus, she questioned how much those Druids actually cared for nature and lived up to their roles as “earth guardians”, as Bee phrased it.

Additionally, Sulis placed the contradictions she observed in the consumption patterns of other Pagans within the wider local context of Glastonbury. She criticized that most of the spiritual stores in town were “full of rubbish made in China” and how particularly crystal shops, and their primarily Pagan and New Age clients, were often unethical: “I mean, where do [these crystals] come from? It’s completely...bonkers. And it’s all this...consumerism. (...) I do think that if someone is, you know, praying to the Goddess...and buying loads of crystals and being very consumerist...for me, that’s a contradiction. And I know lots of Pagans...they have a practice that doesn’t seem to extend into their lives but for me, I think...well, I just think they’ve missed the point.”

Sulis’ narrative suggests the existence of a Pagan ‘other’, who does not act in accordance with her/his beliefs, such as by wearing synthetic ritual clothes, working with unethically sourced crystals and/or being overly consumerist. Consumerism, as she further explained to me, contrasts her Pagan beliefs insofar as that she thinks of “sustainability” as encompassing all aspects of life, including economic systems. By subscribing to a “spiritual consumerism” or “materialism”, as she often called it, people were supporting a capitalist order that exploits humans and non-humans alike and, therefore, were contradicting their beliefs. Moreover, in the larger local context, for Sulis, this is at odds with Glastonbury’s reputation and self-representation as a pioneer in eco-friendly living (Howard-Gordon 2010: 145) and as England’s “spiritual center” (Bowman 2009: 167).

Furthermore, her observations of the inconsistent behaviours of a Pagan ‘other’, again, demonstrate how loosely the worship assemblage is defined: The Pagan ‘other’ partakes in ceremonies in honor of deity, yet her/his ritual robes are made out of a fabric that is harmful to the environment. Likewise, s/he uses crystals without taking into account how these are sourced. This flexibility in worship was further echoed by a comment Aradia once made in one of our conversations, arguing that “it doesn’t matter to [her] whether
somebody eats meat or recycles or not as long as they do what they do out of that sense of ‘the earth is so beautiful and I’m so grateful to be a part of it’. According to this logic, however, even practices that are detrimental to the environment could become a form of worship only by intending gratitude.

Thus, this somewhat random character that Goddess worship can take on enables people to "pick and choose" among the different elements in the assemblage, linking some and disregarding others. This allows them to craft a religious practice that suits their conveniences and that is potentially inconsistent with their beliefs. For instance, while the Pagan ‘other’, whom Sulis described, linked together components such as deity, material and symbolic presence by wearing a ceremonial cloak for a seasonal celebration, s/he did not entangle her/his religious practice with environmental ones; the use of a synthetic, non-eco-friendly robe indicates that the consumer choices that preceded this ceremony did not fully align with the ritual’s intention to honor Goddess and, therefore, nature.

Nevertheless, building on my previous chapter, it should be highlighted that this loose definition of worship not only finds expression in people’s diverse, potentially inconsistent practices but also in their diverse perceptions of what it means to be environmentally friendly. Hence, although, for Sulis, specific consumption patterns characterize contradictory behaviour, her point of view might not be held by everyone. This complicates the assessment of people’s narratives of a Pagan ‘other’, as in the larger scope of my research, a unified rationale that determined what exactly qualified as in/consistency did not exist. Therefore, this ambiguity needs to be taken into account when examining themes of in/consistency.

On the other hand, the reasons my participants suggested for why people acted in a contradictory manner can be outlined more clearly; as I will explore in the following, Bee identified “awareness” as an indicator and root cause for contradictory behavior in the Temple community.

5.2. “You have to have Goddess in your consciousness”

In honor of the changing of the seasons, the Temple community followed the Wheel of the Year by holding a big ceremony on each of the eight Pagan holidays, open for the public. Their Imbolc ceremony, which celebrated the first stirrings of spring, halfway between the winter solstice and Ostara, was the first seasonal one I had ever participated in
Glastonbury. Although I experienced this particular event as a moving and thoughtfully prepared ritual to welcome the Goddess Brighde, Bee, who was part of the ceremonial team, revealed to me that past rituals had not always gone as smoothly.

