



Key Concepts in the Study of Religions in Contact

Knut Martin Stünkel

Key Concepts in the Study of Religions in Contact

Dynamics in the History of Religions

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By

Knut Martin Stünkel



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Published with the support of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

Cover illustration: Crucifix with seated Buddha. National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Freer Study Collection, Gift of Anonymous donor, FSC-M-67.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Stünkel, Knut Martin, 1971– author.

Title: Key concepts in the study of religions in contact / by Knut Martin Stünkel.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2025] | Series: Dynamics in the history of religions, 1878-8106 ; volume 15 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024045796 (print) | LCCN 2024045797 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004516267 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004714908 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Religions—Study and teaching—History. | Religions—Relations—History.

Classification: LCC BL41 .S838 2025 (print) | LCC BL41 (ebook) |

DDC 201/.5—dc23/eng/20241114

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024045796>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024045797>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: “Brill”. See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1878-8106

ISBN 978-90-04-51626-7 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-71490-8 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004714908

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To Volkhard, who made it all possible



Contents

Series Editor's Foreword XI

Acknowledgments XII

Introduction 1

- 1 On Concepts and Contact 1
 - 1.1 *Key Concepts and the DHR Series* 1
 - 1.2 *Concepts* 3
 - 1.3 *Remarks on Theory and Case Studies* 15
 - 1.4 *Contact* 19
- 2 The Andy-Warhol-Syndrome (AWS) in Postcolonial Religious Studies 27
 - 2.1 *Reenacting Andy Warhol* 27
 - 2.2 *Effects of the AWS* 30
 - 2.3 *Beyond Andy Warhol Syndrome* 41
- 3 On Language 47
 - 3.1 *Relating Object Language and Metalanguage* 48
 - 3.2 *Concepts in Contact: the Emergence of Religious Concepts and Concepts of Religion in Situations of Contact* 55
 - 3.3 *Concepts: More than Semantics* 63
 - 3.4 *The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness in the Study of Religion* 71
- 4 On Method 80
 - 4.1 *Retrospection: the Angel Turns His Body* 80
 - 4.2 *"He Who Wants to Travel Foreign Lands Needs Model Forms": Model Forms in Situations of Religious Contact* 91

1 Attraction: Aura as Propensity

Towards a Non-intentionalistic Description of Attraction in Religious Studies or: Why Religion Sucks 119

- 1 Introduction: Against the Intentionalistic Stance 119
 - 1.1 *Attraction and Rational Choice* 122
 - 1.2 *Attraction and Attractiveness* 128
- 2 Towards a Non-intentionalistic Description of Attraction 132
 - 2.1 *Attraction and Intentionality/Searle: Background and Network* 133
 - 2.2 *Benjamin's Concept of Aura and Religious Attraction* 138
 - 2.3 *K.R. Popper: Propensity as Attraction* 146

3	The Process of Attraction	151
3.1	<i>Process</i>	151
3.2	<i>Attractors</i>	154
3.3	<i>Attraction and Contact</i>	161
4	Conclusion: Attraction Revisited	165
2	Dynamics and Stability: Potentiality, Bipolarity, Metastability	
	<i>Some Theoretical Perspectives on the Conceptualization of Dynamics and Stability in the Study of Religion</i>	167
1	Introduction: Dynamics and the Dynamic Scholar	167
2	'Dynamics' in the Study of Religion	171
3	Towards a General Notion of Dynamics	176
4	Aspects of Dynamics	184
4.1	<i>Horizontal Dynamics</i>	185
4.2	<i>Vertical Dynamics</i>	188
4.3	<i>Dynamics of Intensification</i>	192
5	Six Forms (<i>modi</i>) of the Dynamics-Stability Relation	194
5.1	<i>Retrospect Stability of Possibilities/Propensities</i>	195
5.2	<i>Stability of the Chain of Interpretation</i>	197
5.3	<i>Stability of Dynamic Bipolarity</i>	201
5.4	<i>Stability of Dynamic Trails</i>	206
5.5	<i>Stability of Reproduction, Stabilization as Permanent Re-stabilization</i>	211
5.6	<i>Stability of Contingent Contact</i>	214
6	Metastability: A General Notion of the Dynamics/Stability-Relationship	218
7	Conclusion: Bipolar Metastability in Contact	221
3	Tradition	
	<i>Tradition, Recursivity, and Not Identity</i>	223
1	Tradition's Recursivity	223
1.1	<i>An Uncontested Yet Improper Key Concept</i>	223
1.2	<i>The Temporality of Tradition</i>	228
1.3	<i>Relationality and Recursivity of Tradition</i>	239
1.4	<i>Tradition and Contact</i>	248
2	Tradition and Identity	253
2.1	<i>A Concept Lost to Postcolonialist Furor</i>	256
2.2	<i>The Idea of Identity</i>	260
2.3	<i>Identity and Identification</i>	266
3	Conclusion: Toward Self-Referential Tradition	271

4 The Transcendence/Immanence Distinction

Religion as Contrast 278

- 1 Introduction 278
- 2 Transcendence/Immanence in Comparison 280
- 3 The Basic Structure of the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction 283
- 4 Metaphors of Transcendence 286
- 5 The Three-Level Model of Transcendence 290
- 6 The Process of Transcending: Cases from Ancient China, the New World, and Medieval/Early Modern Europe 299
 - 6.1 *Ancient China: Ascending a Mountain and Becoming Immortal* 299
 - 6.2 *Crossing the Ocean and Performing a Process of Transcending: William Bradford on the Pilgrim Fathers* 315
 - 6.3 *Transcending the Walls of Paradise—the Role of Human Language in Nicholas of Cusa's Concepts of God* 328
- 7 Transcending and Semiosis 340
- 8 TID and Contrast 342
- 9 Conclusion: Transcending, Contrast, and the Dynamics of Contact 350

5 Making Sense of the Senses

Communicativeness, Reciprocity, Immediacy, and Scriptuality in Sensory Religious Experience 354

- 1 On the Possible Role of the Study of the Senses in Religious Studies 354
 - 1.1 *Senses, Experience, and Meaning* 357
 - 1.2 *Senses as Hypotheses and Forms* 362
 - 1.3 *Senses and Language* 366
- 2 Object Language Examples of Ascribing Sense to the Senses 368
 - 2.1 *The Sense of Language and the Senses* 368
 - 2.2 *Reciprocity: How to Taste and to See God?* 372
 - 2.3 *Sensing the Author of Nature* 380
- 3 Conclusion: the Dynamics of Sense-Making 390
 - 3.1 *Sense-Making and Contact* 395

6 Secrets: Formally Indicating Blank Spaces in Situations of Religious Contact 401

- 1 Secrets in the Study of Religion 401
- 2 Secrets and Contact 408
 - 2.1 *Georg Simmel's Sociological Analysis of the Secret* 408
 - 2.2 *Strategies of the Secret* 413

2.3	<i>Secrets as an Attractor</i>	416
2.4	<i>Secrets as Interfaces of Transfer</i>	419
3	Secrets as Blank Spaces	423
3.1	<i>Blank Spaces in the Humanities</i>	423
3.2	<i>Blank Spaces: Semantics, Communication, Materiality</i>	426
3.3	<i>Blank Spaces in Contact</i>	432
4	The Blank Spaces of Secrets in Contact: Translation Processes	435
4.1	<i>Herodotus and the Interpretatio Graeca</i>	435
4.2	<i>Paul and the Interpretatio Christiana</i>	444
5	Conclusion: Secrets and Formal Indication of Concepts	447
7	Space: “Quoniam, si nonnulla religio est, ut sepeliantur, non potest nulla esse, quando ubi sepeliantur adtenditur”	
	<i>The Dead Body as Contested Space: The Case of Augustine</i>	452
1	The Dead Body and Its Proper Space in Philosophy and the Study of Religion	452
2	Some Remarks Concerning Augustine’s Phenomenology of the Corpse	463
3	Dealing with the Dead: <i>De Vera Religione, De Civitate Dei, De Cura Pro Mortuis Gerenda</i>	468
3.1	<i>De Vera Religione</i>	468
3.2	<i>De Civitate Dei</i>	472
3.3	<i>De Cura Pro Mortuis Gerenda</i>	479
4	The Contested Dead Body and Its Directive Space— <i>Confessiones, Book IV and IX</i>	486
5	Conclusion: Aspects of Space in the Dynamics of Religions	500
8	Sleep: “Haec est somni et ratio naturalis et natura rationalis”	
	<i>Tertullian on Sleep as a Promotor of Contact</i>	503
1	Tertullian and the Question of Religious Contact	503
2	Contact and Language	512
3	On Sleep as an Interface of Religion	517
4	On Sleep and Contact in Tertullian’s <i>De Anima</i>	519
	Prospect: Contacting the Future	529
1	Typology of Contact	531
2	Evolutional Semiosis and Relationality	532
3	Explorative Conceptualizing	534
	Bibliography	537
	Index of Terms	584
	Index of Names	594

Series Editor's Foreword

As one of the editors of the series *Dynamics in the History of Religion* (DHR), I would like to announce two new co-editors: Carmen Meinert and Kianoosh Rezania. With them, the expertise in Central and West Asian history of religion will be complemented, and the editorship will be strengthened by organizational competence. It is a great pleasure to welcome my colleagues to this position.

At the same time, I regret to say goodbye to Licia Di Giacinto from the editorial team. She has co-edited the DHR series with me for many years and is now leaving at her request. Licia Di Giacinto was a great help during this time, coordinating communication between the board, the publisher, the editors of individual volumes, and the authors. Grazie di cuore, Licia!

Last but not least, I would like to thank Chris Beckwith (Indiana University Bloomington) for his work on the board. Since the beginning of the series, he has always been a great help when it came to Central Asia, cultural contact between Central Asia and Europe in general, and religious contact between these two regions in particular.

Volkhard Krech

Acknowledgments

The sociologist Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy compares innovative intellectual endeavors to the mythical voyage of the Argonauts (*Argonautenfahrt*). To me, this is a description that seems to be charming and well-fitting to the basic characteristics of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) 'Dynamics in the History of Religions' and its particular way of cooperation in research.

Before the inhabitants of the rugged Balkan peninsula and the surrounding isles decided to become Greeks or Hellenes with relevance to intellectual history, they set off on voyages of discovery that contributed significantly to their later self-image. The best known of these voyages is the one against Troy, but the most relevant is the one that was later sung about in the so-called Argonaut myth (*Argonautica*), whereby the Argonauts' venture seems in many respects to be a counter or at least a complementary project to the war-voyage against Troy.

The *Argonautica* symbolizes the founding of a culture in seafaring. This is essentially determined by the courage to venture into the foreign and unfamiliar and shows the Argonauts as potential heroes who prove themselves in this situation. The Argonauts are the bold sailors on the ship named Argo. This large, maneuverable, and fast vessel was designed by the goddess of wisdom, Athena, and built by Argos from talking wood consecrated to Athena as the first truly seaworthy ship for Jason. In mythological tradition, the master builder Argos is only identified by his work, the ship. The absence of all other identifying features makes it possible to say that the Argo practically builds itself and thus becomes the most seaworthy ship known to Greek tradition. The success of the voyage depends on the composition of the seafarers. The Argo, which was unusually stable for its time, offered space for a wide variety of sailors. Unlike the more hands-on heroes of the *Iliad*, the Argonauts prefer negotiation to battle. Diplomacy takes precedence over war; words should explore the path to be taken. It is about mediation that preserves the respective points of view.

In one of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's poems, the Argo is placed in the stars as a symbol of the friendly quests of the most diverse individuals in order to serve as a role model for all to see. The Argonauts represent the multitude of life and different voices. Among them were people of different origins, coming from all parts of the then-known world, with more non-Greeks than Greeks. With a few exceptions, they were not destined to be a community from the outset; they were not related to each other, they did not speak the same language, and they did not worship the same gods. Their community and approach were therefore formed in their common enterprise. Language and ideological reference, therefore, had to be created, if not invented, together in conversation.

This process, however, had a symblysmatic result. What they did have in common was the will to set out. They possessed a multitude of abilities, knowledge, and skills, which only became apparent and helpful in the individual unpredictable adventures. And it was precisely this unusual and unplanned gathering of the most diverse forces that equipped them for their task.

The correspondences between this idealized version of the myth to the research idea and the research practice of the КHK are evident. Scholars of different fields of expertise set out and worked together for the sake of a common goal: the examination of the role of contact situations in the history of religions. To do so, a new language and new ways of collaboration had to be found, and unexpected challenges had to be met with a spirit of interdisciplinary teamwork.

However, the overlaps between the Argo and the КHK only partly coincide. In particular, the part of the story that takes place after the Argonauts' arrival in Colchis should not be the model for the КHK's story and especially not a preview of its future results. In any case, my own endeavor would not have been possible without the help of the КHK Argonauts and our common vessel. All of the КHK colleagues, fellows, and staff contributed in many different ways to the emergence of this book. In the following, I name only a few of them.

Various colleagues from Ruhr University Bochum accompanied the project from the beginning to the end and were always reliable pilots and beacons with their specific expertise: Alexandra Cuffel, Marion Eggert, Carmen Meinert, Jessie Pons, Linda Simonis, Christian Frevel, Reinhold Gleis, Stefan Reichmuth, Heiner Roetz, Peter Wick.

I would especially like to thank my various cabin-mates with whom I was allowed to share an office and exchange ideas there: Matthias Jung, Görgе Hasselhoff, Oliver Freiburger, Jan Bremmer (who, as master of provisions, also provided me with plenty of Swedish cookies), Jason (sic!) Ānanda Josephson Storm, Juan Manuel Tebes, Vasco La Salvia, Sebastian Rimestad, Magnus Schlette.

The ship of my monograph sailed rather unsteadily on the sea of a foreign language until a courageous navigator, Hannah Theaker, resolutely took the helm and maneuvered it around the vast majority of linguistic cliffs with enormous empathy. Not only that, her in-depth criticism often showed a clearer path to the author's intended goal and allowed him to see unexpected shorelines.

Julia Heinig, Alina Krentz, and Ava Asiaii provided invaluable navigational skills in a similar capacity, repairing and supplementing this ship linguistically, factually, and formally during the voyage, thus making it much more seaworthy.

Tim Karis and Kianoosh Rezania took it upon themselves to board the rocking ship during the voyage and guide it into calmer waters, i.e., to read through

the entire manuscript and discuss it in detail with me. As their criticism did much to improve the book, both Argonauts deserve my special thanks. I would also like to thank Carmen Meinert for her intense discussion of the TiD chapter and Linda Simonis, Christoph Auffarth, Max Deeg, Georgios Halkias, Adam Knobler, Patrick Krüger, Lars Niehaus, Eduard Iricinski, Philipp Reichling, Walter Young for their critical reading of individual chapters.

Of course, any remaining errors and ambiguities are not the fault of the persons named but are solely my responsibility.

I would like to thank the editors and the board of the series for including my study in the DHR series, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism of the project and its execution.

My special thanks go to Licia Di Giacinto, a fellow co-traveler on the Argo КHK from the very beginning onwards. Her sinological expertise, lucid criticism of my ideas, and, not least, encouragement to finish the book have proved invaluable.

Most of all, this book and the whole КHK project would not have been possible without Volkhard Krech, the КHK's founding director, representative of its scholarly virtues, and a never-tiring organizer and inspirator. I dedicate this book to him as an attempt to honor his engagement in promoting contact-based research on the history of religions.

It has been a long and fruitful journey and an exciting adventure of ideas that is, hopefully, not over yet.

Introduction

1 On Concepts and Contact

1.1 Key Concepts and the DHR Series

It is an established custom—or perhaps, I should say a ritual of *rite de passage*—in the study of religion as an academic discipline that research, when put onto paper and presented to an interested community of readers, must set forth a markedly defensive position. It must begin with a humble self-defense, often even an apology for tackling such a contested subject as ‘religion’ at all. This is an outcome of the “decades of theoretical angst we have experienced in religious studies over the usefulness of the category of ‘religion.’”¹ Anyone desirous of inclusion in the ‘we’ addressed here must pay theoretical, or even intellectual, tribute to this lurking angst in religious studies.

Luckily, in my own academic training, I have the privilege of claiming incompetence in the field of the study of religion and I am, therefore, not subject to the self-imposed conventions and restrictions of the field. So, admittedly, the following considerations come from ‘outside’ the discipline of religious studies, at least concerning the academic affiliation of the author. Having not been socialized in the academic field of the study of religion I cannot but claim the status of an external observer. Due to a lack of linguistic skills in non-European languages, I expect to remain that way. However, as a member of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) ‘Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe’ project from its very beginnings in the year 2008, this observer is (definitely) personally and (hopefully) intellectually engaged enough to dare to intervene in the ongoing discussion of the field in the hope of offering some clarity.

In the words of its founding director, Volkhard Krech, the KHK project “aim[ed] to contribute to a theory of religious transfer and thus to the historiography of a general and tendentially global history of religion; at the same time we also expect the results to produce new ideas for theories of general cultural transfer and comprehension-oriented hermeneutics.”² As a major output

1 Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China. Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 212.

2 Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions—Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke. DHR 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 57.

of the work of the КHK, the series 'Dynamics in the History of Religions' (DHR) focuses on the crucial role of mutual encounters in the formation, development, and internal differentiation of religious traditions, assuming that the interconnections between self-perception and perception by the other, and of adaptation and demarcation are indispensable factors in the historical dynamics active in the religious field.

So far, the DHR series has mainly concentrated on the analysis and comparison of various case studies. As an addition, a volume dedicated to conceptualization is necessary to realize the aims of the series as originally designed. Situations of religious contact provide a stimulus to the development of basic religious notions and concepts in object language; accordingly, they should trigger the development of suitable concepts of scholarly metalanguage. Examining the emergence and formation of religious traditions via diachronic and synchronic cultural contact and discerning the interactions essential to the process of institutionalization and spread of religions requires a suitable analytic vocabulary that allows us to bridge and mediate scientific meta-discourse on religion and the self-descriptions that emerge from within religious traditions. Here, general concepts, such as the concept of religion³ itself, but also the conceptualization of processes such as attraction, contrast, stabilization, tradition, transcendence/transcending, space/spatial ordering, secrecy, and perhaps even sleep, provide systematic points of reference which allow for the integration of diachronically and synchronically heterogeneous material in a general history of religions. Not least, the role of language and linguistic model forms in situations of contact has to be scrutinized. Thus, the basic relation of contact and dynamics can be conceptually grasped and transformed into a theoretical model for the history of religions.

The present volume offers the reader a set of concepts deemed suitable for the analytical examination of religious phenomena and situations of religious contact. These are, on the one hand, derived abductively from an engagement that sought to unite hypothetical conceptualizations and empirical studies and the interplay between object language and metalanguage on the other hand. On this basis, some frequently used basic terms in the study of religions like 'attraction', 'dynamics', 'tradition', 'transcendence', 'senses', 'secrets', and 'identity' should be re-evaluated and re-defined for the contact-based general approach. The volume also intends to summarize selected guiding themes

3 Within in КHK, a working definition of the concept 'religion' was established that assumes religion as a communicative system being based on the distinction of transcendence and immanence and dealing with ultimate contingency. See Volkhard Krech, *Die Evolution der Religion: Ein soziologischer Grundriss* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021), 24. Compare the chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

from the КHK ‘Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe’ project. In accordance with the other permanent members of the КHK, I believe that the redefined general terms will prove useful for further research, thus allowing a future continuation of the КHK’s basic approach in the forthcoming study of religion.

1.2 Concepts

This book is titled ‘Key Concepts in the Study of Religions in Contact’. Harmless as it seems, the title can, nevertheless, be taken as an indication of the disturbing and almost unspeakable fact that the author of the following pages believes that concepts indeed are no mere tools of cultural imperialism,⁴ but rather, indispensable and useful items of a proper and adequate study or analysis of the phenomenon of religion and the history of religions.⁵ “Concepts,” as Jeppe

4 As usual, there is the need to defend the author of a smashing intellectual slogan, in this case Edward Said against his entourage of followers who reduce his theory to this very slogan. Said’s theory is much more sophisticated than the emphatic references to his work might suggest.

5 As intense philological research within the КHK has shown, even the most disputed concepts in religions studies, first of all the concept of religion itself, might have some operational value and reference in object languages that goes beyond it being an instrument of Western imperialism because of its supposed sole birthplace in Early Modern Western thought, see Reinhold Gleis, “*Pontes fieri iubantur*: Brücken zwischen (Neo-)Latinistik, Religionsgeschichte und Orientalistik,” *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 11 (2009): 281–282 and Reinhold Gleis and Stefan Reichmuth, “Religion between Last Judgment, law and faith: Koranic din and its Rendering in Latin Translations of the Koran,” *Religion* 42, no. 2 (2012). Also see for an even earlier date Jason BeDuhn, “Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of ‘Religion’ in Third Century Iran,” in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, eds. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley. Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Compare Kianoosh Rezaei’s complementary examination of Zoroastrian material: Kianoosh Rezaei, “‘Religion’ in Late Antique Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. Developing a Term in Counterpoint,” *Entangled Religions* 11, no. 2 (2020), par. 100: “Zoroastrianism provided Manichaeism with the necessary semantics in a term for religion in the third century. Having received this abstraction, Manichaeism developed the Zoroastrian dualistic concept of religion further into a hierarchical one and the Zoroastrian noun *dēn* into a generic term for religion. [...]. The dynamics of the processes in these two religious traditions apparently differ: The Manichaean tradition more easily integrated the Zoroastrian concept of religion and developed it further; the Zoroastrian one, by comparison, shows rather conservative behavior and did not abandon its dualistic scheme of religion. In conclusion, one might say that regarding the production of an abstract concept of religion, Zoroastrianism was more formative to Manichaeism than vice versa.” Likewise, Giovanni Casadio has shown that *religio* in Roman antiquity also was used in the plural. Thus, Roman religion was contrasted with the religions of other peoples: Giovanni Casadio, “Religio Versus Religion,” in *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer*, eds. Jitse H.F. Dijkstra, J.E.A. Kroesen and Y. Kuiper (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 315–319.

Sinding Jensen pointedly put it, “enable us to see things, to talk about them, to make theories about them, even if the ‘things’ do not really exist.”⁶

Admittedly, within scholarship on religion, concepts are in a crisis. This is, however, not a reason to abolish concepts and conceptual work, but rather, it is a sign that concepts, as fallible instruments, *genuinely belong* to scientific work. I think it is about time to finally release the study of religion from the judgment that would have us expel all concepts, imposed on it by the well-justified rejection of the claim of one of the founding fathers of the field, Rudolf Otto, that the presence of concepts is a marker of the eminence and superiority of religions, or rather, a particular religion.⁷ As it seems, the study of religion as an academic field was for many good reasons discontent with the impact of philosophy upon the field and the performance resulting; however, this discontent somehow became mutual as philosophy had in turn very good reasons to be discontent with certain developments in religious studies, mainly with regard to its increasingly ‘notioclastic’ tendencies.⁸ The mutual discontent, often resulting in a mutual refusal to communicate, is the unsatisfactory result of recent developments in *both* fields. After all, Alfred N. Whitehead’s claim remains valid for both scholarship and religion alike: “Progress in truth—truth of science and truth of religion—is mainly a progress in the framing of concepts, in discarding artificial abstractions or partial metaphors, and in evolving notions which strike more deeply into the root of reality.”⁹ To stress the point:

6 Jeppe Sinding Jensen, “Epistemology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), 50.

7 “Wir halten es geradezu für ein Kennzeichen des Höhengrades und der Überlegenheit einer Religion daß sie auch ‘Begriffe’ habe und Erkenntnisse (nämlich Glaubenserkenntnisse) vom Übersinnlichen in Begriffen, und zwar in den eben genannten und in andern, sie fortsetzenden Begriffen. Und daß das Christentum Begriffe hat und diese Begriffe in überlegener Klarheit Deutlichkeit und Vollzahl, ist zwar nicht das einzige, auch nicht das hauptsächlichste aber ein sehr wesentliches Merkmal seiner Überlegenheit über andere Religions-stufen und -formen.” Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (München: Beck 1997), 1–2. To Otto’s favour, however, Gregory D. Alles remarks: “Zwar vermutet man, daß Otto immer die Überlegenheit des Christentums voraussetzte, aber sein philosophischer Werkzeugschrank enthielt keine richtigen Werkzeuge, mit denen er diese Voraussetzung hätte beweisen können.” Gregor D. Alles, “Rudolf Otto (1869–1937),” in *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft*, eds. Axel Michaels (München: Beck, 2004), 203.

8 Symptomatic for this development is a book like Brětislav Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft. Plädoyer für eine empirisch fundierte Theorie und Methode* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 24–25.

9 Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making. Lowell Lectures 1926* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 130–131.

the discarding of artificial abstraction goes hand in hand with the effort to develop more suitable notions that 'strike more deeply into the root of reality.' Deconstruction is always to be supplemented by construction. The point is not to stop halfway. The consonance in function, thus, might be something to be kept in mind when approaching religion with the intention of scholarly understanding. Simply abandoning concepts means that scholarship has taken the easy way out.

In his stimulating theory of religion, titled *Crossing and Dwelling*, Thomas A. Tweed quotes Michel Serres: "When everyone around you is demonstrating that no one can walk, it's a good time to get up and start running."¹⁰ Though I do not agree with every aspect of Tweed's theory, he definitely has a crucial point here.¹¹ I would add that stumbling, even falling flat on one's face in an attempt to run, is preferable to sitting securely or advocating a complete standstill as the only possible way of acting. This is all the truer for the use of concepts. There are many concepts around, and there are even a fair few theories of concepts, not least in philosophy.¹² In the following, however, I am interested solely in a certain type of concept that plays a decisive role in academic scholarship of a certain field. The following lines, therefore, are not concerned with the philosophical question of how religion as such works. In order to discern the type of these concepts more precisely, I have employed the metaphoric term 'key concepts'. Key concepts are those concepts that unlock access to certain perspectives that allow the drawing of a better picture of what is going on in a particular field. In our case, that is the study of the history of religions. Key concepts are, therefore, instrumental for a certain usage: the scientific or scholarly representation of the subject of the prevailing research. Scholarly representation consists of description and analysis, which together constitute the decisive elements of explanation. Explanation, therefore, is the scholarly representation of what is going on.

The key concepts discussed here are meant as conceptual offerings to those working in the field of religious studies to be used as heuristic tools. Thus, my considerations of the concepts, as well as the overall validity of the concepts themselves, await corroboration or rejection by my fellow scholars. In fact, to my mind, this is the very thing that any responsible philosophy of religion

10 Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling, A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 29.

11 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability. On the more general difficulties of theories of religion see Michael Stausberg, "Prospects in Theories of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 224f.

12 In the following I shall use 'concept' in the sense of the German *Begriff*, whereas 'notion' denotes the German *Vorstellung*.

can do: to provide conceptual offerings, ideally developed in close collaboration with those working on the material of religious studies, and theoretical models based on those same concepts, to describe and to analyze religious phenomena. The following pages are, thus, suggestions to supplement the colloquial language of the academic field used to describe and analyze the area in question, namely religion. Attempts that go further, such as any scrutiny of the essence of religion, the truth-conditions of religious assertions, or the judgment of religious phenomena, are philosophical questions of metaphysics, logic, and ethics. They are issues that may claim a life of their own but are to be distinguished from the subject matter of religion itself.

Furthermore, the key concepts examined here are not the usual suspects brought forth in the context of the study of religion. Popular, not to mention important notions such as ritual, cult, the sacred and the profane, holiness, the secular and secularization, sacrifice, myth, and magic, all of which have found both acclaim and criticism within the academic field, are clearly absent from this work. A number of concepts appear in this book that seem outdated—or which have even been abolished within religious studies—notably ‘tradition’ and ‘transcendence’, both of which have been subject to a wide array of deconstructivist, culturalist and postcolonial critiques. I should be clear that I do not take the validity of such kinds of criticism for granted and rather claim for a balanced evaluation of the possible capacities of the prevailing concepts for the process of responsible scholarly work.

As a matter of fact, I do not claim that the concepts of attraction, dynamics and stability, tradition, the transcendence/immanence distinction, senses, secret, and space are *the only* key concepts of the study of religion—there are, in fact, others, some of which also played a role in the work of the КХК such as purity, media, gender, and so on.¹³ I also do not claim that the choice of concepts in this volume covers all important concepts for the study of religion, or even the most important ones. I do, nevertheless, claim that these concepts, under the correct (i.e. contact-related) perspective are indeed key concepts that are helpful in providing a more adequate picture of what is going on in the history of religions. However, my stance towards concepts in the field of religious studies is not entirely conservative. One should not keep just anything. There are concepts that are admittedly treated as key concepts, but which in fact rather distort the possibility of an adequate description and

13 These are as well concepts suggested to be suitable generic concepts to be used as *tertia comparationis* in the online-Journal *Entangled Religions*: <https://er.ceres.rub.de/index.php/ER/concepts>.

analysis of the history of religions. In particular, in these pages I do also claim that a very popular concept in political and scholarly discourse, that of 'identity', is not a helpful key concept of the study of religion in this sense; rather, it is not a scholarly concept at all. Critique of this concept is not new, yet despite many well-founded attempts to show the issues with this particular concept it remains with us still.

There is a certain arbitrary logic that has dictated the selection of the key concepts discussed here. First, they were concepts the colleagues and fellows of the KHK in the twelve years of its existence repeatedly discussed and, to a certain degree, then applied to the material in an abductive manner. Most of the concepts even had a 'focus group' dedicated to their examination, or served as an 'overarching topic' that framed and structured discussion across an academic year. All these concepts were considered to be most promising for a fruitful discussion, but, of course, without an exclusive claim as there are many others that deserved the same scrutiny. Second, the key concepts presented here were the ones I personally was involved with most, and it is not by chance that many of them also play a dominant role as basic concepts of philosophy, including dynamics and stability, space and the senses (*Wahrnehmung*). If the transcendence/immanence distinction might be equated to the relationship of subject and object (*ontology*), secrecy can be likewise linked to the problem of insight (*Erkenntnis*), and tradition to the problem of time. There are even more possibilities here to seek connections to philosophy to render the choice of concepts in this work more explicable. However, in doing so, it can also be demonstrated that the concepts raise fundamental problems in both disciplines, and that they are interrelated, as are time and space, insight and experience, and even being and becoming (*Sein und Werden*).

The sequence in which the key concepts are presented seems rather arbitrary as well. In fact, it follows for the first part the chronological sequence in which these concepts were explored by the KHK, meaning that the first concept that was discussed here ('Attraction') in a focus group of its own, is presented first, followed by the more general theme of 'Dynamism and Stability' to which a subsequent Focus Group was devoted to. There is, however, a systematic context that justified the decision to start with the concept of attraction and then proceed through the sequence of concepts that follow as I shall explore later in this introduction. Though the sequence might be too weak to properly be termed systematic, it is (at least hopefully) not without consequence, and will hopefully be apparent to readers as they make their way through this book.

In the following, let me give a short overview of the chapters with regard to the work of the KHK:

1. Attraction

The first chapter on *attraction* aims to answer a very important question posed by all kinds of people involved in matters of religion: that is, *why does religion suck?* Given the fact that philosophy is often seen as a remedy for the hardships of religion, the follow-up question of ‘what philosophy can do about it?’ has some justification stemming from the material itself.

Attraction is perhaps the most unexpected term selected for inclusion in our key concepts of the study of religion, although it played a crucial role in the discussions of the КHK in its early years. It is perhaps the most original notion and concept examined here and in the following pages. The КHK devoted not only a Focus Group to the subject of attraction, which lasted from 2009 to 2011, but also organized two conferences on the subject: *Modes and Models of Religious Attraction* (November 15–18th, 2010) and a successor event in 2011 titled *Modes and Models of Religious Attraction. Part II: Knowledge and Action* (July 25–28th). Attraction here, most importantly, was not understood as a psychological category, but rather as an aspect of the dynamic processes in the history of religions itself, leading to the auratization of religious phenomena that, as such, may display an agency of their own. The focus group ‘Attraction’ intended to identify attractors and cultural operators (in the sense of Lévi-Strauss) accounted responsible for processes of condensing of religious traditions (such as, for example, the phenomenon of secrets). Here, the dynamic constellation of an attractor seemed suitable to describe the contact of emerging religious traditions distinguishing centripetal and centrifugal dynamics.

2. Dynamics and Stability

The immediate successor to the focus group on ‘Attraction’ was the focus group on ‘Dynamics and Stability’ that existed in the years 2011 to 2013. Dynamics and stability, thus, is the subject of the second chapter. As the notion of dynamics is part of the overall title of the КHK project, the concept was considered to be a necessary object of further examination. Above all, the interrelatedness of dynamics and stability in religious attractors made ‘Dynamics and Stability’ an attractive object of further scrutiny that is both on the material side and regarding scholarly meta-language. The focus group was devoted to the elaboration of a general concept of dynamics with reference to the results of other focus groups. On the one hand, it examined possible kinds of dynamics that may be found in the history of religions such as, for example, expansion, transfer, decline or intensification processes. On the other hand, the notion

of dynamics itself was scrutinized with regard to its presuppositions and heuristic value for the examination of phenomena in the history of religions. Dynamics in the history of religions, in any case, is a complex phenomenon of diverse interacting dynamic processes and not reduced to phenomena of change. Therefore, the focus group also addressed intensifying and facilitating dynamics, as well as the interplay of dynamics and stability.

The discussions on the subject were aimed at self-understanding as well as allowing experimental suggestions for explorative purposes. They were, however, not entirely lacking discussion outside the KHK proper. Late in 2013, for example, the KHK conducted a workshop on the 'Dynamics of Signs', organized by Volkhard Krech and myself that was intended to scrutinize the applicability of Peircean semiotics for the explication of processes in the history of religions.

3. Tradition

After the basic working structure of the KHK was changed after 2014 for the sake of providing a more concentrated thematic cohesion, 'Tradition' was the first in a series of overarching topics that guided the work of the KHK over an academic year. Being one of the few uncontested terms in the study of religion (at least, in its relevance for the analysis of religious phenomena), the concept served as a starting point for comparative and structural analysis. Hence, from 2014–2015, tradition and tradition-building processes were examined to throw light on the specific dynamics of the emergence and condensation (*Verdichtung*) of religious traditions as stable and sustained networks. Traditions, thus, were examined as temporally recursive processes resulting in an authoritative texture of mediations, i.e., within a context of scriptural, practical and oral elements. Key questions focused on the metaphors, the contesting forms, the authority, and the paradoxes of tradition as well as the specific question concerning the particular relations of religion and tradition.

There have been a number of workshops dedicated to the subject of tradition as well as on salient elements of traditions that were highlighted in the work of the KHK.¹⁴ Here, the authority of scriptures in processes of

14 See for example 'The Text of the Priests—The Texts of the Laity' on scripturalism in Zoroastrianism in February 2014, organized by Götz König; 'Mission in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Is there something like "mission"?' on the connection of mission and tradition in June 2014; 'Traveling Texts and Transformative Encounters: Interreligious Networks between Medieval and Early Modern Asia, Africa, and Europe' in July 2014, organized by Alexandra Cuffel; 'Iran and Islam: Early Encounters. Formation of Islam and Transformation of Iranian Religious Traditions' organized by Kianoosh Rezaia

traditions and the relation of tradition and innovation extracted from the previous discussion served as important foci of scrutiny.¹⁵

4. Transcendence/Immanence Distinction

The notion of transcendence had been subject of closer scrutiny in a discussion group since 2011 that mainly dealt with concepts. It was introduced in a workshop conducted by sinologist Heiner Roetz on *Transcultural Perspectives on Immanence and Transcendence* on July 8th, 2011. After having been the focus of a discussion group meeting irregularly in the years before, in the academic year 2016/2017 the KHK examined critically the distinction of immanence and transcendence (transcendence/immanence distinction: TID) as the guiding distinction for identifying the religious, regarding the validity of the distinction for both comparative research and the emergence of the religious field. Assuming that religion can be described as communication, the distinction between immanence and transcendence provides what can be termed a communicative code for the identification of religious communication. In order to provide a matrix across which comparison is possible¹⁶ and to be able to describe the emergence of religious communication, a three-level model of the distinction was introduced that allows the examination of religious material as a possible expression of the transcendence-immanence distinction. The presentations and discussions focused in particular on the turning points of the model, at which a more semantized level of transcending is reached.

Several conceptions of transcendence were discussed in KHK workshops, including the June, 2017 workshops on 'The inner self and transcendence' (organized by Christian Frevel). The concluding September conference of the academic year 2016/2017, titled 'The

(12 and 13 March 2015); 'Tradition of Magic: Ritual Powers in Contact From Antiquity to the Middle Ages' organized by Marielle Haase and Rebecca Lesses (20 and 21 July 2015); 'Books as Material and Symbolic Artefacts in Religious Book Cultures' organized by Eduard Iricinschi (28 and 29 May 2015); 'Textual and Visual Dialogues Between Religions In South Asia' organized by Jessie Pons (9 July 2015).

15 In March 2014, a Workshop on 'Texture' examined the role of media in processes of tradition, another workshop on 23 June 2014 dealt with the relation of tradition and innovation. A summarizing workshop 'Media of Scripture, Scripture as Media' (organized by Christian Frevel und Knut Martin Stünkel) was conducted in 10 and 11 December 2015. A monograph on scripturality by Knut Martin Stünkel is in preparation.

16 On the reestablishment of comparison as a distinguished method in the study of religion see former KHK-fellow Oliver Freiburger's illuminating and thought-provoking study *Considering Comparison. A Method for Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Transcendence/Immanence Distinction in the Study of Religious Contacts between Asia and Europe', was devoted to a critical discussion and more detailed elaboration of the model as well as to its possible connections to current guiding themes in the study of religion.

5. Senses

As embodied representations and concretizations of ideas, notions, and concepts dealing with the absent, the senses proved to be a central element in the emergence and formation of religious traditions. The academic year 2015/2016 in the KHK was devoted to this spatially and temporally omnipresent theme in the history of religions. Senses and sense perceptions, if communicated as religions, provide an important mediator of religious experience. Moreover, the evaluation of the senses in religious traditions serves as an interreligious means of demarcation. The process of authorization of the senses becomes noticeably visible if a sense-related practice is challenged—as most often occurs in situations of religious contact. In ritual, the dimension of sensate experience is made visible, although its formalized action tends to distract from everyday sensate experience. Additionally, the sense-relatedness of ritual might serve as an important attractor being at work among contesting religious traditions. In the discussion groups of the year, a particular emphasis was laid on the phenomenon of smell and the olfactory sense. The KHK conducted a number of workshops on the subject, starting in 2014 with an internal explorative Workshop 'Religion and the Senses' in May, and culminating in the 2016 September conference with the same title.

6. Secrets/Secrecy

The focus group 'Secret' (organized by Peter Wick)¹⁷ emerged in 2008 from the specific work of KHK-members on ancient mystery cults and was intended to explore the meaning of secrets in the history of religions from a both synchronic and diachronic perspective regarding, not least, the interrelationships of 'secret' and 'official' religion. It examined the role of secrets and corresponding 'secretizing' practices as an attractor of processes of condensing of religious traditions. The focus group organized several workshops, devoted to, respectively, the subjects of the content of religious secrets in antiquity (January 2009), the traditions of secret, secrecy and secretism in South and East Asia ('Secrecy

¹⁷ See Peter Wick, *Das Geheimnis des Evangeliums. Mysterien bei Paulus, Markus, Johannes und in der Apostelgeschichte als Testfall interkultureller Inklusions- und Demarkationsprozesse* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2023), XII.

in Asian Religions', June 2009), the role of the secret and esotericism in early modern West-European religiosity ('Geheimnis in der Neuzeit', September 2009), esotericism in modern times (19th and 20th century), on religious secrets in contact (December 2010), and, finally, a concluding workshop titled 'Space of Secrecy—Secrets in Contact. Perspectives from the East and the West' was conducted on January, 26th and 27th, 2012.

The focus group predominantly discussed the phenomenology of the secret in diverse religious traditions and the semantic aspect of secret in religious object language that is, in particular, the ways in which secrets are linguistically addressed. The manifest and possible function of the secret for religious traditions themselves and in situations of contact was examined with regard to semantic and communicative strategies, above all concerning the role of the secret as a context-related blank space that might be an interface of religious contact. A collected volume with case-studies on the subject of secrets in contact, published within the DHR series and edited by Anna Akasoy, Licia Di Giacinto, Georgios Halkias, and myself, is now in preparation (2025).

7. Space

Examining 'space' as a key concept of religion one could easily arrive at the conclusion that religions stops at nothing, or, to use the more pertinent German equivalent of this saying: *Religion geht über Leichen*. The concept of space, though it was neither the overall focus of an academic year nor had a focus group of its own, nevertheless, gained some prominence among the subjects discussed at the КHK.¹⁸ There were in fact several КHK events that were devoted to the examination of space as a key concept in the history of religions. In 2011, the Focus Group 'Expansion' devoted a Fellow Year to the subject of 'Space and Religion', culminating in the conference 'Locating Religion: Contacts, Diversity and Translocality' on February 8th–10th, 2012; there was also a reading group 'Space and Diversity—Religions in the Mediterranean' in 2011/2012. 'Ancient Central Asian Networks' were examined as a significant religious space in June 2014. In November, 2014, the internal workshop on 'Space—the Development of Religious Centres and Strategies of Accommodation' examined the manipulation of symbols as legitimization strategies of religious traditions. The notion, accordingly, is one of

¹⁸ This is not at last because of the presentations and interventions of Kianoosh Rezanian, see, above all, his study on the concepts of space in Zoroastrianism: Kianoosh Rezanian, *Raumkonzeptionen im früheren Zoroastrismus: Kosmische, kultische und soziale Räume* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017).

the generic concepts that should frame and guide the case studies examined in the journal *Entangled Religions*.

That space may be contested between religious traditions seems to be a truism. The case of Augustine, however, shows how space is 'placed' to gain religious significance or meaning in a situation of contact, dynamically linking the elements of the transcendence/immanence distinction in a directional or vectoral process.

8. Sleep

Perhaps to the relief of the reader confronted with the dominantly theoretical considerations of the previous chapters, the last chapter of this work is intended to provide a short case study in which the key concepts previously analyzed are applied to the material. Though sleep emerged as an implicitly important topic during some meetings of the КHK, the concept of sleep has not been an object of institutionalized scrutiny within the research world, save a single workshop devoted to the topic.¹⁹ However, I hope to present here an object language discussion of how the phenomenon of sleep might be described and analyzed as a site of contact between religious traditions. Perhaps counter-intuitively, sleep can in fact be shown to facilitate contact between traditions. Rather than giving a summarizing conclusion I would like to show the concepts 'in action', using them to provide a better picture of what is going on in selected religious material.

The КHK was an interdisciplinary and transpersonal enterprise founded on some generally shared common assumptions, notably the central importance of the ideas of contact and its associated processes in the study of the history of religions. There was, however, no preconceived systematic framework to be applied to the phenomena of the prevailing religious traditions, as this framework was intended to be elaborated abductively in the interplay of theory and material in the course of the discussion. The discussion, thus, was moved by a dynamic of its own and led to certain crystallizations on particular subjects thanks to the research interests of both fellows and permanent members. The sequence of key concepts presented here mirrors this process to a certain extent. I am, however, of the opinion that a systematic connection independent of the historical development of the КHK emerges from this sequence of concepts. Below, I provide a brief tentative characterization of these systematic connections.

19 'Sleep in Classical, Late and Eastern Antiquity. A Comparative Inquiry', 26 and 27 September 2017, organized by Eva Kocziszky.

Dealing with the first concept to be explored by the ΚΗΚ, the chapter on attraction establishes an idea of the particular dynamics involved in the history of religions; the chapter on dynamism and stability introduces the concept of a particular bipolarity as connected to this process. The tradition chapter elaborates this bipolarity as a form of self-reference, while the chapter on the transcendence/immanence distinction, which introduces a basic coding for religious communication and a model for its processing, elaborates on the specific forms of processing involved in the process of religions. The chapter on the senses exemplifies the findings of the previous chapters in its exploration of the bipolar interrelationships of physical and mental processing within sensate religious experience. The concept of the secret and the idea of secrecy shows the contact-promoting potential of certain concepts at the object language level. The chapter on space, then, provides a case study on the dynamics of space ascribed with religious meaning, namely the bipolar processuality and directedness of such realms.

The validity of the systematic context, however, is secondary to the primary aim of this study, which is to provide conceptual tools for the study of religions. Just as I myself have taken eclectically from the theoretical reflections of others, the reader should not swallow the book whole, but rather is encouraged to draw on those parts that best fit with their own particular work as appropriate.

It goes almost without saying that the treatment of the key concepts given here is by no means exhaustive. As a matter of fact, every single concept of the eight examined here (and, of course, many more, such as for example the ΚΗΚ concepts of purity,²⁰ mission, and media)²¹ deserve at least a monograph, if not whole libraries of their own. As such, the chapters are mere starting points for further elaboration. This said, they do make claim to discussion of important, if not so far neglected, aspects of the concepts in question. Furthermore, they claim to be documents that record an ongoing discussion. That is, they speak to those aspects that emerged in the discussions of the ΚΗΚ, guided by its overall approach.

Although it be against all one-sided dualistic approaches to spirit and matter—either the assertion of religion as something exclusively spiritual, or

20 On the key concept of purity see *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, eds. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan. DHR 3 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013) and *Discourses of Purity in Transcultural Description (300–1600)*, eds. Matthias Bley, Nikolas Jaspers, and Stefan Köck. DHR 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

21 A special issue of the journal *Entangled Religions* on the subject of media and religion, edited by Giulia Evolvi and Jessie Pons, has been published in 2020: "Religion, Media, and Materiality," Special Issue, *Entangled Religions* 11 (2020).

the current 'material turn' in scholarship of religions—this book demands that religion be explicated as a *bipolar, dynamic relationship* between conceptualizations and the material. This is because the subject of study itself, namely the religious traditions in question, employs this bipolar set of dynamics. In the study of religion, the chasm that has been torn between the material and the mental aspect of religious phenomena must be overcome, and likewise, we must cross those that divide its derivatives, the material and the doctrinal, the practical and the theoretical, the lived and the intellectual. What is needed, is a unified explanation of religious phenomena that prevents either simply explaining the phenomena away or overestimating them to a point where we merely repeat religious self-explanations.

Some bipolar dynamics are also present in the choice of reference, on the one hand regarding theory and, on the other hand, regarding 'material' that is above all, object language expression of religious traditions themselves. I hope that there is some potential in their interrelation thus dynamizing the study of religion.

1.3 *Remarks on Theory and Case Studies*

The study of religion cannot do without concepts or a theoretical angle that allows for a tentative and provisional ordering of the material in question. The theoretical models I would like to introduce, or rather, to stress in their terms of their potential for the analysis of religion, are not exactly new, but still underestimated and underrepresented in religious studies. This is clearly the case for the ideas of Karl Popper and Alfred North Whitehead, although Niklas Luhmann is perhaps slightly better known. If asked directly I would—with a pinch of salt—claim to follow a simplified Whiteheadian approach to the study of the dynamics of the history of religions, supplemented by ideas of Popper and Luhmann.²² Admittedly, I treat these and other authors eclectically for the sake of modelling and theory-building and, accordingly, do not aim to produce an exegesis, let alone an exhaustive interpretation of the authors quoted or mentioned.

