

Special Issue

Dolls and Idols: Critical Essays in Neo-Animism

Message from the Guest Editors

This special issue asks if and under what conditions the term neo-animism is a useful concept to understand interactions between humans and non-humans. We posit that the answer to this question can only be provided through detailed ethnographic studies of concrete cases in which consciousness, aliveness, interiority, agency and intentionality is attributed to a range of others. As a test case, we propose to think through dolls and idols. They can serve as ritual implements, toys for children, decorative objects or uncanny entities and even healing and spiritual aids, depending on the quality of the relationships that dolls are part of. The material, mental, and symbolic spaces they inhabit connect them to questions about desire, attachment, surrogacy, ritual and how we understand the human through the mirror of the doll. We invite contributors to use human simulacra and related items of material culture such as talismans, ex votos and reliquaries to think through the beliefs they foster, the ritual and performances they engender and what their creation and destruction means to their makers and owners.

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Fresh developments in the disciplines that consistently make significant contributions to our understanding of religious personality, authority, devotion, and community – disciplines ranging from psychology, sociology, and anthropology to history, art history, philosophy, literary criticism, and political science – fuel general, as well as scholarly, interest in the world's religions.

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