She explained how last year, one of their ceremonies involved the burning of wool and how the community’s budget restraints were given priority over their environmental commitments: Shortly before the ritual began, Bee made the shocking discovery that the wool another community member had organized was made of polyester. As, during the winter months, the seasonal ceremonies took place in the Goddess Hall, Bee was immediately alarmed. The building didn’t have any windows and the burning of synthetic yarn would be, in her words, a “horrendous … hazard for health and for the environment”. Although she tried to convince her colleagues to refrain from using the wool, they remained confident that burning it would not cause any major problems. What happened next, could have been a lesson to be learned:

“So, we’re using this wool now...we’re firing up the cauldron...in the Goddess Hall. And...people throw this wool in – and there was a lot of it. So, first of all, it goes ‘whoosh’ so everybody got a lot of...for safety, standing back. And then this black smoke comes up and I swear to you we all stank and had people coughing and the person responsible took one look at me and I said, with my eyes, ‘told you that’! So, fast forward to the Goddess conference this year...and I can’t tell you too much about it, but there may or may not be something to do with wool and burning. (...) And there, we’re talking...two to three hundred people that are burning wool. I said you must make sure that you get the right wool because it’s bad, bad, bad for the environment and also you’re gonna make people sick! And it’s just not right! And they now sort of start saying ‘oh but it’s expensive’...I don’t care how expensive it is! It’s just like...what are you thinking?! But...we’re ehm...I think as a community we’re a bit behind...a lot of people.”

As Bee points out, despite following a Pagan path, not all members of the Temple community are committed to environmental practices and some of their actions contradict their religious orientation. Regardless of her warning in last year’s ceremony and the harmful effects the ritual team and attendees experienced, the organizers are still reluctant to use an eco-friendly, responsible alternative in an upcoming, large-scale event and prioritize their budget instead.
Moreover, Bee suggested that not only certain individuals but the community at large is not living up to their beliefs and values. Although I already knew about her position with regard to activism, after having listened to her story, there seemed to be yet more behind her often expressed frustrations: “What do you mean by that? What about all the changes and efforts like the solar panels and organza bags?”

With a sudden exhaustion in her voice, she said: “To be honest, there are people who have individually fought for that for a long time but...I wouldn’t even go as far as to say that this is now a community thing. ‘Cause it’s always the same amount and the same kind of people that do that sort of thing...and people will say they have certain practices or something...but it’s, you know, put your money where your mouth is.” I suddenly remembered Krissy’s words and felt a strange, sobering mix of both surprise and confirmation upon hearing Bee’s comment.

“You have to have Goddess in your consciousness”, she continued, slowly rekindling the fire in her tone. “And I think that the change has to come from that connection. When we come from a place of care, then everything that we do comes from that. At the moment it’s more like, ‘oh yeah, we have some money, let’s do this, let’s do that’. We have three free days, let’s do this. Let’s get solar panels. And then, ‘oh well, we don’t have the grants or the time anymore, so we stop doing it for now’...while it actually needs to come from the connection and not from the idea of it...it’s the motivation that I question.”

Bee relates the contrast between her colleagues’ beliefs and practices back to the theme of “consciousness” or “awareness”, arguing that one’s “connection”/relationship with Goddess determines one’s commitment to environmental practices and ways of honoring Goddess in general. Thus, she proposes, in order to create long-term changes in the community, their collective initiatives need to stem from such a “consciousness” rather than non-religious motivations. Similar to Bear, she suspected that many members strive to make their practices more environmentally friendly “to pat themselves on the back”.