Let me spend a few words on the abovementioned authors as major sources of reference in elaborating on a suitable framework intended to give an

22 Of course, I cannot but, somewhat idiosyncratically, additionally introduce ideas of those authors I dealt with in same detail before—the attentive reader will doubtlessly remark those incidents. I, nevertheless, hope that the reference to these authors clarifies the point in question and enriches the discussion on it. Reference to yet another group of authors who have been subject of my previous research, such as for example Augustine, Llull, Cusanus, or Berkeley are made in order to provide object language examples, that is, material case studies on the prevailing key concept.

adequate picture of what is going on in the dynamics in the history of religions. As usual, on the applicability of these authors, scholars disagree. This is at least very true for the first author I shall tackle here: “An Luhmann—das ist offensichtlich—scheiden sich die Geister.”²³ On Luhmann, opinions differ. It comes as a relief, then, that the applicability of Niklas Luhmann’s ‘highly abstract and complex’ thinking to the study of religion has already convincingly been demonstrated, on the one hand by concrete application, and, on the other hand, by balanced refutations of critiques of his applicability, such as the well-known piece authored by Christoph Kleine.²⁴ What is more, religion gains a prominent status in Luhmann’s thinking as religion is concerned with the very problem of communication, such as in the relation of the definite and the indefinite.²⁵ The most important point, however, that will be addressed in my introductory remarks, is a careful distinction between levels of metalanguage discourse. Such distinction may prove partially suitable for adaption of Luhmannian theorems; partially not.

As supposedly outdated in the theory of science and apparently irrelevant to the academic field that is in question here, Karl Popper seems to be the most unlikely and least fashionable candidate for theoretical benefit in the study of religion.²⁶ At least, of the three persons mentioned, he is undoubtedly the most approachable in the clarity of his language. It should not be

23 Christoph Kleine, “Niklas Luhmann und die Religionswissenschaft: Geht das zusammen?,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 24 (2016): 50.

24 Ibid. In his influential work on ‘Religions in Global Society’, Peter Beyer claims to be indebted to Luhmann’s basic approach, but refuses to accept substantial features of it, namely the introduction of core dichotomies or binary codes, above all, the code of transcendence and immanence, as a theoretical strategy applicable to the subject of religion; see Peter Beyer, *Religions in Global Society* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 13–14.

25 “Religion nimmt sich dieses Grundproblems der Kommunikation an, indem sie das Unbestimmte bestimmbar zu machen vorgibt. Sie tut dies, indem sie das in jeder Kommunikation mitlaufende Appräsentierte in der Immanenz symbolisch repräsentiert” and “Die Religion bietet Lösungen ‘für das Anwendungsproblem der Unbestimmbarkeit aller selbstreferentiell operierenden Sinnverwendung’ an. Alle Funktionssysteme sind genau mit diesem Problem der Unbestimmbarkeit konfrontiert, aber nur Religion garantiert die Bestimmbarkeit allen Sinnes gegen die miterlebte Verweisung ins Unbestimmbare.” Kleine, “Niklas Luhmann und die Religionswissenschaft,” 65, 67.

26 If mentioned at all, Popper is mostly subject to nonchalant and condescending references, such as Manuel Vásquez’ remark on his supposedly ‘naïve’ falsificationism, see Manuel Vásquez, *More than Belief. A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 329. Just recently, Hubert Seiwert seems to have abandoned his earlier critical rationalist position for the alternative of critical realism, see Michael Stausberg, “The Abyss of Intransitivity: On Critical Realism and Theories of Religion,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 29 (2021): 269.

forgotten, however, that the ultimate aim of Popper's thinking was a certain social and cultural theory that takes insights on the acquisition and growth of human knowledge explicitly into account. There are, as a consequence, certain aspects to his thought, in particular with regard to the concepts of dynamics, attraction, tradition, and senses that, at least in my opinion, deserve some more attention.

The ever-careful scholars of religion may gain some confidence in Alfred North Whitehead by the fact that he, as his leading biographer puts it, "was definitely a friend of religion."²⁷ Thus, as a mathematician who later became a philosopher, he was nevertheless someone who took the phenomenon of religion seriously in theory as well as in personal conduct. As he himself noted, it has something to do with transcending one's limitations.²⁸ To Whitehead, religious experience was an undeniable fact, and, consequently, he wrote the book *Religion in the Making* in order to deal philosophically with it.²⁹

Whitehead is often alluded to as a possible theoretical reference for the study of religion, most often, with regard to the notion of 'process' as a suitable concept to be employed in religious studies. However, his thinking is rarely drawn on more broadly, perhaps due to the forbidding appearance of his explicitly 'speculative cosmology'. Admittedly, it is, to my mind, not *Religion in the Making* which is relevant to the present topic, but rather his cosmology as developed in his book *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929), which presents his Gifford Lectures delivered in 1927–8. This lectures series in general

27 Victor Lowe, *Alfred North Whitehead: The Man and His Work. Vol. II: 1910–1947* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 196. On Whitehead's possible contribution concerning the notion of religion see Knut Martin Stünkel, "Religion, Science, and the Modern World. Alfred North Whitehead's justification of belief in doctrine in a pluralistic universe," *Jahrbuch für Religionsphilosophie* 16 (2017).

28 As the young Whitehead put it, see Victor Lowe, *Alfred North Whitehead: The Man and His Work. Vol. I: 1861–1910* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 140.

29 Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*. Lowell Lectures 1926 (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996). On the, for current scholarship stressing non-essentialist and dynamic approaches, attractive title of Whitehead's book *Religion in the Making* see Janico Albrecht et al., "Religion in the making: the Lived Ancient Religion approach," *Religion* 48 (2018): 569–70: "Religion in the making' was the title of the Lowell Lectures of Alfred North Whitehead as published in 1926. Apart from a formulation in the introduction, the phrase is never used again. Whitehead's account is of a universal history of religion, its necessary change in the course of development of a rational worldview and its permanent individual reproduction on the basis of aesthetic experiences that bring together the material and the noetic world. Whereas Whitehead's was a philosophical critique questioning the stability of religion and dogmas in Whitehead, Rüpke's making, instead, focuses on the inherently dynamic quality of those cultural products that we identify as a religion in the course of historical analyses."

provides a fertile ground for basic considerations about religion: another famous example of these Gifford Lectures is F. Max Müller's *Natural Religion* (1888) and William James' pathbreaking *Varieties of Religious Experience* from 1901–02. Here, Whitehead commits himself to a philosophical task that is well fitted to the scientific study of religion (*Religions-Wissenschaft*) and comes as a relief to any philosopher depressed by the lack of applicability of his field of expertise. In his *magnum opus* Whitehead states: "Philosophy frees itself from the taint of ineffectiveness by its close relation with religion and with science, natural and sociological. It attains its chief importance by fusing the two, namely, religion and science, into one rational scheme of thought."

Additionally, there are occasional references to the ideas of Georg Simmel, Charles S. Peirce, Edmund Husserl, Walter Benjamin, Jürgen Frese and Saul Kripke, among others, which I found helpful in the elaboration of a theoretical framework. Ultimately, in introducing all these authors I hope for a cross-fertilizing effect, concerning both the study of religion and the vast field of philosophical theorizing, all of which may be supplemented with concrete relevance. Among the many authors I found myself turning to who are closer to the field of religion proper than the abovementioned sociologists and philosophers, I would like to mention explicitly Jan Assmann, Stephen C. Berkwitz, Robert Ford Campany, Edward Slingerland, Jonathan Z. Smith, Guy G. Stroumsa, and, of course, Volkhard Krech, all of whom combine theoretical expertise with practical experience.

In order to make this study more readable and in an attempt to render it more valid for religious studies, I have tried to give some material examples for the ideas developed here. As some scholars hold that theories become antiquated, but case studies do not (*Theorien veralten, Lokalstudien nicht*³⁰), the presence of some concrete examples can be justified beyond this study's ambition to provide a theoretical supplement to the study of religion. Though I hope that they are able to support my point, the material examples given here are, in any case, also subject to Pascal Boyer's reflections on ethnographic examples: namely, that the "examples given in support of various hypothesis must be treated in the same way as examples in all anthropological theories, i.e. as suggestive illustrations rather than definitive proofs."³¹ To provide such cases, I have had to rely in most instances on the expertise of the authors quoted and the expertise of those who recommended these authors and the prevailing

30 Christoph Schmidt, *Pilger, Popen und Propheten. Eine Religionsgeschichte Osteuropas* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014), 16.

31 Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication. A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), IX.

texts to me.³² In fact, these authors and texts are mostly those that played a role in the presentations and readings of the meetings of the КХК. Nevertheless, my inability to complement the theoretical considerations with original philological studies of my own, and particularly, from the non-European traditions, is a major drawback. I would like, however, to interpret it also as a living testament example to the fact that the study of religions cannot be undertaken successfully by an isolated scholar alone in the tower, but should rather be a matter of intense collaboration between scholars of diverse disciplines and areas of interest. Not least, to this end, should there be collaboration between those interested in theoretical reflections and those working with lived examples. To embroider upon Kant: conceptual work without empirical and philological grounding is empty and free-floating, while empirical and philological work without a conceptual framework is blind and solipsistic. The first of these twin propositions is commonly agreed upon; the second, sadly, is still too often neglected.

1.4 *Contact*

The notion of 'contact' is the most fundamental instrument and paradigm in the work of the КХК. Though object language (that is, the language of religious speakers) of past and present times might insist that there is only one true religion, from a scholarly perspective, and from the perspective of the КХК in particular, religion always appears at least in pairs. *There is no religion until there is a second—There is no religion lest there are, in fact, two religions.* Even a tradition that 'invented' the notion of religion and the concept to match it has done so as a result of a contact situation in which the notion and, perhaps, the concept proved to be a suitable tool to handle the situation of a challenging other. The presence of another 'religion' may come as an unpleasant surprise or as a well-established fact; in any case, contact is the birthplace of religion.³³

32 It was a major advantage in the work of the КХК that these swift consultations were possible, and even essentially integrated into the events and meetings there. At no point of time were our discussions confined to only the specialists in a particular field. Within the КХК these were my colleagues Licia Di Giacinto and Heiner Roetz for China, Marion Eggert for Korea, Carmen Meinert for Central Asia, Jessie Pons and Patrick Krüger for South Asia, Kianoosh Rezania and Götz König for Zoroastrianism, Eduard Iricinschi for Mediterranean Late Antiquity, Christian Frevel for ancient Israel, Giulia Evolfi and Tim Karis for contemporary religion, Alex Cuffel for the history of Judaism, Adam Knobler for the history of religions in times of colonialism, Reinhold F. Gleis for classical and neo-Latin Literature. Thanks also to the some 150 fellows hosted by the КХК across the period in question.

33 Concerning the case of West Asia about two millennia ago Jason BeDuhn stresses: "The category 'religion' emerges only when it has to, when it is summoned forth by conditions

To be more precise: there is no religion until there is a second one to make the claim for the title 'religion' a religiously meaningful enterprise—that to lay claim to the title 'religion' makes religious sense.

This, however, does not mean that there is no religion before religion; rather, it is the reason why it makes sense to denote something as 'religion' before the notion was 'invented'. Due to the later appropriations of traditions or elements of traditions of earlier times made by religious traditions, on the object language level religions *retrospectively* constitute these claimed traditions as belonging to their particular religious tradition.³⁴

This basic assertion has consequences for the history of religions as well. Though there are some dynamics interior to religion that contribute to change, the history of religions is not a closed-shop enterprise. Religions interrelate to their prevailing environments. The basic idea underpinning the КHK 'Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe' was that religious traditions emerge, consolidate, spread, condense and decline via situations in which they come into contact with other religious traditions. The challenge of the other tradition triggers a process of self-reference that leads to an intensification of expression, which may have effects both external and external. In his article *Religious Contact in Past and Present Times: Aspects of a Research Programme*, Volkhard Krech put this point into its paradigmatic form: "Our guiding assumption consists of the claim that the formation, establishment, spread and further development of the major religious traditions (as well as other religious traditions) have been affected by mutual influences, as well as that the formal unity of the history of religions mainly consists of religious contacts, i.e. of mutual perceptions of religious traditions as religious

on the ground that no longer abide by previous assumptions. [...] The category 'religion', then, only emerges where there are options, alternative ways within a single ethnicity or state for relating to the gods. To be more precise, it is not simply a matter of variety, since variety of belief and practice is found everywhere and always. Rather, the key development is what might be called religious pluralism, where distinct and mutually exclusive identities exist that are not interchangeable or coterminous with ethnic identity." Jason BeDuhn, "The Co-formation of the Manichaean and Zoroastrian Religions in Third-Century Iran," *Entangled Religions* 11 (2020): 4. BeDuhn, thus, for good reason locates here in third century Sassanid Iran, and more particularly, in Mani's teachings, the birthplace of the first formal statement of 'religion'. Compare also Jörg Rüpke's insistence on the "radical shift in the social role of religion," where the problem of diversity, differences and separate groups occurred and made the talk of religious pluralism meaningful. See Jörg Rüpke, "Early Christianity out of, and in, Context," *Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (2009): 191.

34 See chapter on Retrospection.

entities that constitute regional religious fields and, in the long run, lead to a global religious field.”³⁵

The possible forms of contact are multifold and cannot be reduced to an ideal (and, in fact, rather artificial) type in the sense of one proponent of religion A meeting another proponent of religion B at a certain time in a certain place. Rather, they may well occur among the same tradition, or across traditions. They may also well involve a number of religious traditions at the same time, and, indeed, this seems to be most normal. As a consequence, a religious contact is more likely to involve multiple actors following diverse agendas. This holds true not only with regards to the prevailing religious traditions, but also with regard to the diverse proponents of one tradition alone. It can be carried out by members of the religious hierarchy, by religious experts or by laymen, by members of a religious majority, or a minority. Situations of contact may in almost every case be described as asymmetrical. Here, one religious tradition observes one or more other traditions, in some cases, however, mutual observation of parties is discernible. Moreover, religious contacts do not exclusively and not even necessarily involve human beings. Concepts, notions, texts, articulated experiences, and even artificial objects used for religious purpose that is, mobile and even immobile objects (buildings, statues, ritual items, etc.) may get into a discernable contact as well. Contacts are neither temporally nor spatially restricted. As it may become clear from this rather incomplete list, possible participants of a contact may meet in small-scale interpersonal

35 Volkhard Krech, “Religious Contact in Past and Present Times: Aspects of a Research Programme,” *Religion* 42 (2012): 192. Scholars even go so far as to extend the overall importance of contact to smaller and much earlier formations than ‘major religious traditions’, thus opposing attempts to describe religious traditions as closed and self-contained units that form and develop on their own. Given a suitable *tertium comparationis*, influences may be detected that were previously not in the center of scholarly attention—even if that means having to refer to a *tertium* like ovicaprolatry, see Victor A. Mair, “Religious Formations and Intercultural Contact in Early China,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke. DHR 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 104–105: “If this investigation has shown anything, it is that the diverse early cultures of Eurasia were integrated, not isolated. Neither were the individual cultures of Eurasia isolated from each other, nor were the religions, technologies, arts, and other components that they shared transmitted separately. Cultures are integral packages. [...] The free sharing of cultural attributes, however, does not necessarily imply their total acceptance as is. Societies, when they borrow elements of culture from each other, pick, choose, and transform, and they meld what they acquire into what they already have. This is what might be called the combinatorial calculus of cultural convergence. The result is neither merely what they began with nor simply what they absorbed from outside. Rather, it is something new that is more (or less) than the sum of its parts. Thus do cultures, and the religions that inform them, progress—and sometimes wane.”

contact situations on one end of the scale, or they may meet during large-scale cultural transfers on the collective level on the other end. Accordingly, the situation of contact may well stretch temporally over long periods of time and unfold spatially in multiple locations, in a particular place, but also within a certain widespread space, for example, trading routes.

Situations of contact typically include both synchronic and diachronic elements, participants may observe the other by referring to previous experiences or traditional ideas. Religious contact situations are no autonomous events but, rather, can be triggered by events or developments from within the religious field, or be induced by outside forces, such as politics, warfare or economics (trade), or, ultimately in a combination of both. Last, but not least, religious contact *may* occur in face-to-face communication, but, as historical events, are more likely to be made tangible for researchers in textual or other media sources. As a result, situations of religious contact can have very different effects that may retrospectively influence the perception of the original scene of contact. Effects may, thus, range on a typological scale from the emergence of a new, symbiotic religious form to the total destruction of one religion through another.

In order to examine and analyze the 'religious field', the notion of contact, here, seems to be more promising and adequate to the phenomena than the somewhat vague ideas of 'cultural flow', cultural translation or unspecified 'transfer processes'. Not least, it draws the scholar's attention to *concrete cases* of contact. "Instead of speaking of transfer processes and cultural flows, it would appear to make more sense to see contact as a constitutive process in which cultural units in general and religious formations in particular form."³⁶ The interconnected processes of adaption and demarcation, self-perception and perception by others are considered to be important factors in the historical dynamics of the religious field.³⁷

The value of this notion of contact for research can be questioned by highlighting the fact that the idea of two (or more) 'sides' or participants in a

36 Krech, "Dynamics in the History of Religions," 70.

37 "When, through cultural contact or imperialism, foreign gods intruded a society, the native cults could themselves come to be more self-consciously defined over against the intrusion. *Judaism*, for instance, arose as native self-consciousness in response to the intrusion of *Hellenism*: The constituent elements were already there, pervading the religious observances of Jewish culture, but coalesced in a more sharply defined and self-consciously observed set of beliefs, practices and values in the presence of the other." Jason BeDuhn, "Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion' in Third Century Iran," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, eds. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley. Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 87 (Leiden: Brill 2015), 250–251.

situation of contact may be problematic, as it seems to suggest that distinct, unified entities are meeting. The dynamics that emerge from the contact of such entities might suggest the impact model that explains contacts of billiard balls.³⁸ Thus, the notion of a 'contact of religions' may lead to an unsuitable reification of 'religions' in question. Of course, any contact is, at first, not a contact of entities such as 'religions' (that are, in any case, too internally diverse to justify the postulation of such an entity). Religious contact as a communicative event is not the result of two religious entities contacting. Rather, it is the other way around namely, that two or more religious 'entities' are the result of religious contact as a communicative event. Here, religious contact produces their prevailing unity and represents it.³⁹ Rather than contact between 'religions', it is a contact between individual religious *acteurs*, themselves the products of manifold influences and, in most cases, not representative for any proposed entity like a religious tradition. Moreover, in some areas, it might even be assumed that religious traditions are and were in *constant contact*, thus rendering the occasion of a contact situation difficult to determine as a clearly discernable event.⁴⁰

38 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction. This important point is, in fact, raised for good reason by many scholars of the field. In the considerations on 'contact' in his book on the encounter of Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road Johan Elverskog put it this way: "[...] Buddhism is not one teaching, school, or tradition. Rather, as with any religion it developed over time into an array of widely divergent and competing schools of thought. [...] Similarly, no one unified group comprised 'Muslims'. What it meant to be a Muslim was very much under debate at the time Islam came into contact with the Dharma. [...] in particular, we need to recognize that Buddhism and Islam were not two monolithic and static entities crashing into one another. Rather, both religions were diverse and ever-developing traditions that were not only grappling with their own internal theological developments, but also trying to understand the world outside their own particular communities." Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia/Oxford: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010), 11.

39 Volkhard Krech, "Nachwort: Können sich Religionen begegnen?," in *Religionsbegegnung in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte. Kritische Reflexionen über ein etabliertes Konzept*, eds. Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, and Christoph Kleine (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2019), 276–77.

40 See Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), 4: "For the comparative historian of religion, the Near East and the whole Mediterranean, from the first to the seventh century, constitute a rare laboratory where a number of religious communities were in constant contact and conflict. Rather than referring to 'sects,' a quite loaded word alluding to doctrines deviant from the reigning orthodoxy, we should perhaps speak of communities. These communities were connected through a highly complex web which offered a kaleidoscope of sorts, in which the various crystals constantly restructured themselves in a seemingly infinite number of new structures."

The claim to abolish the notion and the concept of contact is, however, premature. The theoretical difficulties with the idea of contact arise mainly on the level of scholarly explanation. If there is constant contact and nothing but flow, how do scholars get to their subjects to examine? However, *on object language level*, as humans are beings who make differences (Georg Simmel), the opposing other might be described in that way: as a representative and as a consistent entity. On object language level, such unified entities do indeed meet, at least in the *pars pro toto* form of a or several individuals being referred to as representatives of this entity; the form of the other being a particular strategy of handling the situation by employing difference that introduces both discernable parts of the contact. This is mirrored in object language reflection on the situation of contact. Medieval religious dialogues such as Gilbert Crispin's two works titled *Disputatio* employ an *Iudaeus*, a *Gentilis* and, of course, a *Christianus*. It is *within* the prevailing contact situation, within the contact of concrete individualities, that one might talk about 'religions' meeting, even in the sense of clearly distinguishable, homogenous entities meeting, and this is because the participants themselves, blurred and heterogenous as they may be, conceptualize others and themselves that way. The study of religions, thus, may address, or talk about religions in the manner of talking about persons because the religious themselves in situations of contact have done so.⁴¹ Contact precedes metalanguage.⁴² In his article *Der Buddha als Avatāra*, Oliver Freiberger likewise comes to the conclusion that the study of religion has to leave the differentiation of religions to the religious themselves, or rather, may leave the distinguishing action to the material. It is right at the point when

41 Deeg, Freiberger, and Kleine in the introduction their collected volume stress the fact that the concept of 'religion' is applicable to premodern Asian cultures, above all in the context of situations of contact ('Religionsbegegnung'), where actors found it necessary to demarcate their tradition from other traditions and do so by applying a generic category for both ("[...] insbesondere in Kontexten der 'Religionsbegegnung', nämlich dort, wo es den Akteuren notwendig erschien, die 'eigene' von der 'anderen' Tradition abzugrenzen und im Zuge dessen beide einer generischen Kategorie zuzuordnen."). See Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, and Christoph Kleine, "Einleitung," in *Religionsbegegnung in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte. Kritische Reflexionen über ein etabliertes Konzept*, eds. Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, and Christoph Kleine (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2019), 8.

42 See Philippe Borgeaud's reminder: "C'est de ces contacts et de ces heurts préliminaires, avant bien d'autres heurts, entre d'autres cultures encore, que sont issus les premières préconceptions et les premières controverses, les premiers préjugés et les premiers outils conceptuels d'une enquête comparatiste qui demeure la nôtre, sur des phénomènes que nous considérons comme religieux." Philippe Borgeaud, *Exercices d'histoire des religions. Comparaison, rites, mythes et émotions*, eds. Daniel Barbu and Philippe Matthey (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), 161.

religious actors demarcate themselves from others that the study of religion can identify one religion as a distinct socio-cultural formation.⁴³

Situations of contact in the vast majority of cases, either explicitly or implicitly, are characterized by asymmetry. Due to the fact of the sources the study of religion must rely on, cases in which all the 'participants' in a situation of contact are given a voice of their own are very scarce, if there are such cases at all. There are no neutral sources.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the categorization and demarcation processes in situations of contact may be extremely dynamic, mediated by the situation-dependent interests of the participants. However, the very fact that a source from a religious tradition can deal with a situation of contact shows that the prevailing tradition is being influenced by a contact-related challenge and forced to act correspondingly. It is at these points that contact-based research on the history of religions as to their emergence, formation and condensation can start. It is by repeated contact that characteristics ascribed to others and oneself can solidify and serve as an object language tool for categorization. Vital means for the development and persistence of religious doctrine (i.e. manifest self-reflection) can be generically related to situations of contact. Intra- and intercultural conflict can be described as the major trigger of the emergence of the idea of the canon, as well as for its formation.⁴⁵

It should be stressed that the notion of contact does by no means insinuate a clash or a conflict between religions. Of course, there are agonal forms of contact, and one could well make a case that, given the asymmetric nature of sources, there is always some violence involved in object language contemplating or emerging from situations of contact. However, these cases, such as occasions of translation do not necessarily have to be interpreted as clashes.⁴⁶

43 See Oliver Freiberger, "Der Buddha als Avatāra. Zur Analyse von Grenzen zwischen Religionen," in *Religionsbegegnung in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte. Kritische Reflexionen über ein etabliertes Konzept*, eds. Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, and Christoph Kleine (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2019).

44 "Die Darstellung des Anderen mag das Ergebnis der gewissenhaften Zusammenstellung aller bekannten Daten sein, aber es kann auch auf frei erfundenen Vorstellungen beruhen oder irgendwo dazwischen liegen. [...] Wenn die Akteure das Andere in einer bestimmten Weise konstruieren, ziehen sie damit auch eine Grenze zwischen 'uns' und 'ihnen'." Deeg, Freiberger, and Kleine, "Einleitung," 8–9.

45 See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck 1999), 125, also compare Licia Di Giacinto, "The Early History of the Confucian Canon, Successes and Failures of the First Closure," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 18 (2010): 146f.

46 Rather, in correspondence to Philippe Borgeaud, I would like to stress the experimental character of situations of contact: "Je voudrais pour ma part insister sur le fait que cette

After all, to modify Ann Taves' metaphor, they are also ready bridges that permit scholarly trespassing where a perfect bridge is not or cannot be available.⁴⁷ The fact that the idea of a contact-based approach to the history of religions is not exactly new and that some very dubious intellectual figures indeed such as Paul de Lagarde some 150 years ago already hinted at the salient importance of encounter and interrelation of religions for the analysis of religion and the history of religions alike ("In history, we only find the contact of religions, but never the religions themselves."⁴⁸) should not distract from the value of the contact approach itself.⁴⁹

I would like to continue these introductory lines with some remarks on basic features of language and method that I found increasingly relevant in the course of the work of the КХК, and with regard to my proceeding acquaintance with the discussions within the academic field of the study of religion. It should be noted that in these considerations, I shall not hold back from my personal conviction that certain currents in the study of religion have proved to be counterproductive. I find them even guilty of the worst crime possible in scholarly and scientific *ethos*: that is, in the words of Charles Sanders Peirce, guilty of having blocked the way of inquiry.⁵⁰ Admittedly, the following

belle liberté, cet appel au grand large, ne doivent pas faire oublier l'intérêt de laboratoires plus limités, sinon même plus étriqués, ceux qui concernent des cultures en rapports historiques de contiguïté. L'étude des contacts, des adaptations, des rejets, des réactions et contre réactions, conduit à faire de l'histoire elle-même un laboratoire expérimental." (Borgeaud, *Exercices d'histoire des religions*, 104).

47 See chapter on the Andy-Warhol-Syndrome.

48 Paul de Lagarde, "Die königliche Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften in Göttingen betreffend. Ein Gutachten," in *Paul de Lagarde. Erinnerungen aus seinem Leben zusammengestellt von Anna de Lagarde* (Leipzig: Heims, 1918), 177.

49 Guy Stroumsa even goes so far as to relate contact-based comparison to a particular *ethos* of scholarly conduct: "If comparatism as a grand method searching for overarching theories has failed, comparatism as an ethos remains as valid as ever. As an ethos, comparatism is also a method, but one with much reduced ambitions, seeking only to find ad hoc isomorphisms, similitudes and parallels between phenomena. As an ethos, it may be less than a method, and is perhaps more akin to bricolage. It is an intellectual habitus to always, and immediately look also elsewhere in any investigation. We must learn to compare as we go, avoiding the essentialism of static entities through focusing on points of contact, models of transformation, dynamics of reciprocal impact between religious movements." Guy G. Stroumsa, "History of Religions. The Comparative Moment," in *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion, and Anthropology*, eds. Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill, Geoffrey E.R. Lloyd (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 339.

50 See Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers (8 volumes)*, Vol. I–VI, eds. Charles Hartshorn and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931–1935); Vol. VII + VIII, ed. Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge, Mass./London: Belknap, 1958), *Collected Papers* 1.35.

chapter perhaps seems to demonize certain aspects of current scholarship, but I hope it shall serve to clarify the point and sensitize the reader to the basic problem as I perceive it.

2 The Andy-Warhol-Syndrome (AWS) in Postcolonial Religious Studies

Ich glaube, und das ist tiefster Glaube, daß nur in einer fürchterlichen Übersteigerung der Fremdheit, erst wenn sie sozusagen in Unendliche geführt ist, sie in ihr Gegenteil, in die absolute Erkenntnis umschlagen und das erblühen kann, was als unerreichbares Ziel der Liebe vor ihr her-schwebt und doch sie ausmacht: das Mysterium der Einheit.⁵¹

HERMANN BROCH, *Die Schlafwandler*

As the title of the source of the above quotation suggests, the attitude described here is that of a sleepwalker: the idea that enhancing the strangeness of a phenomenon would at some point suddenly produce an immediate insight guided by an insurmountable mystery, revealing a unity that, in turn, induces a sympathetic feeling, or rather, love. Furthermore, this process is considered to be inaugurated by an attitude of love towards the phenomenon in question that is, the longing to unite with the phenomenon in a mystical wedding wherein all is unified.

2.1 *Reenacting Andy Warhol*

Aiming at a mystical union via the enhancement of strangeness is, in a nutshell, what I call the Andy Warhol Syndrome (AWS). Contemporary study of religion, both as research and as teaching, is permeated and often distorted by the AWS. Explicit references to the AWS are made in almost any discussion of scholarly presentations on methodology or in the subject matter of material-based area studies in the Humanities. It puts any scholarly efforts designed to produce understanding of other cultures into a dubious light, questioning the basic motives of their work. Thus, the very possibility of scientific work in the diverse fields of the Humanities is questioned; instead critiques aim at an exposure of political motives—although the hapless scholar himself might not be aware

51 "I do believe, and it is most profound belief, that it is only by a terrible exaggeration of strangeness, only if it is extended to the infinite that it turns into its contrary, into absolute insight, and that it may bloom, what hovers before it as the unreachable goal of love but what it is, nevertheless, all about: the mystery of unity."

of them. Though not known by that name, the AWS is yet another expression of the ‘fear of knowledge’ within the contemporary Humanities as lucidly analyzed by Paul Boghossian,⁵²—a fear that becomes a public outcry in the literal meaning. This outcry, demanded by many as the ultimate manifestation of academic nature, is a significant expression of the AWS.

To explain the AWS, I have to refer to a personal experience of mine. In the early nineties, I had the opportunity to hear Arthur C. Danto giving a guest lecture at the department for Philosophy at the University of Bielefeld in Germany. Danto, an eminent analytic philosopher and art critic, combined his two capacities in his lecture by contemplating the role of humor in philosophy and the possible contribution of Andy Warhol to it, exploring that famous American Icon, the *Brillo Boxes*, in some detail. The title of the talk was *Andy Philosophicus*. While elaborating on Warhol’s concepts Danto described how Warhol reacted to works of art by other artists in an aside. When confronted with a piece of art and asked what he thought about it, Warhol would, according to Danto, simply open his arms and say ‘Wow!’. Such a reaction is both startling and unsatisfying (and, to a certain extent, funny)—though it might have been very much to the satisfaction of the artist in question.

To my understanding, Warhol’s exclamation, a meaningful outcry at once laconic and expressive, bears considerable methodological significance—precisely thanks to its lack of content and its oversaturation with emphasis. In his book on Andy Warhol, Danto states that the *Brillo Boxes* helped him to solve an old problem, namely how to define art and why it is a philosophical problem.⁵³ In the same manner, the Andy Warhol Syndrome—that is, the disposition manifested in his acknowledgement of work through employment of an otherwise empty word: ‘Wow!’—helped me to define what the actual study of religion should not look like, and what philosophy should do to prevent it.

Though I admit that I might have remembered Danto’s talk incorrectly, the anecdote has since seemed to me a comparatively precise description of the scientifically and politically correct attitude of a ‘Western’ researcher if confronted with non-‘Western’ cultural material,—if one was to follow the verdicts and prescriptions of postcolonial, culturalist and deconstructivist

52 See Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge. Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1–5. ‘Culturalism’ may well be added to Boghossian’s list of academic ideas that have been transformed into ideologies.

53 Arthur C. Danto, *Andy Warhol* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), xiv.

theorists.⁵⁴ Here, nothing is valid but to ‘wow’. Haunted by the ever-present threat of inflicting cultural imperialism on their helpless research subjects, researchers thus destroy every genuine ‘authentic’ approach to the material. Scholars, ever wrecked by their guilt have to refrain from using notions, concepts, theories, ideas, viewpoints, mentalities, methods and languages of ‘Western’ origin to identify or to describe, let alone to analyze their subjects of study.⁵⁵ This idea, however, is not entirely deconstructive, as there is one positive element on which scholarship is supposedly to be re-founded and rebuilt.⁵⁶ Namely, scholars should express their acknowledgement of the *Eigenwürde*, the recognition of the *unique dignity* of their prevailing subject.⁵⁷ In order to achieve this, a therapeutic strategy must be employed to cure both the injuries of the subjects studied and the bad attitudes and associated guilt of the ‘Western’ scholar.⁵⁸ The only possible thing left to do is then

54 See Kevin Schilbrack’s persistent question “[A]fter we deconstruct ‘religion,’ then what? Once we understand that the way we carve up the world is not only historical and socially dependent, but also politically implicated, then what?” Kevin Schilbrack, “After We Deconstruct ‘Religion,’ Then What? A Case for Critical Realism,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 25 (2013): 108.

55 In the case of sinology, but easily to be transferred to other fields of the Humanities, Edward Slingerland has vividly described this attitude as follows: “For scholars committed to this idea [...] even to attempt to talk about Chinese philosophy in a Western language is to destroy its essential nature, ripping it out of its primordial harmony with the world and forcing it into the straitjacket of alienated Western abstraction.” Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China. Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 33.

56 Wouter Hanegraff in a recent article describes the dreary situation of the field correspondingly: “For about three or four decades now, in the study of religion as in the Humanities more generally, we have seen a very strong drive towards deconstructing all metanarratives and exposing any claims of ‘knowledge’ as veiled ideological moves that are ultimately not about the intellectual search for truth (which, after all, is metaphysical and hence illusionary, so the argument goes) but about social battles for hegemony and power.” Wouter J. Hanegraff, “Imagining the future study of religion and spirituality,” *Religion* 49 (2019), 3.

57 See Francis Fukuyama’s lucid considerations on the relation of the idea of identity and the ‘problem of *thymos*’, *thymos* being the part of the soul that craves the recognition of its dignity by others. The problem becomes all the more virulent as “Demand for recognition of one’s identity is a master concept that unifies much of what is going on in world politics today.” Francis Fukuyama, *Identity. Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition* (London: Profile, 2018), XIII, xv. On the impossibility of displaying recognition without misjudgment see also Thomas Bedorf, *Verkennende Anerkennung. Über Identität und Politik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), 144–145.

58 On the therapeutic model see Fukuyama, *Identity*, 103 f. In their zeal, some scholars even compare the use of certain notions to a dangerous and disfiguring illness—as if Susan

the simple indication of the material in question through careful paraphrase, or, even better, by emphatically pointing at it, followed by a non-prejudicing pure acknowledgement of the 'non-Western' material which recognizes its dignity. In a word: *Wow!*

2.2 *Effects of the AWS*

To some people, however, though they might appreciate the basic attitude of the speaker, this self-induced aphasia—that is, the loss of metalanguage in the sense of Roman Jakobson—may be a slightly disappointing result of the work of scholars who are, in many cases, paid from public resources. In his critical discussion of William James' approach to religious experience, Charles Taylor raised the obvious objection to such a conclusion produced by scholarly study of religion: "Many people are not satisfied with a momentary sense of wow! They want to take it further and they are looking for ways of doing so."⁵⁹ This is not least true for individuals interested in any kind of insight, and the ways to achieve such insight best, questionable as the insight may be.

Studying the writings of the diverse culturalist, postcolonialist, deconstructivist and 'critical religionist' promoters of AWS one cannot refrain from the impression that 'Western' scholarship has undertaken a penance analogous to the punishment of the builders of the Tower of Babel. Mutual incomprehension is the punishment for those who for reasons of arrogance and hubris claimed God-likeness in the field of language and insight in their promotion of an universal approach. Now they cannot understand even the smallest religious community outside the 'western' sphere, and this 'fact' is constantly kept in public attention by means of unrestrained redundancy. How dare you think differently, then? Contemporary theorists of religion have put great effort into 'unmasking' the imperialist philosophical and theological claims that lurk beneath the surface of carelessly employed 'Western' notions and ideas

Sontag never had written on the intellectual perils of *Illness as Metaphor* and, more particular, on cancer as a metaphor: "The advent of the discourse on world religions therefore may be finally described in analogy with the onset of a certain serious illness, an illness that is deeply systemic and already metastasized at the time of its first full manifestation. The outbreak of the discourse [...] effectively marked the moment when all of its 'prehistory' was suddenly overwhelmed, covered over in an avalanche of a new reality and thenceforth rendered unrecognizable." Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 11–12.

59 Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today. William James Revisited* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 116. Not being content with registering the fact of the religious 'wow', Birgit Meyer already provides an answer to the more interesting question "How to capture the 'wow': R.R. Marett's notion of awe and the study of religion," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22, no. 1 (2016).

on other cultures.⁶⁰ As for the issue of unmasking, this is no one-way street.⁶¹ Playing devil's advocate I note that this attitude of pure astonished receptiveness, of unprejudiced recognition, itself has strong roots in 'Western' theological tradition as well. For example in the consideration of God's actions as descending vertically from above (*senkrecht von oben*) as in Barthian Dialectic Theology, or in being simply overwhelmed by the numinous as described by Rudolf Otto,⁶² or in the glory and incommensurability of the *non-aliud* ('the not-even-other') of the Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa—or on the focus on experiences of individual men in their solitude as explored by the previously mentioned William James in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Thus, the eager application of AWS becomes a vicious cycle. By employing AWS, the careful student of non-Western material might, therefore, be introducing the very same situation his exclamation is intended to prevent. Indeed, as sinologist and scholar of religion Edward Slingerland has fittingly put it, the Humanities have herein been witness to a new kind of Orientalism proposed by some of their most influential scholars that "has certainly taken older forms of Orientalism to new levels of verbal absurdity."⁶³

60 Michael Puett has justifiably pointed to the fact that the idea of unmasking itself might as well be a product of Western modernity: "Such a theoretical move is a common one in much of twentieth century critical theory concerning religion: looking at the religious beliefs of a given area, and then unmasking those beliefs as ideological constructs that serve to render a given social order as either natural or divinely sanctioned." Michael Puett, "Critical approaches to religion in China," *Critical Research on Religion* 1 (2013): 96. The same holds true for the area of religious studies. As well as it might be possible that the things supposedly waiting to be unmasked by the critical (and, in fact, paternalizing) researcher are already subject of object language consideration (see *ibid.*, 97), it might be the case that theorists of religion are already aware of what is behind their concepts and already use them on a reflected level and that all the more as we already witnessed this movement of unmasking for quite a long time in the Humanities.

61 The relish of the iconoclastic attitude towards earlier concepts, notions, theories, and, not at last, figures of a prevailing scholarly field is something that lacks some deeper scrutiny, if one does not want to end up with the mere application of the Freudian Oedipal complex to intellectual history, or rather, the history of scholarship.

62 See Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (München: Beck, 1997), 30–31. And, of course, there is a shared problem regarding the incommensurability of the other that both fascinates and makes one tremble about the unsuitability of one's concepts: "Freilich gibt es für Otto ein großes und vielleicht auch niederschmetterndes Problem: Wenn das Numinose eigentlich mit uns Menschen inkommensurabel und *ganz anders* ist, was für eine Beziehung kann es zu unseren Begriffen und Moralprinzipien, zu positiver Religion überhaupt, haben?" Gregor D. Alles, "Rudolf Otto (1869–1937)," in *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Axel Michaels (München: Beck, 2004), 205.

63 Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China*, 1.

What is more, the current “ethos of difference,” as Francisca Cha and Richard King Squier in a masterly article have pointed out, “imprisons cultures into impermeable skins,” rendering them incomparable and as such, monolithic and static.⁶⁴ It further fragments reality into windowless, atomistic monads. Observations that hint toward anything contrary to this view are treated as a threat and are denounced as morally flawed. Consequently, science and scholarship are turned into ideology. It is well known that ideology trumps facts, preferably by the introduction of alternative facts (‘other facts’ as facts about the insurmountably radical ‘Other’). It is precisely this ideology that engaged scholars such as Edward Said took firm issue against: “Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more ‘foreign’ elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude.”⁶⁵ This is, however, a truism that has to be brought back into the discussion, as the exaggeration of the ‘otherness’⁶⁶ of non-‘Western’ non-European cultures has given rise to a new and politically well-defended cultural essentialism that is blatantly juxtaposed with the idealistic aims of its academic protagonists forcing them into a performative self-contradiction that is pitiful to witness. As Slingerland put it: “One of the odd features of the modern Academy is the fact that while the negative side of such cultural essentialism has been singled out and rejected as pernicious Orientalism, its normatively positive manifestation has continued to flourish.”⁶⁷ As Slingerland has also stressed the tendency to lay great emphasis on cultural plurality, diversity and differentiation within non-Western cultures that are then portrayed as greatly endangered by notions

64 Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, “Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013): 360.

65 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 15. Compare also *ibid.*, xxix, not only with regard to the modern world: “[A]ll cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic.”

66 See Jonathan Z. Smith’s critique of the language of the ‘other’: “[I]t must be insisted that the language of the ‘other’ always invites misunderstandings, suggesting, as it does, an ontological cleavage rather than an anthropological distinction. Much better is the language of ‘difference’ which is as relational and relative a terminology as the ‘other’ is absolute. ‘Otherness’ blocks language and conceptualization: ‘difference’ invites negotiation and intellection.” Jonathan Z. Smith, “Differential Equations. On Constructing the Other,” in *Relating Religion. Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 241.

67 Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China*, 2. See Slingerland’s alarmingly recognizable list of the central features of the ‘Neo-Orientalist’ stance: linguistic and social constructivism, scholarly metalanguage conceptually freed from the confines of ‘Western’ (= imperialistic) logic, Plato and the Enlightenment as the (arch-)enemy, assumption of monolithic and timeless ‘other’-cultures, the ‘other’ as normatively superior (*ibid.*, 29).

of 'the West' is similarly self-contradictory—thereby assuming that, somehow Western culture is monolithic and unified in patterns of thinking and conceptual matters.⁶⁸ The definite Western notion or concept of X does not exist, not within a certain era, not within a certain school, and one might even go so far as to claim: not within a single individual. Anyone concerned with the history of philosophy will vouch for the truth of this. To use Slingerland's example, the idea that the 'Western' attitude to the mind and body-problem is always Cartesian is an assumption that has itself led to a vast quantity of improper generalization.⁶⁹ Scholars in religious studies who employ this idea are guilty

68 Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China*, 125. It is difficult to find object language self-descriptions of 'western' or 'occidental' authors that employ the category of 'westernness' or 'occident' as a means to characterize their own standpoint. As Reinhold Gleis has shown, even those that may be considered as prime suspects of such a method that is, supposedly prejudiced and biased medieval Christian authors, do not correspond to the expectation of being orientalist in this sense: "Bei all dem bleibt festzuhalten, dass der Begriff oder das Konzept des Abendlandes in der Polemik gegen das Judentum zu keiner Zeit eine erkennbare Rolle spielt. Inhaltlich geht es immer um die rechte Bibelauslegung und die aus christlicher Sicht hartnäckige Weigerung der Juden, die christologisch-typologische Lesart der Bibel anzuerkennen. Auch die antitalmudische Polemik, die eine besondere Schärfe aufweist, bezieht sich nicht auf einen (angeblichen) kulturellen Gegensatz zwischen Orient und Okzident, sondern auf die 'Fabeln', d.h. letztlich auf die Fiktionalität des Talmuds sowie auf dessen unübersichtliche Struktur und die aus christlicher Sicht blasphemischen Elemente." Concluding, Gleis stresses: "Es gibt in der theologischen Traktatliteratur keine Polemik gegen Judentum und Islam speziell mit dem 'Kampfbegriff' des christlichen Abendlandes." Reinhold F. Gleis, "Die Polemik des 'Christlichen Abendlandes' gegen Judentum und Islam," in *Pluralistische Identität. Beobachtungen zur Zukunft Europas*, ed. Dirk Ansorge (Darmstadt: WBG, 2016), 76–77, 82.

69 "The taking of a particular technical, philosophical, or scientific view, most commonly the philosophy of René Descartes, as representative of how 'we' think is painfully common in the literature on Chinese or Eastern 'holism'. It really needs to stop." Slingerland, *Body and Mind in Early China*, 275. Slingerland is very right to point that out. He himself, however, in arguing that "The dominance of Enlightenment rationalism still casts a heavy shadow over Western philosophy and, more insidiously, shapes mainstream views in economics and political science" (*ibid.*, 304) makes a similar assumption, only different in degree from the postmodernist absolutism regarding views of 'the West'. Not only that the connection of both is at best only half the truth (there is, at least, some Enlightenment Empiricism as well): 'Enlightenment' and 'Rationalism' themselves are as internally diverse as any movement in the history of ideas that has been glorified with a name. As diverse 'Enlightenment thinkers', such as La Mettrie, D'Holbach, Helvetius, Hume and others show, there is no reason apart from the ideological to reduce the 'Enlightenment' to a bunch of wealthy, white clerics, misogynists, and puritan bachelors (*ibid.*). Even the figure most likely to be abused as an intellectual cliché of Enlightenment matadors, namely Immanuel Kant, was far from the image made of him as a dry and pedantic bore in both his thinking and his attitude and life conduct. 'The' Enlightenment conceptual cocktail is not only "weird" (*ibid.*), but as diverse as the individuals contributing to it.

of precisely the same hubris as philosophers, implicitly holding the self-same idea that it is basically the philosophical elite that determines the way people think or ought to think.

As is well known from the history of religions, hubris is the deadliest of all deadly sins. Accordingly, the contemporary study of religion has taken strong measures against this archenemy of scholarly conduct and insight. No other scientific discipline can contest with religious studies in its scrupulousness about its own subject, wherein its scholars are permanently questioning the field, its scholarly basis. For sure, *religious studies is the most dangerous area for 'religion'*. In my first encounters with the discipline in an academic environment I was astonished to witness doctoral students of religious studies, while presenting their theses, habitually apologizing for what they were doing and denying that the title of the discipline, 'religion', could possibly be applied to their material—as they were examining mostly non-West-European religious traditions. Now, there is no doubt that a certain humbleness does suit everyone well, and above all the scholar. Humbleness, however, does not consist of making oneself invulnerable to critique by employing over-careful notions and ideas—rather, it consists of allowing oneself to be criticized. Admittedly, one could interpret the self-denial of the young scholars as a sign of the need for a strong self-reflection along the lines of that suggested by Kippenberg and von Stuckrad in their introduction to religious studies. Religious studies, thus, become both scientific discipline and scientific meta-discipline at the same time.⁷⁰ Fair enough. But there is also sufficient justification to describe it as a symptom and as a sign that something is going wrong in the field. Here, the demagogical *argumentum ad baculum* returns with a vengeance: one should not use concepts as in doing so, scholarship is thus inherently Eurocentric and thus a severe threat to the study of religion.⁷¹ In many cases, meta-communication on the study of religion is taken for research while the possible subject of research gets lost in self-centered discussions of the academics.⁷² The hyper-criticism

70 Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft. Gegenstände und Begriffe* (München: Beck, 2003), 14.

71 See Břetislav Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft. Plädoyer für eine empirisch fundierte Theorie und Methode* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 169.

72 "Wird diese Warnung jedoch übertrieben, geht durch die Konzentration auf Metakommunikation der empirische ebenso wie der reflexive Gegenstand der Religionsforschung verloren, so daß die Metakommunikation ins Leere läuft, statt die Forschung zu stimulieren." Volkhard Krech, "Nur wer β sagt, kann auch α sagen: Zu Reinhard Schulzes Ansatz der 'retrospektiven Genealogie,'" in *Islam in der Moderne, Moderne im Islam. Eine Festschrift für Reinhard Schulze zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Florian Zemmin, Johannes Stephan, and Monica Corrado (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 88.

of religious studies, within and outside the discipline itself easily morphs into hypocritical attitudes and behavior.⁷³

In its exaggerated form, even the most contemporary ‘turn’ (the increasingly fast waltz of ‘turns’ in academia does not only make the turners giddy) in scholarship away from the study of what is called doctrine, theology or, more general, text, may be considered as a significant form of Andy Warhol Syndrome in the study of religion. To examine material, objects, bodies, senses, or experiences without reference to categorizing criteria derived from some text-based ‘doctrine’ seems to me a completely misguided, and, what is worse, misleading enterprise. Apart from the fact that scholars have to textualize their findings, they also have to textualize their observations. Of course, the categories, ascriptions and criteria used here should ideally come from the religious tradition in question itself, and not from the scholarly desk alone. But simply trying to do without any is an overtaxing and an abuse of phenomenology. Moreover, as Karl-Heinz Kohl has fittingly pointed out, scholarship mirrors society: the scholarly overtaxing of material objects may well be described as a characteristic trait of modern Western culture. Here, as in no other cultural sphere, material objects play a paramount role.⁷⁴

For many reasons, scholars of area studies might develop a strong sense of protectiveness of their often endangered field of study, not at last from economic considerations regarding what should be taught at universities and what should not. There are contemporary crypto-religions that could be gravely endangered by scholars who reveal details of their practices, ideas, main concepts and persons. Generalizing the results of scholarship could lead to the abuse of such scholarship for political ends (and the ends of hegemonic

73 On the hypocrisy of supposedly ‘critical religion’ see for example Michael Stausberg’s proof that those who consider the notion of religion transculturally inapplicable are actually following a “reverse *sui generis* approach” Michael Stausberg, “Distinctions, Differentiations, Ontology, and Non-human in Theories of Religion,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010), 354, 364: “Behind the common reservation or scepticism towards the validity of the category—as understandable and laudable as they may be in light of partly justified and partly exaggerated accusations of ethnocentric, (neo-)colonial and imperialist implications—one can surmise a kind of reverse-*sui-generis* rhetoric, since the logical implication must be that religion is inherently different from all other categories, because it is clear that all concepts used in academic language are constructed, contextualized, fabricated, invented, selective, part of schemes of classification, and what else.”

74 “[...] das ist eine durchaus zutreffende Aussage über einen der charakteristischsten Züge westlicher Kultur: In kaum einer spielen materielle Gegenstände eine ähnlich herausragende Rolle.” Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge. Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (München: Beck, 2003), 8. One is, of course, reminded of Marx’ ‘material fetishism’.

religious traditions connected to politics) to produce homogenous political and religious bodies and landscapes, outlawing the deviant and the dissenting. There are small traditions that are in danger of being subsumed into the greater ones, thus losing their characteristic features. And finally, there are the philosophers of religion who tend to overlook the important differences in pursuit of a general theory of religion.

Without any doubt, these are sufficient reasons for great care towards the objects of scholarly study. *To protect them from misunderstandings, however, is definitely not among these reasons.*⁷⁵ To deny the validity of any preliminary understanding (i.e. knowledge and understanding that can be subsequently improved upon by trial and error) and to chase the ideal of arriving at the truth totally, exhaustively, and at once, is a serious misunderstanding of the way understanding works. Additionally, it is a misunderstanding of science and the process of research. On the other hand, those who are over-anxious about their material and seek to protect it from any confrontation with near-religious zeal, however, simply act as if they do not have any confidence in the material they seek to protect. Consequently, they act in a fashion that becomes even more paternalistic and imperialistic than that of their supposed opponents.⁷⁶ Othering is an imperialistic device, whether it be in the form of establishing a 'negative' or 'positive' other of one's own. It is even more this when it arrives in the form of trying to define another culture or religion as the incommensurable,

75 Slingerland points to the fact that at some basic point, a level of correspondence is reached that makes the 'radical other' not quite so categorically different: "It is a laudable scholarly instinct to err on the side of caution when translating concepts from one culture and language to another. The extreme to which it has been taken in recent decades would be more justified, and may indeed prove crucial, if we are someday faced with the task of, say, decoding communications or artifacts created by creatures from Alpha Centauri, silicon-based life forms living in vast beehive-like colonies and sharing some sort of extended hive mind. When it comes to fellow human beings, however—social primates struggling to deal with the universal challenges of tribal life or moving from tribal to large-scale societies—our embodied commonality instantly puts us on firm hermeneutical grounding," Slingerland, *Body and Mind in Early China*, 247.

76 Compare on this point Martin Riesebrodt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen. Eine Theorie der Religionen* (München: Beck, 2007), 35–36: "Den Kritikern ist offenbar gar nicht bewußt, daß sie mit ihrem Beharren auf der absoluten Andersartigkeit nichtwestlicher Kulturen diese zu passiven Empfängern dessen degradieren, was der Westen vorgeblich aus ihnen gemacht hat. Offenbar folgen sie naiv romantischen Vorstellungen und deuten die Begegnung mit dem Westen als eine Art Kontamination, durch die Kulturen ihre Authentizität verloren haben. Damit machen sie aber die westliche Moderne nicht nur zur Wasserscheide der Weltgeschichte, sondern auch zu ihrem einzigen wirklichen Akteur."

absolute 'other': here othering even becomes a divinatory act.⁷⁷ A reminder from February 19, 1870, is thus still important today when it comes to the study of religion: "But true reverence does not consist in declaring a subject, because it is dear to us, to be unfit for free and honest inquiry: far from it! True reverence is shown in treating every subject, however sacred, however dear to us, with perfect confidence [...]."⁷⁸

That 'Western' conceptualization may fail to grasp non-Western material might be true to a certain extent. This is, nevertheless, no sufficient reason why such concepts should not be applied to the material in the process of research. In any case, it is only the tension between ways of conceptualization that is to be stated. The conclusion that is often drawn from the fact of this tension, however, namely that any Western conceptualization must be abandoned—is clearly overdone and misleading, not least with regard to the aim of promoting understanding of a 'non-Western' tradition. To overdo the 'culturalistic turn' means to face *aporiae* that counteract its original aim.⁷⁹ With regard to

77 Asad's insight here that the very process of definition might be a product of hidden Orientalism might be useful: "My argument is that there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive process." Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion. Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 29. Though the wording may be slightly exaggerated, Christopher Beckwith points in the right direction with his characterization of the 'New Intellectual' emerging from such attitudes: "In the late twentieth century some Asian writers, led by the journalist Edward Said (1978) accused Western scholars of having 'stolen' Asian peoples' cultures *by studying them*. This extreme anti-intellectualism has been well criticized [...]. Unfortunately, many Orientalists have unknowingly accepted Said's views and have abandoned the old word *Orientalist* as being somehow, vaguely, bad. From this standpoint all genuine scholars are bad, because they seek the truth and help to enlighten the world." Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road. A History of Central Asia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 418.

78 Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion, Four Lecture Delivered at the Royal Institution in February and May, 1870* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882), 6.

79 "Die kulturalistische Wende beruht auf der berechtigten Kritik eines konzeptuellen Universalismus, der sich nicht selbst durch gute Gründe ausweist und die Verallgemeinerbarkeit 'westlicher' Begriffe einfach unterstellt. Sie führt aber zu Aporien, allein schon deshalb, weil ihre Vertreter einen Metadiskurs zu führen beanspruchen, der seinerseits nicht der Kulturgebundenheit unterliegen soll. Hierzu kommt die Gefahr, den alten Begriffshegemonismus einfach durch die lokale Despotie der einzelnen 'Kulturen' zu ersetzen. Beides verträgt sich schlecht mit einer möglichen konsensualen Lösung der Aufgabe, mit der die zusammenwachsende Weltgemeinschaft—wenn wir denn von ihr noch sprechen wollen—heute konfrontiert ist: nämlich die Ausübung politischer und gesellschaftlicher Macht und die ökonomischen und technologischen Imperative, deren Verselbständigung den Planeten zu zerstören droht, in ein ethisches Rahmenwerk

China and Confucianism in particular, however, Heiner Roetz has repeatedly shown that it is no less paternalizing, blinkered and prejudiced to *deny* that Eastern traditions have developed an universalist humanism and ethics⁸⁰ as it is to supposedly imperialistically ‘impose’ a ‘Western’ ideology on them.⁸¹ To Roetz, the post-colonial ideology of ‘aggressive particularism of civilizations’, claiming for the incommensurability of cultural traditions against ‘Western’ ideas for the sake of a ‘culturalistic identity-management’⁸² is a political, intellectual, and scientific dead end.⁸³ It does not enhance, but rather reduce the complexity of cultures, and especially the complexity and plentitude of the prevailing cultures in question. It is, above all, a voluntary and aggressively claimed institutionalization of a declaration of bankruptcy concerning the very possibility of understanding other cultures, and not least, of promoting mutual understanding between them.

Cho and Squier, in opposing the fragmentation of knowledge and the new kind of ethnocentrism, have lucidly described the still growing “ethos of particularism in which the increasing data of religions are treated like atomistic and self-sufficient units of knowledge.”⁸⁴ The following solipsism, imposing

ezzubinden.” Heiner Roetz, “Der konfuzianische Humanismus und sein Ursprung aus dem Geist der Traditionskritik,” in *Menschenbilder in China*, eds. Lena Henningsen and Heiner Roetz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 34.

80 Roetz describes the academic situation fittingly as follows. “Wenn es um die Vereinbarkeit der chinesischen Kultur mit individuellen Menschenrechten geht, tun sich manche Sinologen noch schwerer als die Peking Regierung. Sie haben die chinesischen Argumente sogar noch überboten.” Roetz, “Der konfuzianische Humanismus und sein Ursprung aus dem Geist der Traditionskritik,” 39. This scholarly attitude of outdoing their supposed object of study, however, is by no means reduced to sinology and China.

81 See Heiner Roetz, “Tradition, Universality, and the Time Paradigm of *Zhou* Philosophy,” *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (2009), 371. See also Roetz, “Der konfuzianische Humanismus und sein Ursprung aus dem Geist der Traditionskritik,” 33–66, and Heiner Roetz, “Tradition, Moderne, Traditionskritik. China in der Diskussion,” in *Kulturelle und religiöse Traditionen. Beiträge zu einer interdisziplinären Traditionstheorie und Traditionsanalyse*, eds. Torsten Larbig and Siegfried Wiedenhofer (Münster: Lit, 2005), 135–136.

82 Roetz, “Tradition, Moderne, Traditionskritik,” 137.

83 Roetz’s point is strengthened by Hubert Seiwert, who rightly claims: “Modern Western thinkers were neither the only ones nor the first who have interpreted social realities. Historical ignorance certainly helps believe in the exceptionality of modern understandings of the world, but it is a faulty foundation of far-reaching theoretical claims. It engenders blindness for the realities beyond the scope of theoretical discourses that content themselves with the critique of other academic theories.” Hubert Seiwert, “Theory of Religion and Historical Research. A Critical Realist Perspective on the Study of Religion as an Empirical Discipline.” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 28 (2020): 216.

84 Cho and Squier, “Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System,” 357. As for the uncontextualized accumulation of data, Smith’s warning is still valid: “But the ‘how’ and the ‘why’,

an atomistic worldview in the guise of respect for others,⁸⁵ corresponds to a scholarly particularism and free-floating specialization that cannot but undermine the foundations of interdisciplinary work which is, at the same time, precisely what scholars in contemporary academia are urged to do.⁸⁶ But it is not only the generation of knowledge that is questioned in the ethos of particularism. Such studies tend to generate cultural ghettos that are, as Zhang Longxi put it “[...] closed and of little interest to outsiders in the academic environment.”⁸⁷ And, to take this point even further: the self-sufficient knowledge derived from supposedly atomistic and self-sufficient entities provide for the self-sufficient scholar—and that not at last in terms of monetary maintenance. A self-proclaimed irrelevant scholarship is quite obviously not a good investment for the general public.⁸⁸

Moreover, the assertion that we must interpret cultures solely on their own terms suffers from its rigidity, claiming that understanding, always and in any case, has to be full and complete understanding. This, however, is nothing but a chimera of scholarship that ultimately ends up serving as a regulative idea for research, but is not to be taken too seriously. The “conservative interest in totality,” as Jonathan Z. Smith pointed out, is yet another incidence of scholarly preoccupation with the paraphrase as a supposedly adequate approach to the material of religious studies. This, too, stands opposed to any attempt to translate it into metalanguage: “Whether of a conceptual or a natural language, whether intercultural or intracultural, translation can never be fully adequate, it can never be total. There is always a discrepancy. If there is not, then one is not translating but rather speaking the other language. One cannot escape the suspicion that it is precisely this latter possibility (speaking the

and, above all, the ‘so what’ remain most refractory. These matters will not be resolved by new or increased data. In many respects, we already have too much. It is a problem to be solved by theory and reason, of which we have too little.” Jonathan Z. Smith, “In Comparison a Magic Dwells,” in *Imagining Religion. From Babylon to Jamestown*, (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 35.

85 Cho and Squier, “Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System,” 388.

86 Cho and Squier here fittingly quote Kenneth Boulding’s early dystopian warning from 1956: “One wonders sometimes if science will not grind to a stop in an assemblage of walled-in hermits, each mumbling to himself words in a private language that only they can understand.” Cho and Squier, “Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System,” 385.

87 Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 118.

88 Though, as Hanegraff put it, it conveniently allows to adapt the morally satisfying and comfortable role of the victim Hanegraff, “Imagining the future study of religion and spirituality,” 3.

other language) that defines the goal of many students of religion.”⁸⁹ Scholars and human beings alike cannot but interpret radically⁹⁰ (tentatively, provisionally), above all, to interpret things unknown to them in a radical manner that is, by presupposing some kind of rationality in the other’s actions.⁹¹ Of course, this has to be a rationality that conforms to the standards of one’s own tradition. Accordingly, it is more promising to examine the (scholarly) productivity of misunderstandings.⁹² Above all, such attempts that do not aim for totality give room for trial and error. What is more, they even deliberately corrigible: “This necessary incompleteness of translation means [...] that it is corrigible.”⁹³

The preservative stance towards the prevailing object of one’s study is conservative in the word’s worst meaning, in that it denies dynamics and progress for the sake of the defense of a monolithic unchangeable entity. This position may perhaps consider itself progressive, but in doing so, it neglects the fact of dynamic change and the facts of the interrelatedness of cultural phenomena.

89 Jonathan Z. Smith, “When the Chips are Down,” in *Relating Religion. Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 2004), 31.

90 See Wolfgang Künne, “Prinzipien der wohlwollenden Interpretation,” in *Intentionalität und Verstehen*, ed. Forum für Philosophie Bad Homburg (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990).

91 Compare the ‘translatability in principle’ to be found between one empirical subject and the other as proposed by Josef Simon. According to Simon, we develop a given hypothesis derived from our personal perspective about the cognitive processes of others and address them in that way as it is suggested by the prevailing hypothesis. By the selfsame reaction to this address the hypothesis is altered, either gaining or losing degrees of probability resulting in more or less care in future uses of the hypothesis, see Josef Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 105. Acknowledgement, in this sense, is the acknowledgement of others as having the capacity to alter our hypotheses about them.

92 See, for example, Campanini’s lucid analysis of Johannes Reuchlin’s reception of the cabbala and the emergence of Jewish Studies. Here, Campanini shows that it is not philological correctness or the ‘myth of scientific objectivity’ which promotes a fertile intercultural dialogue in a situation of religious contact, but rather productive misunderstandings grounded in a playful approach albeit not without rules, see Saviero Campanini, “Johannes Reuchlin und die Anfänge der christlichen Kabbala,” in *Johannes Reuchlin und der Judenbücherstreit*, eds. Sönke Lorenz and Dieter Mertens (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2013). It even might be argued that deliberate misunderstandings and outright polemics positively contribute to the process of communication between religious traditions. As García-Arenal and Wiegers put it, religious polemics “is more than mere invective; it involves and produces familiarity, connectedness, scientific or pseudo-scientific exchange.” Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, “Interreligious Encounters in Polemics between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond.” *Medieval Encounters* 24 (2018): 3.

93 Smith, “When the Chips are Down,” 31.

To counter these challenges, progressive scholars become the policemen of what is written on their subject, laying down doctrine and deciding with almost divinatory power where the acceptable limits of academic discourse lie—a process of ‘condensation’ that is familiar from the history of religions examined from a contact-related perspective. Dogma emerges in the face of challenge; self-immunizing strategies arise, become popular and are enthusiastically celebrated when traditions are confronted with critique, or rather, with the presence of another model or (model form) of hermeneutics and interpretation. In his book *Apophatic Paths from Europe to China*, William Franke describes this process of dogmatization with regard to current discussions in sinology as follows: “For Hall and Ames, Chinese culture can be understood only ‘on its own terms,’ and thus in a manner preserving its distinctiveness and integrity. Unfortunately, this position can become dogmatic. After all, what terms can ever be simply and purely ‘one’s own’? All have their remote as well as proximate provenances and are never purely autochthonous. Moreover, the qualities in question cannot be apprehended absolutely and in themselves but only through relation and interaction with other cultures. Cultures and their distinctive characteristics are revealed only through mutual contrast and resistance. The aim of respecting differences is laudable and necessary in order to make comparative philosophy viable, and yet it is also impossible strictly to achieve.”⁹⁴

2.3 *Beyond Andy Warhol Syndrome*

It is better to construct rough and ready bridges than to wait for the construction of a perfect bridge that will stand for all time.

ANN TAVES⁹⁵

“Science wants no partisans.”⁹⁶ Differences only make sense in a comparative context; they do not make sense in a context defined solely by pure acknowledgment and appreciation. The Andy Warhol Syndrome is an obvious manifestation of the fact that in these times of cultural relativism, postcolonialism and deconstructivism the “once curative has become the illness.”⁹⁷ This illness,

94 William Franke, *Apophatic Paths From Europe to China: Regions Without Borders* (Albany: SUNY, 2018), 134.

95 Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered. A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press 2009), XIII.

96 Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 28.

97 Cho and Squier, “Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System,” 360.

moreover, has been exceedingly institutionalized by the moral zeal of the current academic atmosphere. The study of religion, thus, has to leave its present disciplinary comfort zone and abstract itself from the political correctness provided by culturalism, postcolonialism and deconstructivism where the mere utterance of *Wow!* might suffice for a scholarly statement or even a scientific discovery.

Guy Stroumsa reminds us of a pragmatic truth that should be brought back to general attention: "The challenge is how to dissolve false categories without giving up on the grand ambition to find laws; that is, to retain the principle of unity beyond diversity—and what else is science, what else is scholarship?"⁹⁸ Reaching unity via absolute alienation is, however, not the way to go but, in fact, scholarly sleepwalking.⁹⁹

The most notorious concept in the study of religion is that of religion itself, but this concept could provide a way forward. Above all, one should remind Jonathan Z. Smith's clarification of James Leuba's often-quoted line concerning the definitions of 'religion'. In his article *Religion, Religions, Religious* Smith writes: "It was once a tactic of students of religion to cite the appendix of James H. Leuba's *Psychological Study of Religion* (1912), which lists more than fifty definitions of religion, to demonstrate that 'the effort clearly to define religion in short compass is a hopeless task.' Not at all! The moral of Leuba is not that religion cannot be defined, but that it can be defined, with greater or lesser success, in more than in fifty ways."¹⁰⁰ Hence, it is not about the question of what are the prevailing reasons to give a prevailing definition, and thus, to

98 Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26.

99 Cognitive anthropologist Roy D'Andrade has hinted at a cognitive explanation for the zeal for absolute alienation: "I [...] believe that small differences in individual cultural items have great causal effects. Consider a society that is exactly like other societies in most ways except that rather than having the typical understanding that one should fight one's enemies and kill them if necessary, its members have the understanding that one should whenever possible kill everyone who is not a member of one's own society. The change in propositional content is not great, but the effects of that change would be, especially on visiting strangers. Perhaps it is for reasons such as that we humans have learned to be very sensitive to small cultural differences and to be very wary when we encounter unusual ways of acting or thinking. The sense of being in a totally different universe when one encounters small cultural differences can be very powerful. [...] Perhaps this strong human sensitivity to small cultural differences has led anthropologists to experience the culture they have studied as if it were almost totally different than anything else." Roy D'Andrade, "A Cognitivist's View on the Units Debate in Cultural Anthropology," *Cross-Cultural Research* 35 (2001), 242–257, 254.

100 Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Relating Religions. Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 193.

be stuck in metacommunicative musings Smith is concerned with.¹⁰¹ Rather, Smith's intervention is merely a simple observation. Namely: the attempt to define has been clearly fertile, given so many results. To continue: 'religion' as a term provides more than fifty starting points for examination and evaluation concerning the 'greater and lesser success' of each notion, all adding up to a base of more or less scientifically defensible mutually contrasting assumptions about religion.

The possibilities of continuation multiply and restrict further research at the same time, if one adds the corresponding phenomena on *object language* level. It is true that the notion of religion was created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and, therefore, it is theirs to define. However, it is also true that it is created and defined on object language level by object language speakers trying to develop appropriate, and perhaps contact-induced metalanguage. Thus, the process of notion-building is a shared strategy on object language and metalanguage levels, and scholarly research could take these occasions as a point of departure. It is better to manufacture religion than to be industrious about abolishing the notion from scholarly discourse.

To prevent Andy Warhol Syndrome from further developing into an obstacle to scholarly research, there are certain measures that may be taken. Scholarly progress depends on the scholarly ability to provide more suitable and adequate concepts, i.e. to evolve notions that strike more deeply into the root of reality (A.N. Whitehead). Accordingly, the main issue is not about trying to make concepts more fluid, fuzzy and provisional, but rather the opposite, to sharpen and to enforce their 'Westernness', their distinctness, or: distinctive potential in order to start a truly productive dialogue with the material.¹⁰² The appropriate approach is not to blur distinctions, but rather to move from more abstract distinction to more concrete distinctions in which the abstract distinction is an element. By doing so, metalanguage becomes ever more refined and differentiated. Above all, it is these notions that religious traditions themselves

101 See Kippenberg and von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 38.

102 Provided Helmut Zander is right in stating that Eurocentrism is something that the European scholar has to accept (but permanently to reflect on) it is then more fertile to accept and reflect certain notions associated to this background as well: "Den Problemen einer historischen Semantik und den damit verbundenen kontextuellen oder normativen Implikationen ist nicht auszuweichen, sondern nur, wie beim Religionsbegriff, reflexiv zu begegnen. [...] Die Konsequenz lautet auch hier, einen hingenommenen Eurozentrismus kritisch zu akzeptieren und einer Dauerreflexion zu unterziehen." See Helmut Zander, *'Europäische' Religionsgeschichte. Religiöse Zugehörigkeit durch Entscheidung—Konsequenzen im interkulturellen Vergleich* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 41.

use and apply in situations of contact which can be used as a starting point for scholarly metalanguage.¹⁰³

Moreover, such a notion can claim for further epistemic advantages. It is often claimed that certain concepts, such as religion, have to be as fuzzy as possible in supposed accordance with Wittgenstein's 'concepts with blurred edges' (*Begriffe mit verschwommenen Rändern*) in order to cover the whole panorama of possible meanings of certain generalizing notions.¹⁰⁴ These 'soft' concepts would, then, manifest a careful approach to the phenomena. The real point of Wittgensteinian blurred edges, however, is not to cover all possible meanings of all possible cases, but rather to allow for concrete examples of the notion in question that, in turn, allow for distinct meaning.¹⁰⁵ To have such an example inaugurates a process of inquiry leading to distinct knowledge.¹⁰⁶ First of all, being able to give material-based discursive reasons for *not* applying certain well-defined concepts and models to one's subject of study does in fact serve scholarship by directing the field toward a better understanding and a more adequate picture of what is going on. These reasons, in turn, can be used for the development of adapted concepts that might again be confirmed or reasonably refuted, and so on and so forth. Thomas Tweed put it this way: "The term religion has not failed us when we decide it obscures some features we want to highlight. It has directed our attention to practices that we might otherwise

103 See chapter on Language in Contact.

104 See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, in *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Tagebücher 1914–1916. Philosophische Untersuchungen (Werkausgabe Band 1)* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 280 (71).

105 "Man gibt Beispiele und will, daß sie in einem gewissen Sinn verstanden werden.—Aber mit diesem Ausdruck meine ich nicht: er solle nun an diesen Beispielen das Gemeinsame sehen, welches ich—aus irgendeinem Grunde nicht aussprechen konnte. Sondern: er solle diese Beispiele nun in bestimmter Weise *verwenden*. Das Exemplifizieren ist hier nicht ein indirektes Mittel der Erklärung,—in Ermangelung eines Besseren. Denn mißverstanden kann auch jede allgemeine Erklärung werden. So spielen wir eben das Spiel [...]." Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 281 (71).

106 It is this idea that is claimed by, for example, William James in his lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: "My lectures must be limited to a fraction of the subject. And, although it would indeed be foolish to set up an abstract definition of religion's essence, and then proceed to defend that definition against all comers, yet this need not prevent me from taking my own narrow view of what religion shall consist in *for the purpose of these lectures*, or out of the many meanings of the word, from choosing the one meaning in which I wish to interest you particularly, and proclaiming arbitrarily that when I say 'religion' I mean *that*." William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature* (Mineola: Dover, 2002), 28. Blurred boundaries, therefore, allow for arbitrary definiteness in the concrete cases of scholarly research.

have missed. It has prompted further conversation, more contestation. It has done its work. We know something we did not know.”¹⁰⁷

Thus, it becomes obvious that, furthermore, more reflection on the *possible role of notions and concepts* in scholarly research is sorely in need.¹⁰⁸ In scholarship, the question “How to do things with words?” or rather, “How do words do things?” remains of surpassing moment. Not least to preempt further futile discussion on the adaptability and applicability of notions and concepts, a *topology* of notions may prove to be necessary and useful for further work.¹⁰⁹

Moreover, as object language examples of contact situations show, one should not underestimate the potential of creative misunderstandings to ultimately engender intercultural understanding.¹¹⁰ What to a more sophisticated time may retrospectively appear to be a clumsy encounter or mistaken blunder might, in the long run, yet still provide the inevitable basis that future sophistication develops from with regard to the examination of religious traditions. Introducing their examination of Picart’s and Bernard’s voluminous work *Céramonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples de monde* (1723–1737), Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt note: “*Religious Ceremonies of the World* marked a major turning point in European attitudes towards religious belief and hence the sacred. It sowed the radical idea that religions could be compared on equal terms, and therefore that all religions were equally worthy of respect—and criticism.”¹¹¹ Accordingly, in these early attempts that are the nemesis of the

¹⁰⁷ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 41.

¹⁰⁸ See as a case-study example my considerations on the concept of religion in Hermann Cohen’s systematic philosophy: Knut Martin Stünkel, “Der Religionsbegriff bei Hermann Cohen. Versuch einer Aktualisierung,” in *Diese Einheit von Erzeugen und Erzeugnis fordert den Begriff des reinen Denkens*—Vorträge zu Erkenntnistheorie und Religion im Denken von Hermann Cohen, eds. Gorge K. Hasselhoff (Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ See chapter on More than Semantics.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Berkwitz, for instance, insistently stresses the importance of the early Portuguese reports on Buddhism as “significant for understanding the history of religious encounters,” despite of and apart from the fact that they are prejudiced and one-sided. See Stephen C. Berkwitz, “The Portuguese Discovery of Buddhism: Locating Religion in Early Modern Asia,” in *Locating Religions. Contact, Diversity and Translocality*, eds. Reinhold F. Gleis and Nikolaus Jaspert (Leiden/Boston, 2017), 58. Also compare Christina Brauner, “Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood. Stories of Misunderstandings, Concepts of Culture and the Process of European Expansion,” in *Chaos in the Contact Zone. Unpredictability, Improvisation and the Struggle for Control in Cultural Encounters*, eds. Stephanie Wodianka and Christoph Behrends (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017).

¹¹¹ Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe. Picart & Bernard’s Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap, 2010), 1–2. Though the authors optimistically claim that “The idea of comparing

orientalist and postcolonial mind, there can still be dynamics present that trend towards a better understanding, which should not be obscured entirely by the focus solely on the problematic aspects of such encounters. As Stroumsa reminds us: “As Edward Said has shown in his book *Orientalism*, the birth of orientalism in France and England, for instance, is certainly related to imperialist designs and attitudes. But this is true only to a certain extent. What Said did not see, and what too many forget or fail to remark, is that for scholars to invest so much energy throughout their lives in the study of difficult languages, abstruse mythologies, and odd literatures, they must be inspired by intense intellectual curiosity. Such intellectual curiosity goes a long way toward transforming traditional perceptions and patterns of thought. Crossing all traditional boundaries—ethnic, cultural, religious, or ideological—intellectual curiosity provides a necessary condition for the blooming of ‘la science pour la science.’”¹¹²

Ultimately, it is vital to refrain from habits of political branding with regard to the introduction and usage of certain notions. For instance, it is clearly not enough to use the notion of *dynamics* in the study of religion as a mere surface indicator of ‘good’ science. That is, by emphatically referring to such, an author proves that he is on the politically correct side of theory-building, standing out against static, essentialist and, therefore, ‘orientalistic’ forms of theorizing ‘over the heads of the phenomena’. Concepts have to be used more carefully than merely claiming to belong to the light side of scholarship. The question of *language* is, therefore crucial for responsible research on the history of religions.

dispassionately the religions of the world is hardly surprising today, much less shocking even if we do it too infrequently or with too little willingness to suspend our own beliefs.” (ibid., 9), one cannot refrain from having the opposite impression that comparing religions is even more shocking today. This is perhaps not for the same reasons as it once was but with the same intent to defend an ‘authentic’ faith; today, that is the faith in an unsurmountable otherness and that to attempt to compare is itself degrading to the subject. But comparison as a routine cognitive activity is as such surely not at the root of such objections, but rather the political and ideological issues masked by it. See Michael Stausberg, “Comparison,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), 22.

112 Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science. The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 11–12.

3 On Language

In the year 2011, Břetislav Horyna, professor of philosophy at the University of Brno, published a provocative intervention in the study of religion, titled *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft* ('Critique of Reason in Religious Studies').¹¹³ According to him, the current study of religion severely lacks an adequate theory and methodology. This is all the more disturbing to Horyna, because there is immense pressure upon religious studies from the public sphere, which looks to religious studies for answers to questions such as how to deal with the 'clash of civilizations' or how to construct the dialogue between religious traditions. One of the biggest obstacles to such a theory is the problem of underdevelopment in a certain field, which he characterizes as follows:

The major problems of the study of religion [...] are located in the field of language. For too long, the Study of Religion relied on narrative forms to objectify the results of its research: today it is so underdeveloped regarding the logic of its language that one is hardly able to find an analogous situation in other sciences.¹¹⁴

To Horyna, religious studies severely lack a satisfying theory of language based on a logic of speech, having relied too long on the narrative forms of objectivation. The reason for religious studies currently being (in his words) the academic equivalent of an underdeveloped third-world country if compared to other sciences is, that a special question has not been answered satisfactorily up to now. Horyna phrases the question in the following way:

which forms of projective reference of our language to the experienceable world of religious experience are formed in such a way that, in the field of objective (real) objects of experience, the assertions and/or the statements convey sense and meaning?¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Břetislav Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft. Plädoyer für eine empirisch fundierte Theorie und Methode* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011).

¹¹⁴ Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft*, 116: "Die größten Probleme der Religionswissenschaft [...] liegen im Sprachbereich. Die Religionswissenschaft hat sich zu lange auf die narrativen Formen der Objektivierung ihrer Forschungsergebnisse verlassen: heute ist sie sprachlogisch so unterentwickelt, dass man dafür kaum eine Analogie in anderen Wissenschaften findet."

¹¹⁵ Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft*, 118: "[...] welche Form der projektiven Bezugnahme von unserer Sprache auf die erfahrbare Welt der religiösen Empirie so gebildet ist, dass im Bereich der objektiven (realen) Erfahrungsgegenstände die Sätze und/oder die Aussagen Sinn und Bedeutung haben?."

Horyna's question is vital for the overall effort of research on religion and religions. To put the impressive wording of the question into simpler terms: How can scientific (meta-)language be adequate for the examined objects? Or else: How can object- and metalanguage be mediated? In the following I would like to give some hints at how this problem might be solved. Most importantly, I explore the elements of assertions or propositions that might serve as mediating and meaning-bequeathing catalysts of transfer—that is, provided the way they gain their meaning is interpreted a little differently from the usual.

I would like to start my considerations with an observation: comparative religion as a scientific discipline, as well as a dialogue of religious traditions as a historical event—or even as a proposed political necessity—both seem to share the same problem. The difficulties posed by both the encounter of different religious traditions and the scientific description of religions necessitate an adequate and translatable language. The contact of object language and object language as well as the approach of scientific metalanguage towards phenomena, thus seem to be comparable with respect to this problem.

3.1 *Relating Object Language and Metalanguage*

A good deal of work in the study of religions is devoted to the examination of the establishment, maintenance, preservation, articulation and transfer of religious ideas that constitute a body of religious knowledge. Religious knowledge is the point of reference for every instance of ascription of religious meaning to events, experiences, objects and matter of fact. Access to religious knowledge is provided by language. As knowledge might manifest on different levels, scholars examine the utterances of religious *speakers* in everyday practice as well as elaborated religious *doctrines*; they contemplate their interrelationships and the characteristics of the knowledge emerging from them.

Therefore, the study of religions is fundamentally concerned with the phenomenon of language. The study of language within the religious field is devoted to the examination of concepts and rhetoric, the semantics, syntactic, and pragmatics of religious language. In particular, it examines the *role of concepts* within the examination of religious phenomena, with particular regard to the *basic distinction between (religious) object language and (descriptive, analytical, and explanatory) scientific metalanguage*. The emergence, intercultural diffusion and the self-reflexive analysis of religious concepts, religious notions, and religious language, which together constitute the sphere of religious knowledge are an indispensable part of the study of religion.

The use of the notions of object language and metalanguage here differs from the more sophisticated philosophical notions as prominently developed by Alfred Tarski, Bertrand Russell, and Rudolf Carnap. Meta-language, for my

purposes, is language about language. To talk about language, one needs metalanguage. Here, object language is the language used to talk about objects, while metalanguage is the language used to talk about object language. Metalanguage, then, is used to develop an exact semantology of formalized languages in order to prevent antinomies.¹¹⁶ In our present context, however, object language designates religious language as used by the religious speakers themselves, while metalanguage is the language used by the scholarly observer to describe and analyze religious phenomena, including religious object language. The two languages, thus, differ significantly, though there is no evaluative hierarchy between them involved.¹¹⁷

However, in the case of the scholarly metalanguage, it is claimed that the two languages are related in a manner that is analogous to the claims made in formal philosophy, i.e., that metalanguage is able to express everything that is expressed in object language. This claim notoriously gives rise to one of the most pertinent challenges in scholarly research on religion, namely the question: is scholarly metalanguage able to cover all expressions of object language? This question is usually answered in the negative, pointing at cultural constraints that lead to insurmountable differences in meaning. Hence, a secondary question arises: how can a basically inadequate metalanguage be responsibly adapted to talk about object language phenomena?

In recent years, the study of religion has been mainly occupied with metalinguistic considerations of scholarly metalanguage, not least concerning the use and even the very possibility of employing concepts in the process of research. Here, the scholarly controversies over the concept of religion is the most prominent example. The (critical) metalanguage of metalanguage is tacitly supposed to be able to grasp and express everything that is expressed in metalanguage, even non-explicit content by means of an unveiling critique. As these attempts to develop higher orders of reflection on metalanguage can easily be continued *ad infinitum*, the subject of the actual research can easily become lost in meta-metalanguage sophistication.

116 See Thomas Rentsch, "Metasprache/Objektsprache," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Vol. v L–Mn*, eds. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 1301.

117 See Josef Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 175. See also Volkhard Krech, "From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back: Some Methodological Considerations on Comparative Perspectives in the Science of Religion," in *The Dynamics of Transculturality, Transcultural Research—Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, eds. A. Flüchter and J. Schöttli (Cham: Springer, 2015), 40–41.

Therefore, it is time to return to the original matter of research. The predominant methodological approach taken in the first years of the KHK's work with regard to religious knowledge as expressed in language was the *analysis of the history of concepts* (*conceptual history*, *Begriffsgeschichte*).¹¹⁸ All basic notions (*Grundbegriffe*) are subject to functional and semantic changes during the course of intellectual history, not least change induced by situations of contact of religious traditions. In all cases, however, change in these basic notions induces change in religious knowledge. Conceptual history clearly shows that concepts are not 'what they used to be'. This is an important insight; conceptual history, however, has to be put in some larger systematic context when it comes to the question of the role of language within religions (namely, *religious* knowledge) and their prevailing systems of description (namely, area studies and scholarly disciplines: both dealing with knowledge *about religion*). In addition to semantics, syntax and pragmatics are decisive elements for an examination of conceptual language.

In order to do justice to the full spectrum of linguistically mediated religious knowledge, the KHK adopted a material-based approach informed by situations of *contact* of religious traditions. As indicated, within the study of religions, notions and concepts appear on two main linguistic *levels* comprising

1. the wording used by the prevailing religious tradition itself (*object language*), as one may find in prayers, ritual language etc.
2. the analysis of religious phenomena and its description in scholarly *metalanguage* that is systematic (meta-)reflection.

The main problem is the mediation between these categorically distinguished levels, or rather, the question: How may the scholar grasp religious phenomena, via the indispensable instrument of language? The answer is through concepts (*Begriffe*) and notions (*Vorstellungen*); concepts here being defined as notions put into concrete terms and words. Here, it is of vital importance to remember the difference between object language and metalanguage in order to prevent one-sided approaches and circular reasoning.¹¹⁹ These approaches often contradict well-meant attempts to free metalanguage from its cultural background, above all, from theologoumena. Robert Ford Campamy here points at the anti-intellectuality of such an approach to ancient texts: "The fantasy that we should use only 'local terms' to represent them is itself essentially theological—the Immaculate Cultural Other as a sort of numinous *Ding an sich* before which the only appropriate response is to be seized by its spirit and

¹¹⁸ See chapter on More than Semantics.

¹¹⁹ Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft*, 22.

begin speaking in tongues or else to bow in silent reverence [...].”¹²⁰ Both naive object language paraphrase (‘theologism’), possibly inaugurated by AWS, or sterile ‘scienticism’ in scholarly research are the extremes to be avoided in any responsible scholarly work. As Edward Slingerland has inimitably put it: “We are not confronted by a forced choice between either wild-eyed Orientalism or crude positivism.”¹²¹

In order to answer this challenge, a ‘mixed-method approach’ proved to be most fruitful for the work of the КХК. Namely, the consortium’s work focused on the examination of *descriptions of religious processes (religious knowledge) by reflective religious individuals* within the course of history. Object-language scholarly reflection, or in other words, the reflections of religious specialists may be considered as a striking example of this process. The necessary precondition to this approach is the fact that object language is often used in a reflective way, as manifested in the occasions of meta-communication that are an element of everyday communication. According to Roman Jakobson, even for native speakers metalanguage is necessary in order to learn and to use language. Accordingly, it is an element of language itself.¹²² Applying this approach means allowing the subject of scholarly examination to guide the first steps of the research process and following its basic lead. It takes advantage of the fact that the metacommunicative elements of object language by their nature serve to ensure mutual understanding and agreement of the object language speakers in question. This means that the emergence of metalanguage in object language discourse has social aspects, that is, it assumes the factual or imagined presence of other speakers. In his *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* Niklas Luhmann has characterized this approach as follows, opposing essentializing efforts that approach religion ontologically: “We, therefore, shift the question and are asking one single observer: religion itself. [...] Then, as external

120 Robert Ford Company, “‘Religious’ as a Category: A Comparative Case Study,” *Numen* 65 (2018): 337.

121 Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China. Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 294.

122 See Roman Jakobson, “Zwei Seiten der Sprache und zwei Typen aphatischer Störungen,” in *Aufsätze zur Linguistik und Poetik*, 141 (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1974), 127: “Die Erläuterung eines sprachlichen Zeichens durch andere in gewisser Hinsicht homogene Zeichen derselben Sprache ist eine metasprachliche Operation, die auch beim Erlernen einer Sprache durch ein Kind eine wesentliche Rolle spielt. Beobachtungen der letzten Zeit haben gezeigt, welch beachtlichen Platz das Gespräch über die Sprache im sprachlichen Verhalten der Kinder im Vorschulalter einnimmt. Die Hilfe der Metasprache ist sowohl für das Erlernen der Sprache als auch für den normalen Sprachgebrauch notwendig.”

observers, we rely on the self-observation of religion. We do not prescribe anything, we rather accept that which describes itself as religion.”¹²³

Therefore, the *emergence of metalanguage notions or even concepts on the object language level* has to be used as a starting point for the elaboration of metalanguage which takes its point of departure from the very material of research i.e., the object language in question. Its presence indicates the emergence, formation and further intensification of a (self-)consciousness of religion on the level of object language. Volkhard Krech has summarized the advantage of this approach as follows: “[M]etalanguage can best correspond with religious-historical material and avoid a sterile scientism when it links in with the reflection abductively identified as religious, in which an object-linguistic awareness of the religious arises and is actively promoted.”¹²⁴ Religious object language is, thus, not something to be slavishly followed or to be explained away by metalanguage, but rather an inexhaustible field of *scientific* possibility: “The possibilities available for academic metalanguage to correspond with object language can be found wherever agents perceive each other through contact and are stimulated to reflect to a greater degree.”¹²⁵ Object-language does not determinate or hinder metalanguage, but rather allows it.¹²⁶

The emergence of metalanguage in most cases does not come out of the blue but is inaugurated by definable triggers. Accordingly, the *pragmatic* context of the process by which metalanguage develops becomes important. Emic self-reflection of religion arises if traditions themselves become a theme of reflection, thereby serving an analytical need for themselves. This might be the case, for instance, when traditions or elements of tradition are being compiled, reformed, criticized, or rejected. Here, the main assumption of the KHK comes

123 Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002), 57–58 [my translation]: “Wir verschieben deshalb die Fragestellung und fragen nur einen einzigen Beobachter: die Religion selbst. [...] Als externe Beobachter verlassen wir uns dann auf die Selbstbeobachtung der Religion. Wir schreiben nicht vor, wir nehmen hin, was sich selbst als Religion beschreibt.”

124 Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions—Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke, (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 21.

125 Krech, “From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back,” 41.

126 Bruno Latour introduces the concept of ‘infralanguage’ for metalanguage emerging from object language, stressing the fact that “We have to resist pretending that actors have only a language while the analyst possesses the *meta*-language in which the first is ‘embedded’. As I said earlier, analysts are allowed to possess only some *infra*-language whose role is simply to help them to become attentive to the actors’ own fully developed meta-language, a reflexive account of what they are saying.” Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 49.

into play, for it is mainly in *situations of contact* between religious traditions when such reflection processes are inaugurated. When challenged, traditions examine and conceptualize themselves *and* the challenging other. They seek to find aiming at a common denominator in order to develop a suitable basis on which to deal with the challenge.¹²⁷

The contact situations that stimulate conceptual reflections are likely to include a vast range of possible encounters, including translation enterprises performed by an individual, personal encounters of traders and travelers, and official meetings of representatives.¹²⁸ Religious notions and concepts, therefore, are, in many regards, to be examined as *relational notions and concepts* on several levels, stabilizing and dynamizing themselves (1) *via* situations of contact, (2) *in* relating object language to metalanguage, but also (3) *in* unfolding their descriptive potential in semantic binary codes. Examples of the latter are: believer-unbeliever, pure-impure, and, last but not least, the transcendence/immanence-distinction as the guiding distinction of religion.¹²⁹ To Niklas Luhmann “it appears that religion is one of many things that signifies itself and is capable of giving itself a form. But that also means that religion determines itself and excludes everything that is incompatible. Yet how does it do so if there are (for instance) other religions, heathens, the *civitas terrena* [secular society, viz., Augustine’s City of Man, as opposed to the city of God (*Civitas Dei*)], or evil? Religion can only be the subject of itself if it includes what is being excluded, it is assisted by a negative correlate. The system is only autonomous if it is able to monitor what is not. In this light, religion can only (externally) be defined in the mode of a second-order observation, as an observation of its own self-observation—and not by the dictates of some external essence.”¹³⁰

127 Compare on this conceptual operation with regard to the concept of religion Kianoosh Rezaia, “Religion’ in Late Antique Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism Developing a Term in Counterpoint,” *Entangled Religions* 11, no. 2 (2020): par. 5.

128 On the interrelation of the pragmatic circumstances of situations of contact and the possible employment of certain concepts, in particular: the concept of religion see Martin Riesebrodt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen. Eine Theorie der Religionen* (München: Beck, 2007), 44: “Wenn sich Religionen also in ganz unterschiedlichen kulturellen Kontexten und historischen Zeiträumen wechselseitig aufeinander bezogen und geformt haben, wenn Herrscher Religionspolitik betrieben und Reisende Religionen beschreibend verglichen haben, dann kann man legitimerweise einen Religionsbegriff einführen, der sich durch Sinnstrukturen rechtfertigt, die mit universalen Mustern sozialer Beziehungen kompatibel sind.”

129 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

130 Niklas Luhmann, *A System’s Theory of Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 7. Compare Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 15: “Vielmehr scheint [...] Religion zu jenen Sachverhalten zu gehören, die sich selbst bezeichnen, sich selbst

Thus, the slogan that underpins our approach to contact¹³¹ can be further explicated: There is no religion until there is another religion; the interrelation or contact of the two religions provides the trigger and the means for self-observation in the form of a (second order) metalanguage.

It was the scholarly aim of the KHK to examine processes of these forms of concept-building and notion-building in order to elaborate a suitable and adequate metalanguage as a reliable instrument for scholarly research, designed for description, analysis and explanation. This approach might allow the combination of a *phenomenological* (empirical) perspective, a *historical* perspective intended to elaborate conceptual history of the notions used, and a *systematic* perspective intended to produce a responsible relational metalanguage.

Via repeated situations of contact, themselves determined by previous situations of contact, we can observe the tendency towards a *closer mutual interrelation* (*Verweisungszusammenhang*: context of indication) between object- and metalanguage with regard to their mutual substantiation and explanation in the history of concepts. Once introduced and established, self-reflective notions tend to be integrated into object language description and prescription systems. Although there may have been no full-fledged notion of religion in East Asia two hundred years ago, there clearly is one now—perhaps even to the extent that it has been institutionalized in state constitutions. This tendency toward adaption leads to the consolidation of religious knowledge via religious language both on an object- and on metalanguage level.

Following the initial intellectual efforts afforded to the description of religion, the ‘most challenging goal of the study of religion: explanation’ is likewise dependent on the suitable choice of concepts, models, and notions, as “[t]oo much work by too many scholars of religion takes the form of a description or paraphrase—particularly weak modes of translation, insufficiently different from their subject matter for purposes of thought. To summarize: a theory, a model, a conceptual category cannot be simply the data writ large.”¹³²

eine Form geben können. Aber das heißt dann auch, daß die Religion sich selber definiert und alles, was damit inkompatibel ist, ausschließt. Aber wie das, wenn es zum Beispiel um andere Religionen, um Heiden, um die *civitas terrena*, um das Böse geht? Selbstthematisierung ist nur mit Einschließen des Ausschließens, nur mit Hilfe eines negativen Korrelats möglich. Das System ist autonom nur, wenn es mitkontrolliert, was es nicht ist. Angesichts eines solchen Sachverhalts kann Religion extern nur im Modus der Beobachtung zweiter Ordnung, nur als Beobachtung ihrer Selbstbeobachtung definiert werden—und nicht durch ein Wesensdiktat von außen.”