Thus, Bee’s observation indicates that this “consciousness” or “awareness”, as most of my participants named it, is not only individual but also social. It needs to be enacted by the community as a group so as to generate practices that conform with their beliefs and that, in turn, contribute to sustaining this “consciousness” on both a personal and collective level.
Finally, Bee argues, a lack of “awareness” is the root cause for inconsistent behavior. The Pagan ‘other’, for her, is a believer who does not have Goddess in her/his “consciousness” and whose practices, therefore, do not come “from a place of care”.

In addition, as I will show in the following, Bear and Timothy understand this “consciousness” as being shaped by the community members’ individual Pagan backgrounds.

5.3. Doing it with vs. focusing on nature – Religious demographics in the Temple community

Glastonbury had just seen its first snow in eight years, when, after a slippery walk up to the Tor\footnote{Glastonbury’s sacred hill and landmark, see chapter 2.1.} and capturing this unusual scenery with our cameras, we picked up Timothy along the way to warm up at his favourite café. All schools and stores were closed due to the weather and it seemed like the entire town had left their houses to enjoy the snow. With three hot teas in the making, we watched kids and adults alike playing with the white powder in the streets. I still had my conversation with Bee freshly in my mind and was already getting warm, burning with curiosity to find out how the two of them were thinking of the inconsistencies she revealed to me.

When, anonymously referring to Bee’s wool story, I asked them about how they viewed these contradictions, Bear, similar to Bee, related this behavior back to people’s relationship with Goddess. As a former Wiccan priest, he was familiar with other Pagan paths and noted that in the temple community many members liked and honored the idea of nature but often did not form a practical relationship with her. This became apparent to him in the ways many priestesses struggled to perform ceremonies outdoors. He explained:

“Whether it’s the weather, whether it’s the ground’s uneven...the amount of ceremonies I’ve been to where they’ve taken out a table into the wilderness, why the table? (...) Yes, it’s nice to have an altar, but an altar can be a tablecloth on the floor, a tree stump, rock...whatever. Something I find deeply funny, and I...kind of...stick my tongue out at regular times...you just take the average priestess and you put her outside and they don’t know where north is! Because they’re not doing it with nature. They focus on nature, they...”
love the...trees and the soft grass and all the rest of it. But they haven’t quite learned to actually work with nature as opposed to...well focusing on nature.”

Hence, ironically, despite their nature-oriented beliefs, the practices of many community members indicate a lack of communion with and knowledge of their surrounding natural environment. For Bear, this is rooted in people’s tendency to rather “focus on” nature than to actually “work with” her. Like Bee, he opposes being in relationship with Goddess to merely liking the idea of it. Since, as Bee explained, “awareness” arises from this relationship, from “working with nature”, as Bear put it, his observation reaffirms the argument that an absence or lack of it is what contributes to contradictions between people’s beliefs and practices.

Moreover, Bear further related this back to the community’s religious make-up: “If you compare [the Avalonian] to other [Pagan] systems...those tend to teach...earth magicks first, you know, plants and stuff and then the finer, deeply energetic stuff comes at the end once you have already connected with and understood the natural world, you know. But in our community, we throw it all in...or we almost teach it in reverse, yeah.”

Thus, according to Bear, people’s Pagan backgrounds further contribute to how their practices are shaped. Whereas, returning to Brigid’s metaphor of the five-levelled fountain, in other Pagan orientations, a relationship with deity is established step by step, from the densest to the finest “aggregate state” of Goddess, in the Avalonian tradition, this is not necessarily the case and almost the other way round. Here, “working with nature” does not form the basis of Goddess worship but rather emerges along the way or even at the end of it.

As I have outlined in chapter 2 (Stepping into the field section), the specific Pagan orientations among my participants are diverse and, even within the Temple community itself, can range from merely following the Avalonian tradition, over combining it with a Wiccan approach to explicitly identifying as a Druid. While Bear, Timothy, Irene, Brigid and Bee have all been involved with Wicca and/or Druidry beforehand, many other community members, as Bear later explained, have gotten in touch with Pagan practices through the Avalonian path.