131 See chapter on Concepts and Contact.

132 Jonathan Z. Smith, “When the Chips are Down,” in *Relating Religion. Essays in the study of Religion* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 31.

To paraphrase something, careful as it may be, surely does not mean to explain it. Rather, it means to describe and to explain nothing at all. Jonathan Smith's repeatedly uttered reminder is to be kept in mind regarding the examination of object language developing metalanguage: though scholars' metalanguage is to be related to object language, there is still a categorical difference between the two.¹³³

Regarding the overall importance of the adequate language in the study of religion and the history of religions, the emergence of (religious) metalanguage in contact, thus, has to be subject to further scrutiny. Religious language on the *conceptual* level is the prime place to turn to in the effort to gain a better picture of what is going on in the religious field.

3.2 *Concepts in Contact: the Emergence of Religious Concepts and Concepts of Religion in Situations of Contact*¹³⁴

At least since the linguistic turn,¹³⁵ the first and yet still underappreciated scholarly turn, the symbiotic relationship between religion and language has been widely acknowledged, deeply and intensely reflected upon and examined in the study of religion.¹³⁶ The interrelation is considered as rooted in the existence of humans and humanity alike. As Walter Burkert stresses, religion is always connected to language and one might also assume that it participates in the selection advantage provided by language, or even was co-constitutive of the advantage.¹³⁷

133 See Krech, "From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back," 41.

134 An earlier version of this chapter was published as the 'Introduction' to: Görges K. Hasselhoff and Knut Martin Stünkel, *Transcending Words: The Language of Religious Contacts between Buddhists, Christians, Jews and Muslims in Premodern Times* (Bochum: Winkler 2015). The book presents the results of the KHK workshops 'Religious Language' (May 2012) 'Convivencia and Religious Language: Dialogue of Religion on the Iberian Peninsula' (April 2013), and partly from a third workshop 'The Impact of the Reformation on the Establishment of Religious Language' (February 2014). All three workshops were organized by Görges Hasselhoff and Knut Martin Stünkel.

135 See the introductory sentences in Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft. Gegenstände und Begriffe* (München: Beck, 2003), 11–12. Horyna even claims a 'naively missed linguistic turn' in the academic study of religion (Břetislav Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft. Plädoyer für eine empirisch fundierte Theorie und Methode* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 116).

136 See its prominence in introductions to the study of religion, for example in Kippenberg and von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, *ibid.*; compare also Klaus Hock, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2006), 29–30.

137 Walter Burkert, *Kulte des Altertums. Biologische Grundlagen der Religion* (München: Beck, 2009), 35.

No wonder, then, that religious studies, as an academic discipline, has taken the conjunction seriously, not least for reasons of self-reflection. In most cases, the scholarly interest is focused upon the expression of religious experience for reasons of communication. Alternatively, the possibility of communication with a transcendent sphere is scrutinized. Religious language, as defined in *Metzler Lexikon Religion*, is comprised of two interrelated fields: the emergence of a cult-language and the formation of a special vocabulary within the religious group in question.¹³⁸ This shorthand definition benefits from some additional criteria. The corresponding article in the *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* ('Manual of Basic Notions in Religious Studies') lists five 'basic' forms of religious language. First is the revelational language of the gods, the teaching and promising language of the gods, prayer, and expressive language all of which are under the heading of 'communication' (*Kommunikation*). Second is 'performativity' (*Performanz*) which comprises the effective word, the creative word, the effective word in history, the hypostatic word and the magical word. Third, there is 'representation' (*Vergegenwärtigung*), which is further divided into myth as the representation of the world of gods, and ritual language. Fourth, there is 'interplay' (*Wechselwirkung*), namely language describing, reporting, and passing down religious experience which in turn influences the use of language itself. Finally, there is the possibility of the 'elimination of language (and thought)' (*Entsprachlichung*) as to be found in mysticism wherein the highest levels of religious experience cannot be grasped in language at all.¹³⁹ As such, the theme of 'religion and language' opens a vast spectrum for scholarly research.

However, with regard to this approach, religious language is both communication with the transcendent and with fellow humans, and may take certain forms among which there is the communicative possibility of non-communication. Within such a sphere of religious language, the close relation of religion to certain languages is undoubtedly stressed but, as a consequence, the scholarly examination is confined to autochthonous areas, that is, on developments *within a single religious tradition*. Accordingly, although the variety of aspects of religious language in such an approach is extensive, the approach itself is still reductive in a way that has effects on the possible explication of

138 See Hiroshi Kubota, "Sprache," in *Metzler Lexikon Religion. Gegenwart—Alltag—Medien. Volume 3: Paganismus—Zombie*, eds. Christoph Auffarth, Jutta Bernard, and Hubert Mohr (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 364.

139 See Reinhard Wonneberger, "Sprache," in *Handwörterbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe. Volume v: Säkularisierung-Zwischenwesen*, eds. Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, and Karl-Heinz Kohl (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln: Kohlhammer, 2001), 94–101.

the function and the meaning of religious language as it does not take the *contact* of religious tradition and, consequently, the contact of languages into account. Religious language is a matter of contact and self-reflection connected to challenging situations of contact.

The study of religion, due to its origin, was well prepared for a linguistic turn. From its very beginnings, religious studies were closely connected to philology and its perspectives and methods. As one might learn from Friedrich Max Müller, one of the founding fathers of the new academic field in the nineteenth century, the only secure way to understand religion is language. Accordingly, there are important parallels between the study of religion and philology; above all, the necessity of a comparative perspective in order to arrive at valid results. Müller's famous Goethean maxim 'He who knows one, knows none'¹⁴⁰ expresses a core principle for both religion and language.¹⁴¹ Accordingly, it is not religion and philology that are interrelated, but rather *religions* and *philologies*.

This reminder is important to answer current challenges of the study of religion. Philology has provided invaluable support to the study of religion,¹⁴² not least in emancipating the study of religion from theology.¹⁴³ For Müller himself was also lucidly aware of the future precarity of a science or scholarship that takes language and concepts seriously: "I know I shall have to meet determined antagonists who will deny the very possibility of a scientific treatment of religions, as formerly they denied the possibility of a scientific treatment of language."¹⁴⁴ But despite the attempted abandonment of any preference for any particular religion in the process of research, the problem remains of how to conduct comparison on strictly neutral terms, how to avoid the imposition of concepts or notions thus avoiding forms of scientific imperialism that have been justifiably criticized by analysts of Orientalism in the succession of Edward Said. Müller himself was positive that his idea was soon to be realized:

140 Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion, Four Lecture Delivered at the Royal Institution in February and May, 1870* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882), 13.

141 On this credo of the nascent field of the study of religion see Michael Stausberg, "Comparison," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), 23.

142 The current possibilities of philology as a research method as provided in the *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* seem rather limited, given a disappointing half a page of 'philology as linguistics' dealing with lexicography and the rest being dedicated to textual studies in the article of Einar Thomassen, "Philology," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London/New York: Routledge, 2011).

143 Hock, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 30.

144 Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 4.

“A Science of Religion, based on an impartial and truly scientific comparison of all, or at all events, of the most important, religions of mankind is now only a question of time.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, the main problem for the scholar of religions is how to do comparative work that is how to introduce adequate notions and concepts without losing touch with one’s material.

Some leading scholars of religious studies, among them Jonathan Z. Smith, claim that current scholarship has not yet met the challenge of Müller’s vision for an approach both comparative and generalizing.¹⁴⁶ For Smith, however, there can be no question of surrender in the face of this challenge and to apply a quietist and, ultimately, religious attitude: “I am aware of the new ethos that eschews classification, comparison, and explanation. In the satiric formulation of Kimberley Patton, ‘Thou Shalt Compare Neither Religious Traditions, Nor Elements of Religious Traditions, Lest Thou Totalize, Essentialize, or Commit Hegemonic Discourse’—to which I might add, ‘Nor shalt thou consider thyself as a member of the academy.’”¹⁴⁷ The postcolonial commandment suits a religious, but not a scholarly attitude and is, therefore, not set in stone. It may, however, well indicate a prominent challenge scholarship has to face.

Within the КНК, the challenge was met by the introduction of a contact-related perspective, stressing both the importance of situations of contact for the history of religions and for scholarly metalanguage. It is of vital importance to draw the consequence from the comparative perspective as introduced to religious studies and examine occasions where the perspective is applied by the religious traditions *themselves* i.e., situations of contact, and to scrutinize their reflections regarding the presuppositions for as well as the possibilities of the perspective. By doing so, one may witness the emergence of metalanguage, of comparative concepts and notions, *within object language itself*. Thus, by describing this process and using the concepts and notions evolving here, we remain in close contact with the material itself without imposing scientific vocabulary on the phenomena in question. The search for *tertia comparationis*, thus, is guided by the material of research itself, and not imposed on it by armchair scholarship.¹⁴⁸

145 Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 26.

146 See Jonathan Z. Smith, “A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion,” in *Relating Religion. Essays in the study of Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 173.

147 Smith, “A Matter of Class,” 174.

148 This claim counters the well-known critique raised against the use of generic concepts. The main problem with *tertia* in the scholarly context is that they are often not grounded in the empirical data, but rather imposed upon the data by researchers, which leads to serious distortions in our overall understanding of a given religion. The corresponding

Accordingly, the question of the role of language in an interreligious context inevitably arises. As it is commonly accepted, religions and religious traditions are not to be described as monolithic entities, subject only to internal developments. Rather, they emerge, expand and stabilize under conditions and the attendant processes of interreligious exchange. As one may learn from the history of religions, it is the contact of different religious traditions that causes an intensified interest in language as a medium of dealing with the other tradition or traditions. This interest manifests itself, for example, in religious dialogues, but is found more often in projects of translation and the concepts developed to support them.¹⁴⁹ In this regard, anything might be expected from the material. A medieval translator, for instance “[...] would also know the joy of cross-fertilizing languages, and of finding new contexts and audiences for text through their translation.”¹⁵⁰ In any case, the other religious tradition provides a challenge that has to be answered explicitly. Above all, this is done via language.

Therefore, religious language could be examined twice over: on the one hand, with regard to the ways of talking about the religious, or rather, how to talk religiously. On the other hand, one might inspect how religious traditions start to introduce a meta-perspective on religion via language, that is by introducing certain patterns of language to be used for comparative purposes—including for instance general notions as the concept of religion

pitfalls of the scholarly practice of comparing have been well acknowledged and analyzed in scholarship, see, for example, Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars. Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 121–123.

149 On translation as an example of a situation of contact see Kianoosh Rezania, “‘Religion’ in Late Antique Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism Developing a Term in Counterpoint,” *Entangled Religions* 11, no. 2 (2020): par. 99: “It is not far-fetched if we consider the translation of a contact situation as intra-religious contact. Translation, the transfer of a text from one language to another, constitutes a contact of two linguistic fields. Religions other than the one that the translated text belongs to influence these linguistic fields differently. This could have happened, for example, because of different geographical distributions of adherents, asynchronic features, or because of the different periods of presence of these religions in these linguistic fields, a diachronic feature. I can refer to the hypothetically supposed difference between the abstraction of *dēn* in Middle Persian and Parthian because of the stronger influence of Zoroastrianism in the south of the empire as an example. Therefore, if the source and target linguistic fields of the translation involve a difference in the influence of other religions, the act of translation is not a mere linguistic undertaking but presents an example of religious contact between two different religious fields.”

150 Catherine Batt, “Introduction,” in *Translating the Middle Ages*, eds. Karen L. Fresco and Charles D. Wright (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 3.

itself. Regarding epistemology, this way of examination seems to be more promising with regard to both the internal (emic) and the external (scientific) perspective. It might even be the case that the former method may be an expression of the introduction of the meta-perspective. Dealing with religious language does not merely mean enquiring about how to speak religiously or how to do so appropriately, but also means finding the means to speak about the religious and those religious ways of speaking. Therefore, in the first place, 'religious language', here, means talking *about* religion on the object language level. To examine it is to examine a meta-communicative perspective.¹⁵¹ This perspective, crucially, is not the mind-child of the scholarly observer, but rather has been introduced by the observed themselves.

Methodologically, the role of the challenge of the religious other while examining a religious tradition cannot be overemphasized. It is evident that such considerations on the object language level do not appear out of the blue, but are rather triggered in situations of contact between religious traditions. The formation of religious language in this sense is, therefore, another example of a particular assumption of the KHK approach, which consists of the claim that the formation, establishment, spread and further development of religious traditions have been affected by mutual influences, as well as that the formal unity of the history of religions mainly consists of mutual perceptions of religious traditions as religious entities. As such, contacts of religious traditions constitute regional religious fields and, in the long run, lead to a global religious field.¹⁵² Here, facing the religious other, a religious tradition is forced to contemplate its own status just as it is forced to develop certain patterns of language to encompass both itself and the other to be able to deal with the other in a general way. The so-called "religious dialogues"—of medieval times for example, are predominately philosophically based answers to the challenges posed by a number of situations of religious contact. The answers to such challenges will mainly consist of a *philosophy of language*, either implicit or explicit, that especially examines the communicative functions of notions or structural concepts. Thus, the approach of an author who writes a religious dialogue is, therefore, not a reflection on commonality or even tolerance, but

151 See Jörn Müller, "Lessons in Communication. A New Approach to Peter Abelard's Collationes," in *Transcending Words. The Language of Religious Contacts between Buddhists, Christians, Jews and Muslims in Premodern Times*, eds. Görg K. Hasselhoff and Knut Martin Stünkel (Bochum: Winkler, 2015).

152 See Volkhard Krech, "Religious Contact in Past and Present Times: Aspects of a Research Programme," *Religion* 42, no. 2 (2012): 192. On the problematic of this notion regarding the medieval material see Reinhold F. Gleis, "Religious Dialogues and Trialogues in the Middle Ages. A Preliminary Essay," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 38 (2012): 22.

rather a reflection on language. It is performed in order to make the contact situation a matter of action-guiding knowledge that deals with the problem of transfer. The conceptual results of the reflection are, therefore, primarily related to the contact situation, which proves to be of great importance when it comes to the question of concepts and their meaning. The philosophical dialogue is thus a reflection on how language works, or rather, how it should work in order to provide both understanding and some balance of positions (which may well be an act of usurpation). Of course, one cannot expect this meta-perspective to be balanced in the way the neutral observer wishes it to be. Religious dialogues are not to be primarily considered as documents of tolerance. However, some paramount level of observation and analysis is, nevertheless, established which then might be described.

Admittedly, there are many situations of contact imaginable, from direct contact between individuals, by chance or within an institutional framework, to indirect forms such as translating texts from another tradition. It is, however, these very situations that provide the opportunity to describe processes of emergence of metalanguage on the object language level, and accordingly prevent oneself from merely imposing one's notions on the traditions examined. In this way, scholarly metalanguage may correspond with religious-historical material and, at the same time, avoid an oppressive and, ultimately, sterile scientism: by connecting to the reflections in which an object-linguistic awareness of the religious arises and is actively promoted.¹⁵³

The contact-based approach derives an advantage from the simple fact that it is outright impossible not to respond to the other. "Whenever religious entities come into contact, they do compare with each other. In this case indifference or disregard seems to be out of question."¹⁵⁴ Moreover, contact implies language. If there is contact, there is also conceptualization and translation. If we take the notion of religion as an example, one might assume a contact situation in which representatives of one tradition do have a conceptualized notion of religion that is, semantically clearly definable awareness of their prevailing cultural background as a 'religion'. Here, the representatives (be they messengers, explorers, envoys, or translators) are likely to describe the other as a 'religion' if there are certain family resemblances that might be compared to religious elements of their own tradition. The other tradition taking part in

153 See Krech, "Religious Contact in Past and Present," 195.

154 Volkhard Krech, "From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back: Some Methodological Considerations on Comparative Perspectives in the Science of Religion," in *The Dynamics of Transculturality, Transcultural Research—Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, eds. A. Flüchter and J. Schöttli (Cham: Springer, 2015), 41.

the contact, however, which has no concept or notion of religion, still equally translates the concept of religion on the basis of resemblances and similarities to existing notions within the tradition.¹⁵⁵ Thus, notions and concepts of religion can emerge from the situation of contact that may have nothing to do with the notions employed by one side. The new notion, however, is strongly related to the traditions in question from which it emerges. It may well be the case that the particular elements both sides adapt to the concept do scarcely overlap, if at all, that, at first, the two sides of the contact are not talking about the same things.

In this manner, situations of contact allow for the study of religious language in two perspectives: first with regard to the relationship of object language and metalanguage, and, secondly with regard to the relationships of the respective object languages of the traditions involved in the contact. In the former, the work on concepts of object language can serve as a point of reference for scholarly examinations of the conditions of the 'baptism' of concepts in the prevailing traditions: it is not so much the content of a concept introduced here, but rather the conditions of its introduction that define its meaning for a religious tradition. Though the introduction of the prevailing concept might be performed because of a certain family resemblance or the presumed recognition of certain elements of the notion, the meaning of the concept is not reduced to these resemblances and elements. It also depends (and continues to depend) on the situation of introduction.

Regarding the second perspective, although the contact-born notions may initially have nothing in common, nevertheless, perceiving the usage of the concept by its counterpart for certain elements, the prevailing representatives may presume that a process of translation has taken place. Then they may use that assumed process of translation as the point of reference for further elaboration and future tuning of the concepts in question. Gradually, however, by taking the concepts derived from earlier contacts as a basis, the traditions taking part in our hypothetical situation of contact are likely to be brought in line with each other, although there may still be fundamental misunderstandings.¹⁵⁶ It might even be the case that misunderstandings are

155 Compare Krech, "Dynamics in the History of Religions," 52.

156 See Max Deeg's reminder on the nature of dubious renderings in the early Chinese Buddhist translations: "A scheme for arranging and analyzing the early Chinese translation vocabulary should raise an awareness of these different categories, and the terminological creativity may warn us not to discard some of the renderings as crude or even 'false' before we try to understand why they were chosen by the translator in the first place. A correct interpretation of these early translation activities will not only throw light on some aspects of the history of Buddhist texts, especially those of early Mahāyāna, but will lay the foundation of a better understanding for the development and spread of

a vital and inevitable, that is, contact-promoting element between religious traditions.

The basic idea concerning the language of contact and its significance for further research is that it allows for a more careful approach than simply confronting the subject of study with one's own linguistic apparatus. Instead of doing so, the approach aims at observing, describing and analyzing *others* who have done so; not through other theories or meta-linguistic models but rather object language meeting object language and trying to cope meta-linguistically with the situation, and retracing the processes that follow or, in fact, constitute the first encounter.¹⁵⁷ The two perspectives of the study of religious language are, thus, indirectly interrelated, maintaining the categorical difference between object language and metalanguage: The contact of metalanguage and object language, thus, relies on the contact of object language and object language. (Scholarly) Meta-language is not imposed upon object language, but follows object language's own metalanguage.

In any case, the specific nature of the concepts introduced in situations of contact has to be further examined. Both the resemblance-related and situation-dependent meaning of metalanguage notions and concepts emerging from the meeting of object languages effects their possible usages in object language and, correspondingly, in metalanguage. It is clear, however, that the semantics of these concepts are difficult to discern and are further subject to change. There is, however, more to these concepts than semantics alone.

3.3 *Concepts: More than Semantics*

3.3.1 Conceptual History

From 2008 to 2014 during the first phase of the KHK, a 'research field' and a transversal 'focus group' were devoted to the examination of concepts. The 'research field', which was loosely related temporally to the early modern period scrutinized the role of notions and concepts in the study of the history of religions, focusing on identifying and examining possible religious key concepts. The focus group concentrated particularly on the role of the concept of 'religion'. The work of the group proceeded diachronically and interculturality by examining conceptual candidates in diverse traditions that semantically have a certain degree of family resemblance that, despite different lexis, can be instrumental for the development of a general notion of religion.

Buddhism in India and beyond in the first centuries CE." Max Deeg, "Creating Religious Terminology—A Comparative Approach to Early Chinese Buddhist Translations," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 31 (2010): 112–113.

¹⁵⁷ See chapter on Retrospection.

The work in the ‘research field’ as well as in the ‘focus group’ followed a particular approach related to the method of conceptual history, as introduced by the historian Reinhard Koselleck.¹⁵⁸ To Koselleck, language in the study of history is not an epiphenomenon, but an irreducible last instance (*irreduzible Letztinstanz*) as both an indicator of reality and a factor of finding reality. There is no experience and no knowledge of the world without language. Conceptual history deals with the way experiences and facts are conceptualized and, in particular, with the shifting of the relationships between concept and object. Accordingly, the conceptual history approach is based on a notion of ‘concept’ that is not exclusively linguistic. Rather, it examines social, political, religious, and institutional structures that correspond to semantic structures. The proponents of conceptual history assume that there are analogies between semantic and non-semantic structures and that in examining periods of semantic change, changing structures in other fields of society may be discovered. Thus, conceptual history is a privileged tool within a sociology of knowledge (*Wissenssoziologie*). It is used to analyze the structural change of past societies by analyzing the semantic change.

Conceptual history is mainly concerned with salient terms, used to refer to objects outside language. As objects can only be semantically identified by discourses, to focus exclusively on certain terms would be to restrict one’s perspective. The broader context must be taken into consideration. Here, it is the concepts summarizing others, such as, for example, the concepts of ‘state’ or ‘religion’, that have become irreplaceable and unexchangeable for a given community of speakers, that emerge as a special focus of conceptual history as history’s founding concepts (*Grundbegriffe*).¹⁵⁹ These concepts, far from being non-temporal ideas or ahistorical, are rather subject to change and contest, as diverse speakers claim a monopoly of interpretation for them.¹⁶⁰

It is almost a truism that the meaning of words has changed over the course of time. In general terms, conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) is a method of self-reflection and, not least, self-discipline for historians concerning the concepts they employ to describe and analyze historical developments. These concepts are subject to temporal change. After all, conceptual history deals with the history of ideas, or rather, discourses in a particular twofold and inter-related way. Exploring the change of a concept means, firstly, following the

158 See for a short account of the idea of conceptual history Reinhard Koselleck, “Stichwort: Begriffsgeschichte,” in *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010).

159 The most manifest expression of this focus is the encyclopedia *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon der politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (1972–1997), a project led and edited by Koselleck.

160 See Koselleck, “Stichwort: Begriffsgeschichte,” 99–100.

changing objects in history, which are covered by one and the same word; secondly, it means tracing the changing words, which represent the same object at different times. Hence, the term ‘semantic’ as used in conceptual history relates to the *meaning* of a concept, and comprises several aspects: the definition of the word, the discursive explication of an object, and the rules for using the concept in certain historical situations. Research on semantics has provided important insights into how the dynamics in the history of religion might be manifested. It has also sharpened scholarly sensitivity to the fact that a present notion that is connected to a certain concept cannot be transferred easily to the same concept in earlier times, thus giving rise to the question of whether the diachronic study of concepts is possible at all and how best to integrate the necessary reservations about the applicability of the concept into one’s research and the metalanguage by which this research is presented.

However, the focus on the *semantic* change as determining the prevailing meaning of a concept at diverse points of time is a somewhat unsatisfying result for a discussion of the dynamics in the history of religion. Moreover, the focus on the history of semantics is likely to give rise to a very popular argument concerning the notion of religion, namely, that because religion in today’s use of the word is detectable not until modern times, it cannot be used to describe earlier phenomena, or, after all, has altogether no real referent apart from its linguistic use.¹⁶¹

The meaning and the linguistic function of a concept are different matters, though they are both subject to change. After all, concepts are related to different dimensions of the religious field, and additionally may be used differently as regards dimensions of action, cognition, experience, and materiality. Moreover, there is difference with regard to vertical or hierarchical aspects. To use Koselleck’s distinction, there is also a difference if a concept in question is used as a founding concept or a transformative concept that makes experience possible (as a *Grundbegriff* or as an *Erfahrungsstiftungsbegriff*),¹⁶² or as a subordinate concept to such a founding concept—that is, concepts behave differently dependent on their place within a hierarchy of concepts. Positions here may change in the course of time, the subordinate becoming the founding concept and vice versa.

161 See Volkhard Krech, “Nur wer β sagt, kann auch α sagen: Zu Reinhard Schulzes Ansatz der ‘retrospektiven Genealogie,’” in *Islam in der Moderne, Moderne im Islam. Eine Festschrift für Reinhard Schulze zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Florian Zemmin, Johannes Stephan, and Monica Corrado (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 87.

162 See Reinhard Koselleck, “Die Geschichte der Begriffe und Begriffe der Geschichte,” in *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), 68.

As a consequence, it is not only the changing meaning of words that should play a role in examining the dynamics in the history of religions. This is well recognized in the field: "We should seek, therefore, to discover the rules of a transformative grammar which could explain patterns of religious transformation. This is obviously not an easy task, but giving up without even trying condemns us to counting trees rather than delineating the forest's contours."¹⁶³ Stroumsa's claim for a grammar of religious transformation goes well beyond the examination of the changing meaning of words and provides the examination of concepts with explanatory power, dependent on generic concepts (i.e., that one might be able to see forests instead of a mere multitude of trees).

Therefore, what is needed is not a phenomenology of religion,¹⁶⁴ but rather a phenomenology of religious concepts. That is, we should explore not only the manner in which their meanings change across history, but also the specific dynamics of their *syntax* and *pragmatics*. As conceptualized by Koselleck, syntax and pragmatics can make important contributions to understanding the way concepts operate in conceptual history, through analysis of the way prevailing concepts react to challenge (pragmatics) and the slowly changing scope of the possible uses of concepts (syntax/grammar).¹⁶⁵ It seems, however, promising to examine the concrete cases of application of these concepts in a situation of challenge (contact) with regard to all three aspects (semantics, syntax, pragmatics) of the concepts, and thus to discern the prevailing dynamizing and stabilizing effects. Moreover, it seems that it is through syntax rather than semantics that the dynamics of the objective reference of the concepts in question may be examined. Above all, it is, the linguistic *level* on which the prevailing notion is used that has to be scrutinized carefully, i.e. the *topology* of the concept.

3.3.2 Object Language Topologies

Topology, as the concept is used in the following, examines the specific place (*topos*) of a certain word (*logos*) in a particular context. Though it is basically

¹⁶³ Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1–2.

¹⁶⁴ According to Gerardus van der Leeuw, phenomenology consists of talking about that that becomes visible by giving names to it. This procedure is always in danger of becoming a goal in itself as the researcher becomes intoxicated with the name he has given to the phenomenon, see Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1956), 772. In our context, it seems, thus, more promising to examine the names given to phenomena by the traditions examined themselves and scrutinize the ways they show and function in the course of time.

¹⁶⁵ See Koselleck, "Stichwort: Begriffsgeschichte," 100.

an issue of metalanguage, it is interesting to notice that users of religious object language, such as in texts evolving from and/or staging contact situations of religious traditions, themselves comprehend the importance of levels and introduce theoretical considerations on them. Given today's scholarly tendencies, it is sad to witness how deeply the proponents of notioclastic ideas sink below the level of their supposed object of study.

A topologically based process of notion-building can be observed in the works of the Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), composed in fifteenth-century medieval Europe as it was on the brink of early modernity.¹⁶⁶ His 1453 work *De Pace Fidei* is the most fruitful starting point with regard to religion. *De Pace Fidei*, if not in the purest sense a dialogue, is a colloquy wherein representatives of different religious traditions participate and are given voice to a certain extent.¹⁶⁷ In a fictitious *situation of contact* he creates, Nicholas is stage-managing the introduction of a certain general concept of religion which is characterized by its mandatory qualities as referring to the one God. He does so by means of a certain topology, indicated in the dialogue's setting. The concept of religion is introduced as being active on a higher level of intellectual insight. This is made perfectly clear by Cusanus in his concluding remarks to the whole work, which take the form of a vision (outlook) of the future guided by an intellectual vision (*visio*). It is the *heaven of reason* where the concept of religion is relevant: "Conclusa est in caelo rationis concordantia religionum modo quo praemittitur."¹⁶⁸ Therefore, it is not religion that is located on the level of diversity but different rites. Accordingly, it would be a striking example of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness—that is, to mistake the abstract for the concrete—to search for religion on a different level than the intellectual which is characterized by the rational activity of general concepts.¹⁶⁹ 'Religion' here is the intellectually reflected conceptual unity of God which transcends diversity. This idea, at least to the participants present

166 For a more detailed discussion of Cusanus' as well as of Llull's and of Maimonides' topological ideas on the notion and the concepts of religion see my monograph: Knut Martin Stünkel, *Una sit religio. Religionsbegriffe und Begriffstopologien bei Cusanus, Llull und Maimonides* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013).

167 In the following, I quote from the edition: Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei cum epistula ad Ioannem de Segobia*, Opera omnia VII, eds. R. Klibansky and H. Bascour (Hamburg: Meiner, 1970) (h VII).

168 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Pace Fidei* (h VII, p. 62, 19–20). "Therefore, in the loftiest domain of reason a harmony among the religions was reached, in the aforeshown manner" (tr. Hopkins).

169 I use this term in the sense of Alfred North Whitehead, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World. Lowell Lectures 1925* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 51; see chapter on Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.

in the multilogue, provides a mandatory attribute to the general concept of religion that is characterized by Cusanus at the end of his work: “Et mandatum est per Regem regum ut sapientes redeant et ad unitatem veri cultus nationes inducant, et quod administratorii spiritus illos ducant et eis assistant.”¹⁷⁰ At least for the *sapientes* i.e., the scholars of religion in Cusa’s text, the optative notion that there is but one religion is mandatory. Moreover, in order to spread this idea, the scholars are guided by the *intellectual powers* as introduced at the beginning of the text, that is, the reminders of the location in which the discussion has taken place. Nicholas describes them as follows: “non enim habitu ut homines sed intellectuales virtutes comparebant.”¹⁷¹ It becomes apparent that the names and descriptions are carefully chosen by Cusanus in order to clarify his topology. It is not simply God and angels who are present, but rather more specifically: on this level, intellectual powers/virtues are discussing issues of religion guided by a processual (i.e., unifying) unity. To Cusa, the human mind is drawn to this discussion and is transcending its way of dealing with diversity on the lower level. According to Kurt Flasch, what may be witnessed in this text is akin to the birthplace of religious studies, or rather, the study of the history of religion within object language considerations. For the second stage of their work, the scholars use the concept of religion developed here in order to illuminate the history of the diverse traditions.¹⁷²

Of course, this kind of topological consideration is not confined to ‘Western’ theology. Robert Ford Campany in elaborating on his own field of Chinese religions writes “that the tendency to nominalize and reify ‘religions,’ *daos*, *jiaos*, and so on, and to conceive of them in metaphorically specific ways are most in evidence where there is heightened awareness of religious plurality and difference—and, therefore, also, very often, religious rivalry and competition for resources, patronage, and prestige, with attendant attempts to classify

170 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Pace Fidei* (h VII, p. 62–63, 20–1). “And the King of kings commanded that the wise [men] return and lead their nations unto a oneness of true worship and that administering spirits guide and assist them [in this undertaking]” (tr. Hopkins).

171 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Pace Fidei* (h VII, p. 4, 18–19) “For, in form, they did not appear to be men but to be intellectual powers” (tr. Hopkins).

172 “Denn die Weisen der Völker machen sich gemeinsam an das Studium der Religionsgeschichte. Sie schaffen Bücher herbei, in denen die Religionsgebräuche der Völker beschrieben sind. Sie studieren die religionsgeschichtlichen Klassiker aller Völker—Varro für das antike Rom, Eusebius für die Griechen—unter dem Gesichtspunkt, wie sich die tatsächlich vorfindbaren historischen Religionen sich zu der einen Vernunftreligion faktisch verhalten. Cusanus gibt nur das Ergebnis dieser empirischen Erforschung der Religionen im Lichte der einen Vernunftreligion wieder: Die Verschiedenheiten der Religionen beziehen sich auf die äußeren Rituale.” Kurt Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2001), 373–374.

and narrate so as to bring some conceptual and rhetorical order to the confusing field of players. Early medieval China and early modern Europe were two such contexts. [...] [M]ost human groups are at least aware of others on their margins who do things differently. In contexts where such differences become acute, where religious plurality is not only evident but also the locus of some particular problems, nominalizations and reifications [...] begin to be invoked.”¹⁷³ Object-language ‘players,’ thus in a challenging situation reacted to the challenge by conceptualizing themselves and other players on a higher level of abstraction for ordering purposes that is, on a rationalizing level that is deliberately set apart from the confusing multiformity of everyday experience.

3.3.3 Metalanguage Topologies

If religious object language under conditions of situations of contact is able to topologically differentiate between levels of the possible usage of concepts, then scholarly metalanguage should be able to do so as well, lest a severe reductionism of theoretical sophistication be deliberately intended. Situations of contact transcend object language, forcing object language to ascend to new levels in response. Admittedly, any topologically-related notions in the process of mutual understanding might easily turn into an u-topological (utopian) enterprise (such as the proposed concept of *religio* in Cusanus’ thinking); however, the concepts in question might still serve as regulatory ideas for further scholarly research, as well as in interreligious action. Semantic examination of concepts is necessary, but not sufficient in finding an adequate approach for examining religious phenomena.

Following the contact-based approach, it is appropriate to relate meta-linguistic topologies of concepts closely to object language topologies in order to discern and describe the function of the prevailing concepts on the level of religious language. It is not only through the creation of typologies of concepts, that is, by means of a cluster relating words semantically to particular fields, but also through mapping topologies of concepts that we are able to interrogate the use of concepts within a particular language game.

In his enlightening study of the process of comparison in the study of religion, Oliver Freiberger has drawn attention to the diverse possible levels and scales a comparative enterprise might address. “Existing studies compare at many different points on the scale, from comparisons of particular individual persons in their local settings to comparisons of entire religions. While the scale is continuous, it might make sense to broadly distinguish, related to how

173 Robert Ford Campany, “On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China),” *History of Religions* 42 (2003), 312–313.

much the study ‘zooms in,’ three levels: Micro, meso, and macrocomparison. Micro-comparative studies zoom in on very specific items such as certain individuals or groups, certain texts, certain objects, certain practices, etc., and compare them. Macro-comparative studies compare entire religions, or several religions in view of one phenomenon (e.g., in studies entitled ‘Sacred Places in World Religions’ or the like). Located in-between, on a mid-level scale, are meso-comparative studies, which cover more ground than micro-comparative ones but remain within clearly defined limits.”¹⁷⁴ Here, I would argue that it is not only the items of comparison in question that have to be subject of a scale-based or topological consideration, but also the concepts employed to grasp them. Of course, the concepts used in such kinds of comparison have constraints and possibilities of their own that might render them unsuitable for use on another level. Scales of comparison, as Freiburger argues, are, above all, different levels of abstraction on which comparison is intended to take place.¹⁷⁵ “It is therefore crucial that the selected scale matches the question that a study seeks to answer. If that is the case, from a methodological standpoint all three levels are valid.”¹⁷⁶

Taking the necessary topological aspect of concepts into consideration not only improves the adequacy and validity of scholarly metalanguage but also proffers the study of religion with a promising future. On the metalanguage level, the importance of distinguishing between diverse levels of notions has been stressed by Jonathan Z. Smith in his introduction to the term ‘generalization’. Distinguishing concepts on the basis of their topological level may lead to a more refined metalanguage for the description of religious phenomena. It also renders metalanguage more flexible, as it may be corrected via processes of trial and error. Last but not least, it renders it more *explorative* by hinting at contexts that were not in the scholar’s focus before: “The ‘general’ differs from the ‘universal’ in that it admits to exceptions; it differs from the ‘particular’ in that it is highly selective. Both characteristics guarantee that generalizations are always corrigible. As with comparison, generalization brings disparate phenomena together in the space of the scholar’s intellect. As such, it often results in surprise, which calls forth efforts at explanation and rectification. One goal of the study of religion is the proposal of comparative generalizations based on the careful description of data that, nevertheless, remain firmly situated: generalizations that are advanced in the service of some stated intellectual

¹⁷⁴ Oliver Freiburger, “Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion,” *Religions* 9, no. 38 (2018), 6.

¹⁷⁵ Freiburger, “Elements of a Comparative Methodology,” 5.

¹⁷⁶ Freiburger, “Elements of a Comparative Methodology,” 6.

task.”¹⁷⁷ As a consequence, the disadvantages of generalizations on some levels (incompleteness and selectiveness) are, in turn, advantages on the other level (allowing surprising, explorative associations and being corrigible). The particular level of a particular concept, thus, allows for *explorative* results. It is impossible to find anything on the level of diversity.

The insights above into the relevance of the topology of certain concepts might also shed some light on the flawed basis of certain kinds of criticism of scholarly metalanguage; a criticism that is likely to block the process of inquiry. Scholarly concepts are diverse in many regards, not only in terms of their content, and not the least in their prevailing level of possible application.

3.4 *The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness in the Study of Religion*

One could easily write a history of the study of religion as a history of its major fallacies, or perhaps better still, a history of what the subsequent generation of scholars considered to be the major fallacies of their immediate predecessor. Given the self-reflexive nature of the present field, much research can perhaps be described as showing that certain assumptions about and concepts of religion do *not* work, rather than showing how religion works. Of course, this self-reflexivity itself is the reaction to a fallacy, namely the fallacy of overtrusting concepts, theoretical considerations and preconceptions. However, in turn, putting no trust at all in concepts is clearly an overreaction and one that has done more harm to the progress of insight than the original fallacy itself did.¹⁷⁸

Moreover, there are several fallacies current in research, derived as they are from postmodernism, postcolonialism and deconstructivism that have attracted the attention of more careful observers. Edward Slingerland, for

¹⁷⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, “When the Chips are Down,” in *Relating Religion. Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 31. Koselleck describes the potentials of concepts (as opposed to mere words) correspondingly: “Als Worte waren sie nicht innovativ gewesen. Erst der kollektiv-singulare Begriff, der mit dem alten Wort transportiert wurde, hat die beschriebenen semantischen und pragmatischen Innovationspotentiale entbunden.” Reinhard Koselleck, “Begriffliche Innovationen der Aufklärungssprache,” in *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), 333.

¹⁷⁸ To some observers, however, the history of the study of religion may present itself as a manifestation of the arrogant Wagnerian attitude towards the history of science as expressed in Goethe’s *Faust*: to be happy about seeing how the wise have thought before and how we have done so much better. We have supposedly done better, because we know about the ideological backgrounds of scientists and science. It has to be added, though, that the progress here merely consists of avoiding something rather than doing something. (“Verzeiht! Es ist ein groß Ergetzen,/Sich in den Geist der Zeiten zu versetzen;/Zu schauen, wie vor uns ein weiser Mann gedacht,/Und wie wir’s dann zuletzt so herrlich weit gebracht.” *Faust I*, Nacht, 570–574).

instance, has described the fallacy of *the single meaning*—the idea that a word must always mean precisely the same thing every time it appears in a corpus of texts in question. He also identified the *fallacy of mistaking argument for assumption*: the idea that an instance of an idea is necessarily proof that it had currency within an intellectual field. Rather, context must be considered as well, as it may be the case that a certain use of a notion is serving as a thought experiment opposing a common opinion, and hence does not demonstrate the ubiquity of the notion in question.¹⁷⁹ Fellow sinologist Michael Puett warns about this fallacy with regard to the idea of holism in early China as follows: “These ideas should not be construed as dominant assumptions at all: they were, on the contrary, consciously formulated claims within a larger debate ... [T]he very fact that they were polemical strongly suggests that it is not an assumption at all, but a claim.”¹⁸⁰

Regarding the present state of affairs in the cultural sciences and the study of religion in particular, one serious fallacy concerning the progress of science and scholarship is the *fallacy of immobilizing distinctions* as found in both negative and positive Orientalism i.e., the hypostasis of the ‘other’ as an unchangeable and unreachable entity. This fallacy cuts down the productive interplay of distinctions in scholarly work and inevitably leads to an intellectual dead-end situation of decidedly un-splendid isolation.

On the use of concepts, one could easily list a number of additional fallacies that result in dead-ends. To a certain degree, the fallacies are interrelated and sometimes may be merely reformulations of each other, depending on the research interest. In the following, I list and gather a few examples from my observations of discussions of the КHK and the study of religion. For example:

1. The *genealogical* fallacy—the opinion that given proof a concept has developed or was even deliberately ‘made’ up within a certain tradition automatically proves its unworthiness for scholarly work.¹⁸¹ The phrase

179 See Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China. Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 103, also see *ibid.* 284–288.

180 Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 17.

181 See this fallacy as described on a more general level by Jeppe Sinding Jensen, “Epistemology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), 43: “The history of the study of religion amply demonstrates how even erudite scholars have used their academic positions and influence to produce what was ultimately religious apologetics more than scholarly knowledge. However, this does not imply that it is in principle impossible to have a reasoned science of religion, as reasoned as any science about any other kind of human practice.”

‘the invention’ of something is the most obvious example of this fallacy in action to consider the impacts of arguments concerning the invention of Hinduism, for instance. A closely related fallacy leads deep into the realm of conspiracy theory: the idea that concepts were made up and introduced by certain agents to follow sinister aims. In both cases, the difference between genesis and validity (*Genesis und Geltung*) is not taken into due consideration.¹⁸²

2. The *self-censoring* fallacy—the opinion that the occidental origin of a concept automatically makes it unsuitable for other traditions which are thereby supposedly not given a voice of their own. This is most often seen applied to the concept of religion itself. Thus, the ‘Western’ scholar disqualifies himself from research for reasons of his own ‘Western-ness’. Sadly, this fallacy is the main result of the Orientalism-debate as inaugurated by Edward Said.
3. The *rigid* fallacy—the opinion that if the concept of religion is not applicable to *every* religious phenomenon, it should not to be used at all and is better replaced by another (more general) notion like that of culture. This fallacy is often connected to a misinterpretation of Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘concepts with blurred boundaries’¹⁸³ that is, the claim to introduce ‘fuzzy’ concepts that are allowed to extend their extension if suitable (see 7.)
4. The *authenticity*-fallacy—the opinion that if the concept is not found among the tradition it is being employed to describe, then it cannot be

182 See Pollack’s description of the deconstructivist current in the study of religion: “Offenbar geht es den Vertretern der dekonstruktivistischen Theorie nicht darum, herauszufinden, welcher Begriff von Religion der wissenschaftlichen Analyse zugrunde gelegt werden sollte, sondern darum, den Begriff zu Fall zu bringen. Welcher Begriff an seine Stelle treten kann, bleibt unklar. Möglicherweise wird in den konstruktivistischen Ansätzen die Benutzung von begrifflichen Unterscheidungen selbst schon als problematisch angesehen. Der dekonstruktivistische Ansatz trägt so wenig zum Erkenntnisfortschritt bei, sondern verbleibt in der Negation. Seine rein zerstörerische Absicht hat viel mit seinem antiwestlichen Bias zu tun. Selbst wenn der Religionsbegriff eine europäische Herkunftsgeschichte hat, ist damit ja noch nichts über seine Brauchbarkeit gesagt. Oder ist ein Begriffsvorschlag, weil er aus dem Westen stammt, automatisch diskreditiert? Es scheint, dass die dekonstruktivistische Kritik an den normativistischen Implikationen des Religionsbegriffs selbst auf normativen Vorannahmen beruht.” Detlef Pollack, “Probleme der Definition von Religion,” in *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, eds. Detlef Pollack, Volkhard Krech, Olaf Müller, and Marcus Hero (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 41.

183 See chapter on the Andy-Warhol-Syndrome.

used at all.¹⁸⁴ This fallacy is closely related to the ideology of authenticity and, ultimately, identity in the methodology of current Humanities.¹⁸⁵

5. The fallacy of *claiming autarky*—the opinion that every tradition has to be described exclusively in its own terms. This fallacy can also be described as confusion between object language and metalanguage, which are categorically different. Speaking about a tradition solely in its own terms means to speak in object language.¹⁸⁶
6. The fallacy of inferring *from fact to concept*—the confusion of object language, where the concept might be unsuitable, and metalanguage, where the concept might be suitable in scholarly description.¹⁸⁷
7. The *extensional independence* fallacy—the opinion that one may change the extension of a concept without reference to its intention (meaning).¹⁸⁸ If a concept must be blurred in order to cover anything, it is all the more likely to be in practice meaningless. However, deliberateness of meaning does in itself not solve the issue of concepts for the study of religion. A general concept of religion will always be presupposed but it is now often implicitly used without due reflection. The abductive potential of the concept made explicit for the progress of research is severely underestimated.

These fallacies are significant obstacles to the scientific examination and explanation of religious phenomena, especially if concentration on preventing these fallacies results in the separation of the scholarly discourse from the material and subject of the study of religion.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, there is another important fallacy now active in the field that not only immobilizes the advancement of research, but even threatens those insights already achieved: the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*. Timothy Fitzgerald famously discussed this fallacy in his article ‘A critique of “religion” as a cross-cultural category’.¹⁹⁰ The context of its introduction is significant,

184 On this fallacy see Kevin Schilbrack, “The Social Construction of ‘Religion’ and Its Limits: A Critical Reading of Timothy Fitzgerald,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24 (2012), 101–102. Schilbrack calls this fallacy the fallacy of ‘linguistic determinism’ (ibid., 103).

185 See chapter on Tradition.

186 On this fallacy see Smith, “When the Chips are Down,” 31.

187 See chapter More than Semantics.

188 This fallacy was described by KHK-fellow Matthias Jung in one of his presentations.

189 Compare the “phenomenological fallacy” as explained by Hubert Seiwert in “Theory of Religion and Historical Research,” 231.

190 Timothy Fitzgerald, “A Critique of ‘Religion’ as a Cross-Cultural Category,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997), 91–110.

as it is not used in the analysis of religion, but rather in the analysis of the academic field of the study of religion. It is a historical irony that this notion was introduced into the field of religious study by a protagonist of those people most likely to fall victim to it. Fitzgerald connects the fallacy—mistaking the abstract for the concrete—with a substantialist claim: “This notion that Buddhism is an entity with an essence which can be described and listed with other such entities as the religions or the world religions, can be described as a substantialist fallacy, a case of misplaced concreteness.”¹⁹¹ The notion of the fallacy, thus, is a supportive instrument in the ever-popular struggle against unsuitable reification and the very idea of world religions, a struggle that is ultimately aimed at unmasking an ideological construction. It is questionable, however, whether users, and, in particular, metalanguage users of concepts such as ‘Buddhism’ or ‘religion’, in fact do perform a process of reification. Listing ‘Buddhism’ and other ‘religions’ does not necessarily and exclusively indicate essentialism, but is, first of all, a particular use of words that expresses a certain linguistic function. If that function is not scrutinized carefully, then to describe this utterance as an instance of the fallacy is premature. Moreover, the fallacy itself might mean something very different than the equivalence Fitzgerald nonchalantly gives it with an act of essentialism.

To explain, we must turn to the original context from which the notion of the fallacy emerged. The fallacy of misplaced concreteness as a description of the shortcomings of theoretical considerations was introduced by Alfred North Whitehead, who described it, together with the *fallacy of the perfect dictionary*, as a major obstacle to progress in philosophical thinking. The avoidance of these two fallacies in Whitehead’s thought was employed as a measurement of the quality of a philosophy. In his *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead introduced the fallacy in his discussion of the seventeenth century, which he denoted as the century of genius for its place in the development of modern science. Therein he defined it as “mistaking the abstract for the concrete.”¹⁹² Referring to the ideas of substance and quality, Whitehead notes:

My point will be, that we are presenting ourselves with simplified editions of immediate matters of fact. When we examine the primary elements of these simplified editions, we shall find that they are in truth only to be justified as being elaborate logical constructions of a high degree of abstraction. Of course, as a point of individual psychology, we get at

¹⁹¹ Fitzgerald, “A Critique of ‘Religion’ as a Cross-Cultural Category,” 106.

¹⁹² Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, *Lowell Lectures 1925* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 51.

the ideas by the rough and ready method of suppressing what appear to be irrelevant details. But when we attempt to justify this suppression of irrelevance, we find that, though there are entities left corresponding to the entities we talk about, yet these are of a high degree of abstraction.

This apparent critique of abstraction is likely to hit a nerve in current scholarly discussion. Nevertheless, it is important to notice here, that Whitehead, in describing the fallacy, does *not* claim that these abstractions do not exist. although he does assert that they should not be confused with the immediate matter of fact. Hence, there is no case that because of their non-existence, they also have to be abolished from philosophical use in explicatory language. To him, there absolutely are such entities, but they are characterized by a high degree of abstraction that might not be suitable to the detailedness of concrete facts. Accordingly, at the end of the chapter, Whitehead stresses the “enormous success of the scientific abstractions” as employed by the predominantly ‘mathematical mind’ active during the seventeenth century of genius, whose great characteristic is precisely the capacity for dealing with abstractions.¹⁹³ To Whitehead, it is the task of philosophy to criticize abstractions, not to merely abolish them:

You cannot think without abstractions; accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to be vigilant in critically revising your modes of abstraction. It is here that philosophy finds its niche as essential for the healthy progress of society. It is the critic of abstractions.¹⁹⁴

Therefore, in trying to evade the pitfalls of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, one has to be equally careful not to pour the baby out with the bathwater by disregarding the role of abstractions in human thinking. The fallacy of misplaced concreteness has two forms: it may, on the one hand, criticize the premature application of abstractions to facts and, on the other hand, it warns us not to treat abstractions as if they were facts and to check their validity accordingly. In the more refined explication given in *Process and Reality*, Whitehead describes the fallacy as follows:

This fallacy consists in neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain

193 See Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 55.

194 Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 59.

categories of thought. There are aspects of actualities that are simply ignored as long as we restrict thought to these categories.¹⁹⁵

Accordingly, the fallacy of misplaced concreteness as introduced by Whitehead denotes a confusion of the different *levels* on which the abstract concept might be used. It is an appropriation made too fast. Within religious studies, the notion of religion is a prime example; here specifically concerning the aim to identify 'religion' objectively as in the sentence: "This is religion." The validity of the concept is put to the test by its capacity to be identified as a referent of this sentence on the level of elements of the outside world. However, religion is not an indexical notion—something to be pointed at—but an operative and discursive concept, used to point something out.¹⁹⁶ Of course, this is not unrecognized in careful scholarship: "Religions do not exist, at least not in the same way that people and their textual and visual artifacts and performances do."¹⁹⁷ They exist on another linguistic level.

As a consequence, a critique of a generalized notion is by no means valid for *every* level of possible usage of the concept. The topology of the notion has to be taken into consideration:

There is no justification for checking generalization at any particular stage. Each phase of generalization exhibits its own peculiar simplicities which stand out just at that stage, and at no other stage. There are simplicities connected with the motion of a bar of steel which are obscured if we refuse to abstract from the individual molecules, and there are certain simplicities concerning the behavior of men which are obscured if we refuse to abstract from the individual peculiarities of particular specimens. In the same way, there are certain general truths, about the actual

195 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York/London: The Free Press, 1979), 7–8.

196 Compare the chapter on the 'Three-level Model of Transcendence' within the discussion of the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction. The very same thing holds true for the much-vaunted replacement for the concept of religion that is, the concept of 'culture'. "The real point here is that it doesn't matter that one can't define the *it* that makes up culture because culture isn't really an *it* at all. The total collection of cultural items is a fact but not a thing. [...] Do not think of culture as a thing that does something. *It* doesn't—it, as a collection has no causal powers." Roy D'Andrade, "A Cognitivist's View on the Units Debate in Cultural Anthropology," *Cross-Cultural Research* 35 (2001), 253.

197 Robert Ford Campney, "On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," *History of Religions* 42 (2003), 319.

things in the common world of activity, which will be obscured when attention is confined to some particular detailed mode of considering them.¹⁹⁸

What seems to be good advice in the context of philosophy might also be good advice for the self-reflection of the study of religion.¹⁹⁹ In religious studies, scholars analyzing a notion or even a concept of religion tend to criticize it as if it were to be used on a very concrete level of research—as if it were to be used in a similar manner as the word ‘vase’, which has a referent in the real world that can be pointed at.²⁰⁰

In the case of the concept of ‘religion’ the reminder of Jonathan Z. Smith remains valid: “It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as ‘language’ plays in linguistics or ‘culture’ plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.”²⁰¹ One could also add the concept of ‘nature’ for the natural sciences or ‘law’ for jurisprudence. All these notions work on a certain level of generalization, but not on others.

198 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 16–17.

199 In introductory secondary literature on Whitehead's ideas the example chosen for a case of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness is taken from the religious field, where abstract and generalizing notions are used without care for their topology: “But Whitehead is keenly aware of the difference between the abstract and the concrete. And he recognized that abstractions are often credited with functions they cannot have. They are often treated as if they were concrete. Consider, for example, the statement that Buddhism teaches that all things are impermanent. Of course, one may use it as a shorthand formulation of the fact that most teachers who call themselves Buddhists affirm this. However, one may also forget that it is shorthand for something else and begin to think there is such a thing as Buddhism that has its own essence, acts in this or that way, and can accurately be described as having or lacking particular characteristics.” John B. Cobb, Jr., *Whitehead Word Book. A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality* (Claremont: P&F Press, 2008), 15.

200 A case of the fallacy is, therefore, expressed by Manuel Vásquez in discussing McCutcheon's critique on the manuscript of his book *More than Belief*: “As McCutcheon put it in his helpful review of this manuscript, today there is a new generation of scholars who critique past scholarship ‘because it did not allow them to find religion in enough places.’ While appearing radical, this critique, in fact, gives religious studies a new lease on life, since it opens the possibility of seeing religion everywhere, in everyday life.” Manuel Vásquez, *More than Belief. A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 325.

201 Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Relating Religions. Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 194.

Therefore, according to Cho and Squier, one has to relate one's use of concepts to the chosen scale of abstraction, as "we can talk meaningfully of a staggering large entity such as 'Buddhism' by using an amenable scale and scope. If we wish to encompass its twenty-five centuries of history, in Asia and now Europe and the Americas, our scale of closest observation periods of time."²⁰² All macro-states are abstractions, which leave out an increasing number of things. Examining matters on the macro-level requires the detection of patterns that emerge at different scales and perspectives, thus it also necessitates a differentiated set of concepts. This differentiated approach, however, does not reduce, but rather increases the possibilities for insight: "When we increase our scope of observation, we necessarily sacrifice information available at the smaller scale. Contrary to the prevailing assumption, however, this is not a reduction in knowledge." Compared at the micro-level, two subjects of investigation almost certainly have nothing much in common. But observed on macro-level, relevant information will emerge: "But looked at from afar, Earth and Jupiter appear very similar and share obvious properties, such as being spherical and orbiting the sun. This provides new information not available to the smaller perspective. [...] Distinctions between 'finer' and 'coarser' scales should not be confused with differences in their reality of information."²⁰³ It is, therefore, senseless to claim any kind of 'reality' for a concept of a high level of abstraction, such as religion or system. They do not correspond to something in the 'real' world, save from on the scholarly desk where they are employed. The ontological indifference or lack of correspondence to real objects is not a reason to abolish the notion. "Whether a system is an ontological reality or heuristic device is of little practical importance. What is important is that these conceptual tools can expand our understanding in an intellectual environment where the ever-increasing collection of observation is wasted without a means to make sense of it."²⁰⁴ 'Religion', thus, makes scholarly sense, even while religion often does not to the common-sense observer.

However, it is not on the empirical level that the possibility of the application of a certain abstract concept is decided. Rather, it is decided on a more abstract level. To Whitehead, the true task of metaphysics is to determine the limits of the applicability of abstract concepts—and limiting the applicability

202 Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013), 373.

203 Cho and Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," 378.

204 Cho and Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," 385.

of a concept means, at the same time, that the concept *has* a genuine field of application.²⁰⁵

It is for good reason that Whitehead considered abstractions as of utmost importance for the process of acquiring knowledge and maintaining the search for it, for the *Adventures of Ideas*. Balanced by humbleness before logic and facts, conceptual boldness can bring fertile results. As a mathematician by training, Whitehead knew about the many ways by which the mathematical treatment of abstractions had proven to be exploratory, as it led to new discoveries about what was going on in the world. In consequence, Whitehead advised natural scientists as follows:

The aim of science is to seek the simplest explanation of complex facts. We are apt to fall into the error of thinking that the facts are simple because simplicity is the goal of our quest. The guiding motto in the life of every natural philosopher should be, Seek simplicity and distrust it.²⁰⁶

Therefore, abstractions and general ideas cannot be given too much attention and too large a role in the process of scientific discovery—provided only that they are used at the appropriate level of insight.

General notions are, above all, not descriptive, but explorative notions. Discoveries are made via general ideas.²⁰⁷ There seems to be some justification to the assumption that the notion and the concept of religion have explored more and, thus, provided more information and increased knowledge than its shortcomings have prevented.

4 On Method

4.1 *Retrospection: the Angel Turns His Body*

And with his head over his shoulder turned,/He seemed to find his way
without his eyes/For out a' doors he went without their help/And to the
last bended their light on me.

SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*

²⁰⁵ See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 93.

²⁰⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature. The Turner Lectures delivered in Trinity College November 1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 163.

²⁰⁷ Compare Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 5.

4.1.1 On Historical Investigation and the Emergence of Religion

The angel of history famously looks backwards, at least in Walter Benjamin's intense and well-known characterization in one of his last texts 'On the concept of history' (*Über den Begriff der Geschichte*) from 1940.²⁰⁸ Benjamin's characterization is rather desperate, at least from the perspective of the angel. Caught in the storm blowing from paradise, the angel cannot heal the wounds of the past, yet is driven inexorably towards the future, which he cannot see. In his considerations on the angel in Benjamin's thought, Gershom Scholem comes to the conclusion that the angel is a melancholic figure who fails to heal the wounds of the past within history. This task can only be achieved by applying another method. According to Scholem, the past cannot be preserved in an image of perpetual continuity, but rather by rigidly relating (via a 'leap') it to the present.²⁰⁹

Scholem's interpretation provides an important insight regarding the very basic method of writing history. Depressing the perspective of the angel may be, perhaps it is not only catastrophe the angel faces. Taken as a model, the angel's perspective also expresses the fact that history by definition deals with matters of the past that are steadily moving towards the future, truism as that may be. There seems to be some consensus among historians that historical matters have to be displayed *prospectively*. In this sense, historians, and not at last historians of religion, tend to be oriented toward future, as they start their examination from an earlier point of time and proceed to a later point in time.²¹⁰ Accordingly, the 'emergence' or 'development' of historical

208 "Es gibt ein Bild von Klee, das Angelus Novus heisst. Ein Engel ist darauf dargestellt, der aussieht als wäre er im Begriff, sich von etwas zu entfernen worauf er starrt. Seine Augen sind aufgerissen, sein Mund steht offen und seine Flügel sind angespannt. Der Engel der Geschichte muss so aussehen. Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet." Walter Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, ed. Gérard Raulet (Kritische Gesamtausgabe Band 19) (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), 35.

209 See Gershom Scholem, "Walter Benjamin und sein Engel," in *Walter Benjamin und sein Engel. Vierzehn Aufsätze und kleine Beiträge* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), 67: "Der Engel der Geschichte ist also im Grunde eine melancholische Figur, die in der Immanenz der Geschichte scheitert, weil sie nur durch einen Sprung überwunden werden kann, der die Vergangenheit des Historischen nicht in einem 'ewigen' Bild [...] von ihr rettet, sondern in einem aus ihrem Kontinuum herausführenden Sprung in die, sei es revolutionär, sei es messianisch geladene 'Jetztzeit' [...]."

210 There are some notable exceptions to this method, such as Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's account of Western revolutionary history that starts with the Russian Revolution in 1917 and ends with the so-called 'Papal Revolution in the 11/12th century CE', see Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Out of Revolution. Autobiography of Western Man* (Providence/Oxford: Berg, 1993). Rosenstock defends his decision to reverse the chronology as follows: "But a great new event is more than an additional paragraph to be inserted in the next edition

issues are examined and presented by choosing a not-too-arbitrary—perhaps popular—starting point and taking things from there.

The prospective method, however, is not without its own problematic constraints. Studying the past in this way encodes some kind of teleology: there is always a residuum of the present involved, even if the researcher claims to understand past times ‘on their own terms’. The main constraint with regard to religion is the fact that such a history may be very short indeed, as there are cultures and traditions in which an explicit notion of religion is a comparatively current phenomenon, thus supposedly rendering the time before unsuitable for the writing of a history of religion proper.²¹¹ Moreover, if it is true that the concept of religion as we know it only emerged in European early modernity, scholars of Egyptian and medieval religion alike would be out of work.

However, the examination of the history of religions cannot be based upon a historical approach in the prospective sense. To Alfred North Whitehead, any attempt to deal with religion historically is an illusion which does not grasp the depth of the phenomenon in question:

It is a curious delusion that the rock upon which our beliefs can be founded is a historical investigation. You can only interpret the past in terms of the present. The present is all you have; and unless in this present you can find general principles which interpret the present as including a representation of the whole community of existents, you cannot move a step beyond your little patch of immediacy. Thus history presupposes a metaphysic.²¹²

Historical investigation has replaced the certainty that formerly was attributed to certain concepts. To Whitehead, however, this certainty may be treacherous, as the present, providing the instruments to do so, is the very ground from which an examination of the past has to start. In order to escape one’s little

of a book. It rewrites history, it simplifies history, it changes the past because it initiates a new future. Anyone who looks back on his own life knows how completely anew love, a new home, a new conviction, changes the aspect of his past. How, then, can history remain a piecemeal confusion of national developments after a conflagration of the dimensions of the World War. A race that was not impressed by such an experience, that could not rewrite its history after such an earthquake, would not deserve any history” (Ibid., 5–6).

211 See for the case of China Wolfgang Ommerborn, *Zwischen Sakralem und Säkularem. Bedeutung und Entwicklung religiöser Begriffe und Praktiken in China bis zur Han-Zeit* (Bochum/Freiburg: Projekt, 2012), 11–12.

212 Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making. Lowell Lectures 1926* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 84.

patch of immediacy, one has to apply general principles that may well collide with the aim of understanding the past in its own terms.

In contemplating the phenomenon of tradition, sociologist Edward Shils hints at the possibility that the present may change the past:

The past of hard facts is a past of unfathomable depths. We can never be finished with discovering what it was and what is it as a result of what it was. The past of hard facts is ineluctable and unchangeable in principle but we are constantly having to change our ideas about those ineluctable and unchangeable hard facts as new ones appear, take their place alongside the older ones, and, in doing so, change what we see of those we know previously. T.S. Eliot once said that the literary tradition is changed by what every important work, which has incorporated the tradition adds to it.²¹³

It may well be the case that Whitehead's and Shils' musings are interpreted as obstacles to the very possibility of finding an adequate relationship to the past and the possibility of writing history. They may, moreover, be considered irrelevant in order to preserve the prospective perspective in the examination of historical issues. They may even be considered as truisms in current historical research. I would, however, suggest that their considerations may be used as a starting point for the development of an alternative perspective to the history of religion: a critical turn-away from prospection and toward retrospection.

4.1.2 The Retrospective Emergence of Religion

In parts of the Humanities, the idea that concepts coined in modernity cannot possibly be applied to facts of the past, even less to other cultures and even lesser to other cultures of the past, is repeated *ad nauseam* with increasing enthusiasm, joyfully mistaking redundancy for scientific care.²¹⁴ However, these modern concepts are those that scholars factually have and have built

²¹³ Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 196.

²¹⁴ Jason BeDuhn fittingly evaluates the scientific surplus of this practice as follows: "It is purely tautological, however, to say that the way we moderns use the term religion is a modern invention, informed by distinctive, historically conditioned shifts in discourse and social organization. That fact does not preclude the possibility of a pre-modern concept that anticipated the modern one by identifying the same socio-cultural entities we would place at the center of the modern category of religion." Jason BeDuhn, "Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion' in Third Century Iran," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, eds. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley. Nag Hammadi and Manichaeism Studies 87 (Leiden: Brill 2015), 274.

their questions of research upon. What is more, even if it is true that there is nothing that may serve as references, it does not really contribute additional insight to the fact that there may *now* be such notions, concepts and, consequently, things *now* that have effects on people's life and thoughts. Volkhard Krech has rephrased the 'Thomas-Theorem' as follows: if situations are defined that relate communication to religion, then religions exist in the communicative results.²¹⁵ The prime example of such a concept is, of course, the concept of religion itself. Thus, the question arises, how concepts can be historicized in a rigid manner while at the same time being used to describe historical facts for the sake of scientific analysis?²¹⁶

In fact, promising approaches that center on the examination of the role of the historical narrative as a method have already been proposed. In his studies on the Qur'ān and the genealogy of Islam, Reinhard Schulze has described the decisive turn from providing an answer to the question of what religion is and how it emerged to examining the question of what *became* religion and *how* it did so as the main task of scholarship in the study of the history of religions. To him, it is all about addressing the process that *retrospectively* may be conceptualized as the genealogy of religion.²¹⁷ Thus, the narration of the historical process that retrospectively leads to religion has to be one of review ("Die Narration dieses Prozesses muß als Rückschau erfolgen").²¹⁸ Schulze, in the following, elaborates on a reverse genealogy (*rücklaufende Genealogie*) for the notion of religion itself, ultimately reaching the capacity of perception. More important, however, are the possibilities produced when the reverse genealogical method is applied to meso-level or micro-level processes in the history of religion.²¹⁹ To me, the method seems to be more fertile if applied to questions

215 Volkhard Krech, "Nur wer β sagt, kann auch α sagen: Zu Reinhard Schulzes Ansatz der 'retrospektiven Genealogie,'" in *Islam in der Moderne. Moderne im Islam*, eds. Florian Zemmin, Johannes Stephan, and Monica Corrado (Leiden: Brill 2018), 89. "Wenn also Situationen mit Bezug auf Kommunikation über Religion bestimmt werden, existiert in den kommunikativen Folgen auch Religion."

216 "Wie können Begriffe konsequent historisiert und zugleich historische Sachverhalte mit modernen Konzepten beschrieben werden?" Krech, "Nur wer β sagt, kann auch α sagen," 86.

217 "Die Frage ist also nicht: Wie *entstand* beziehungsweise was *ist* Religion? Sondern: Was und wie *wurde* Religion? Es gilt demnach, den Prozess zu benennen, der sich rückwirkend, oder genauer gesagt retrospektiv als Genealogie der Religion fassen läßt." Reinhard Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam*, (Basel: Schwabe, 2015), 109.

218 Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam*, 117.

219 A corresponding approach on macro-level was taken by Stephen C. Berkwitz, "The History of Buddhism in Retrospect," in *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006).

of how certain notions can be genealogically traced back in diverse traditions. A more general musing on the macro-level of the genealogy of religion as such may lead to, though interesting, more contested discussions of the notions of (to use Schulze's concepts) transcendence, symbol, or perception.

In contemplating the history of religion, one must not forget the concrete material of one's study: object language self-descriptions. One has to relate them to theoretical models. In fact, above all in religious tradition that include a founding figure, certain *original scenes* are most likely to emerge. As Schulze put it: All traditions cannot help but self-substantiate through creation of positive genealogies.²²⁰ Of course, these genealogies cannot be taken at face value, but have to be analyzed according to their prevailing functions and the role they play in the afterworld's imagination and the reasons they have such a strong influence. According to Schulze, the reverse genealogy in the case of the Qu'rān allows two important insights: first, to discern the role of the Islamic tradition in the reverse genealogy (α -process), and, second, to free the tradition process from the historicist search for origins.²²¹

In accordance with Whitehead's and Shils' considerations and summarizing Schulze's approach, Krech emphasizes that it is epistemologically negligent to think the reconstruction of religious evolution could possibly start with its chronological beginnings, and, then, move linearly towards the present. Rather, such an enterprise has to historicize the present by relating the past (in Scholem's sense) strongly to the present, thus allowing for scholarly explication and explanation.²²²

The above method provides a fitting response to the supposed ever-present challenge of how scholars may ever reach or reconstruct the pure original

220 Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam*, 170 ("Keine dieser Ordnungen verzichtet darauf, sich durch eine positive Genealogie zu begründen.").

221 Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam*, 174 ("Aber sie erlaubt zweierlei: erstens den Status islamischen Traditionsgeschehens im α -Prozess zu bestimmen und zweitens das islamische Traditionsgeschehen aus einer historistischen Ursprungssuche zu befreien"). Earlier in his book, Schulze has defined the α -process as the genealogy of religion in retrospective perspective (ibid., 38), that is, the reverse genealogy in which the α is a semantical blank space, formal indication for the notion of 'religion', or, in this case, Islam.

222 "Es wäre daher epistemologisch fahrlässig zu meinen, man könne mit der Rekonstruktion religiöser Evolution bei ihren chronologischen Anfängen—und schon gar bei einem einzigen Anfang—beginnen und sich von dort aus mehr oder minder unilinear der Gegenwart nähern. [...] Die Rekonstruktion religiöser Evolution ist vielmehr ein Vorgang der Erklärung ermöglichenden Vergegenwärtigung des Vergangenen sowie zugleich der distanzierend reflexiven Historisierung der Gegenwart [...]." Krech, "Nur wer β sagt, kann auch α sagen," 96.

scene (*Urszene*) unspoiled by tradition and biased texts.²²³ Herein, those same traditions and biased texts are instead considered as integral, and, in fact, decisive parts of the scene and the process in question. Accordingly, they are not to be deconstructed, but rather to be analyzed in their constructive capacity.

For the explication of the original scene a closer examination of Tomoko Masuzawa's chapter on Freud in her book 'In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion' proves fruitful.²²⁴ Of course, the quest for the origin of the notion of religion cannot be fulfilled by reliance on psychoanalysis, let alone to examine the introduction and use of certain notions in extant religious traditions. Nevertheless, and perhaps surprisingly, Freud's most famous case study of the Wolf-Man, has some relevance for the discussion of the notion of religion and the processes involved with its usage on both metalanguage and object language levels. As Masuzawa stresses, the reference to the Oedipal drama in the case of the Wolf-man illustrates a crucial aspect of the idea of originality and the corresponding attitude towards history. For "[...] it should call our attention to the curious fact that his histories do not start from a beginning but always in the midst, not even in an ambiguously and unequivocally locatable 'one day'."²²⁵ This is mainly because of the special structure of time derived from Freud's theory here: Freud's 'refounding of time'.

The application of the structure of re-founded time may be an important tool for further work on the history of religions. The refoundation may be described as follows: Masuzawa states that the crucial event of one's psychological development "is not an event that can be located at a precise point in time for it is literally a complex, which arises codependently. They arise *in* and *as* the traces of diachronic cross-reference, interpenetration, and superimposition of 'events' dispersed in time."²²⁶ Accordingly, the process is not related to a common interpretation of chronology as proceeding linearly from a to (some later point in time) b. Directionally, it is the other way around. Thus, the original scene itself is a product of communication in the double sense: first, it represents a challenging encounter and, second, the encounter of that encounter with later experiences. Because of that, the content and the significance of the original scene are unfixed from the very beginning: it is "not something that happens in the beginning in any simple chronological sense; it comes into

223 I prefer the translation *Urszene* as 'original scene' as opposed to the usual 'primal scene' that involves a certain (temporal) priority of the scene in question.

224 Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime. The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

225 Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime*, 137.

226 Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime*, 136.

effect sometime in the course of the individual's life, and assumes the position of an origin, or *Ursache* [ground]. Since it does invariably come into effect, everything that came before and comes after it will equally fall under its dictate [...]."²²⁷ It may well be the case that an encounter gains relevance and significance only after another event has occurred which *retrospectively* makes the first encounter relevant, meaningful, and important. The meaning and importance of an original scene, thus, is gained in retrospect when it is juxtaposed with later experiences all of which add to the content and the relevance of the original scene.

Thus, by this 'refoundation of time', a perhaps once insignificant incidence is enriched with meaning over the course of time, being modified by the experiences of the participant of the original scene in such a way *becoming* the decisive original scene that now determines the whole story. Therefore, it is not the case that observers of history do perceive the decisive event in time; rather it is the further course of events that makes one event decisive. Masuzawa even goes so far as to hint at the peculiar *bipolar* structure of the reality derived from this interplay: though the original scene may never have in fact happened, it nevertheless represents itself as real in following experiences. Thus, the reality of the subsequent experience is founded on the basis of an 'unreal' event, the 'mental pole', thus, structuring the actual—and *vice versa*.²²⁸ This "antihistoricist sense of time"²²⁹ as opposed to the former "logic of origination that animates and dominates much of our discursive practices, in religious studies as in many other fields,"²³⁰ however, might be useful for examining the notion of religion and of justifying its further use in scholarly metalanguage.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Compare Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime*, 129: "What remains conspicuous nonetheless is the two-point (or *diphasic*) structure of the 'reality' involved in both instances. Inferring from this, then, it might be said that [...] the 'reality' of the primal scene is, *structurally speaking* a nonperception, nonexperience, and that it is only in its unexpected return that it (re)presents itself as real, that it founds the real on the basis of this never-has-been." See chapter on the stability of dynamic bipolarity.

²²⁹ Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime*, 179.

²³⁰ Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime*, 4. Perhaps surprisingly to many of the current matadors of the study of religion, Masuzawa manages to show that even the supposedly outdated founding figures of the academic study of religion, such as Max Müller, had some very deviant ideas on particular notions: "What comes to the fore as a result is an unexpected image of history, seemingly uncharacteristic of his time and of his profession: 'history' not as an organic, continuous narrative but as a series of casualties fraught with loss, decay, incidental conjunctions of foreign elements, and fortuitous and deviant aftergrowths. Such a history is anything, but teleological; there is no font of plenitude anywhere in this history that guarantees its destiny. Above all, it is a history of going abroad and going astray" (ibid., 9).

4.1.3 From 'Religion' to Back

Reversing the course of time makes things more complicated, but it also allows us to start our historical research now and then travel back in time. We do not have to assume an original point in time and start from there. The perspective of description is reversed, and the body of the historian's work turns towards the phenomena, following the orientation to the past.

A concept acquires general and generic qualities in retrospect of the concrete situation when it was introduced. If a concept is introduced in a contingent situation of contact (i.e. an original scene of this concept) into a tradition, then it is right *this* concept or a translation, used because of resemblance and similarity, that is *the* notion of religion. The concept of religion, thus, is not a correctly derived notion as regards historical development nor is it the most adequate notion of the 'phenomenon' of religion. Concepts are in a permanent state of modification, that further tends towards generalization, as they are handed down. As they are transmitted, further importance is added to the original scene of introduction—the *ur*-usage of the term. In his considerations on religious language, Bruno Latour has described a set of characteristics that are well suited to the notion of religion that is actually used today: "This particular universal is so unlike the other kind that, far from coming down, stable, from the past to the present, it takes off from the present and goes back to the past, changing and deepening the past's foundation. So much so that, the more time passes, the more the point of departure swells with the future. What happens after that allows the beginning to be the beginning of something. The start depends on the sequel. The father depends on the son."²³¹

The retrospective perspective is employed on the object language level either in emerging traditions or in situations of contact between traditions. Concerning the question of temporal priority in Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism Jason BeDuhn notes: "Yet, when set within the larger context of historical developments, the evidence suggests that Zoroastrianism was in its formative (not reformatory) period at the same time as Manichaeism was; that both religions emerged only in the third century against the background of Iranian religious cultural traditions; that both religions laid claim to those older traditions, and appropriated them selectively, tendentiously, within the bounds of their distinct hermeneutics; that this process of cultural interpretation and consolidation in third-century Iran resulted in precisely the emergence of 'religions' as distinct institutional entities for the first time in this part of the world; but that both religions wanted to read their present into the past,

²³¹ Bruno Latour, *Rejoicing or the Torments of Religious Speech* (Cambridge/Malden: Polity, 2013), 47.

and set about constructing a narrative of an earlier time much like theirs, of an earlier founding of Zarathustra's 'religion.'²³² Supposing that both traditions constituted themselves as 'religions' the predecessors they claimed for were then constituted as religions as well. However, they were interpreted in accordance with the prevailing religious teachings of the time—and as though they were also the origin of the later one.

The main fallacy regarding the examination of the origin of religion is to look for the definitory elements of religion at the earliest possible time—i.e., to search for the 'birthplace' of a religion, when it was still small, yet already equipped with all the elements that justify the name of religion. Having discovered its birthplace, the scholar then writes the history of religion into the form of a biography, starting with early and perhaps even pre-birth events and closing with the later events of its 'life'. Rather, it should be written the other way around: one has to start with the refined notion of religion now and then travel back into time, accepting the risk and the probable result that the religion in question gets conceptually 'smaller' and the notion less and less refined in the course of time. This method is by no means a hidden apotheosis of a particular notion that has factually prevailed in the course of history (perhaps with the help of force), but rather a suggestion for an approach to deal with the fact of historically successful notions. Moreover, it may well be the case that religion proper gradually turns into the religioid. What can be written is an anti-(or kata-)biography or anti-(kata-)history of religion based on a refoundation of time. It goes without saying that within such a project, the Orientalist approach is not valid anymore, as one needs the prevailing notion of today as an inevitable starting point.

It may well be the case that there is no such notion or concept of religion that can be found in the, say, third century BCE in Japan. There is, however, such a notion *now* that has its counterparts with regard to supposedly corresponding notions that are presently found in Japanese culture. These notions may be traced back to earlier notions, right back to third century notions. Accordingly, it is futile to check if there is an item in third century Japan that fits with the characteristics of a notion of religion, and to state that there was religion if there is a 100 percent hit. It is not even promising to allow a lower percentage of 'hits'. What allows for the statement 'there is religion in Japan at that time' is another kind of reasoning entirely. Though it might be provocative to some ears, there is much truth in the assertion that there was religion in Japan in the third century because there is religion in Japan now. What happened here was

232 Jason BeDuhn, "The Co-formation of the Manichaean and Zoroastrian Religions in Third-Century Iran," *Entangled Religions* 11 (2020), 2.

something that may be described using the model of 'genealogical Platonism' as introduced by Volkhard Krech. The model studies the emergence of forms from diffuse and incomplete elements, aiming at completing and achieving unambiguous patterns to adapt to known and well-established forms.²³³ By tracing 'religion' back to possible candidates from its own conceptual horizon, *object language* considerations *retrospectively* co-ordinate earlier and later patterns to a continuum of meaning that may be subject to *metalanguage* description. Retrospection and the examination of the conceptual processes involved in the forming of patterns are, thus, the main elements of a study of the history of religions. The instances, in which patterns are obviously and, perhaps forcibly, coordinated to achieve a continuum are not obstacles to metalanguage description or the proof that a later concept is somehow 'wrong' or not suitable for the prevailing cultural context, but rather the decisive leaping points where the retrospective pattern-building process becomes obvious, differentiated and scientifically describable. They are, as decisive points of *contact*, the very situations in which meaning is retrospectively introduced—loaded cumulatively in the Freudian sense—with meaning and that, accordingly, make scholarly work possible.²³⁴

'Religion' is, thus, a permanently emerging fact of the present that is continuously retrospectively appropriated in the past. After, all this is a process that also may be witnessed on the object-language level, concerning the particular ways religious groups, if challenged internally or externally, relate themselves to temporality. Traditions dynamically stabilize themselves by retrospectively adapting the past to the present needs.

On the scholarly metalanguage level, regarding the description, analysis and explanation of historical processes, it is important to notice that the idea of the 'invention' of a historical item, a concept, a notion, an idea and so on, under the retrospective perspective becomes basically senseless. This is—perhaps—much of a pity if one looks at the legions of books and articles that bear the notion 'the invention of X' in their title. There may have been an invention of Hinduism, perhaps even performed by sinister agents of colonialism and imperialism, but Hinduism is a present-day object language reality, having communicative results that shape reality. As it makes no sense to

233 See Krech, "Nur wer β sagt, kann auch α sagen," 93.

234 "Gerade deshalb ist das Verfahren der retrospektiven Genealogie zumindest wissenschaftlich notwendig. Es will nicht die epistemischen Brüche zwischen Moderne und Vormoderne auf der Objektebene nivellieren oder auch nur abschwächen. Vielmehr ist es die Bedingung der Möglichkeit, sich von der Moderne aus überhaupt der Geschichte nähern zu können." Krech, "Nur wer β sagt, kann auch α sagen," 95.

explain it away for reasons of its inventedness, it makes also no sense to talk about the only possible history of Hinduism dating back about 200 years (as the word ‘Hinduism’ did not exist in Indian languages before 1816).²³⁵ Hinduism, from today’s perspective, is as old as the earliest manifestations of the human mind in the outside world because there is meaningful communication on Hinduism now.

It is about time to call for another scholarly turn, but this time for a turn that is really a turn. The image of the angel of history as described by Walter Benjamin is not merely descriptive, but also makes a request of the reader. The head of the angel of history is already turned: what is now required is that it turns its body as well. What is needed, is a *katahistory*, a turn of the body of history. Thus, moving backwards into the open that is the un-foreseen future is the only appropriate orientation for scientific enterprise.²³⁶

4.2 “*He Who Wants to Travel Foreign Lands Needs Model Forms*”: *Model Forms in Situations of Religious Contact*

Given that situations of contact are the most important events for understanding the dynamics of the history of religions, we then require appropriate scholarly instruments and models to grasp these situations of contact conceptually.²³⁷ With regard to this question, I would like to suggest the examination and use of *model forms* as an important tool and as a subject in themselves for scholarly work. Accordingly, in the following chapter, I hope to demonstrate how model forms are used on object language level and, correspondingly, how they can be used on metalanguage level for the description, analysis and explication of situations that dynamize the history of religions. By doing so, the process and the merits of inevitable, but also productive misunderstandings in situations of contact may be scrutinized.

To introduce and explain the notion of ‘model form’ I have to refer to one of the most dreaded pieces of writing in the history of humankind—namely the spectre of the income tax return form. People in modern societies are used to such documents which can be considered instrumental in both acknowledging and exploiting them as members of the society in which they find themselves. As frightening, bureaucratic and as specified as it may be, the model

235 On the ‘Invention of Hinduism’-thesis (as well as the ‘premordialist-Hinduism’-thesis) see Manu V. Devadevan, *A Prehistory of Hinduism* (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2016), 6–7.

236 See Karl Raimund Popper, *Das Elend des Historizismus* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1987), XI–XIII.

237 A previous version of this chapter was presented at the KHK workshop ‘Ritual, Normativity and Representation. New Methods in the Study of Religious Contacts’ (9–11 May 2019), organized by Giulia Evolvi and Eduard Iricinschi.

form as employed here may prove fitting for the analysis and description of what is going on in the history of religions, in particular with regard to situations of religious contact.

On a basic level, model forms (*Formulare*) are characterized by the inclusion of fixed text and blank spaces. The process expected by this template is that the blank spaces be filled with the personal data of the individual, for example, name, address, date of birth, income tax number, and even religion. By doing so, by filling in the blanks, the individual inscribes them into the model form. The notion of inscribing or inscription as used here refers to this process.

The example of the dreaded income tax form (*Steuererklärungsformular*) is, nevertheless a good example of the model form, as it is in many regards representative of the basic functions of a model form. What is peculiar about them is the fact that someone who fills the slots of the form is considered to be responsible for the way the text is read. This responsibility may result in a change of status, a requirement for additional payment or even legal persecution. In rare cases, as it seems, one may also get some money back.

The following lines are intended to provide a conceptual approach for the phenomenological reformulation of the situation of contact as a catalyst for the particular dynamics of the history of religions. It is my main thesis that by examining *model form* narratives the different levels of instantiation of potential and real situations of contact can be discerned. Moreover, the model form (*Formular*) can be described as the structural basis of communication and transfer of religious knowledge.

Model forms are a decisive element of object language communication and can be described on the level of scientific metalanguage courtesy of a structural correspondence between object language and metalanguage strategies. Meta-language model forms here can be compared to phenomenological notions such as Edmund Husserl's notion of the 'empty horizon' or 'empty (pre-)indication' (*Leerhorizont/Leervorweise*). According to Husserl, in perception processes, the presence of objects is constituted both by the recognizable and the indications of the not-yet recognizable, such as a table that, at a given point of time, is partly perceived and partly not-yet perceived. Husserl explains these indications as indications of an emptiness not yet *filled*. The emptiness or blank is not arbitrary; rather, it is framed by *prescriptive* rules that determine how the blanks are to be filled, i.e. it is connected to meaning which allows the synthesis of perception. To a certain degree, and following Husserl's notion, Martin Heidegger's *formaleAnzeige* (formal indication) can be conceptualized as a phenomenological instrument that works in the manner of model forms. These instruments are intended to guarantee that the direction of explication of a phenomenon is provided by the phenomenon itself, and not by an a priori

theory or preconceived concept. For this sake, suitably framed *blank spaces* are used, which thereby allow the phenomenologist to follow the lead of the phenomenon in question without bias.²³⁸

4.2.1 On Model Forms (Formulare)

Model forms are no mere theoretical constructs, but rather objects in and for every-day practice. It is to be expected that the very majority of the world's population today is familiar with model forms, not least digital natives who are used to the basic procedures and elements found on the internet. In the following, I would like to concentrate on two examples of model forms that are to be found today and the historical background that led to their introduction.

4.2.1.1 *In Bureaucracy*

To the possible surprise of many of its hapless victims, the model form is, nevertheless, predominantly a cultural achievement. That it also might be an important scholarly tool in modeling the dynamics of the history of religion, I hope to show in the following. But first, let me stick to model form's cultural significance as it throws some light on the possible use of the concept in scholarly work on situations of religious contact.

Especially in its modern fearsome appearance, the model form is, above all, an instrument to enhance the productivity of a given society by means of an *optimization of the efficacy of communication*. Model forms are the main media of communication between the individual and institutions. Though model forms undoubtedly restrict and channel communication—they inaugurate something that is called an asymmetrical dialogical situation (mostly between an authority asking and an individual answering)—they, nevertheless *allow* communication in the first place. This is communication of a special kind, characterized by a certain dichotomy between the individual particular and the institutionalized general, or rather, between a dynamic contingent and the stable lasting element.

Above all, it is a *reliable* communication. First, the complexity of communication is reduced by means of the *standardization* of language, of questions and answers, or rather, of texts and blank spaces. Second, many model forms have a *binding* quality as the filling of the blank spaces has to be confirmed through provision of a date and signature at the end of the model form. In many contexts, the model form, thus, achieves a legally relevant status. Signing

238 On formal indication in Heidegger's thinking see Knut Martin Stünkel, "Formal anzeigendes Philosophieren. Heideggers Denken 1916–1976," PhD diss., Universität Bielefeld, 2002.

your income tax form means not least that you can be made legally responsible for your entries, and that you will suffer legal persecution if these entries are found false.²³⁹

A model form functions as an interface between the contingency of an individual inscription on the one hand, and the stability and formativeness of a general text on the other hand. It produces and stabilizes information via inscription. It provides a framework for communication that partly consists of variable information and partly of constant information.²⁴⁰ By doing so, it provides a generally readable text that *mediates* between the individual and society. Thus, the form can be described as a cultural achievement—as a mediator between individual and society, forms (and the form they take) are culturally determined. The individual, thus, is not dissolved, but rather maintained and specified within the spaces of a model-form-based communication. By using model forms, the individual claims to be seen (and recognized by the institution or authority). A model form, thus, allows both generalization (of the prevailing information) and the attribution of individuality as the center the information achieved by the model form is ascribed to.

The decisive characteristic of model forms are their *blank spaces*.²⁴¹ These spaces do not only allow individual inscriptions. In inscribing these blank spaces, the individual also performs a juridical act. It might be argued that in Western societies, particularly after the Second World War, the use of model forms in bureaucracy somehow gets more democratic, as now the individual themselves fills out the model form. The task is no longer relegated to an expert, normally a civil servant. The personal inscription, however, does also enhance the degree of responsibility held by the individual for his inscriptions into the model form. Media theorist Cornelia Vismann in her book *Akten, Medientechnik und Recht* (2011) has stressed the legal obligation that follows the inscription into the model form:

The printed model form relates to the written filling-in as the abstract law to the concrete case. It prefigures the subsumptive proceeding for the application of abstract laws. The blank space in model forms marks the

239 Compare on the reliability and trustworthiness of standardized juridical documents in medieval times Petra Schulte, *Scripturae publicae creditor. Das Vertrauen in Notariatsurkunden im kommunalen Italien des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003).

240 Benedikt Burkard, "Liste, Vordruck, Bildschirmmaske. Eine kleine Geschichte des Formulars," *Das Archiv* 1 (2010), 7.

241 On the significance of blank spaces see the chapter on Secret.

place of the concrete in the manner of blank and its infilled content. It is its hollow form.²⁴²

Model forms, thus, in-form bureaucracy via formalization. As such, bureaucracy is indebted to a binding order manifested in standardized communication processes—as well as the individual in question who completes the model form.

4.2.1.2 *In Religious Contexts*

The in-formative communicative function outlined above as well as the obligation that derives from the model form structure, finds its resonances in the religious sphere—as should, perhaps be of interest to scholars of religious studies.

Thus, it should not come as a surprise that the notion of model forms is not unknown to religious traditions and that forms are also used in religious contexts. They may even be the objects of some enthusiasm—for they make use of bureaucratic practice. Basil of Caesarea (Basil the Great), for example, refers to a model form of the emerging Christian church in his Homily XIII:

Come, then, at once, to me: devote thyself entirely to the Lord: give in thy name: be enrolled in the list of the Church. The soldier's name is enrolled: the champion enters on the combat, after his name has been inscribed on the lists: a naturalized citizen is registered on the city books. By all these titles thou art bound to give in thy name, as a soldier of Christ, a champion of piety, and one who aspires to citizenship in heaven. Have it inscribed on this book, that it may be inscribed above.²⁴³

Here, in fact, it is bureaucracy multiplied: a model form then permits access to another model form, rendering the process both reliable and binding (“Be dead to sin: be crucified together with Christ”) in anticipation of a future reward gained as a result of these processes of inscription (“Through many

242 Cornelia Vismann, *Akten, Medientechnik und Recht* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2011), 161: “Das gedruckte Formular verhält sich dabei zur handschriftlichen Eintragung wie das abstrakte Gesetz zum konkreten Fall. Es präfiguriert das subsumptive Verfahren zur Anwendung von abstrakt gefaßten Gesetzen. Die Lücke auf den Formularen markiert ‘nach dem Muster slot and filler’ den Platz des Konkreten. Sie ist die Hohlform dafür.”

243 Basil the Great, “Exhortation to Baptism,” in *A Treatise on Baptism: With an Exhortation to Receive it, translated from the Works of St. Basil the Great, ed. and trans. Francis Patrick Kenrick* (Philadelphia: Fithian, 1843), 237.

tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of heaven: but the beatitude of the heavenly kingdom succeeds these tribulations").²⁴⁴

The presence of model forms, however, is not restricted to Christian contexts. In Lucian's *Deorum Concilium* one finds an interesting example of the use of model forms in an admittedly satirical literary context, in which bureaucratic, legal, and religious aspects are combined. Here, Zeus convenes an *ekklesia* of the gods in order to discuss how to deal with unworthy gods who have illicitly joined the table of the legitimate gods. As Momos, the god of reproach, argues, unworthy strangers, Greeks and Barbarians had themselves *inscribed into the citizen's roll of heaven*, and, thus, claimed unjustifiably for the honor of divinity.

There are, I repeat it, many persons who, despite their mixed origin, have been admitted to our feasts and councils upon terms of equality; and who, not satisfied with this, have brought hither their servants and satellites, and enrolled them among the Gods; and these menials now share in our rations and sacrifices without ever so much as paying the customary tax.²⁴⁵

As a consequence, the table of the gods is crowded with riff-raff who are not even willing to pay the necessary 'Metoikae'-tax. It is not by chance that one might be reminded of the model form by which one pays income tax.²⁴⁶

The element of obligation that is connected to model form structures can be identified in religious contexts as well. As Webb Keane has stressed, creeds are closely linked to a 'performative of assent': "A creed normally looks like a series of propositions about the world. But they are peculiar in certain respects. First, usually they are formulaic, condensing complex arguments about doctrine into a readily learned and reproduced form. Moreover, the propositions are attached to a performative of assent. The creed states an objective claim (it is the case that 'Jesus is the Son of God'). As such it appears to be merely a proposition. But it has performative force; the Nicene creed begins 'We believe'. It asserts the speaker's alignment with the claims ('Jesus is the Son of God' is true

244 Basil the Great, "Exhortation," 226.

245 πολλοὶ γάρ, φημί, οὐκ ἀγαπῶντες ὅτι αὐτοὶ μετέχουσι τῶν αὐτῶν ἡμῖν ξυνεδρίων καὶ εὐωχοῦνται ἐπ' ἴσης, καὶ ταῦτα θνητοὶ ἐξ ἡμισείας ὄντες, ἔτι καὶ τοὺς ὑπηρετάς καὶ θιασώτας τοὺς αὐτῶν ἀνήγαγον ἐς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ παρενέγραψαν, καὶ νῦν ἐπ' ἴσης διανομάς τε νέμονται καὶ θυσίων μετέχουσιν, οὐδὲ καταβαλόντες ἡμῖν τὸ μετοίκιον. Lucian, *The Parliament of the Gods*, in *Works. Volume V*, (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press 1936), 420.

246 See Wolfgang Spickermann, "Lukian von Samosata und die fremden Götter," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 11 (2009), 233.

about the world, and I hold that it is true). Moreover, it publicly reports this alignment ('Jesus is the Son of God' is true about the world, and I hold that it is true, and I hereby state so, that is, I take responsibility for the match between my words and the world itself). The creed takes the publicly circulating form of an assertion. It represents the speaker as taking responsibility for her own thoughts."²⁴⁷ The same formulaic structure that is at the same time a performative of assent and of obligation, of taking responsibility, of informing and being informed—up to the point that any retraction is no longer possible save at peril of severe consequences—may be found in the Islamic *šahāda* "I bear witness that there is no deity but God, and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the messenger of God." The testimony of monotheism as a declaration of allegiance and abjuration of other divinities²⁴⁸ also hints at a context of religious challenge, which is then met in the formulaic manner of a binding self-declaration.²⁴⁹

Model forms as an instrument of communication appear prominently in the context of the Christian ritual—in liturgical contexts: the *formularia*. Scholars of Christian liturgy date precursors of the model forms in question back as early as to the *Didache*, and in particular to the words that are supposed to be spoken at the Eucharist. These, in turn, may be traced back to Jewish and Pagan sources.²⁵⁰ Originally, from at least the Carolingian renaissance and the introduction of liturgical books (supposedly from the time of Gregory the Great) from Rome at Charlemagne's court during the ninth century CE, *formularia* in liturgy of the West effect the communicative regulation of the general and the particular by imposing a model upon free improvisation within

247 Webb Keane, "The evidence of the senses and the materiality of religion," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (2008), 123.