Therefore, Bear’s explanation suggests that people’s differing ways of imagining and relating with Goddess, depending on their individual Pagan backgrounds, shape how their “awareness” is crafted and enacted in society at large. According to him, a lack of
practical engagement with nature contributes to a lack of “consciousness” and results in a lesser commitment to environmental practices or even contradictions in the behaviors of a Pagan ‘other’.

5.4. “The WI of Paganism” – Wider demographics and hybrid subjectivities

Returning to the conversation Bee and I had about inconsistencies in the Temple community, I finally asked her why specifically among this group of Pagans contradictions between people’s beliefs and practices seemed so apparent. As the Temple community had emerged more than twenty years ago out of environmentalist and feminist struggles and had since become internationally recognized, I had expected this to be the opposite. Bee argued:

“I would say part of that is because of the demographic that we’re made out of. You know, as I always say, and this is my saying, we are the WI [Women’s Institute] of Paganism. We are...predominantly middle age, middle class, White women, from a privileged background...and I think that’s where our mindset is still very much different to the...what some people call the “crusty”31 next door, yeah? The person who...you know...doesn’t have fifteen showers a day. And many people here, I mean we don’t do any heavy work, but they go and wash their clothes every day. Some people have a shower in the morning, shower in the evening. So it’s a lot of energy we use. It’s that sort of thing.”

Thus, as Bee indicates, besides one’s religious background and “awareness”, there are other factors that contribute to the degree of people’s environmental consciousness and commitment. Not only people’s religiosity but also their position in the larger social context inform their practices. Therefore, as being both expressed and constituted in these practices, Pagan subjectivities are not only religious but hybrid (Mantin 2004: 159). As predominantly White, middle class, British women, the majority of the community members comes from a fairly privileged background. In comparison with other groups, such as the “‘crusty’ next door”, they have access to and enjoy a lifestyle that increases their ecological impact. However, due to their privileged position, they fail to notice and reflect on this. Their Pagan subjectivities, thus, are further shaped by factors such as gender, race, class etc. and, therefore, enacted in multiple ways. This, as Bee argues, is

31 A local word to refer to a “traveller” or “homeless young hippy” (Ivakhiv 2001: 67).
another reason why many members of the Temple community appear to act as a Pagan ‘other’ and contradict their commonly expressed beliefs.

**Concluding remarks**

Finally, as this chapter has shown, the narratives of both my Pagan and non-Pagan participants point to the existence of a Pagan ‘other’, whose practices are inconsistent with their expressed beliefs. This is also reflected in the larger local context, such as in Glastonbury’s tendency towards a “spiritual materialism”, as Sulis called it. However, the fact that among my participants, there is no coherent rationale of what it means to act in accordance with one’s religious path complicates the assessment of what qualifies as in/consistent behaviour.

On the other hand, the reasons given for why people act in a contradictory manner can be outlined more clearly. As Bee explained, it can be traced back to the theme of “awareness”, arguing that one’s relationship with Goddess determines one’s commitment to environmental practices and ways of honoring her in general. Additionally, Bear further related this to the diversity in how this “awareness” is shaped depending on people’s individual Pagan backgrounds. Whereas some Pagan paths stress and are based on a practically oriented engagement with the natural environment, others don’t prioritize this as much. This suggests that a lack of practical engagement with nature contributes to a lack of “consciousness” and results in a lesser commitment to environmental practices or even contradictions in the behaviors of a Pagan ‘other’.
In this thesis, I have offered a glimpse into the everyday lives of Pagans in Glastonbury. I have demonstrated how in Goddess worship seemingly mundane affairs of life can become sacred and how this infusion of sacrality into life contributes to the environmental practices of Pagan believers.

More specifically, I have argued that people make up their daily lives through a worship *assemblage*: Goddess worship is constituted by multiple elements, such as time, place, material and symbolic presence etc. When linked together, these elements form a larger network that shapes and configures people’s acts of worship both in collective rituals as well as in their everyday lives. Therefore, following people’s daily practices through assemblage thinking shows how worship appears as an entangled web of relationships, which generates Goddess(es).