248 See Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 369. On the Paleo-Islamic move from alliance to allegiance in Arab politics that is, to an unequal commitment of "formal obeisance and a habitus of routinised obeisance" see *ibid.*, 132–133.

249 Al-Azmeh also stresses the lack of content of the formula that, at the beginning of the emergence of Islam "had yet to enter the moulds of theological sublimation, doxological expression, interpretation and mythological elaboration": "But overall, and beyond formulaic statements that betokened more ritual utterances than doctrinal substance, the creedal content was meagre, and the formulaic statements characteristic of the new movement were open to all manner of possible interpretations in term of the generally scant theological ideas in place in the newly conquered lands, senior clergy excepted." Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 369–370.

250 See Marcel Metzger, *Geschichte der Liturgie* (Paderborn: Schöningh 1998), 26–27, 49. See Dietmar von Huebner, "Formular, liturg," in *Lexikon des Mittelalter*, Vol. IV: *Erzkanzler-Hiddensee* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 656–657.

liturgy. *Formularia*, thus, interrelate past and present as well as temporality and eternity.²⁵¹

There has been a tendency for collections of model forms created for practical purposes in liturgy to become normative. In doing so, they can become codified cult rituals insensitive to the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Yet, nevertheless, the free spaces that are contained within the model forms, as it seems, can also allow for the gradual transformation of the *formularia* to emancipatory elements of individual use.²⁵² The protestant theologian Rainer Volp (1931–1998) in his two-volume study on liturgy as ‘the art to celebrate God’ described the task and the function of model forms in a corresponding fashion. Above all, *formularia* are introduced to combine objectified formula and subjective form. In this sense, the model form can be seen as proffing an opportunity for an individual inscription into a ritual that is intended to combine the immanent and the transcendent sphere for the sake of communication.²⁵³ According to current theological considerations, in Christian liturgy, model forms are, therefore, used to prepare and allow this kind of *communicatio idiomatum* with regard to general application in service, allowing participants to inscribe themselves individually into the ritual.²⁵⁴ The individually and

251 Concerning liturgy (and, as a consequence, model forms) Martin Riesebrodt raised an important point that well contributes to the model of the model form, i.e. that all religious liturgies contain some kind of promise about what they are able to do. The promising aspect, thus, might correlate to the binding aspect, thus making the employment of model forms to deal with challenges more comprehensible, see Martin Riesebrodt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen. Eine Theorie der Religionen* (München: Beck, 2007), 109.

252 See Metzger, *Geschichte der Liturgie*, 125. On the *formularia* as an issue in the period of Reformation see Anders R. Messner, *Die Meßreform Martin Luthers und die Eucharistie der Alten Kirche. Ein Beitrag zur systematischen Liturgiewissenschaft* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1989), 190.

253 See Rainer Volp, *Liturgik: die Kunst, Gott zu feiern. Vol. 2: Theorien und Gestaltung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlags-Haus, 1994), 1014–1015: “Formulare sind operative Hilfsmittel, die das Zusammenspiel von objektivierten Formeln und subjektiven Formen erleichtern. Sie sind weder zu reproduzieren noch zu produzieren, sondern je neu zu redigieren. [...] Die kompositorische *Einheit* des Gottesdienstes zu erstellen ist die je neue Aufgabe [...] Denn die angestrebte Form ist das optimale Zusammenspiel aller Kombinationsregeln: Sie sollen gestatten, daß im Erleben der Beteiligten das Ereignis weder durch entleerte Vorgaben noch durch zufällige Kombinationen verstellt wird. Das im Formular vorgesehene ‘Ordinarium’ enthält lediglich das Minimum rechtlich notwendiger und häufig wiederkehrender Rahmenbedingungen. Der weithin schlechte Ruf sogenannter ‘agendarischer Formen’ liegt weniger in der Beschaffenheit der Formulare als vielmehr in der Unfähigkeit, situations- und sachgerecht mit ihnen umzugehen.”

254 “Gottesdienstformulare sind keine beliebig auffüllbaren oder kürzbaren Gerüste. Es sind Überlieferungen dichter Erfahrungen, Ausschnitte eines Syntagmas, das einmal in

temporally prevailing inscription within the ritual, therefore, allows for gradual changes of the model form.²⁵⁵

As such, model forms are *manifestations of situations of contact*. They are used to allow communication via in-formation. It is this informative and communicative aspect that may be instrumental for the description and analysis of situations of contact between religious traditions.

4.2.2 Sociological Theory of Model Forms

Model forms allow and structure communication. They do so, firstly by the mediating function they hold between the general and the particular and secondly, through their obligatory character they acquire once the blank spaces have been filled and the process of inscription has been corroborated through the act of dating and signing the form. In general, model forms objectify individuals via information, i.e. *they make them visible to a greater context*. It guarantees the social accountability/reliability of an individual as a generally readable *sociotext*.

Despite their seemingly static character, model forms can serve as a decisive building block of a processual social theory. The introduction of model forms manifests the scientific decision to read and to describe social processes as textures, and to utilize structural correspondences between social phenomena and their scholarly description. In this regard, the sociological theory of model forms is an element of a (meta-)hermeneutics that is able to describe the mutual hermeneutics of religious traditions that are in contact with each other.

sensibler Abstimmung als strukturierte *Ganzheit* geplant war. Was immer man davon übernimmt, Ordinariusstücke, Propriumsstücke bzw. Gebetsformulierungen: die leitende Frage ist nicht die einer sensationellen Attraktion oder einer unanstößigen Repetition, sondern die nach dem Optimum des inneren Mitvollzugs der Anwesenden; da sich diese aber nur unterschiedlich zu eigenständiger Interpretation bereitfinden, sind Freiräume in der dramaturgischen Einheit jedesmal neu aufzuspüren." Volp, *Liturgie: die Kunst, Gott zu feiern*, 1017.

255 "Operationen an einem Formular haben dem Grundsatz zu entsprechen, daß einerseits die Überfülle der Botschaften Freiräume für Innovationen braucht, andererseits aber die Änderung jedes Details die Dramaturgie des Ganzen mitbetrifft. [...] Formulare bewahren vor Willkür, indem sie den Sprachlosen mit den Regeln des Brauchs bekannte Räume zur Verfügung stellen. Diese Rituale enthalten Spuren vergangener Entscheidungen, die jedoch bei zunehmender Disfunktionalität merkliche Innovationsschübe brauchen. Die Änderung auch nur eines Elements betrifft immer auch das Ganze." Volp, *Liturgie: die Kunst, Gott zu feiern*, 1018–1020.

The sociological theory of model forms was introduced by the social philosopher Jürgen Frese. In his work to produce a general theory located between social philosophy and social sciences, the notion of model form became relevant to Frese in the conceptual description of experience and its relation to the social context. In his book *Prozesse im Handlungsfeld* ('Processes in the field of action') from 1985, Frese claims that "one can describe social processes as meaningful filling-ins of model forms, thus generating self-identifying systems" ("soziale Prozesse sind beschreibbar als sinnvolle Ausfüllungen von Formularen zu sich selbstidentifizierenden Systemen").²⁵⁶ In accordance with Niklas Luhmann's basic idea that the essence of the social is communication, one could, accordingly, claim that communication is performed by certain model forms. In general,

model forms can be described as a partly filled-out (and, therefore, pre-conceived) structure with certain blank spaces, into which individualizing characteristics, data and facts can be registered. A model form is more than merely structural fixation of possible fulfillments, but less determined as regards content.²⁵⁷

Blank spaces allow for individual use. It is this concrete action-guiding and mediating function that provides model forms with their potential to establish sociality. According to Frese, model forms, are the 'living common' (*das lebendig Allgemeine*) in social processes, not only in linguistic expression, but rather as regards action in general.²⁵⁸ Thus, sociality can be defined as fulfilling blank spaces by means of concrete action. Correspondingly, responsibility for these actions depends on the character of the possible field of action within the model form.

As such, model forms instantiate a *threefold connective function* between the particular and the general. Firstly, model forms connect the lived experience (*Erleben*) of the individual to the texture of the contemporary concrete situation the individual is in. They allow for self-reference. The isolated elements of lived experience, thus, may be described as 'fitting into' the model form.

²⁵⁶ Jürgen Frese, *Prozesse im Handlungsfeld* (München: Boer, 1985), 16.

²⁵⁷ Frese, *Prozesse im Handlungsfeld*, 155: "[So kann] das Formular [...] beschreiben werden als bereits teilweise ausgefüllte, dadurch inhaltlich stark vorgeprägte Struktur mit bestimmten Leerstellen, in die individualisierende Charakteristika, Daten und Fakten eingetragen werden können. Ein Formular ist mehr als bloß strukturelle Festlegung möglicher Erfüllungen, aber weniger als inhaltliche Determination."

²⁵⁸ Frese, *Prozesse im Handlungsfeld*, 156.

Thus, 'incommensurable' lived experience becomes communicable experience (*Erfahrung*), and this is true, above all, for the experiencing individual themselves. The description that then constitutes the experience (*Erfahrung*) thus follows a familiar pattern of recognition (*Wiedererkennung*) for oneself and others.²⁵⁹ Thus, unique lived experience is transformed into socially relevant experience constituting a recognizable *habitus*. Via model forms, the individual may even compose or write their own life story (autobiography): lived experience achieves familiarity by being informed through model forms.

At the same time, secondly, model forms *connect to the event in question*. That is to say, individual experience and the event are no longer basically unrelated. Individual experience is inscribed into the model form, meaning that the resulting text (the story of one's life) affects and concerns the individual personally.

And third, and socially most important, model forms *connect the self and others surrounding the self* (*Selbstwelt und Mitwelt*) to a common environment (*Umwelt*). Via the medium of the general, the socially *visible* individual emerges (the communicative and the communicable individual) within the spaces of a model form. "By dealing with model forms, experience is structured and disciplined historically in such a way that in between general definiteness and individual contingency of an event *a mutually recognizing and accounting level emerges and stabilizes*."

Model forms are also employed in order to transform individual lived experience into communicable experience.²⁶⁰ Experience, thus, is not hampered by communication, but in fact it provides the forms in which even the unspeakable

259 Frese, *Prozesse im Handlungsfeld*, 157: "Das Durchprüfen von Erinnerungselementen mit Formularen kann zu einem systematisierten Prozeß des Wiedererkennens entwickelt werden, und zwar so, dass das isolierte Element von Erleben beschreibbar wird als einsetzbar in das Formular."

260 In his study on the Piedmontese Waldensian Sebastian Bazan (d. in 1623), Giovanni Tarantino examines the emotional strategy of taking on the language of Christian sacrifice and martyrdom to make sense of suffering in instances of persecution. Here, in a situation of synchronic violent contact with the catholic inquisition, religious object language employs emotional rhetoric that connects its user diachronically to the revered original martyrs of the Christian faith. His formulaic story, thus, could be used to arouse demarcating emotion in contemporary anti-papal circles and countries, such as anti-Jacobite England where it could be used for both religious and political purposes, see Giovanni Tarantino, "'I am contented to die': The letters from prison of the Waldensian Sebastian Bazan (d. 1623) and the Anti-Jacobite narratives of the Reformed martyrs of Piedmont," in *Feeling Exclusion. Religious Conflict, Exile and Emotions in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Giovanni Tarantino and Charles Zika (New York: Routledge, 2019), 139.

(as the unspeakable) might be grasped. Otherwise, individual lived experience is not worth talking about.²⁶¹

On this level of mutual recognition and accountability, translation processes become possible. As regards the hermeneutics of model-form-based translation processes, Frese's following notion is particularly interesting: "The filled-in, consistent, socially defensible, sensibly readable model form forms a text, in which elements of the model form and fillings indistinguishably merge into each other. The content of the text is a story, told after the main connecting thread of the model form."²⁶²

The concept of the story or the narrative is clearly not previously unknown to the Humanities. The relevance and importance of narrative have been stressed by many scholars and the notion is abundantly used to describe and analyze all kinds of human conduct. Phenomenologist Wilhelm Schapp (1884–1965) considered both stories (*Geschichten*) at the individual and family level and 'big stories' (*Großgeschichten/Weltgeschichten/Allgeschichten*), such as myths, Biblical or Qur'anic stories as the essentials for the existence of both individuals and societies, providing and preconditioning the scope of possible action.²⁶³

261 Compare Hubert Knoblauch's claim regarding not only modern popular religions: "Darüber hinaus werden die Erfahrungen von der Kommunikation nicht nur behindert, wie gerne unter Hinweis auf die sogenannte Unaussprechlichkeit bzw. 'Ineffabilität' behauptet wird. Die Kommunikation ermöglicht es ja erst, von der 'Unaussprechlichkeit' zu sprechen, also der Differenz zu dem, was man alltäglich mitzuteilen gewohnt ist. Die Kommunikation bietet auch Formen, in den die Erfahrungen gefaßt werden können. Die Legende, das Gleichnis und die Wundergeschichte stellen klassische Gattungen dar, aber auch die Predigt und ihre weltliche Variante, die Moralpredigt, zählen dazu." Hubert Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion. Auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: New York, 2009), 149. The conversion narrative, Knoblauch continues, in ancient as well as in modern times follows the pattern of Paul's Damascus-experience, thus prevalently referring to the individual experience of transcendence and the interpretation of the whole biography of the convert. Here, the model form is again mediating between the individual and the general by providing a recognizable sociotext.

262 Frese, *Prozesse im Handlungsfeld*, 162: "Das fertig ausgefüllte, konsistente, sozial vertretbare, sinnvoll lesbare Formular bildet einen Text, in dem (grundsätzlich) Formular-Elemente und Ausfüllungen ununterscheidbar ineinander übergehen. Inhalt des Textes ist eine am Leitfaden des Formulars erzählte Geschichte."

263 See Wilhelm Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt. Zum Sein von Mensch und Ding*, 3rd ed. (1953; repr. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2004), 198–201. Compare also Wilhelm Schapp, *Philosophie der Geschichten* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1981), 182 f. A corresponding idea was elaborated by cognitive linguist Mark Turner: "The literary mind is not a separate kind of mind. It is our mind. The literary mind is the fundamental mind. Although cognitive science is associated with mechanical technologies like robots and computer

It is the 'big stories' that provide the most telling model forms for a given society's sociotexts.²⁶⁴

Model forms, so far, have been neglected in the 'narrative turn' in cultural sciences. Jerome Bruner in his considerations about the narrative construction of reality stresses the importance of narratives for the interpretation of social situations: "Just as our experience of the natural world tends to imitate the categories of familiar science, so our experience of human affairs comes to take the form of the narratives we use in telling about them."²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, I think that the model form character of such important stories or narratives has not been stressed properly. In order to fulfill their social, mediating function, narratives have to be interpreted as model forms. It is only then that individuals can inscribe themselves to the (big) stories that exist within the relevant cultural archive. These inscriptions make them 'visible', that is, communicative and communicable to others.

4.2.3 Model Forms in Contact

Now, how can scholars use these findings to describe situations of contact between religious traditions more adequately? Model forms may not only provide sociotexts within a given society, but also establish sociotexts between societies, or between cultures and religious traditions. In doing so, they profit from the reliability connected to formalization. This reliability is, after all,

instruments that seem unlitrary, the central issues for cognitive science are in fact the issues of the literary mind. *Story* is a basic principle of mind. Most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking is organized as stories. The mental scope of story is magnified by projection—one story helps us to make sense of another." Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), v.

264 Compare the idea of 'Narrated Religion' in the 'Lived Ancient Religion' approach in Janico Albrecht et al., "Religion in the making: the Lived Ancient Religion approach," *Religion* 48 (2018), 583: "Narratives are a powerful instrument for the formation of groups. The very process of narrative emplotment renders persons, objects and events meaningful by setting them into temporal, spatial and social frames. Narratives however are rarely 'closed': the biographical narrative of the individual, for example, necessarily alludes to, even incorporates, the 'public' narratives of families, groups and polities, thus creating a complex narrative identity, which is not the mere sum of all the narrative vectors, but has been filtered through a variety of institutions and interests, each of which can be understood as itself a complex network of narratives and practices, whose ramifications have no natural limits."

265 Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991), 5.

found in bureaucratic contexts,²⁶⁶ but also on object language level in the religious field.²⁶⁷

Perhaps the model form-like qualities of sociotexts might explain the “astounding compatibility of the religious” (Walter Burkert), which has often been manifested in multifold situations of contact.²⁶⁸ That the ill-reputed notion of ‘religion’ is nowadays often replaced by the more agreeable notion of ‘religious tradition’ may already hint at the fact that, regarding religions, a certain narrative about themselves—a diachronic self-reference—is already employed. To overcome contingency, a story of continuity and legitimization is told.²⁶⁹ The traditional self-reference—the self-reference inherent to tradition—can be taken for granted in case of a religion.

Accordingly, in a situation of (religious) contact, two distinct narratives or stories of continuity and legitimization meet. These stories may be different in many regards. However, this event also means that two model forms meet as well; model forms that invite the other tradition in question to inscribe itself into the form in order to make themselves visible for the users of the model form. I know that the term ‘invites’ sounds quite positive, one could also and perhaps with more reason talk about ‘forcing the other to inscribe itself’.

266 Of course, the bureaucratic element is not to be neglected in situations of religious contact comprising a tradition with a strongly bureaucratized political environment such as in the Chinese case. In his considerations on the chances of success of a foreign religion in China, Max Deeg asks: “What could a religion, especially a foreign, non-Chinese religion claim to bring as a benefit to the state and to the ruling dynasty? If one looks at the rhetoric of Chinese religious documents two things become clear very soon: first of all, it had to adapt itself to the mainstream terminology of official documents and had to use this discourse in claiming to have gained the support of the emperor who was ruling at a particular historical moment when the religious document was composed, or at least to have had the support of emperors which official historiography found worthy of being ‘good rulers.’” Max Deeg, “The Rhetoric of Antiquity: Politico-Religious Propaganda in the Nestorian Stele of Chang’an,” *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 1 (2007), 17–18.

267 Pascal Boyer, in examining the claims for truth connected to traditional discourse on object language level has stressed this model from-character with regard to ritualized speech: that “the utterances are supposed to convey a truth not in spite of, but *because of* their formalization. This of course goes against the common idea, that such forms of discourse consist in the expression of world-views or cultural ‘conceptions’. It we analyse ritual discourse in this way, we are led to focus on aspects which are either nonexistent or irrelevant, while the aspects considered crucial by the actors, notably the formalization, are just ignored. [...] The more formalized the utterances, the more they are conceived of containing some truth.” Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication. A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 81.

268 Walter Burkert, *Kulte des Altertums. Biologische Grundlagen der Religion* (München: Beck, 2009), 14.

269 Compare chapter on Tradition.

Nonetheless, it is the fact that communication is made possible at all that is relevant for our current context.

It is precisely because of the blank spaces inherent within the model form that distinct traditions may communicate. Inscription into a model form establishes a sociotext. In a situation of contact, the prevailing sociotext is then subject to hermeneutical processes on both sides. Both sides have to proceed by means of conjectures: they have to tentatively fill the blank spaces with possible entries derived from their own sociotext. Thus, they fill the slots provided by the other tradition regarding the possible inscriptions of their own tradition. This is bound to produce misunderstandings of the other. Nevertheless, the inscription into the model form produces a consistent and readable text that renders the other tradition visible and communicative.²⁷⁰ A common environment is established. Moreover, hermeneutical means of understanding, such as radical interpretation and the basic hermeneutical 'principle of charity', also work via model forms. In both cases, a model form text is established for the other due to the bounds of rationality within one's own tradition which the other is invited to inscribe.

The presence of model forms is most obvious in institutionalized situations of contact, such as mission, religious disputations, or in meetings of legations. However, model forms can also be found in the more contingent meetings of individuals. The other is considered trainable, to be treated by means of a plan. The model form in this instance works to establish a certain habitus that allows the party to the encounter to react to an unknown situation and to contextualize the event into a readable and reliable sociotext. Model forms, and not least model forms of action allow connectabilites (*Anschlußmöglichkeiten*, points of connection) that may lead to mutual understanding.²⁷¹ Here, the

²⁷⁰ See, for example, Marianna Ferrara's analysis of the first Portuguese reports on supposed Indian 'Christians' and the ambiguity of the model form 'sacrifice' in these reports: Marianna Ferrara, "The Sacrifice of Others. South Asian Religious Practices in Early Modern European Vocabulary," *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 82 (2016), 609–615. Summarizing her point, Ferrara claims: "What happened in South Asia should be rethought keeping into account two levels of stereotypisation. On the one hand, the circulation of standardised descriptions of the Amerindians in Europe provided an iconographic and imagological repertoire which would have been used, redefined or domesticated, and enriched for sure with new data from Asia. On the other one, the term 'sacrifice' was useful to consider the Indian practices as different but comparable with the Christian religion" (Ibid., 619).

²⁷¹ In this sense, the flexibility, or rather, the lack of imagery in her texture as a deity made the goddess Nanaya a likely subject of adaption among the diverse religious traditions on the Silk Road and from the Sumerians to the Sogdians, see Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Trading the Symbols of the Goddess Nanaya," in *Religions and Trade. Religious Formation*,

argument returns to its bureaucratic beginnings. Volkhard Krech, in a discussion on the model form in a meeting of the КHK,²⁷² has put it this way: he who wants to travel unknown foreign lands, needs model forms (*Wenn man in ein neues Land reisen möchte, braucht man Formulare*).²⁷³ This is, not at last, true for the scholar of religions who is confronted with material from another cultural sphere: model forms might be annoying, but they allow for basic, reliable communication processes.

4.2.4 Textual and Material Examples of Model Forms in Contact

Model forms are an important item of object language, above all, if a tradition is challenged by a situation of contact. Model forms function on several levels, such as textual or material level, but also on diverse levels of scale, namely regarding macro-, meso-, and micro-processes. In the following I am going to

Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West, eds. Peter Wick and Volker Rabens. DHR 5 (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2014), 195: "What place do her symbols play as attractors? Nanaya's symbols were flexible. She was not the embodiment of one sign. her ability to absorb other symbols may be the factor that made her worship attractive. She underwent various transformations and was worshipped as a native deity by the local populace along the trade routes of the historical Silk road that crisscrossed Eurasia from early first millennium CE through the middle of the second millennium CE."

272 In his lecture 'Spurenlese: Religiöse Prozesse im Handlungsfeld' Krech states in more detail: "Wenn man aus dem Niemandsland in ein neues Land einreisen und sich dort beheimaten möchte, braucht es Formulare." Volkhard Krech, "Spurenlese: Religiöse Prozesse im Handlungsfeld." (lecture, Frese-Gedenk-Symposium, 23 July 2008), 10.

273 This also seems to be true for the very final journey. It should not come as a surprise that Chinese bureaucratic afterworld needed model forms to function properly. Accordingly, in tombs of the Han period, one finds model forms such as 'celestial ordinances for the dead' issued by exorcists, and contracts to buy land. Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens characterizes these texts as follows: "The document is written for the administration of the other world, as are the inventory lists. Tiandi's representative orders the celestial administration to deliver the deceased from punishment and the living from calamity, that the sepulture may be maintained in peace and the descendants be happy. The text ends with an administrative formula copied from official documents: 'Promptly, promptly in accordance with the statutes and ordinances' (*jiji ru lüling* 急急如律令). It is often accompanied by a talisman in the form of archetypical characters. On the whole, these exorcist texts are rather standardized and very coherent." The contracts are described as follows: "These texts were most often written on ceramics or on tablets of wood or lead. Placed in the tomb, they specified, in imitation of a contract used in the world of the living, the names of the seller and the buyer, the date of purchase, the cost, the place and the surface area of the land; they were designed as evidence of the rights of the deceased to the land of his tomb so that he could avoid long lawsuits in the other world and protect his descendants from the vengeance of the gods of the earth." Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, "Death and the Dead. Practices and Images in the Qin and Han," in *Early Chinese Religion. Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)*, eds. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 972, 974–975.

list a few examples of the presence and usage of model forms in the context of religions and, in particular, in the context of contact of religious traditions.

Considering a special case, the phenomenon of institutionalized situations of contact between religious traditions, the aim or the aspired outcome of the situation is the elaboration of a model form of mutual recognition and future dealings. There even might be a written text in form of a contract. The participants inscribe into the model form and interpret it according to their prevailing background thus preparing the occupation or re-interpretation of the binding fixed text and the subsequent integration into the universal narration.

However, in most cases the presence and employment of model forms may be implicit but is nevertheless clearly discernable. One could think of many *textual* incidents for the relevance of model forms in contact. Herodotus' famous *interpretatio graeca* may serve as an example, though the basic cultural technique of translation of names of Gods can already be traced back to third Millennium BCE Mesopotamia. Here, the names of the gods and their functions within a certain cosmological frame are treated as transferable, able to be slotted into the blank space where the name of a god would appear in another tradition. The substitution of name—foreign god for familiar deity—thus generates some immediate understanding of an otherwise unfamiliar tradition within that textual context. The question of whether this procedure is 'right' or 'correct' in the supposed connection of name and story that is thus made is beside the point.²⁷⁴ The nature of the form itself²⁷⁵ may present difficulties for interpretation of the other tradition—when information in a received narrative does not fit the understanding of the gods within a tradition—but these difficulties become questions of doctrine, which by prompting self-reflection

274 The Manichean and the Zoroastrian usage of Avestan ritual texts of obscure meanings could be another example of the reading of unknown textures as a model form that can be freely inscribed with regard to their own teachings, see Jason BeDuhn, "The Co-formation of the Manichaean and Zoroastrian Religions in Third-Century Iran," *Entangled Religions* 11 (2020), 38: "The exact meaning of such Avestan ritual texts was already obscure in Sasanid times, as the Middle Persian glosses make evident [...]. As Pallan Ichaporia has demonstrated, the creators of the Pahlavi 'translations' misunderstood much of the language of the gāthās, or perhaps creatively read into them their own later religious culture [...]. In these conditions, Manichaeans were as free as Zoroastrians to make what sense of these obscure chants they could, and to employ them in whatever ritual context they thought appropriate."

275 Jan Assmann hints at this point by stating with reference to the ancient Mesopotamian cultural technique of translating of gods or names of gods: "Andere Völker, Kulturen, politischen Systeme konnten so fremd sein, wie sie wollten—solange sie nur irgendwelche definierbaren und identifizierbaren Götter verehrten, von deren Rechtsautorität man überzeugt sein konnte, ließ sich diese Fremdheit überwinden und eine gemeinsame Basis der Allianz und Verständigung finden." (Jan Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1998), 75 [my emphasis]).

then condense the self-conception of a tradition by means of a process of transcending.²⁷⁶

An instance from Elizabethan times provides a further telling example of the particular use of a model form in a contact situation.²⁷⁷ Here, it is both an expression of the perils of an encounter of belligerent religious traditions and, supposedly due to this, of the binding quality that is connected to its usage.

In 1757, a strange document was found by workers demolishing an old house in Henley Street, Stratford. As it seems, the document still displays some destructiveness on certain branches of scholarship, though the “very extraordinary manuscript [found] between the rafters and the tiling of the house [...] is a small paperbook consisting of six leaves, but unluckily the first was wanting when the book was found.” Edmond Malone, the eminent scholar, lawyer and editor, who reported on the discovery of the document in 1790, furthermore claims to “have taken some pains to ascertain the authenticity of this

276 On the macro-level, the idea of the model form could be used in the description of translation processes that are not subject to the modern idea that translation has to be as close as possible to the original. These were, in part, large-scale endeavors that gained particular influence, not only on individuals but on the development of cultures. In his examination of the Graeco-Arabian translation movement from the eighteenth century CE onwards, Dimitri Gutas has described prevalent theoretical aims of translations at this early stage. Referring to object language considerations of Ishāq ibn-Ḥunayn Gutas states: “[T]he primary quality that defined what a ‘(source) text’ is was not the physical form (i.e. the precise and unique concatenation of words) given to it by its author, but rather its contents and the use for which it was consulted. This would also seem to be indicated by Ḥunayn’s stressing [...] that it is important to know for whom the work was translated in order to evaluate its quality. The obligation of the ‘target text,’ accordingly, would be to reproduce *these* features, and not a presumed ‘integrity’ of the source text as we assume today.” The contents of the translated text were by translation inscribed into the model form provided by the dominant interests of the client, who ordered the translation in the first place. Thus translators were provided with both the model form to use as well as the model form’s authority. It is, therefore, important to note that it is according to this process that “the *translation movement itself* [was] *generated*” with spectacular results for the Arabic language. “The translators developed an Arabic vocabulary and style for scientific discourse that remained standard well into the present century.” Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad an Early ‘Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 140–141. On this creative process of translating Gutas concludes: “This means that some of the translations were deliberately not literal because they were made for a special purpose and to serve certain theoretical positions already held. Thus, just as certain Greek texts were selected for translation because they were expected to provide information and arguments in discussions in progress in ‘Abbāsīd society, the ideological or scientific orientation of these very discussions influenced the way in which the texts were translated” (ibid., 146). I owe the reference to this example to a presentation of the former KHK-fellow Mohsen Zakeri.

277 Also compare my article Knut Martin Stünkel, “Inscription—Einschreiben—Formular,” in *Poetik der Inschrift*, eds. Ulrich Rehm and Linda Simonis (Heidelberg: Winter, 2019).

manuscript, and after a very careful inquiry [is] perfectly satisfied that it is genuine.”²⁷⁸ The manuscript in question is a ‘will’, its content a written confession of faith and of the religious convictions of the person who had inserted his name into the blank spaces that were to be found in every paragraph of the otherwise set text. Additionally, the text was signed at the end by one *John Shakespear*. By inscribing his name into the model form of the text, William Shakespeare’s father confessed his affiliation with the Catholic Church.

In the name of God, the father, sonne, and holy ghost, the most holy and blessed Virgin Mary, mother of God, the holy host of archangels, angels, patriarchs, prophets, evangelists, apostles, saints, martyrs, and all the celestrial court and company of heaven, *I John Shakespear*, a unworthy member of the holy Catholick religion [...] make and ordaine this my last spiritual will, testament, confession, protestation, and confession of faith, hopinge hereby to receive pardon for all my sinnes and offences, and thereby to be made partaker of life everlasting, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my savior and redeemer, who took upon himself the likeness of man, suffered death, and was crucified upon the crosse, for the redemption of the sinners.²⁷⁹

In the present context, the question of whether the document proves that John Shakespeare and his son were in fact secret Catholics or not, is utterly irrelevant.²⁸⁰ Scholarship still struggles on this question.²⁸¹ Unfortunately, the

278 Edmond Malone, “An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the English Stage and of the Economy and Usage of our Ancient Theatres,” in *The Plays of William Shakespeare. Volume the Third containing Prolegomena etc.* (London: Basil, 1800), 205.

279 Malone, “An Historical Account,” 208.

280 On the question of William Shakespeare’s religiosity see David Scott Kastan, *A Will to Believe, Shakespeare and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). It should be mentioned, however, that, albeit in a quite different context, William Shakespeare made use of model forms as well, by characterizing his Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act II, 1 by means of letters he wrote to some ladies, Mrs Ford and Mrs Page: “Mrs Ford: [...] Did you ever hear the like? Mrs Page: Letter for letter, but that the name of Page and Ford differs. —To thy great comfort in the mystery of ill opinions, here’s the twin brother of thy letter. But let thine inherit first, for I protest mine never shall. I warrant he hath a thousand of these letters, writ with blank space for different names—sure, more—and these are of the second edition. He will print, them, out of doubt; for he cares not what he puts into the press, when he would put us two. I had rather be a giantess and lie under Mount Pelion. Well, I will find you twenty lascivious turtles ere one chaste man.” Mrs Ford: “Why, this is the very same: the very hand, the very words. What doth he think of us?”

281 Malone himself seems to have changed his mind on the authenticity of the manuscript: “Edmund Malone suspected [...] that this document bears all the hallmarks of an eighteenth century hoax and that subsequent attempts to link it to the Jesuit Mission of

pamphlet itself has not survived save for a number of copies made in the eighteenth century. Regardless of whether John Shakespeare's confession of faith was genuine, however there are other extant examples of similar fill-in-the-blank confessions of faith. The oldest of these model forms has been dated to around the year 1635.²⁸²

It is more interesting, however, to consider the historical context of religious encounter in which the document emerged than the question of its authenticity. The background concerns the Jesuit Mission of 1580–1581 to England which was itself an expression of the conflict between the Anglican and the Catholic Church. Following Pope Pius v's excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570, Catholicism in England was supported from overseas through the seminary at Duai (Flanders), triggering stern countermeasures from the English authorities.²⁸³ Supposedly, in these times of repression of Catholics, the Jesuit Mission circulated pre-formulated forms that could be used to confess the Catholic faith through inscribing data into the provided form. As the story goes, these forms were brought to England by the Catholic martyr Edmund Campion (1540–1581)²⁸⁴ and the leader of the re-catholicization movement, Robert Parsons (1546–1610).²⁸⁵ Perhaps for reasons of scope or poor choice of targets (the aristocracy and the gentry), the mission was heroic in its efforts—but largely disastrous, ending as it did with Campion executed and Parsons fleeing England.²⁸⁶

Whether the papers were really part of the 1580–1581 endeavor or date from later times, they can nevertheless be contextualized within the Catholic history of counterreformation and mission, as well as into a history of martyrs. In sum, they appear in the context (intra-)religious conflict, a particular

the early 1580th are unjustified." Robert Bearman, "John Shakespeare: A Papist or Just Penniless?," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005), 412.

282 See Robert Bearman, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament'. A Reappraisal," *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003).

283 See Ulrich Suerbaum, *Das elisabethanische Zeitalter* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003), 154–155.

284 On Campion's role in the mission see Sonja Fielitz, "Shakespeare and Catholicism: The Jesuits as Cultural Mediators in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Survey* 21 (2009), 71–86.

285 On Parson's motivation and strategy for his mission see Michael J. Carafiello, "English Catholicism and the Jesuit Mission of 1580–1581," *The Historical Journal* 37 (1994), 761–774. If Carafiello is right in assuming that the Jesuit mission concentrated on high-standing Catholics to promote a possible reconversion of England by force, then it becomes even more mysterious that the missionaries should bother with comparatively lower-standing figures such as John Shakespeare (see *ibid.*, 771).

286 Compare Robert E. Scully, "Trickle Down Spirituality? Dilemmas of the Elizabethan Jesuit Mission," *Nederlands archief for kerkgeschiedenes* 85 (2005), 285–299.

instance of contact.²⁸⁷ Any possible forger of John Shakespeare's spiritual testament would have been aware of these histories. Even in the case of genuine documents, their embeddedness into the story, of course, has effects on the function of the documents itself. The inscription of data into a binding (and potentially deadly) model form was considered at this point in time to be an adequate religious confessional reaction of an individual in a challenging situation. To profit from the benefits of the Catholic faith, one had to fill the blank spaces of the form adequately: that is, by inscribing one's name, the name of a saint of one's choice, and by signing the whole document at the end. By doing so, one dedicates oneself manifestly to salvation as mediated by the Catholic Church. Thus the individual relates themselves to the institution, and is personally written into the general story of salvation that the institution proclaims. Once filled out, the form is considered to be unchangeable; its binding quality is in force for eternity, as the unchangeability itself is a feature written into the model form—explicitly in the case of this example: *and I beseech him above all things, that he never permit any change to be made by me John Shakespear of this my aforesaid will and testament. Amen.*²⁸⁸

In the Shakespeare example given above the significance of the material object of the model form, the form of the incriminating 'small paperbook' is already revealing. As this example suggests, model forms in religious contexts are by no means confined to texts alone. They are not restricted to manifest scripture or even written and printed accounts. Rather, there are many material examples that reveal themselves as being model forms via a manifest religious contact that is expressed within them.

Instead the range of material objects that can be considered model forms is far, far broader than merely texts. The shape of the crucifix is well-known: the tortured body of Jesus hanging on the cross, perhaps marked with the inscription INRI. As such, the material object might be interpreted as a texture connecting the story of Jesus, as the person depicted, to what became the symbol of the religious movement that followed him. But there are more layers to the texture here: as a whole, the crucifix fixed visibly to a wall makes a statement of confession. However, there are also incidents of objects which adapt to this form, but in which certain salient elements have been replaced. In the following example, the place of Jesus within the texture of the cross has been instead

287 Carafiello characterizes the aims of the Jesuit leader as follows: "The English mission had taken on the importance and urgency of a holy war in the mind of Parsons, and he came to believe that it was inextricably tied to the very survival of Catholicism in Europe." Carafiello, "English Catholicism and the Jesuit Mission of 1580–1581," 768.

288 Malone, "An Historical Account," 213.

filled by a statuette of the Buddha. Hence, the cross has become another instance of a model form: the place of Jesus within the whole has become an element considered dispositional, a free space that has been inscribed with another signifier, changing the meaning of the whole.

The Buddha cross itself at first glance could be interpreted as an attempt to adapt the teachings of Buddhism to Christianity or *vice versa*. It might be taken to suggest that within the context of the cross, the function of Christ might be replaced by the function of the Buddha. However, the material object in question is an artefact from seventeenth-century Japan, used by Christians in a situation of repression and persecution. Beginning with the 1549 arrival of Francis Xavier in Japan, an astounding number of Japanese, estimated at over a quarter of a million, converted to Christianity courtesy of the efforts of the Jesuit Mission.²⁸⁹ However, following the Expulsion Edict of 1614 and the persecution of Christians in Nagasaki in 1629, the remaining Christian communities were forced to go underground. The Japanese authorities of the Tokugawa shogunate developed a cunning strategy for finding hidden Christians (*kirishitan*) and forced them to retract: suspects were forced to step on images (*efumi/fumi-e*) made of wood, stone or bronze depicting crucified Christ or the Virgin Mary. If they declined, they were tortured and eventually executed. By 1644 over two thousand people in Japan had been martyred to the Catholic faith in this way.²⁹⁰ The practice of trampling Christian images developed into a public festival in some regions of Japan, and was maintained even after the banishment of the last missionaries in 1639. It was not officially abandoned until 1873.²⁹¹

289 See Peter Nosco, "Secrecy and Transmission of Tradition: Issues in the Study of the 'Underground' Christians," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 20 (1993), 5.

290 See Junhyoung Michael Shin, "Avalokiteśvara's Manifestation as the Virgin Mary: The Jesuit Adaptation and the Visual Conflation in Japanese Catholicism after 1614," *Church History* 80 (2011), 6.

291 In *Gulliver's Travels* Swift used the practice with satirical intention: "To this I added another petition, that for the sake of my patron the king of Luggnagg, his majesty would condescend to excuse my performing the ceremony imposed on my countrymen, of trampling upon the crucifix: because I had been thrown into his kingdom by my misfortunes, without any intention of trading. When this latter petition was interpreted to the Emperor, he seemed a little surprised; and said, he believed I was the first of my countryman who ever made any scruple in this point, and that he began to doubt whether I was a real Hollander or not, but rather suspected I must be a Christian." Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguins, 1994), 237–238.

Christianity was considered a threat to the basis of Japanese society as the Christian faith ultimately transferred loyalty to an otherworldly sphere.²⁹² In order to maximize control of the suspected converts, all Japanese subjects were required to associate to have a bureaucratic affiliation with a Buddhist institution: "Like all persons in Japan from the mid-seventeenth century, underground Christians had to register with local Buddhist temples, which functioned as an arm of the state, registering births, deaths, marriages, and so on. This meant that all underground Christians had to master the role of being nominally Buddhist as required, and secretly something forbidden."²⁹³ Via this procedure, bureaucratized Buddhism became an instrumental institution for the interests of the Tokugawa state.²⁹⁴

Despite all the measures taken to hunt converts to the forbidden faith, the extinguishment of Christianity was never completely eliminated in Japan due to some techniques of secrecy²⁹⁵ and subversion, many of which involved the careful use of model forms such as the crucifix mentioned above. "Many Christians secretly retained the faith by disguising their true religious identity with Buddhist paraphernalia."²⁹⁶ In order to forestall being forced to desecrate Christian symbols, and, thus, endangering either one's life or one's spiritual

292 See George Elison, *Deus Destroyed. The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA. /London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1: "Japanese thought held no preconception corresponding to the Christian predicate. The Japanese Critic found the notion of an omnipotent personal deity specious, its consequence disastrous. The foreign religion could be accused of otherworldliness; for the Christians removed the justification of human action from the social sphere to an extraterrestrial locus. The Christian dictate of supernal loyalty pre-empted loyalty to a secular sovereign."

293 Peter Nosco, "The Experiences of Christians During the Underground Years and Thereafter," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34 (2007), 91.

294 Elison stresses the intensity of bureaucratic control with a telling example: "Forced registry of all the land's people in Buddhist temples made of Buddhism an instrument applied to the elimination of religious heterodoxy. [...] The suspiciousness of the Tokugawa officials, and the thoroughness of their control measures, reached a hysterical pitch akin to that of their Spanish contemporaries (or of those petty bureaucrats of modern Germany) who were bent on enforcing 'racial purity'. Entry into almost any sort of service occupation involved the prior attestation that the person was not a Christian. For instance, a whore's initial contract required such a formula; for officialdom was most concerned that the lady's customers not be contaminated." Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, 4–5.

295 On these techniques see Nosco, "Secrecy and Transmission of Tradition." Also compare Nosco, "The Experience of Christians," 91 on the strategy of over-fulfillment of expectations: "[U]nderground Christians, both individually and collectively, had begun to master the best disguise of all, that is, the invisibility of the model subject and neighbor. Everywhere the evidence points to underground Christians being model cultivators, herders and other dwellers of the countryside."

296 Shin, "Avalokiteśvara's Manifestation as the Virgin Mary," 1.

salvation, or being simply detected by the religious objects they possessed, Christians changed the texture of their venerated images.²⁹⁷ Hence, in the crucifix mentioned above, the believer replaced the body of Christ with the figure of the Buddha on the crucifix, thus keeping the confessional symbol and its texture in place.²⁹⁸ For protective reasons, the crucifix in this case was treated as a model form and thus was able to retain its binding character. It was further strategically connected to a model form arising from another tradition, thereby profiting from its associate narratives. A similar phenomenon is found in the conflation of the image of Mary with the bodhisattva Kannon who had a similar role and appearance (Maria-Kannon).²⁹⁹ Model forms, thus, can well be employed subversively in situations of religious contact.³⁰⁰

297 "One distinctive feature of the nontextual material culture of the underground Christians is that it was, in general, visually indistinguishable from nonproscribed objects of everyday use associated with the Buddhist and eclectic folk religious traditions. What distinguished most of these objects to underground Christians was only the fact that they were of ritual or symbolic import to their communities, and so only rarely were underground Christians uncovered through discovery of their religious possessions." Nosco, "Secrecy and Transmission of Tradition," 14.

298 Shin identifies some images of the Buddha used in this way as Amida, "the savior and lord of afterlife paradise, [...] the most appealing Buddha to the Japanese populace." Shin elaborates on this idea as follows: "Amida, unlike other Buddhas, has two distinctive theological aspects that are closely analogous to Christianity. First, the terms of salvation do not rely on the part of the believer, but on the compassion and will of Amida. [...] Since sinful men do not have the capacity to be freed from the eternal chain of karmic reincarnation and suffering, Amida allows them transferred to his paradisiacal Pure Land, where reborn believers will receive the profound teaching [...] and eventually proceed to nirvana." Shin, "Avalokiteśvara's Manifestation as the Virgin Mary," 28–29, 32–33.

299 See Shin, "Avalokiteśvara's Manifestation as the Virgin Mary," 4. "The double circumstances of persecution and isolation were bringing their religious imagery of Mary close to that of Kannon, since the latter not only protected their identity, but was filling in their incomplete and fading knowledge of Marian imagery and theology" (ibid., 14). In another context of contact, the model form of Mary serves as an interface as well. In her article "Beyond Muslim and Christians. The Moriscos Marian Scriptures," Amy Remensnyder describes the function of the figure of Mary as a model form that is, on the one hand, suitable for processes of demarcation of religious traditions (in this case, Old Christians and Moriscos), but may also be used to adapt—and, perhaps, subvert—the hegemonic tradition by employing a version of Christianity "carefully cut along the patterns of Islam." As such, the figure of Mary works as an interface of communication in a particular contact of religious traditions, though its revolutionary possibilities have been tamed in later times by the official Roman Church, see Amy Remensnyder, "Beyond Muslim and Christians. The Moriscos Marian Scriptures," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 41 (2011): 551, 568.

300 In a recent article, Reinhold Gleis examined a situation of contact manifested in the writings of the Orientalist and protestant theologian Johann Michael Lange (1664–1731), in which subversive elements are present that both conceal an affirmative and philological

As in this case, the combination of fixed and free (or open) elements within such a form,³⁰¹ often results in the emergence of a new texture, thereby transforming the supposed meaning of the fixed texts and the inscribed spaces. As Alison argues, deprived of expert pastors, underground Japanese Christianity transformed into “a folk religion in which the Christian element was explicitly magical. The incantation of incomprehensible pseudo-Latin or pseudo-Portuguese formulas became the hallmark of the cult, along with the veneration of cruciform images and other such symbols concealed and absorbed within Buddhist icons. The major tenets of Christianity assumed a thoroughly legendary coloration.”³⁰² Likewise, Shin stresses that the conflation of Christian and Buddhist imaginaries gradually led to the emergence of a new religion that was neither Buddhist nor Christian, thus hinting at the fact that the use of model forms allows for modifications of the fixed text that can dynamically lead to new contrasting religious formations.³⁰³ In their operation, model forms are not merely confined to preserving a certain state (of communication) but are also instrumental in the (unintentional) formation of new traditions.

approach to the Qur'an and an implicit provocation of (co-)Christian viewpoints towards it. As Gleis points out, Lange made use of the formal compatibility of Christian and Muslim introductory formulas to counteract his theological profession's obligation to promote the conversion of Muslims. Reinhold F. Gleis. “Bismillāhi ... Three Dissertations by Johann Michael Lange on Editions and Translations of the Koran,” in *Early Modern Disputations and Dissertations in an Interdisciplinary and European Context*, eds. Meelis Friedenthal, Hanspeter Marti, and Robert Seidel (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021), 455–456.

301 On the form as the continuous element in hidden Japanese Christianity see Yoshie Kojima, “Orthodoxy and Acculturation of Christian Art in Japan: The Transformation of the Eucharistic Representation of ‘Hidden’ Christians,” in *Interactions between Rivals. The Christian Missions and Buddhist Sects in Japan (c. 1549–c. 1647)*, eds. Alexandra Curvelo and Angelo Cattaneo (Frankfurt: Lang, 2021), 399: “It is significant that the continuity of Christian tradition in Kakure Kirishitan practice is largely formal, as with the sounds of prayers in Latin as mentioned before, and is combined with a substantial loss of meaning. This presumably happened also to the ‘御掛け絵 Okake-e,’ sacred images of Kakure Kirishitan of Ikitsuki. That is to say, the essential formal elements like composition, personage, gesture, and frequently even the colours, were preserved.” The Kakure Kirishitan, Kojima concludes, “adhered rather to the formalities and forms inherited from their ancestors, who supported their faith at the cost of their own lives. The formalities and forms are, paradoxically, substantially those of these ancestors, and in such a way that their religious attitude seems to have become synchronized with traditional ancestor worship” (*ibid.*, 418).