Furthermore, tracing the development and intersections of the relationships in this assemblage exposes an entanglement of worship and environmental practices. In Pagan practices, religiosity and environment mutually contribute to each other and deliver us to an ecology of life that speaks of sacrality and the mundane along each other. In this way, environmental practices become ways of honoring Goddess in both intentional, everyday religious acts as well as routines.

However, the elements of this network are not linked together in a stable and consistent flow. Rather, the sociocultural configurations of this web move and act erratically due to the ups and downs of Pagan subjectivities. These fluctuations bring about practices that yo-yo between “aware” and “unaware” acts, between an absence and presence of Goddess in people’s “consciousness” and actions. As a result of these fluctuations, not only the Pagan ‘other’ but even my participants, regardless of their commitments to their environmental practices, from time to time, appeared to be inconsistent with their beliefs:

For instance, Orianna’s photo of her “moment with Goddess” portrays her “Ecover”-cleaning products. This reveals that despite her efforts to assess which of her consumer choices would have the least damaging impact on the environment, she bought her detergent from a company that is associated with animal testing. Likewise, Bear, whose guiding rationale is to have a measurable impact, enjoys speedy driving and, in doing so,
actually contributes to air pollution. Finally, even though I as a Pagan believer attempt to use eco-friendly sanitary products, the fact that I don’t own recycled toilet paper still makes me wonder, “(how much) do I give a crap?”

This not only reaffirms that a lack of “awareness”, as also Bee explained, contributes to people’s inconsistencies, but it further suggests that there is a limited extent to which people become “aware” and “have Goddess in [their] consciousness”. Therefore, they do not take into account certain aspects, such as their driving style.

Nevertheless, despite these fluctuations and limitations, it can be argued that Goddess worship and its entanglements with environmental practices not only imply a religious “awareness” but also craft and express a “consciousness” that demonstrates the possibility of being political. As Sulis phrased it, nature/Goddess is not just an “abstract idea”, but something Pagans find tangible in life; people’s intimate, heartfelt bonds and even material link with deity are maintained through everyday acts of worship. This web of relationships and constantly regenerating assemblage gives rise to and shapes the “consciousness” that I have encountered. It encourages people to not only engage with environmental practices but to passionately commit to protecting and promoting biodiversity. Hence, regardless of whether these practices are understood to be a form of “earth guardianship” or are about “working together with the planet so that we can survive?!”, they are enactments of this “consciousness” both on a personal and collective level.

Finally, although the stories that we have explored throughout this thesis have offered a perspective on how to understand the links between Goddess worship and environmental practices and how to make sense of both consistent and inconsistent behaviors of Pagans in Glastonbury, the questions that remain are: what does it ultimately require to be environmentally friendly and to act consistently with one’s Pagan beliefs? Should we pay attention to small-scale changes or prioritize activism? Is it about directing one’s everyday life towards “having a measurable impact” or towards doing one’s best by paying attention to the details? And is someone “aware” and committed enough to her/his beliefs by focusing on only either the one or the other?

Certainly, people’s positions in society at large further contribute to what and how much they can invest; not everyone has the time or financial resources to make their practices thoroughly committed. Furthermore, oftentimes even the very availability of
environmentally friendly alternatives is limited and/or these are not as eco-conscious as they appear to be. Yet, although there are limitations to how much people can become “aware” and active, the loose definitions of Goddess worship make it easier for people to prioritize convenience over environment. This demands Pagans to critically reflect on their practices and commitments and to continuously question themselves: am I doing it for “the circus of feel-good”\(^{32}\) – or truly for the Goddess’ sake?

\(^{32}\) Comment by Bear; see chapter 4.3.
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Appendix

Aradia’s “moment with Goddess”; taken with her disposable camera

![Aradia's moment with Goddess](image1)

Orianna’s “moment with Goddess”; taken with her disposable camera

![Orianna's moment with Goddess](image2)