302 Alison, *Deus Destroyed*, 222.

303 Shin, “Avalokiteśvara's Manifestation as the Virgin Mary,” 3.

Of course, the use of model forms in contact situations is also not confined to Christianity and is also not always a deliberate strategy. Another material example of inscription into a model form emerges from ancient animal masks that have been uncovered in China. At this time, Buddhism was spreading into China, and its adherents were facing the problem of best to communicate the teachings to another culture.

It is in this context that the images of dragons found on animal masks can be read. Here, the model form of the traditional Chinese legend of the dragon-tamer Huan Long Shi is employed to translate the Buddha for Chinese culture. "Since the Buddha was taken as a deity or *shenxian*, capable of flying and transmutation, in the Chinese mind it became easily associated with the dragon, which possessed the same capabilities. [...] Even more revealing is a *pu-shou*, or animal mask, dated to the fourth century AD [...] In the upper part of this work, a deity who has a high protrusion or a chignon on top of his head, and who is dressed like a Bodhisattva, holds dragons' harnesses in each hand. This composition combines the Bodhisattva image with that of Huan Long Shi, the dragon-tamer, a famous character in a traditional Chinese legend, whose image can be found on a similar *pu-shou* [...]."304 In the particular

304 Wu Hung, "Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2nd and 3rd centuries AD)," *Artibus Asiae* 47 (1986): 269–270. I owe this example to Licia Di Giacinto. Also compare *ibid.*, 268: "A further example was found in the tomb at Yinan, Shandong province. On four main sides of an octagonal pillar in the back chamber, there are carvings of Dong Wanggong, Xi Wangmu and two standing figures with halos [...]. Dong Wanggong wears a flat-topped cap, and Xi Wangmu, an elaborate flower hat. Their hands are concealed inside long, wide sleeves, and both are holding flat ceremonial objects in their arms. They are seated under a canopy on the magic mountain Kunlun which, in the illustrations, has three peaks held up by a huge turtle. The two standing figures with halos are in positions matching those of Dong Wanggong and Xi Wangmu. They are dressed alike in a narrow-sleeved top and a short skirt with tassels, and wear the same ornaments. There are differences between the two figures. For instance, one holds a bird on his arm and stands on a mythical animal, the dragon; the other holds nothing, and stands on a divine plant, the glossy *ganoderma*. Therefore, their divine characteristics are indicated by sacred marks from different religious traditions: the halo is the symbol of the Buddha, while the dragon and *ganoderma* are traditionally connected with Chinese immortals. These mixed features are shared by another figure on the south side of the same pillar [...]. He is winged, like Dong Wanggong and Xi Wangmu, and is held up by an immortal. His right hand is raised in a distinct *abhaya mudrā* gesture, like that of the Buddha in the Mahao tomb. A protuberance on his head suggests an attempted *uṣṇīṣa* but on top of it there is a small cap or a ribbon. Owing to these mixed or non-standard iconographic features, it is difficult to identify these three figures definitely as Buddha. What we can say is that they combine artistic representations both from the Buddha's image and from the Chinese immortals. Together with Dong Wanggong and Xi Wangmu, they were carved in the tomb to symbolize the wonderland to which it was hoped the deceased would go."

texture of the animal mask, the figure of the dragon-tamer has been replaced by the figure of the Buddha while the dragons he holds remain unchanged. Once again, the exchange was performed by means of treating the figure within the composition as a space that can be filled with different, although parallel content—in this case, the Buddha now holds the relationship to the dragons that the dragon-tamer once did. It is now possible to ‘read’ the Buddha in the context of the Chinese legend—and vice versa.

To give a final example from the East Asian context, Suzanne E. Cahill hints at the possibility of interpreting depictions of the Taoist Queen Mother of the West through the model form provided by common images of the Buddha. Thus, such images manifest a religious contact situation in the context of a mutual elaboration of doctrinal ideas: “The Queen Mother’s pose on the clay brick, seated and facing straight out at the viewer, along with her clothing, which resembles a monk robes, may reflect the influence of the seated Buddha image imported to China from Gandhara in northwestern India, to which it bears an uncanny resemblance. Buddhist texts and images were beginning to enter China along the Silk Road during this period. Han dynasty Chinese people may have perceived the Queen Mother and the Buddha as similar in function and meaning since both were depicted in funerary contexts and associated with the dead and with hopes for an immortal afterlife in paradise. In addition, the Chinese may have noticed a similarity in form between the Gandharan Buddha and extant representations of their goddess. The goddess’s image as it emerges in the Han may represent in art the beginning of mutual influence between Taoism and Buddhism in China that we know from the scriptures of both religions to have been taking place on the doctrinal level at the same time.”³⁰⁵ The emphasis on form, function, meaning, and context, likely to be solidified in religious doctrine here, shows the model form in action being inscribed by another religious tradition.

4.2.5 Model Forms and Scholarly Research

As in scholarship as in international travel, it is advisable to be equipped with appropriate model forms if one is about to cross borders. Despite their forbidding appearance, model forms could prove to be a suitable instrument or model for the description of processes involved in situations of religious contact.

³⁰⁵ Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence & Divine Passion. The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 27.

As the abovementioned cases show, they are employed on object language level in situations of contact in numerous ways. Although at first glance, they seem too rigid and formulaic to promote understanding, it is precisely the reliable mode of communication found in such models that actually allows for the development of some kind of understanding. In most cases, this fits the pragmatic aims of those who are involved in a situation of contact. Even a more sophisticated or subversive use of a model form is intended to communication in its presentation of a readable sociotext, albeit one with particular ends. Establishing a readable sociotext, moreover, opens possibilities for interpretations of this text that may, ultimately, lead to modifications of the model form—thus allowing the form itself to adapt for future encounters. The description and analysis of model forms that arise from the object language level, therefore, might be a suitable starting point for scholarly investigation.

Attraction: Aura as Propensity

Towards a Non-intentionalistic Description of Attraction in Religious Studies or: Why Religion Sucks

We are lived by Powers we pretend to understand.

W.H. AUDEN



1 Introduction: Against the Intentionalistic Stance

I hope that readers see some connection between the topics in the main title of this chapter and religious attraction.¹ If not, such connections will be developed over the course of it. The way I approach these matters will be, in some ways, quite different from what people are thinking today, although it does retain some connection to earlier work—several of which will be discussed in detail further on. Some of the views that I suggest are views which may at first glance strike some readers as obvious, some perhaps as wrong and some obviously wrong (though this might—as I hope—result from a decisive change of perspective as suggested here). But I hope that I am not simply singling to the choir with my following remarks.

The problem of attraction arises in the context of the scholarly description of the processes of emergence, formation, stabilization and densification (*Verdichtung*) of religious traditions. In scholarship, the notion has not gone undetected but is regularly used in the description of dynamic processes. Complementing the process of spatial expansion of a religious tradition, the process of attraction provides the description with an element of intensification² within the dynamics of the history of religions. Thus, attraction, as a model, is a sub-genre of *Dynamics* in the History of Religions, or, perhaps, a more concrete model for the description of the specific ‘dynamics’.

1 A first version of this chapter was presented at the annual conference of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK), titled *Modes and Models of Religious Attraction* (15–18 November 2010) at the Ruhr-University Bochum.

2 For a more refined concept of intensification see chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

As a second analytical step, the process of attraction is often related to the identification of certain elements that are considered to be attractive. To me, these two steps are scientifically justifiable applications of the model of attraction. However, moreover, as a final step, these certain elements or items are described to be perceived as attractive by the individuals involved in the tradition-building process and thus are defined as the aims and triggers of the individuals' intentions. Attraction, thus, is supposed to become identifiable through the intentions of individuals.

This last step in the scholarly reconstruction of religious history via the model of attraction, however, seems to be highly questionable. In the following, my main aim is to give an explication of the operation of a particular dynamic—that of attraction—in the religious field which does not rely on the *intentions* of individuals towards an attractive item, thus becoming or remaining religious, intensifying their religiosity or even changing religion—conversion being the most emphatic case of changing one's religion. A mere psychological explanation of attraction, a secular counterpart of what Jan Assmann has called the 'Theology of Will' (*Theologie des Willens*), would draw a very poor picture of the dynamics in the history of religions.³ In the following, this psychological recourse to the intentions of the individual is referred to as '*intentionalistic*'. The intentionalistic stance towards the phenomena of the history of religions is to be distinguished from the philosophically more refined notion of intentionality. In the following, I will oppose the intentionalistic viewpoint to the elaborated notion of intentionality.

Even at this point of the discussion, the shortcomings of the intentionalistic approach are quite obvious. There are several points to be mentioned. What at a certain point of time and space was attractive for individuals i.e., that which was attractive to individuals at a particular point in space and time, thus that they consciously chose to be associated with, can only ever be a matter of speculation.⁴ Still worse, as a regulative idea for further research,

3 See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1999), 234. Assmann describes the idea of religious justice as the connection between action and passion provided by divine action. Accordingly, reward and punishment are results of divine intervention. "Das setzt den Kontext einer Theologie des Willens' voraus, die den Göttern eine auf die irdisch-menschlichen Geschehnisse gerichtete Intentionalität zuschreibt." In a similar manner, the intentionalistic notion of attraction ascribes the results of the individual's action to the will of the individual.

4 See Harvey Whitehouse's reminder: "Implicit motivations direct a great deal of human behavior. But since we humans (1) are aware of most what we do but not why we do it and (2) are inveterate fabricators of stories, much of culture consists of relatively standard post hoc rationalizations of why we do what we do. By contrast, some religious concepts run

the intentionalistic notion of attraction reeks of a kind of scholarly orientalism that claims speculations on the needs and demands of human beings and their corresponding actions to be universally applicable. Moreover, even if one accepts an intentionalistic model, the notion is likely to founder in analyzing real-life complexity. For instance, it may well be the case that a certain element of a religious tradition can be considered attractive to individuals. However if, for example, the means to reach this element are constrained, the situation and the reasons for the ultimate choice made by the individuals become more and more complicated as outward and inward constraints multiply. As it is clear in Christoph Auffarth's considerations on *religio attractiva* it is not enough to simply have an attractive religious offer. Additionally, there has to be a suitable infrastructure in place thus that the 'attractiveness' becomes valid for possible adopters. *Religio attractiva* is, therefore, dependent on a certain environment that makes attractiveness possible in this sense.⁵

Additionally, the intentionalistic notion of attraction is connected to the problematic use of an idea of membership in a certain definable tradition before and after the event of attraction. Thus, the notion does not take the historical condition of its basic assumptions into account. The idea of membership and (exclusive) belonging (*Zugehörigkeit*) has been, as Helmut Zander puts it, developed in early Christianity as a concept in which the decision (*Entscheidung*) to join Christianity became a central factor of demarcation from pagan religion.⁶

However, in the study of the dynamics of the history of religions, the notion of attraction as a model to describe dynamic processes should not be confused with the concept of free choice in a free market that can be taken to express a certain intention. It should also be distinguished from the voluntary decision to become a member of a community. This, as Zander has shown, is an invention of early Christianity in which membership or affiliation by birth

against the grain of more intuitive kinds of thinking, pushing behavior in directions that are contrary to our 'natural' impulses and inclinations. Obedience to religious imperatives is often a matter of overriding—rather than rationalizing—implicit decision making." (Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity. A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2004), 7.)

5 See Christoph Auffarth, "Menschen reisen zu den Göttern, Götter reisen zu den Menschen. *Religio migrans* in Abonuteichos und am Schwarzen Meer," *Phasis* 18 (2015), 40–41.

6 See Helmut Zander, *'Europäisch' Religionsgeschichte. Religiöse Zugehörigkeit durch Entscheidung—Konsequenzen im interkulturellen Vergleich* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016). In a working paper on the concept of membership, presented during his fellowship at the КНХ, Zander elaborated the intricate relationships between religious attraction and the formation of religious traditions.

was replaced with membership and affiliation by decision—a key shift that underpins many phenomena considered to be vital for the ‘true’ religion of Christianity including baptism, catechesis, and mission.

The reference to intentions follows a scientific aim, for this reference as an explicatory tool is not least used to identify and to objectify subjects of study, i.e. in this case ‘Christians.’⁷ Apart from the fact that such a concept conflicts with the theological object language of the material of study (conversion narratives, object language reports on the spread of religions), it seems to me, moreover, to be more appropriate to describe attraction in an ontologically (or materially) wider sense in which it is *not reduced to people being attracted to something*. It is not only human beings that can be subjects or objects of attraction, but also ideas, theories, and material objects.⁸

1.1 *Attraction and Rational Choice*

My research interest concerns the question of how to describe the dynamic processes of formation, stabilization, expansion and decline of religious traditions. The notion of attraction provides a useful model here, for it combines both the *dynamic* as well as the *stabilizing* element in the history of religion.⁹ However, it must be used correctly. In order to discern the motivation or the reasoning that underpins such processes, it has been argued that the processes of religious traditions are very suitably described by using the notion of attractiveness (thus relating it to physical attractiveness and its physiological basis). As a consequence, in introductions to the history of religions, one can often read assertions such as the following: the rise, expansion, and later victory of Christianity in late antiquity is not least based upon the fact that Christianity was in some sense more attractive than its competing religious traditions, such as the ancient mystery cults, the official Roman religion (if there is such a thing), Mithraism or Judaism. As soon as people realized Christianity’s attractiveness they chose to join it: Christianity was sexy. By the logic of such

7 Compare the chapter on Tradition. On the objectivating function of intentionality see Evan M. Zuesse, “The Role of Intentionality in the Phenomenology of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985): 54.

8 See Guy Stroumsa’s confessional statement on his field of study and the history of religions in general: “As a historian of religions, I believe in the capital importance of ideas and in the agency of beliefs (or rather of persons moved by their beliefs). As much as rituals, ideas provided the motor of religious transformation in Late Antiquity.” Guy G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice. Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), XVII.

9 Compare Chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

assertions, Christianity answers best to the needs of people in that particular historical situation, be they religious or non-religious needs.

That religion might answer the psycho-biological needs of people seems an attractive, even sexy thesis for describing and explaining the attraction of religion—not just for any single religious tradition, but for the growth of religions in general. Why is religion still around, and, moreover, increasingly widespread? In an edited volume from 2015 titled *The Attraction of Religion* the authors argue “that religion may be widespread because, among other factors, it helps people to solve adaptive problems related to reproduction.”¹⁰ Thus, the attraction of religion is based on sexual selection and reproductive success: “[T]he central hypothesis explored in this volume is that religion is widespread because it is attractive to people, and it is attractive to people because it helps to manage the suite of adaptive problems related to the reproduction via the costly signaling of strategic information useful for attracting, acquiring, and retaining mates, ensuring paternity certainty, preventing mate defection and infidelity, encouraging parental investment, and more.”¹¹ What to the Protestant-socialized ear (in the sense of Max Weber) at first seems to be a slightly counterintuitive thesis still has some merits.¹² That is, in offering some explanation of the attraction taking place in the context of religion, it shifts the focus from the conscious choice of action dependent on intentions to a level where the actions of people are described as being moved by other forces rather than the conscious self in a situation of free choice.

Of course, this kind of answering to the needs of people is a very hoarse and undifferentiated description of the theory of attraction. However, even when taken to a more sophisticated place, it nevertheless suffers from an insurmountable defect. In a nutshell, it suffers from the fact that it operates with a very strong notion of *intentionality* thus presupposing a *situation of choice*. Though

10 Jason Slone and James A. Van Syke, “Introduction: Connecting Religion, Sex and Education,” in *The Attraction of Religion. A New Evolutionary Psychology of Religion*, eds. Jason Slone and James A. Van Syke (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 2. A corresponding phenomenon described on an object language level is presented by Nicola Denzey Lewis in her examination of the ‘Gnostic hieratic specialist’ Marcus the Magician in the second century CE, who, according to his adversary Irenaeus, displayed a considerable attraction to women. Nicola Denzey Lewis, “Lived Religion Among Second Century ‘Gnostic Hieratic Specialists,’” in *Beyond Priesthood, Religious Entrepreneurs and Innovators in the Roman Empire*, eds. Richard L. Gordon, Georgia Petridou, and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 93f.

11 Slone and Van Syke, “Introduction,” 3.

12 See the discussion of the sociobiological ‘fitness’ of religion, not at last regarding reproduction in Walter Burkert, *Kulte des Altertums. Biologische Grundlagen der Religion* (München: Beck, 2009), 26–28.

there is some truth in the statement: “For a student of religion concerned with generic matters, choice is everything,” one cannot simply transfer this preoccupation to one’s subjects of study.¹³ If this notion of choice in religion is taken further, one arrives at a universal and diachronically persistent ‘supermarket of religion’. This is held to have been exemplified in the decisive phase of the formation of later religious traditions during the Roman Empire, but is often applied to all situations of religious contact.¹⁴ On the (super-)market of religions, religious commodities are offered, negotiated or bought—according to whether they are perceived by the individuals concerned as attractive. Accordingly, people are described as having a choice, as though they are able to change their religious ‘identity’ through a voluntary conversion. The resemblance to modern economics is by no means by chance: here and there in scholarship, individual human beings are interpreted as ‘rational utility maximizers’—beings who use their cognitive abilities to act toward their self-interest by means of comparison and evaluation of possibilities. Individuals, thus, are defined by their preferences and by their ‘utility function’.

The application of models such as the supermarket of religion clearly profits from the factual preeminence of economic discourse in present society. However, modern economics is quite right in stressing that it only examines the *ways* preferences are rationally pursued. The discipline does not seek to explain *what* it is, that is pursued. Religious studies here goes one decisive step further—and a step too far.¹⁵ This is not improved by adding a democratic and liberal undertone, stating that the various possibilities were offered to everyone with freedom and richness previously unknown, leading to a freely chosen (religious) community.¹⁶ This kind of attraction also seems to be at

13 Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place. Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), xi–xii.

14 See John North, “The Development of Religious Pluralism,” in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, eds. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak (London/New York: Routledge, 1992).

15 Steve Bruce put it this way: “Economistic models work well for cornflakes and cars—products for which there is a very high general demand and little brand loyalty. For those, most people will maximize. It follows that religious behavior will be explained by a rational choice approach only when religion is no longer strongly associated with other important social institutions and identities, when it is removed from the public sphere and reduced to a matter of personal preference, when its focus is not the life of a nation but the privatized sensibilities of the individual. In a thoroughly secular society, our religion will be no one else’s business. Then we will be free to choose. However, most of us will not bother.” Steve Bruce, *Choice and Religion. A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129.

16 Stroumsa, *End of Sacrifice*, 89.

work in the 'religious field' as described by Pierre Bourdieu, namely as "an arena in which a variety of religious actors with different degrees of organization and different commodities interact with clients in order to keep or acquire their attraction and affiliation."¹⁷

Of course, this idealist picture of what is, let alone of what was going on in the religious field, is little more than wishful thinking. Moreover, it is wishful thinking on behalf of people long gone when applied to the question of what the religious field was like historically.¹⁸ Steve Bruce has listed a series of basic errors of the rational choice approach, including the absence of a framework of comparability, the underestimation of constraints on choices, and the ever-changing and obscure criteria of the rationality of choice.¹⁹ One might add that it is also difficult to discern the 'unit' of attraction as a *tertium comparationis* between different offers: can the promise of salvation be taken as such a unit? Or is it to be combined with, say, celibacy or expected asceticism? Do you have to buy the whole package?—and so on.²⁰ It should also be noted that individuals are not always aware, or do not fully comprehend, the range of possible choices present in a particular situation.

17 See (with reference to Bourdieu's *Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field*) Heinz Streib, "Deconversion," in *The Oxford Handbook on Religious Conversion*, eds. L.R. Rambo and C.E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 273.

18 As a critique on the rational choice theory of religion regarding the instability of preferences, its tautological starting-point, and its simplified modelling and self-contradicting nature see Martin Riesebrödt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen. Eine Theorie der Religionen* (München: Beck, 2007), 104–106. Concluding his argument, Riesebrödt states: "Die Rational-choice Theorie eignet sich am besten für die Analyse von Situationen, in denen rationales Kalkulieren institutionalisiert ist. Als Grundlage für eine universale Religions-theorie ist sie jedoch untauglich. Selbst als Marktforschung ist sie begrenzt anwendbar, weil sie auf einem protestantischen Sektenmodell basiert. Die Behauptung, daß Religion nur als freiwillige Vereinigung—in Webers Terminologie als 'wertrational motivierter Gesinnungsverein'—mit strikten Grenzen und hohen Anforderungen an die Mitglieder vital bleibt, bringt eine erstaunliche historische und kulturelle Ignoranz zum Ausdruck" (ibid., 106).

19 Bruce, *Choice and Religion*, 124–127.

20 See the debate on cultural units and the difficulty in defining basic or relevant cultural units in the humanities (compare Roy D'Andrade, "A Cognitivist's View on the Units Debate in Cultural Anthropology," *Cross-Cultural Research* 35 (2001): 242–257). To D'Andrade, the question is a complicated one due to the human capacity of chunking, forming basic elements to complex cultural molecules: "A major difficulty involves the fact that most cultural items can be packed into larger and larger cultural chunks or broken down into smaller and smaller cultural chunks. The problem then becomes one of picking the right level or size chunks—that is, the level of detail that will facilitate analysis and comparison" (ibid., 249).

What is more, even these people subject to wishful thinking do not seem to be bothered about their supposed intentions: “One general criticism that can be made of the economic approach to religion is that it has little resonance with the understandings of the people whose behavior it must explain.”²¹ The metaphor of the supermarket, after all, relies on the existence of common space in which the market takes place, on comparability and the possibility of self-service. These elements are not easily found in the religious field. Christoph Auffarth has suggested a more promising qualified space for possible attraction and religious exchange than the modern supermarket: the *neighborhood*:

Most important for exchange is what I call neighbourhood. This means that a contingent of vacant houses or a new construction terrain enables a coexistence of different cultures which is not planned. In neighbourhoods, places of exchange emerge among neighbours. Interest in a stranger’s food or in help from his god or fascination with another’s god are aroused by watching one’s neighbours. The first step toward building a bridge can lead in the longer run to a bonding within the community and integration into a “modern” and new form which takes elements of both societies. Thus, the notion of strangeness and difference is eventually lost. these forms of exchange are not offered in an open market but emerge out of mutual trust as people become acquainted with their neighbours.²²

Concerning the Roman Empire in particular, Jörg Rüpke stressed that it is not ‘religions’ or ‘cults’ in competition in a marketplace that constitute the

²¹ Bruce, *Choice and Religion*, 121.

²² Christoph Auffarth, “With the Grain Came the Gods from the Orient to Rome: The Example of Serapis and some Systematic Reflections,” in *Religions and Trade. Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West*, eds. Peter Wick and Volker Rabens. DHR 5 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 36–37. Jason BeDuhn hints at the same situation: “[...] [I]n the cosmopolitan conditions of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, different ethnicities found themselves juxtaposed in urban areas, and people could be attracted to a ‘foreign’ enclave right outside their front door.” (Jason BeDuhn, “Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of ‘Religion’ in Third Century Iran,” in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, eds. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley. Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 252) The neighborhood as a common space of attraction well suits to and allows a more refined characteristics of Tweed’s metaphors of ‘making homes’ (dwelling) as the locative dynamic action of the religious sphere. Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling, A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 74–75.

religious field, but rather the permanent reconnection of cultural symbols performed in a broad cultural horizon.²³ Moreover, even if there is a situation of choice, these situations of choice often consist of having to choose the lesser evil, rather than the best option. Nevertheless, it is the very situation of choice, and the intentions leading to choice as such that are at stake here. In the end, the application of a model derived from a market, connected with the idea of a situation of free intentional choice, serves a certain anthropological ideology. Unquestionably, such an anthropological ideology is a product of modern times.²⁴ It may be related to the still immensely popular concept of ‘identity’ in the humanities.²⁵ The only remarkable aspect of the idea of the religious market is that it pictures the formation of a religious tradition as a *process* in a *contact situation*—choosing while being confronted by challenging and contesting possibilities. It is precisely the mechanics of attraction which may become an issue in a situation of contact between openly opposed religious traditions—and, similarly, those same mechanisms of attraction are the subject of critique from the religious traditions thus opposed.

I do not deny that economy is an important aspect of the history of religions. There can be no doubt that trade was and is an important factor that contributes to the dynamics in the history of religion a great deal, not at last regarding the dynamic trails of the great trading routes in historical times. As Jason Neelis put it in his work on Buddhism: “A deeply engrained symbiosis between religion and trade was a significant catalyst for contact, transfer and exchange.”²⁶ I also do not deny that there are economic metaphors to be found

23 “So wird deutlich, daß nicht ‘Religionen’ oder ‘Kulte’ miteinander in Wettbewerb treten, sondern in einem kulturellen Großraum Symbole immer wieder neu verknüpft werden und Professionelle mit großem Aufwand Gruppengrenzen errichten und zu sichern versuchen.” Jörg Rüpke, “Reichsreligion? Überlegungen zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Mittelmeerraums in der römischen Zeit,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 292 (2011): 298, 322.

24 As Neena Mahadev has shown, in contemporary Buddhist critique of practices of mission employed by Christian evangelists in Sri Lanka, the very introduction of the ‘materialistic’ market model of free choice on the basis of one’s personal needs before conversion is considered to be an element of the Christian doctrine itself, thus denying very basic normative elements of Buddhist cosmology and soteriology. See Neena Mahadev, “Conversion and Anti-conversion in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Pentecostal Christian Evangelism and Theravada Buddhist Views on the Ethics of Religious Attraction,” in *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia*, eds. J. Finucane and R.M. Feener (Singapore: Springer, 2014), 217–218, 221.

25 See chapter on Tradition.

26 Jason Neelis, “Localizing the Buddha’s Presence at Wayside Shrines in Northern Pakistan,” in *Religions and Trade. Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West*, eds. Peter Wick and Volker Rabens. DHR 5 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 60.

in texts of religious object language.²⁷ However, to employ the idea of motivated choice as derived from economic models as the grounding force behind processes of attraction is flawed and oversimplistic. To describe the dynamics of transformation in the history of religion, Guy Stroumsa, in his analysis of late antiquity, proposes a more careful approach. Changes in human societies evidently do not occur as if by magic, they are rather due to actions, decisions, and reflections on the part of the individuals and collectivities, “[b]ut these human decisions, specific and individual, are never sufficient, even in their sum, to explain the transformation as a whole.”²⁸ While Stroumsa is right to stress the push factors active in religious dynamics (people’s actions), these factors still have to be supplemented by *pull factors* motivating or directing decisions that cannot be explained by intention alone.

1.2 *Attraction and Attractiveness*

The intentionalistic model of attractiveness is most likely to lose contact with the sources. Object language considerations may well confirm that the pull factors are decisive in the process, taking the possibility of choice from the hands and intentions of the individual and ascribing the action-directing capacity to another source entirely.²⁹ One example is John 6, 43–44: “Jesus

27 Some of them from Christian tradition are listed in Laurence R. Iannaccone’s defense of the realism of rational choice theory in the religious field, see Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Voodoo Economics? Reviewing the Rational Choice Approach to Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (1995): 80–81. To conclude, however, ‘subscribing to a religion is a bit like buying stock’ (ibid., 81), is a bit premature regarding the limited amount of evidence.

28 Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice*, 2.

29 With regard to the aspect of media in this process, Linda Simonis has introduced the suitable notion of ‘heteronomous mediality’ to conceptualize processes, in which human beings are not the actors, but rather the objects of mediation processes, such as in object language descriptions of inspiration: “Hier stoßen wir auf Formen von Medialität, in denen nicht Menschen als Akteure oder aktive Nutzer erscheinen, die sich Medien zu eignen und von ihnen Gebrauch machen, sondern in denen sie vielmehr zu Objekten von Medien werden und sich von diesen beeinflussen, affizieren und verändern lassen. Als Beispiel einer solchen heteronomen Medialität, die vom Subjekt als Einwirkung einer äußeren Macht erfahren wird, sei das für die frühe antike Dichtungstheorie bestimmende Konzept der Inspiration genannt. [...] [W]ir [haben] es hier mit einer Medialität zu tun [...], deren Träger nicht als eigenmächtige Akteure, sondern als Elemente in einem Kraftfeld zu denken sind, von dessen Wirkungen sie affiziert und durchströmt werden. Religiöse Medialität zeigt sich hier als ein Zusammenhang sukzessiv aufeinander einwirkender Elemente, die je für sich genommen über keine selbstständige Handlungsmacht verfügen.” Linda Simonis, “Einleitung. Medien und Religion—Ansätze zu einem interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm,” in *Medien und Religion. Ansätze zu einem interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm*, ed. Linda Simonis (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2019), 9–10.

therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Here, the decisive action is described to be performed by the divine sphere, by conspicuously employing an expression denoting strong attraction: 'draw him' (ἐλκύσῃ αὐτόν). For John, the religious process of conversion (and, ultimately, salvation, as Jesus claims: 'I will raise him' ἀναστήσω αὐτόν) is clearly not primarily dependent on a free choice made by individuals, although an interplay of active and directed movement on the side of the individual cannot be ruled out entirely.³⁰ It should be noted that the process of attraction described here is used as an argument in a situation of contact and contest in which Jesus defends his messianic claims against 'the Jews'—those who murmur among themselves.

As a first step, in examining the dynamics in the history of religions a distinction has to be made between the notions of *attraction* and *attractiveness*. *Attraction* denotes the scientifically describable process that can be found in the emergence and formation of a religious tradition, while *attractiveness* is a philosophical interpretation of this process by means of psychological or anthropological ideas. The fact that the latter has often been taken for the former leads to diverse misapprehensions in research on religious dynamics. In the history of religions, people may well be *attracted*, but not necessarily because of *attractiveness*. It is even possible that there can be religious attraction without people at all. In the following, therefore, I would prefer to use the notion of attraction as modeled through physics and chaos theory to describe and analyze the dynamics of the history of religions.

The reference to physics and, in consequence, to natural laws, however, should not overload the process described with a notion of fateful and inescapable development, for all that object language description itself of the processes of attraction may intend to give precisely that impression. Of course, attraction also can relate to choice, but this is only one side of it that, admittedly, gains prominence in modern Western intellectual discourse and, in particular, in the reflection on religion. Attraction, as manifested in people's choices or expressions of their free will, seems to be a comparatively modern phenomenon. This, of course, is based on modernity's emphasis on the individual as a basic epistemic and social category and on the ethical considerations of the Enlightenment period that relate the individual's exit from self-induced immaturity to the reason-based choice between possibilities of action. Free choice is in itself an item of attraction (attractor) that cannot be chosen.

30 Compare Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1–10*. Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 4, no. 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 256–257.

Using the intentionalistic formula: a (religious item, idea, practice) is attractive to b (person) because of c (psychological disposition), the scholar might get into serious trouble concerning the relation of metalanguage and object language³¹ and risks losing contact with his objects of study. First, there is the danger of reductionism—the tendency to identify one attractive element as the preeminent and decisive reason for historical development. Secondly, the assumed needs a religion supposedly answers best (and is, therefore, attractive), are in many cases *even only established with or after the adaption of that particular religion*. If, for example, a devout Christian or Muslim is asked what is attractive about his religion, he would probably not refer to the items or concepts the external observer or even the scholar would highlight, such as a philosophically satisfying monotheism, ethics, rich literature, beauty, fun, temples, the notorious virgins, or as, for example, Friedhelm Winkelmann suggests: clearness, age, integrity, joy, esteeming families, etc.³² In a similar manner, Hans Kloft relates the particular attractiveness of the Romanic mystery cults to the possibility of individual redemption provided by them.³³ Rather, such a person could simply say that their religion is the true religion, or perhaps, that relating oneself to truth itself is the right thing to do.³⁴ This notion

31 See chapter on Object Language and Metalanguage.

32 Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Geschichte des frühen Christentums* (München: Beck, 2007), 44–45. As to the question of this kind of attractiveness, Jörg Rüpke fittingly remarked: “Die Attraktivität des Christentums, seine hohen Zuwachsraten über mehrere Jahrhunderte hinweg gehören zu den erstaunlichsten Phänomenen der kaiserzeitlichen Religionsgeschichte. Erklärungshypothesen von der Anziehungskraft der Lehre für Unterprivilegierte über die organisatorische Stärke des Episkopensystems bis hin zum Überlebensvorteil christlichen Sozialverhaltens in Pestzeiten sind bemüht worden; sie sind als einzelne ebenso problematisch wie treffend in der Beleuchtung wichtiger Facetten. Eine abschließende Faktorengewichtung scheint mir noch lange nicht möglich. Der Hinweis sei aber angebracht, daß die Konzentration auf diese spezielle Entwicklung *nicht* zum Rückgrat der Geschichte eines religiösen Systems gemacht werden kann, das aus vielen vergleichbaren Elementen besteht und von politischen Strukturen abhängt, die nach ihrer republikanischen Vergangenheit selbst nicht als religiös betrachtet wurden.” Jörg Rüpke, *Die Religion der Römer. Eine Einführung* (München: Beck, 2006), 228.

33 Hans Kloft, *Mysterienkulte der Antike. Götter—Menschen—Rituale* (München: Beck, 2006), 96–97. Kloft here also makes use of the metaphorological possibilities of the market model when he speaks about a certain ‘offer’ that the mysteries are able to provide: “So läßt sich mit einiger Berechtigung von der doppelten Funktion der Mysterien sprechen. Sie bieten lebenspraktische Therapien an, eine ‘Erlösung’ im Ritual, und zugleich eine Hoffnung auf ein Leben nach dem Tode” (ibid., 97). Later on, Kloft also relates the attractiveness of the mystery to the offer or possibility of *methexis*, i.e. participation in the fate of the divine that leads to salvation (ibid., 106).

34 See the descriptions of conversions to Christianity in Christoph Markschies, *Das antike Christentum. Frömmigkeit, Lebensformen, Institutionen* (München: Beck, 2006), 53–56.

of truth is hardly to be accepted as the item that makes the difference, say, between Christianity and Buddhism (i.e. 'Buddhism is more/most attractive to people because it is the truth')—at least not in the scientific community.³⁵ Jan Assmann, introducing his notion of the 'Mosaic distinction',³⁶ has suggested that a connection made between religion and truth is an essential demarcating characteristic of Jewish, and hence, also of, Christian and Islamic monotheism. The requirement for truth in religion, which renders it structurally intolerant, was unknown in the rest of the ancient world. The Mosaic distinction led to a new definition of religious belonging that insisted on personal choice in contrast to previous models that had placed weight on ethnic or cultural constraints.³⁷ Thus, choice itself and situations of religious choice can be considered a Christian theologoumenon. Even if there is a description of some kind of choice between conflicting rights in the object language material, these are *ex post* elaborations, that are, in this case, based upon the supposed truth of the faith chosen.³⁸ Moreover, on an object language level, to either Paul or Augustine, conversion is decidedly not the result of some consciously made choice, but rather an act of divine mercy.³⁹ Ultimately, choice seems

35 Also problematic are the object language reports of conversions caused by evidentiary miracles, for example in early Christianity (see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 262–263). One might, at the danger of losing contact with one's sources dismiss such reports for the sake of the market model, but the complex social and intellectual environment making such reports religiously convincing might get lost as well, depriving the phenomenon of religion of one of its basic characteristics: the ascription processes of religious sense. On the object language reflection of miracles causing conversion in medieval thought, in particular in Thomas Aquinas, see Christoph Kann, "Wunder als Argumente. Ein Motiv religiöser Herausforderung bei Thomas von Aquin," in *Herausforderung durch Religion? Begegnungen der Philosophie mit Religionen im Mittelalter und Renaissance*, eds. Gerhard Krieger. *Contradictio 11* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 175–180.

36 See Jan Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1998), 17 f. Assmann himself points at the analogously revolutionary emergence of the Greek 'Parmenideian Distinction' between true knowledge and false knowledge i.e., between science and non-science, see Jan Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (München: Hanser, 2003), 23 f.

37 Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice*, 104.

38 See, for example, the report *Opusculum de conversione sua* of the later monk *Hermannus quondam Iudaeus* in which the conversion to Christianity is interpreted *ex eventu* and, thus, provided with an inner coherence and consequence that covers the chaotic and existentially threatening phase before the conversion, see Fidel Rädle, "Wie ein Kölner Jude im 12. Jahrhundert zum Christen wurde. Hermannus quondam Iudaeus *de conversione sua*," in *Konversionen im Mittelalter und in der Frühneuzeit*, eds. Friedrich Niewöhner and Fidel Rädle (Hildesheim: Olms, 1999), 11.

39 Marksches, *Das antike Christentum*, 58.

to be something that happens to an intellectual elite; most others are simply born in a certain context and hence learn or adapt religion by simple participation.⁴⁰ Sadly, this leaves no space for the development of a consciousness of the possibility to choose.

On a structural level, the hypothetical situation of choice between religions, which is conceptualized as the opportunity for realization of the individual's intentions, also introduces an ever-popular philosophical problem: the precarious relation of subject and object. That attraction is not easily described in terms of subject-object relationship is demonstrated in that it is not clear who the object is and who the subject of action is within the process of attraction. The 'subject' cannot be called this way for it is, in fact, the object of a certain process (the object that is attracted) and the object (which could be a material object or a ritual) cannot really act as a subject.⁴¹ Thus, the explication of attraction demands a more carefully differentiated approach.

2 Towards a Non-intentionalistic Description of Attraction

A word of warning at the beginning of my attempt at the explication of religious attraction: in the following I would like to execute an idea that many people will find not in the least attractive: I propose the idea for a design of a theory that is derived from the intellectual marriage of two authors or even a *ménage à trois*. The authors are seldom mentioned in one sentence—Walter Benjamin and Karl Raimund Popper, John Searle would be the third. Whereas Benjamin's presence might still be tolerated, due to his reflections on the concept of aura, the presence and fertility of Popper in the realm of religious studies will be highly disputable. As a firm believer in the power of marriage in the process of theorizing, I nevertheless dare to introduce a mixture of both that I hope some readers might find attractive. Four parts are to follow this prologue: a short introduction to the relationship of intentionality and attraction, a discussion of Benjamin's and Popper's ideas and finally some basic hints for a material theory of attraction within the dynamics of the history of religions.

⁴⁰ See Rüpkke, *Die Religion der Römer*, 16.

⁴¹ Unless it is being melted together with a performer or a devotee to an 'actant' as Bruno Latour would call it. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 54; and 71.

2.1 *Attraction and Intentionality/Searle: Background and Network*

The concept of intentionality originates from a utilitarian context in Jeremy Bentham's foundational work of that same philosophical school. Utilitarianism claims intentionality.⁴² In the very first sentences of his *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation* Bentham famously defined pleasure and pain as fundamental action-guiding prospects for human beings: "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne." Accordingly, the basic "*principle of utility* recognizes the subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law."⁴³ Intentionality, thus, is the expression of this principle of utility. Usefulness is then the basis for the human actions in question.

To clarify the notion of intentionality⁴⁴ and my objections against its implicit and unreflected use in the study of attraction in the religious field, I shall refer to the elaborated notion of intentionality which was developed by John Searle in his book *Intentionality. An essay in the philosophy of mind* (1983).⁴⁵ Despite the reference to 'mind' in the title of his book, it is Searle's aim to develop a naturalistic theory of intentionality in the context of a biological naturalism.⁴⁶ In doing so, he hints at a material notion of intentionality which has the potential to overcome the shortcomings of the common intentionalistic notion of attraction.

42 On the influence of classical utilitarianism on rational choice theory see Philip A. Mellor, "Rational Choice or Sacred Contagion? 'Rationality', 'Non-rationality' and Religion," *Social Compass* 47 (2000): 274–275.

43 Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: Payne and Son, 1789), i. On utility as a matter of social construction see Steve Bruce, "Religion and Rational Choice: A Critique of Economic Explanation of Religious Behavior," *Sociology of Religion* 54 (1993): 201.

44 On the applicability of the 'classical' authors on intentionality following a phenomenological approach (i.e. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty) in the Study of Religion see Zuesse, "The Role of Intentionality in the Phenomenology of Religion," 51–73.

45 On Searle as a possible point of philosophical reference for the study of religion see Michael Stausberg, "Distinctions, Differentiations, Ontology, and Non-human in Theories of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 365–369.

46 See John R. Searle, *Intentionality. An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ix.

According to the commonly held conception of attraction, an attractive object causes an intentional act of the subject towards it. This is, then, what makes the experience of attraction. The performance of this intentional act by a decision resulting in an action to realize the decision—as opposed to other possibilities not realized—is the manifestation of attraction. Attraction is, thus, a utility-based interaction of the individual with its environment.

This commonly recognizable description of attraction seems to be valid for the study of religion as well, at least regarding how scholars describe the process. To give an example related to the religious field: in episode six, *She of Little Faith*, season 1 of the *Simpsons*, the intelligent and highly reflective Lisa Simpson—whose only true faith is scientific reason—decides to abandon the morally appalling and intellectually unsatisfactory Christianity of her background.⁴⁷ Transforming decision into action, Lisa finally decides upon Buddhism thanks to the attractiveness of its teachings and converts by means of a public self-declaration. Of course, her conversion entails having to defend her choice against the onslaughts of her Christian environment, not least against the attraction of a family Christmas with suitable presents for an eight-year-old girl, in this case, a pony. Significantly, the fact that Buddhism allows one to celebrate any religious festivity one chooses to celebrate is the decisive factor in convincing Lisa to stay with her new religion. This example from popular culture neatly expresses the modern Western attitude towards the religious market. A choice within the religious market is primarily based upon a reasonable decision to take the better alternative, the alternative being the aim of the individual's intention. David Feltmate explains Lisa's conversion as follows:

The turn East explains this decision through its emphasis on the East's spiritual purity in the face of Western materialism. The episode does not even consider alternate forms of Christianity and Christian activism which would also be in line with Lisa's character. It does, however, portray her in such a way that her decision is consistent with other North American converts to Buddhism [...]. She is seeking, and finding, what she wants in another religious tradition without the "cultural baggage" accompanying its lived forms.⁴⁸

47 On this episode see Jenna Mowbray, "Christian, Jew and Miscellaneous: Representation of Minority Religion in The Simpsons" (MA Thesis, Queen's University Kingston, Ontario, 2017), 41–47.

48 David Seward Feltmate, "Springfield's Sacred Canopy: Religion and Humour in The Simpsons," PhD. Diss., University of Waterloo, 2010, 78.

The viewer of the episode, thus, is able to see how certain Buddhist teachings, such as the focus on a positive attitude towards life, “[...] are easily integrated into the life of a modern Western scientifically minded individual. Lisa is able to embrace her new belief system as well as continue within her Western framework.”⁴⁹ By consciously choosing on the basis of Buddhism’s attractiveness and simultaneously shunning Christianity’s repulsive elements, such as commercialization and oppressive zeal Lisa proves to be the archetypical Western convert.⁵⁰ Accordingly, “Lisa’s attraction to Buddhism is consistent with her character.”⁵¹ Or at least, consistent with the way how rationalist scientific individuals would explain it.⁵²

As a matter of fact, the decision to choose another religion is only relevant in a context influenced by the Christian idea of membership, wherein the thought of making the ‘wrong’ choice is appalling to her environment. This is intentionality in a very strong sense which, nevertheless, can often be found in the description of religious processes. For example, we can observe something similar in modern descriptions of conversions, where conversion is described as a process of choosing the intellectually more satisfying offer—what could be more attractive than truth itself if it is a possible choice? Intentionality is always connected to self-reference, which means that there is a self that performs the intentional act due to its own predispositions to gain a self-fulfilling

49 Mowbray, *Christian, Jew and Miscellaneous: Representation of Minority Religion in The Simpsons*, 46.

50 Jenna Mowbray comments on the conversion as follows: “The presentation of the conversion of a Western Buddhist in this episode is in line with many aspects of modern Buddhism. There is a connection to science, consumerism, loss of tradition and mythology, and an emphasis on a positive view of the world. Through Lisa, the image of a Buddhist in popular culture is changed from an Oriental monk wearing a robe, or someone from an Asian country, to that of progressive, intelligent, female and reflective of the modern consumer.” Mowbray, *Christian, Jew and Miscellaneous: Representation of Minority Religion in The Simpsons*, 46.

51 Feltmate, *Springfield’s Sacred Canopy*, 81.

52 In the same manner, the possible advantages of Judaism to Hellenistic Alexandrians are listed in the following: “Gentiles were attracted by Judaism for a wide range of reasons. its refined concept of god, its moral standards, its practice of a regular one day in seven as a day of rest, and its festivals—these are some of the attractors that have been singled out. some scholars speculate that gentiles may have considered the long history of the Jews and their possession of an ancient text to be particularly attractive qualities. [...] The Jewish reputation among certain Greek writers as a wise and philosophical people—in part probably because of their emphasis on the study of their ancient texts—likewise would have attracted certain individuals to Judaism.” Volker Rabens, “Philo’s Attractive Ethics on the ‘Religious Market’ in Ancient Alexandria,” in *Religions and Trade. Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West*, eds. Peter Wick and Volker Rabens. DHR 5 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 335.

'identity'. This is likely to give reason for the introduction of the notion of identity into the discussion whose untimely use in scientific descriptions is another and similarly misleading story.⁵³

Searle, however, introduces a very vague concept of intentionality for well-founded reasons. To him, intentionality means mental directedness towards objects or facts in the world, which is then the basis of action.⁵⁴ Now, to be conscious of something at all is one special case of directedness. But to be conscious of something means precisely that one is a discerning *subject*. Yet, the question is clearly: Does someone who is attracted to something really have a clear consciousness of *it*? Moreover, there is the subsequent question of whether the attracted has any consciousness of *being attracted* or even has a consciousness of *themselves* at all.⁵⁵ One could propose the well-known philosophical objection that consciousness of something *only* arises in cases where the intentional acts do *not* work out and the acts meet with unsuspected obstacles.⁵⁶ Accordingly, one cannot always consider persons under the influence of attraction as being able to choose something, which is, compared to other things, attractive. Attraction, therefore, cannot be generally described with reference to (strong) intentionality. Those rare cases where it works like this are philosophical reflections or more importantly, the descriptions of attraction by a reflective observer. Descriptions of dynamic religious processes

53 See chapter on Tradition.

54 Searle, *Intentionality*, 1.

55 See the interrelation of conversion and individuation: it is only after performing the religious act of conversion the individual is established as the subject (or object) of this process, compare Volkhard Krech, "Was ist religiöse Bekehrung? Ein Streifzug durch zehn Jahre soziologischer Konversionsforschung," *Handlung—Kultur—Interpretation* 4 (1995): 150.

56 The *Auffälligkeit* (conspicuousness), *Aufdringlichkeit* (pushiness), and *Aufsässigkeit* (obstreperousness) *des Zuhandenen* (of the things-at-hand), generating a sense about oneself and one's intentions in this process, is sustainedly described in § 16 of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 16th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer 1986), 72–74). Also compare Bruno Latour's considerations on a similar well-known phenomenon of everyday life: "[...] the same situation of novelty is produced, for the analyst at least, by the interruption into the normal course of action of strange, exotic, archaic, or mysterious implements. In those encounters, objects become mediators, at least for a while, before soon disappearing again through know-how, habituation, or disuse. Anyone who has tried to make sense of a user's manual will know how time-consuming—and how painful—it is to read what is ironically called an 'assembly drawing'. The third type of occasion is that offered by accidents, breakdowns, and strikes: all of a sudden, completely silent intermediaries become full-blown mediators; even objects, which a minute before appeared fully automatic, autonomous, and devoid of human agents, are now made of crowds of frantically moving humans with heavy equipment." Latour, *Reassembling the social*, 80–81.

such as for example ‘People (decided to become) became Christians because of the attraction of Christian symbols, teachings, or performances, compared to other religious offers’ are, therefore, not valid. Admittedly, research questions such as ‘What were the reasons for the success of the implementation of Christianity/Islam/Scientology?’ motivate psychological statements—the fault is not all with the answer.⁵⁷

In Searle’s discussion, the concept of intentionality is inextricably linked to two other important notions: the *background* and the *network*.⁵⁸ According to Searle, without these two, intentionality is not possible. This makes Searle’s theory of intentionality a promising candidate for further elaboration, as it is proposing a careful ‘contextualistic intentionality’ that takes the dynamics of the environment into account, as opposed to essentializing intentionality.⁵⁹

Both notions, background and network, are of use in describing the dynamics in the history of religions. While, on the one hand, the *background* is the common set of abilities, capacities, tendencies and dispositions (the ‘know-how’) which are not themselves intentional states, the *network*, on the other hand, contains beliefs, desires and other intentional states. Searle differentiates between a common biological (‘deeper’) background and a ‘local’ background

57 See for example Eric R. Dodds’ classical work on *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety*. Here, Christianity is described as being attractive because of the weakness of paganism, for its courage, its rigidity, its promise of a better afterlife, future rewards, and the sense of belonging etc. E.R. Dodds, *Heiden und Christen in einem Zeitalter der Angst. Aspekte religiöser Erfahrung von Marc Aurel bis Konstantin* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), 113 f. Compare also Winkelmann, *Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, 73 f. Here, the major aspects of the religious and intellectual attractiveness of Christianity are monotheism, a personal God, the overcoming of death, provision of hope, sense-making, and active ethics. See also *ibid.*, 97 f: here, the social attractiveness of Christianity is based on equality, emancipation of women, deaconry, and the esteem of work (of the lower classes). It could also be said that an additional attractor lies in the fact that all these are precisely the values that are still attractive in our own time. Compare also Marksches, *Das antike Christentum*, 215 f. Marksches, however, reminds us that there are very few psychologically analyzable reports of conversions in the period of Late Antique period (see *ibid.*, 216).

58 Manuel Vásquez in his theory of religion stresses the notion of network as a suitable corrective to theoretical approaches to religion that stress its fluidity, see Manuel Vásquez, *More than Belief. A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 290. A refined notion of background as a vital element of the network approach, however, is missing here.

59 See Zuesse, “The Role of Intentionality,” 68 (with regard to ‘contextualistic phenomenology’). Also compare Manuel Vásquez, *More than Belief*, 298–299 on the necessity to reconceptualize networks as ‘phenomenological realities’ in order to stress their anti-essentialist capacity.

which consists of local cultural techniques.⁶⁰ Justifiably or not, this differentiation could be disputed in favor of an entirely cultural background. More importantly, without background and network, there cannot be intentionality, which means that there cannot be perception, action or memory. The background is, therefore, not located on the periphery of intentionality but permeates the whole network.⁶¹ In this way, both cause a particular intentional state to *make sense* (= 'indexicality'). Now, sense-making is the decisive element for characterizing something as 'religious'. Searle's assertion that the background provides necessary but not sufficient grounds for action is very important in preventing us from using the strong notion of intentionality. That is, it allows but it does not command action.⁶²

However, here is the point to go one step beyond Searle's theory of intentionality. For Searle, background, network and, as a consequence, intentionality always belong to a first person—and, as Searle is a proper philosopher of mind, of course *a mind*. But that is, to my understanding, a subjectivist step too far. According to his background/network theory, every intentional act could be described without the subject and the intentional object. It can be described as a certain *identifiable directedness within some context* using only the notions of background and network. Intentions here are to be reformulated as privileged paths within the network with reference to a (traditional) background. They provide a certain *space* (field of action/process) that is not homogenous but, in a certain way, qualified as, for example, making religious sense. This dynamic space/field *is* attraction. To put it in terms of process philosophy, the actors of such a process are certain actual entities who might be explicated in a non-intentionalistic way as *states of a distinctive process*.

2.2 Benjamin's Concept of Aura and Religious Attraction

The concept of 'aura' recurs regularly in discussions of the nature of religious attraction. As was noted in a 2010 KHK conference titled *Modes and Models of religious attraction*,⁶³ the concept of aura forms a kind of leitmotif in reflections upon attraction. Attraction and aura are somehow connected. Is aura attractive? Is it the aura that causes the attraction? Or is it the special attraction that is responsible for the aura? Obviously, these are the wrong questions. Rather, aura is attractive for reasons of its phenomenology.

60 Searle, *Intentionality*, 143.

61 Searle, *Intentionality*, 151.

62 Searle, *Intentionality*, 158.

63 These titles were *The Conceptualization of Aura, Charisma, and Transcendence* (section 1) or *Re-constructing Auratic Material* (section 3).

In philosophy, as well as in cultural studies, the notion of aura gained special relevance and, indeed some notoriety, in the writings of Walter Benjamin, thus (at least for some people) rehabilitating it from its use in cabbalism, occultism and theosophy. Because of that, it is no wonder that, due to a famous *bonmot* of Bertolt Brecht,⁶⁴ the aura is the *spleen* of Benjamin in the succession of Charles Baudelaire (whose spleen, in turn, according to Benjamin, was to suffer from the decay of the aura).⁶⁵ In the relevant literature, the aura is considered to be a typical notion of Benjamin's: an explanation of a phenomenon that in itself is even more in need of explanation.⁶⁶ Miriam Bratu Hansen characterizes the concept as follows: "Anything but a clearly delimited, stable concept, aura describes a cluster of meanings and relations that appear in Benjamin's writings in various configurations and not always under its own name; it is this conceptual fluidity that allows aura to become such a productive nodal point in Benjamin's thinking."⁶⁷

Nevertheless, or rather, because of this fluidity, the concept of aura has proven to be attractive and triggered considerable interest, not least in the study of religion. There are some inherent reasons for that. As Brent Plate remarked: "Translating the aura into the language of religious studies is not much of a task, for the leap from aura to 'sacred' or 'holy' is quite short. Benjamin's application of aura to objects of art shares some similarities with Rudolf Otto's 'idea of the holy' as that which is both mysterious and fascinating (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*)."⁶⁸ Admittedly, the easy translatability of these concepts makes the concept of aura seem somewhat outdated as applied to the current state of affairs in religious studies. However, in my opinion, it is not the possible connection to the concepts of 'sacred' and 'holy' that makes the concept of aura relevant for the study of religion, but rather the possible combination of the concept with the non-intentionalistic concept of attraction.

64 Brecht's entry in his *Arbeitsjournal* is quoted in: Dietrich Hardt and Martin Grzimek, "Aura und Aktualität als ästhetische Begriffe," in *Walter Benjamin—Zeitgenosse der Moderne*, eds. Peter Gebhardt (Kronberg im Taunus.: Scriptor, 1976), 111.

65 See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften Vol. v/1. Das Passagen-Werk* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 433: "Baudelaires spleen ist das Leiden am Verfall der Aura.," J 64,5.

66 See Michael Makropoulos, *Modernität als ontologischer Ausnahmezustand? Walter Benjamins Theorie der Moderne* (München: Fink, 1989), 84–85. Compare Hardt and Grzimek, "Aura und Aktualität als ästhetische Begriffe," 114.

67 Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (2008), 339.

68 S. Brent Plate, *Walter Benjamin, Religion, and Aesthetics. Rethinking Religion Through the Arts* (New York: Routledge 2005), 88.

In any case, Benjamin's aura shares one decisive element with the main concepts of religious studies: they both resist attempts to define them.⁶⁹ There is no constant, definable concept of aura in Benjamin's thinking. This fact, however, indicates that the concept of aura is used as a philosophical operator in his theory. To him, the aura is closely connected to a certain object namely, the work of art, although it can also be connected to natural objects. However, Benjamin's notion of aura is attractive to us not because of its cultural or natural reference but because of its fundamentally religious background. Here, Benjamin relates aura essentially to tradition.⁷⁰

The uniqueness of the work of art is identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition. Of course, this tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for instance existed in a traditional context for the Greeks (who made it an object of worship) that was different from the context in which it existed for medieval clerics (who viewed it as a sinister idol). But what was equally evident to both was its uniqueness—that is, its aura.⁷¹

It is the context of (religious) tradition and a corresponding indication that makes a work of art auratic. To Benjamin, this is all the more evident in the ways of dealing with the aura, either in ancient or in modern times that still display a recognizable "secularized ritual in even the most profane forms of the cult of beauty."⁷² Benjamin here creates an inseparable connection between object, action, and context. As evidence for his views, he claims:

Originally, the embeddedness of an artwork in the context of tradition found expression in a cult. As we know, the earliest artworks originated in the service of ritual—first magical, then religious. And it is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed

69 Thus, as Marleen Stoessel regarding Benjamin's 'definition' of the aura puts it, they are both transcending the limits of the usual linguistic forms of definition or categorization. Marleen Stoessel, *Aura. Das vergessene Menschliche. Zur Sprache und Erfahrung bei Walter Benjamin* (München/Wien: Hanser, 1983), 46.

70 Compare the chapter on Tradition.

71 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, 2nd ed., in: *Walter Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other writings on media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge/London: Belknap, 2008), 24.

72 Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, 24.

from its ritual function. In other words: *the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art always has its basis in ritual.*⁷³

It does not matter whether the evolutionary history of auratic artworks from magical to religious ritual is an adequate description. Benjamin's contextual phenomenology of the aura still bears some significance for the analysis of religious attraction. Aura originates in cult and ritual and provides its bearer with the authority of uniqueness and unreachable distance. Authority and distance, here, imply historical significance and a close relation to a past to be revered.⁷⁴ Aura is not something beyond things but rather some ornamental cover in which the object is embedded like a second skin. A halo is yet another metaphorical description of the appearance of the aura. To the cultist, aura and object are inseparable. However, this also means that the cultist is inseparable from the auratic cult object to which he might feel drawn. So once again, we cannot describe the aura by means of the choice-preparing formula of attraction, as a quality of an object which attracts a subject to it. With regard to activity, object and subject here change places anyway.

Benjamin gives a historical explanation for why the intentionalistic idea of attraction cannot be applied to the aura. The oft-quoted key passage on the aura in his *Little History of Photography* runs as follows:

What is aura, actually? A strange web [*Gespinst*] of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer's noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow in the observer, until the moment or the hour becomes part of their appearance—this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch.⁷⁵

As such, aura is characterized by a combination of spatial and temporal aspects that at the same time seem to contradict each other. Aura seems to attract because of the strangeness of its appearance. Most importantly, Benjamin does not refer to quality, utility value, or worth when it comes to the question

73 Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, 24.

74 See Benjamin's notes *Zu Krakauer*: "Der Kultwert (das Heilige) ist als seine mit historischem Gehalt gesättigte Aura zu definieren. Die Aura war ursprünglich (solange sie den Kultwert begründete) mit Geschichte geladen." Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, ed. Burkhardt Lindner. Kritische Gesamtausgabe Band 16 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2012), 309.

75 Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other writings on media*, 285.

of what comprises a unique appearance. He does not refer to good reasons to find the object in question attractive and to choose accordingly, but rather, he refers to an unapproachability, detecting an insurmountable distance even in those things close.⁷⁶ The tension or interplay of distance and closeness, thus, qualifies as aura. Moreover, with regard to the perceiver, the aura is inseparably bound to the “presence in the here and now,” rendering the experience of the aura an event that is not to be repeated through reflection, but which depends on a unique constellation of time and space connecting the aura and the perceiver of the aura to a particular time/space relation.⁷⁷ Thus, the presence of the aura is ephemeral and cannot be intentionally evoked.⁷⁸ As such, the aura actively makes sense without being intentionally formed to do so. Or rather, sense may be attributed to the process of the aura without having to refer to certain (human) actors as the source of the particular sense the aura displays. In fact, the ‘subject’ involved may only claim the role of a *medium* for the basic auratic process.⁷⁹

The poetic and not very enlightening description of the definition of aura above is modified by a sense of loss, in Benjamin’s later reflections on the topic:

Now ‘to bring things closer’ to us, or rather to the masses, is just as passionate an inclination in our day as the overcoming of whatever is unique in every situation by means of its reproduction. Every day the need to possess the object, from the closest proximity, in a picture—or rather a copy, which illustrated papers and newsreels keep in readiness, and the original picture is unmistakable. Uniqueness and duration are as intimately intertwined in the latter as are transience and reproducibility in the former. The peeling away of the object’s shell, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose sense for all that is the same in the world has grown to the point, where even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness—by means of its reproduction.⁸⁰

76 With regard to this unapproachability Benjamin remarks in a footnote: “Die Definition der Aura als ‘einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag’, stellt nichts anderes dar als die Formulierung des Kultwertes des Kunstwerks in Kategorien der raum-zeitlichen Wahrnehmung. Ferne ist das Gegenteil von Nähe. Das *wesentlich* Ferne ist das Unnahbare. In der Tat ist Unnahbarkeit eine Hauptqualität des Kultbildes. Es bleibt seiner Natur nach ‘Ferne so nah sie sein mag’. Die Nähe, die man seiner Materie abzugewinnen vermag, tut der Ferne nicht Abbruch, die es nach seiner Erscheinung bewahrt.” Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit und weitere Dokumente*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), 18.

77 Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, 31.

78 Makropoulos, *Modernität als ontologischer Ausnahmezustand?*, 85.

79 See Stoessel, *Aura. Das vergessene Menschliche*, 48.

80 Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” 285.

In the first place, it is not the famous destruction of the aura in modern times, economically caused by mass production, socially caused by the struggle of class against class that proves to be relevant for our reflection upon attraction, but rather the clarification of the *process of the aura* which Benjamin describes here.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Benjamin's reflections on the decay of the aura have systematic significance because they illustrate a special notion of attraction—and that is our notorious equation: a is attractive for b because of c, the aura. It becomes clear that the connection between aura and attraction is not such kind of a relation of causality. On the contrary, the causality of attraction leads to the *destruction of the aura* in times of the reproducibility of the work of art. Benjamin describes this form of attraction as the need of someone, or indeed of many, to possess the object in form of a picture or a copy. It is this destructive process, where an *object as such* is freed: freed from being the auratic work of art. Additionally, the destruction of the aura as it originated from the cult can also be described as an emancipation *of the subject*.⁸² This is quite a revolutionary act, which Benjamin seems to have appreciated. However, the revolution does not refer to politics but to philosophy: it is only in the moment of decay that the aura might be philosophically categorized.⁸³ One might, therefore, put this process into philosophical terms: the decay of the aura introduces both subject and object and makes their relation intentional.⁸⁴

However, the aura itself is subject to another phenomenology. The aura cannot be perceived intentionally and does not consist of a conscious assignment of reference.⁸⁵ The aura is an event of perception displaying a form of atmosphere that signifies a unique moment, where time itself becomes an element of an 'object', or better, a complex situation.⁸⁶ One is at the particular instance in time directed *towards* (intentionality) and *removed from* the auratic.

81 Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, 433: "Die Massenproduktion ist die ökonomische, der Klassenkampf die gesellschaftliche Hauptursache für den Verfall der Aura," J 64 a, 1.

82 See Rudolphe Gasché, "Objective Diversions: On some Kantian Themes in Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,'" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, eds. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osbourne (London: Routledge, 1994), 185.

83 See Stoessel, *Aura. Das vergessene Menschliche*, 15.

84 Hansen relates the aura to a "type of vision that exceeds and destabilizes traditional scientific practical, and representational conceptions of vision, along with linear notions of time and space and clear-cut, hierarchical distinctions between subject and object." Hansen, *Benjamin's Aura*, 345.

85 See Christine Schmider and Michael Walter, "Das Baudelaire-Buch," in *Benjamin-Handbuch. Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. Burkhardt Lindner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), 580.

86 See Burkhardt Lindner, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in *Benjamin-Handbuch. Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, eds. Burkhardt Lindner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), 237.

Accordingly, following Benjamin, the auratic object, in the processing aura, takes hold of us. In *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* Benjamin describes the absorbing potency of the work of art that is accessed by the art lover through their sense of concentration and devotion—in contrast to the masses, who in turn absorb the work of art thanks to their need for distraction.⁸⁷ In his notes on the idea of the aura, Benjamin qualifies in even more detail the process by which the aura is absorbed as a reciprocal movement of sensory perception, in this case, vision.⁸⁸ At first, experiencing the aura is to experience a turn of perception in which the perceiver becomes the perceived:⁸⁹

What is aura? The experience of aura is based upon the transfer of a common form of reaction in human society on the relation of nature and man. He, who is looked at or believes to be looked at, looks back [...]. To experience the aura of an appearance or of a being means to realize its ability to look back. This ability is full of poetry. Whenever under our look a human being, an animal or an inanimate looks back, it draws us at first into a distance; its look dreams and draws *us* with it to its dream. Aura is the appearance of a distance, no matter how close it may be.⁹⁰

The inner dynamics of the aura, thus, are characterized by reciprocity—a process by which perceiver and perceived form an inseparable unity. The perceiver is released as a ‘subject’ and incorporated into the process of the

87 Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, 39–40.

88 Compare chapter on Senses.

89 Compare Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2002), 28: “Im Wahrnehmungsgeschehen wird also nicht nur ein Sichentziehendes ausgemacht, vielmehr wird die Wahrnehmung umgekehrt von einem Sichentziehenden her erschlossen. [...] Nichts anderes bezeichnet Aura: Das Phänomen einer Bemächtigung durch anderes, dem ebenso ein Ermächtigtwerden des Subjekts entspricht, dem wiederum die genannten Gefühle des Verwunders (*thaumaton*) und des Schrecklichen (*tremendum*) korrespondieren.”

90 “Was ist Aura? Die Erfahrung der Aura beruht auf der Übertragung einer in der menschlichen Gesellschaft geläufigen Reaktionsform auf das Verhältnis der Natur zum Menschen. Der Angesehene oder angesehen sich Glaubende erwidert mit einem Blick [...]. Die Aura einer Erscheinung oder eines Wesens erfahren, heißt, ihres Vermögens inne werden, einen Blick zu erwidern [...]. Dieses Vermögen ist voller Poesie. Wo ein Mensch, ein Tier oder ein Unbeseeltes unter unserem Blick seinen eigenen aufschlägt, zieht es uns zunächst in die Ferne; sein Blick träumt, zieht *uns* in seinem Traume nach. Aura ist Erscheinung einer Ferne so nah sie sein mag.” Walter Benjamin, “Aufzeichnungen zur Aura,” in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, ed. Burkhardt Lindner. Kritische Gesamtausgabe Band 16 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2012), 304–305.

‘object’ in question. The perceiver is, as Benjamin puts it, ‘drawn’ to it: a process of attraction is displayed and this very process results in an auratic unity. It should be noted that Benjamin here also explicitly ascribes inanimate objects the capacity to look back although they are, supposedly, free of intentional action.⁹¹ Benjamin continues that even words such as language and scripture display reciprocal ability. They, too may be auratic in the interplay of closeness and distance.⁹²

Aura is both distance and closeness connected in a reciprocal interplay.⁹³ They are suitable to be described metaphorically as connected by the process that enables life itself, breathing.⁹⁴ Breath is the original Greek meaning of aura.⁹⁵ If Benjamin associates the auratic object closely with the cult, by using his example, he also connects it with the (Holy) Spirit. What is needed is a pneumatology of aura callable to identify its attraction.

Though the process of breathing might have some religious appeal, the important issue in Benjamin’s description is in fact the particular process connected to it, combining in/out, or rather, here and there and both together in a tense interactive relation—that is only to be described as a union.⁹⁶ The result

91 Compare the effects of the Orthodox icon as described by Sonja Luehrmann: “[I]cons and their use belong to a visual paradigm of ‘seeing into being’ where what one puts before one’s eyes has profound effects on the kind of person one becomes and the reality one lives in.” Sonja Luehrmann, “Iconographic Historicism: Being Contemporary and Orthodox at the Same Time,” *Material Religion* 12 (2016), 238.

92 Benjamin, “Aufzeichnungen zur Aura,” 305. Here, Benjamin quotes Karl Kraus: “Je näher man ein Wort ansieht, desto ferner blickt es zurück.”

93 The attraction of the Greek mystery cults can be described accordingly as a reciprocal interplay. With regard to the cult of Isis, Hans Kloft states: “Es war dieses gut inszenierte Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Schauenlassen und Verbergen, das der Festgemeinde, den Eingeweihten ihren exklusiven Status verlieh und zum anderen bei Außerstehenden eine attraktive und werbende Wirkung entfaltete.” Kloft, *Mysterienkulte der Antike*, 50.

94 See Hardt and Grzimek, “Aura und Aktualität als ästhetische Begriffe,” 114. On the phenomenology of breathing as a special kind of movement with regard to Pauline theology see Knut Martin Stünkel, “ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν. Die präpositionale Bewegtheit des Glaubens im Römerbrief,” in *Es ist hier kein Unterschied unter Juden und Griechen. Nachdenken über den Römerbrief und das Buch Genesis*, eds. Gerhard Gillhoff and Knut Martin Stünkel (Nijmegen: Wolff, 2006).

95 In Greek medicine, the aura is considered to be the harbinger of an epileptic fit; that is to say, it is the sign of the presence (or advent) of a ‘holy’ illness, see Rolf Tiedemann, “Aura,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Vol. 1 A–C*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Darmstadt: WBG, 1971), 652.

96 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction. On the reasons for the very possibility of religion in Benjamin, to maintain the tension between the finite and the infinite see Bernhard Sommerfeld, *Symphilosophie und Praxis. Studien zum Frühwerk Walter Benjamins* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998), 30–31.

of Benjamin's pneumatology is quite the opposite of revolutionary. Attraction is hence the special state in which subject and object as distinguishable entities, due to time and space, become here and now indistinguishable. This is enabled through the process of the aura which is characterized as a *bipolar* ('breathing') movement.⁹⁷ Although this concept might seem pretty aloof from the current discipline of religious studies, it, nevertheless, achieves scientific honor in the book of Thomas A. Tweed *Crossing and Dwelling. A Theory of religion* (2006). Here, with reference to Bruno Latour's lecture *Another Take on the Science and Religion Debate*, Tweed points out that:

Religions bring the distant close, as he [i.e. Latour] suggests, but they are flows that also propel adherents back and forth between the close and the distant. Religions move between what is imagined as the most distant horizon and what is imagined as the most intimate domain. To use traditional Christian language, they travel vertically back and forth between transcendence and immanence.⁹⁸

In the case of religious dynamics, attraction seen as the Benjaminian aura is the bipolar movement of attraction (being drawn towards) and repulsion (rejection *by* the 'object' as well as *of* other possibilities) or the (living) process of religious delimitation and repulsion. *Religious attraction is a matter of breath*. Attraction therefore only gains life if it is seen as a particular *contact* phenomenon.

2.3 *K.R. Popper: Propensity as Attraction*

With the notions of background and network and of the *bipolar process* that underpins the aura, much is gained for further theoretical design. However, the above lacks a non-intentionalistic description of the directedness in the process of attraction. An example of such a directedness might be found in the notion of *propensity*.

The theory of propensity to be introduced here is rather a late development of Karl Raimund Popper's lifelong philosophical struggle in defense of objectivity in scientific research. The concept of propensity itself was established in philosophy by Charles S. Peirce.⁹⁹ To a certain extent, his theorizing on

97 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability (III. e. iii.).

98 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 158.

99 Popper himself seemed to be reluctant to relate his idea of propensity to Peircean concepts, not least due to the relationality of his notion of propensity. See Karl Popper, *Realism and the Aim of Science*, ed. by W.W. Bartley III (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 282.

propensity formed Popper's final remarks in the field of philosophy and, therefore, can be considered his legacy. It evolved from a discussion on the interpretation of probability calculus in 1956, but later in 1988 achieved overall cosmological dignity: "The theory has further grown so that it was only in the last year that I realized its cosmological significance. I mean the fact that we live in a *world of propensities* [...]."100 Given its presumed all-compassing range, the theory of propensities surely must also be relevant to the worldly phenomenon of religion and its scholarly description and analysis alike. Popper's theory has many decisive advantages, the most important of which is that it formally defines the probability of events without recourse to the intentions of subjects.

Popper's main idea is that the probability of an event does not relate to a homogenous field of possibilities. Therefore, the intuitive idea that within a formal theory of probability the probabilities of the different possibilities are equal, is false. There is no democracy in probability, but also no dictatorship (this would be determinism). Instead, there are rather *objective tendencies* toward the adoption of a certain state. This means that there are *definite directed possibilities*. Accordingly, possibility is an objective modality, which nevertheless contains a certain propensity.101 Historically, Popper refers to the *vis vitalis* of the vitalists, but also to the Aristotelian concept of *dynamis* as related to his notion of propensity,102 though, as Popper states, propensities are not inherent in the individual things (as an individual's intentions would be), but are "relational properties of the total objective situation" and, therefore resemble (Newtonian) forces as relational property of at least two things.103

Propensity is the tendency to realize a certain state or attribute in a certain situation. Thus, the situation, or rather, the background in question is of great importance to propensities.104 It changes the field of possibilities and,

100 Karl R. Popper, *A World of Propensities* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), 9.

101 As an example from the history of religions consider the case of the city of Rome with its thousands of temples and sacred places. Here, as Jörg Rüpke remarks, some choice is possible among them, but only under the direction of certain propensities: "In einem solchen Rahmen ist individuelle Wahl möglich, aber diese Wahl erfolgte in vorgegebenen, in Ritualen präsentierten oder in der Familie erlernten Schemata. 'Wahl' war unter diesen Bedingungen vielleicht noch häufiger individuelle Negation, persönliche Ablehnung als positive Auswahl." Rüpke, *Die Religion der Römer*, 82. See chapter on Model Forms.

102 See Lothar Schäfer, *Karl R. Popper* (München: Beck, 1992), 85. On the Aristotelian notion of *dynamics* see the chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

103 See Popper, *Realism and the Aim of Science*, 359.

104 Angelos Chaniotis has analyzed an attempt to make use of the propensities involved in a situation of religious competition in the case of Alexander of Abonouteichos' cult of 'Glykon Neos Asklepios' as described by Lucian. The process even works without supposing (as Lucian did) an intentional fraud as the elements involved display attraction

therefore, the propensity. Popper's formula for this is $p(a,b) = r$ (the possibility p of an event a in a situation b equals r). This tendency can be stated objectively: it is part of reality. Therefore, it can be compared to physical realities like forces or force fields. Thus, according to Popper, a new picture of the world can be drawn, that is, as he calls it, the 'world of propensities'. Here, all attributes of the world are dispositional and, in consequence, the real state of a system can be understood as the sum of its dispositions or as the field of propensities.

Accordingly, with regard to scholarly analysis, legitimation of the realized possibility by the employment of psychological causality and, therefore, the recourse to motivations for realization, is no longer necessary.¹⁰⁵ In fact, the desire to determine our actions through our motivation, or rather, our intention, is led by the desire to establish the ideology of determinism in human concerns.¹⁰⁶ With the introduction of propensities, this ideology evaporates,¹⁰⁷ hopefully in favor of the examination of a "socially assumed matrix of behaviors and expectations."¹⁰⁸

There is a change of perspective, switching from motivations that originated in the past and determine the future to an attraction that works from the future by attracting future action. The present can be described as a continuous process of actualizing propensities, as a 'crystallization' of propensities.¹⁰⁹ This dynamic crystallization of a directed force field is attraction becoming a

due to their propensities: "Alexander's foundation presents an instructive paradigm in this regard. The exploitation and adaptation of traditional—therefore familiar—cultic elements facilitated the propagation of the cult and increased both attraction and trustworthiness. On the other hand, the unique combination of these elements into an entirely new construct and to a lesser extent the careful introduction of new elements gave his cult a unique profile and his followers a distinct identity." Angelos Chaniotis, "Old Wine in New Skin: Tradition and Innovation in the Cult Foundation of Alexander of Abonouteichos," in *Tradition and Innovation in the Ancient World*, ed. E. Dabrowa (Cracow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2002), 81.

105 See Hubert Seiwert's critique on motivational explanations of religious change in Hubert Seiwert, "Religiöser Wandel: Alternativen religionswissenschaftlicher Fragestellungen und Erklärungsmodelle," in *Der Religionswandel unserer Zeit im Spiegel der Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Gunther Stephenson (Darmstadt: WBG, 1976), 318.

106 Moreover, as Robert Ford Campany put it, the recurse on 'true' motivations may prove to be quite boring as an expression of the observer's personal obsessions about the needs of human beings. "Penetrating historical actors' true motives seems not only impossible but also less interesting than charting the sets of gestures, the structures of social attitudes and poses and mores, and the matrix of assumptions within which plural individuals—both the senders and receivers of social signals—operated." Robert Ford Campany, "Secrecy and Display in the Quest for Transcendence in China, ca. 220 BCE–350 CE," *History of Religions* 45 (2006), 326.

107 Popper, *World of Propensities*, 17.

108 Campany, "Secrecy and Display," 327.

109 Popper, *World of Propensities*, 18.

realized, objective process. It must be stressed, however, that no paradigm of historical necessity evolves from this theory. Causality is merely a dangerous descriptive tool that can be ‘found’ afterward and can be considered a very special case of the persistent tendency of things to be realized. The emergence of crystallizations, or to use the КХК-term, ‘condensations’, in form of objectified attraction remains unpredictable, but it may well be described phenomenologically.

Popper noted a close relationship between propensity and attraction as well. In his theory, probabilities possess a form of reality as unrealized possibilities. “In any case, they are propensities, similar to attractive forces.”¹¹⁰ Propensities are like active attractive forces, and thus are inherently creative.¹¹¹ Therefore, propensities are the basic endogenous factors within religious-historical *dynamics*.¹¹² Moreover, as in Benjamin’s theory of the aura, a new concept of time emerges through a rethinking of the dynamics of propensities. For “in so far as these possibilities can, and partly will, realize themselves in time, the open future is, in some way, already present, with its many competing possibilities, almost as a promise, as a temptation, as a lure. The future is, in this way, *actively* present at every moment.”¹¹³ This is an important remark for the scientific description of dynamic processes which cannot be realized by a narration of deterministic evolution, especially not in the form: ‘action because of reasons’. To wit:

It’s not the kicks from the back, from the past, that *impel* us but the attraction, the lure of the future and its competing possibilities, that *attract* us, that *entice* us. This is what keeps life—and, indeed, the world—unfolding. (Remember that Newtonian forces too are attractive forces!)¹¹⁴

In Popper’s vivid description, there is also a reevaluation of the push- and pull factors in the history of religion that makes the concept of attraction attractive for the study of the dynamics of the history of religions. Religion is not only

110 Popper, *World of Propensities*, 19.

111 Popper, *World of Propensities*, 20.

112 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

113 Popper, *World of Propensities*, 20.

114 Popper, *World of Propensities*, 20–21. The Newtonian idea of attraction as well as the idea of a force, according to Popper, at first display an affinity to ideas not exactly suitable for the scientific explanation of the processes in the natural world, for they were “[...] ideas which almost had the character of astrological ideas, and which were felt to be occult by most enlightened men, such as Berkeley. They were even felt to be occult by Newton himself.” Karl R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge. An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 174.

pushed or constructed through decisions by individual or collective actors, but displays a gravity of its own. As in Benjamin's description of the aura, the theory of propensity bears special significance for the idea of life itself.¹¹⁵ The particular temporal structure of attraction stimulates the world to unfold itself as a future-directed process. Popper here refers to the process of evolution as directed by a tendency, and thus, in consequence, it can be considered quasi-teleological or 'goal-directed'.¹¹⁶ And just as in Searle's description of the background, the possibilities allow but do not command action.

According to this cosmology of an unfolding world of propensities there is no definable starting-point in the process of attraction as well as no ending point. The process of propensities conserves the horizon of possibilities in every situation against the theories of a common origin of religions.¹¹⁷ Propensities, thus, prohibit theories of origin as well as the scholarly occupation with originality.

The theory of propensity is especially suitable for the description of the recombination/solidification of religious traditions through religious *contact*. It is not a pre-formative deterministic teleology, for there is always an infinity of possibilities and possibilities to recombine. However, this does not make the theory indifferent, for some logical possibilities can be excluded thus indicating the attraction. Hence, here follows the law-like character of propensities, which makes scientifically relevant statements of sufficient generality about the emergence of a network of tradition possible, without forcing the dynamics of the process into a general law. Propensities enable the formation of a hypothesis abductively and produce plausibility of historical description without recurrence to the motivations and intentions of the individual.

115 In his book on *Objective Knowledge* Popper analyzes the advantages of introducing a propensity-based theory to biology, above all with regard to its explanatory potential for the phenomenon of evolution. Here he claims that the theory "[...] allows us, in principle, to explain the evolution of complex organs such as the eye by many steps leading in a definite direction. The direction may indeed, as the vitalists asserted, be determined by a mind-like tendency—by the aim-structure of the organism which may develop a tendency, or a wish, to use the eye, and a skill in interpreting the stimuli received from it." Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, 279.

116 "Once a new aim or tendency or disposition, or a new skill, or a new way of behaving, has evolved in the central propensity structure, this fact will influence the effects of natural selection in such a way that previously unfavorable (though potentially favourable) mutations become actually favourable if they support the newly established tendency. *But this means that the evolution of the executive organs will become directed by that tendency or aim, and thus 'goal-directed.'*" Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, 278.

117 See Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime. The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

3 The Process of Attraction

Like Jesus on the cross, it is of the actors that one should always say 'Forgive them Father, they know not what they do.'

BRUNO LATOUR

3.1 *Process*

So far, attraction as it operates in the field of religious dynamics seems to be an interplay of background/network and propensity, resulting in a processual aura. Nevertheless, I do not intend to refer to the authors discussed above as the concept of attraction needs a further philosophical basis or historical intellectual background in order to be taken seriously, and to be used in researching the 'Dynamics of the History of Religions'. This recourse is performed to strengthen some simple phenomenological insights by means of generalizing models: that attraction is a process. But before readers consider me the master of the obvious, we must look at the consequences of such a statement. I am not claiming to be outlining a 'true' theory but rather intend these remarks to give a better picture of what is going on in a process of attraction.

First of all, it is a process and not a psychological relationship. The most striking result of the simple-sounding fact is that attraction cannot be formalized in the generalized assertion: 'a is attractive for b because of c'. There are many examples of such descriptions of the process: for example, some Harnackian ideas¹¹⁸ are still around: under the conditions of political insecurity and permanent endangerment of human existence in late antiquity, Christianity becomes attractive to the people thanks to its promise of a better afterlife, or perhaps, its social achievements. Attraction here would manifest itself in many individuals of their own choosing becoming Christians, that is, members of something called Christianity.¹¹⁹ To give another example from our times: concerning the religious situation of today one may find the explanation: 'The attractiveness of Asian religions is directly connected to their ability to provide extraordinary experiences.'¹²⁰ Now, I would not deny that 'extraordinary experiences' in the context of Asian Religions are possible, though their qualification as being extraordinary has to be carefully discerned. My objection refers

¹¹⁸ See Marksches, *Das antike Christentum*, 213.

¹¹⁹ In late antiquity, this notion was even used (by Julian the Apostate) to denounce Christians as being deliberate agents of their social attractiveness, compare Marksches, *Das antike Christentum*, 128.

¹²⁰ Hubert Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion. Auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2009), 139.

to the fact that we cannot reasonably say that something or someone is attractive (for b) for reasons c in a responsible way. Without very subtle insight into the thoughts and intentions, and indeed the psychology, of the people concerned, and very strong anthropological assertions, which are always disputable as they are necessarily historical, this statement cannot stand. To me, it is only under the conditions of the so-called 'Erlebnisgesellschaft' (event society) and (post-)modern individualism that such a statement about the attractiveness of Asian religions becomes valid. After all, it is the basically non-social character of choice-based accounts of attraction that propose individuals as the elementary units of social life,¹²¹ which prevents these accounts from taking the background/network and the corresponding propensities of action into consideration. Thus, they are also prevented from recognizing auratic phenomena as manifestations of religious attraction.

Along with the problem of intentionality another interesting question arises: Why should the concept of attraction be reduced to human beings at all?¹²² If attraction is not to be explicated with reference to an individual's intentions, then the paramount role or function of individuals within the process becomes questionable. The description of religious attraction cannot evade the involvement of human beings at some point, but it should not be reduced to the focus on them.¹²³ Via attraction, non-human entities, such as ideas, *habitus*, and material objects can be described as displaying effects that might be described as possessing an 'agency', that is a process-directing

121 See Mellor, "Rational Choice or Sacred Contagion?," 275.

122 Compare Bruno Latour's considerations on the possible agency of objects (Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 71–72).

123 The unit of examination 'human being' is highly questionable in this context, either as too limited or too broad as a distinctive element. In Niklas Luhmann's thinking, the empirical unit 'human being' may well be further differentiated through (sub-) systems that may well work for their own ends in processes of communication, such as bodies and psyches (see Christoph Kleine, "Niklas Luhmann und die Religionswissenschaft: Geht das zusammen?," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 24 (2016): 53). Also compare Volkhard Krech's consideration on the ascription-unit 'human being(s)' in the study of religion: "The perspective taken here does not exclude the consideration of human actors as forms of attribution but does not reduce the processes to them. Assuming an organic-mental-social unity called 'human being', the focus of communication in its autonomy gets lost while evolutionarily formed boundaries between mental, organic, and social processes are blurred. Moreover, the focus on processes of the negotiation of interests of individual actors reproduces all too often only object-linguistical semantics outside the religious and therefore prevents the possibility of analyzing religion." Volkhard Krech, "Theory and Empiricism of Religious Evolution (THERE): Foundation of a Research Program. Part 1," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 26 (2018): 37.

capacity of their own.¹²⁴ The agency of non-human entities can lead to transformations of the religious field as well as of the religious itself, and likewise the religious groups and individuals involved.¹²⁵ Above all, religiously attractive items display the potential for social mobilization. In his study on *The Jaina Cult of Relic Stūpas*, explicitly intended to be a representative case with overall significance for the history of religions, Peter Flügel elaborates on the special kind of dynamics religious objects, in this case relics, display to exert influence: “[...] relics condense energy in a passive way, but are perceived to be the source of the power, essentially social relationships that they mobilize and represent. Relics of renowned ascetics have the power to attract rather than to command. [...] As objects of mimetic desire, they act as social catalysts, conditioning, focusing, and energizing collective energies and actions of individual human beings.”¹²⁶ It is precisely the capacity to condition, focus and energize that makes religious attraction, thus forming, directing and intensifying the dynamics that might be the object of scholarly description.

124 Compare the agency of statues of gods and goddesses in Greek Antiquity that are considered to have emotions (e-motive tendencies, i.e. moving beyond the boundaries of objects) and agencies of their own: “Although divine statues or other divine images were not an indispensable element in the worship of the gods, they did enhance worship, in particular through their emotive power. [...] [S]tatues have a life also in the sense that they have agency: by arousing emotions, they provoke actions that are beyond or contrary to human intentions.” Angelos Chaniotis, “The Life of Statues of Gods in the Greek World,” *Kernos* 30 (2017): 92. Chaniotis notes that “The agency of lifeless objects, not only statues, mainly originates in the fact that they may provoke unintended responses, usually emotional responses, and so set a series of actions in motion” (ibid., 97). However, in order to perform that kind of agency, there has to be some kind of attraction toward the object in question involved in the process; such as, for example, in the case of Praxiteles’ Knidian Aphrodite or, more likely, the social attraction involved in the common belief that statues are the place of a possible interaction/communication with the divinity. On object-language level, such as with archaic Greeks having not yet conceptualized the difference between a divinity and its statue, the agency of statues does not seem to be counter-intuitive. On the process that made the agency of statues remarkable and subject to critique see Jan N. Bremmer, “The Agency of Greek and Roman Statues: From Homer to Constantine,” *Opuscula* 6 (2013): 9–10, 16.

125 See Jörg Rüpke’s characterization of the impact of statues of the religious conduct in polytheistic contexts: “In fact, in using statues housed in temples, ancient religions had a powerful instrument to construct—or, from a different perspective, represent—the divine in a differentiated, polytheistic form. It enabled ritual access, stimulated reflexion, inspired imagination in day or night dreams and visions. It even informed critical philosophical thinking. The gods could be met and addressed in their temples, sacrifices enabled via extispicy to put questions and receive immediate answer. The inquiry into the will of the gods in the many forms of divination frequently draws on this system of representation, too.” Jörg Rüpke, “Representation or Presence? Picturing the Divine in Ancient Rome,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 12 (2010): 181.

126 Peter Flügel, “The Jaina Cult of Relic Stūpas,” *Numen* 57 (2010): 473.

The simple statement *the formation of Christianity worked as a process of attraction* provides a better picture than assertions of the form 'Christianity was attractive to people because of X'. First, it does not presume the (pre-)existence of an entity called Christianity to provide the objects of attraction. Rather, what was later called Christianity *emerged in the process as an intricate (meta-stable) state*.¹²⁷ Second, attraction is not grounded on subjective motivation, but the 'real (material) attractedness', the process of being attracted to an objective, which is a scientifically identifiable state. After all, there is always the danger of mistaking consequences for motivations that is, for example, taking Christianity as attractive item (German: *Attraktion*) instead of describing it as a special process of attraction. Due to its communicative constitution by means of *contact situations* Christianity evolved as a process that can be characterized as attraction. Thus, attraction is different from the intentionality of a subject to the objective orientation through an attractive item. As a relational feature of a certain situation, it moves the field of research from the motivation of subjects to the objective states, thus demystifying the decision-making situation and preventing the postulate of psychosocial determinism in the individual. Thus, we might be able to reconstruct the processes of condensation of traditional religious networks *materially*. The presence of the network means that there is much that depends genealogically on former attraction processes (as the energetic prerequisites), but is condensed and newly interpreted, which is *transformed* in the process of acquisition. This might be called interreligious and intrareligious 'powerplay'.

3.2 *Attractors*

Attraction, therefore, is not merely a relationship that combines a and b. Attraction is the name of the process that at a certain point leads to a particular state that can be identified but not defined (as finished) as an *attractor*. Within the inexhaustible possibilities of reality, the attractor forms or orders ('structures') processes with respect to the complex conditions of the processes' environments. This is a suitable, but nevertheless dangerous notion for it might cause the impression that the attractor is some object in a final state. However, this analogy to chaos theory is misleading. One crucial aim in religious studies and of the КХК in particular is the analysis of the condensation of religious network *processes*. It is concerned with *processes* of condensation ('densification') or crystallization underlying diverse elements of traditions as well as with the transforming functions of the condensation processes as an important point

127 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

of the dynamics of the history of religions. Attraction is the process manifested by an attractor, thus the attractor is the objective (meta-stable)¹²⁸ state of a system but, nevertheless, it is also still a process. However, the advantage of using attractors as models lies in turning the focus of investigation towards *endogenous* factors within religious-historical dynamics¹²⁹ without having to rely on psychological or anthropological assumptions underlying the dynamics of religious history. After all, what is needed is a unified model of attraction that combines endogenous and exogenous factors to describe the specific dynamics of religions.¹³⁰ Regarding the meta-stable state of attractors, in his theory on the *Modes of Religiosity* Harvey Whitehouse has correspondingly interpreted the contrasting doctrinal and imagistic mode as “alternative *attractor positions*, around which religious traditions tend to coalesce”¹³¹ although he was still referring to psychological mechanisms of selection. This is, they “constitute attractor positions around which ritual actions and associated religious concepts cumulatively tend to cluster.”¹³² Attractors, thus are centers of clustering movements that follow certain propensities or ‘marked tendencies’ described as gravitations to their particular position.¹³³

The concept of attractor is employed to describe a complex but directed and discernable movement that is not simple causality. As being both more and less than an aggregate of its elements, it goes well beyond the distinction

128 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

129 See Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions—Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden: Brill 2011), 33.

130 See Jason Neelis’ claim concerning the attraction to Buddhist communities in ancient Northern India: Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks. Mobility and Exchange Within and Beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*. DHR 2 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 318: “The production of merit through meditation has traditionally been associated with monastic specialists, who developed paths of practice and thought for attaining religious goals of awakening, release from the cycle of worldly rebirth, and transcendence of mundane patterns of cognition. To posit that one of these examples is necessarily more internal, intrinsic, or ‘endogenous’ as a motivation for attraction to the *saṅgha* than so-called ‘exogenous’ factors is to prioritize a particular location for Buddhist traditions in the realm of philosophical thought, ritual practice, or meditative techniques. Rather than constructing a dichotomy between internal religious causes and external social conditions or reifying a ‘protestant’ hierarchy of primary ideological beliefs over secondary vulgarizations, it would be more fruitful to develop integrative models in which attractors and catalysts are correlated in a dynamic system of Buddhist formation, transmission, and transformation.”

131 Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 8.

132 Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 74.

133 Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 76.

between the part and the whole. Most importantly, the concept indicates *recursivity*, as the process denoted by it is at the same time constituted by the movement of its elements which, are, in turn, influenced by it.¹³⁴ As such, it manifests a special time-space that provides the moving elements within the process with meaning, thus that the meaningful content follows form, “just as semantics follows syntactical arrangements.”¹³⁵ The temporal and spatial position of an entity within an attractor provides it with meaning which is, then, a possible subject of *topological* considerations. It is precisely here that attempts to localize religion make good sense¹³⁶—as religious meaning ascribed to an entity is dependent on its dynamic position in a process of attraction. Every actual entity of the meta-stable attraction (attractor) is, thus, defined by its meaningful position within the network of the directed (propensional) process. The metaphoric model provided by the notion of attraction and the notion of attractors provides significant promise for a more accurate description of what is going on in the history of religions than the supermarket model of free choice, which seems to be a mere *ex post* interpretation of the active auratic background- and network-based process as directed by propensities. Moreover, the very reason that attractiveness might perform as a reason for the choices of an individual is based upon the process of attraction. The intentions of individuals are part of this process, but the emphasis on them is an interpretation of the dynamics that are in great danger of introducing speculative causal determinism—although this, admittedly, may well serve the ends of an object language doctrine.

For the sake of internal differentiation, it seems suitable to consider more possible attractors in the field of religion than just the modes of doctrinal and imagistic religiosity. One may list possible types of attractors, including, but not limited to certain *practices*, *perceptions* (*experiences*), *knowledge* and *material*.¹³⁷ Within these types, certain phenomena that may be conceptualized in metalanguage can be described as attractors.

134 See chapter on Tradition.

135 See Volkhard Krech, “Introduction to the Annual КНК-conference ‘Modes and Models of Religious Attraction. Part II: Knowledge and Action’” (unpublished paper, КНК-conference, 25–28 July 2011), 2.

136 On the localization of transcendence within Tibetan Buddhism see Carmen Meinert, “Beyond Spatial and Temporal Contingencies: Tantric Rituals in Eastern Central Asia under Tangut Rule, 11th–13th C.” in *Buddhism in Central Asia ii: Practices and Rituals, Visual and Material Transfer*, eds. Yukiyo Kasai and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 319.

137 Compare Volkhard Krech, “Dimensionen des Religiösen,” in *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, eds. Detlef Pollack, Volkhard Krech, Olaf Müller, and Marcus Hero (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 54–55.

Attractors related to *practices* are, for instance, appealing rituals or ethical conduct.¹³⁸ Mysteries, secrets and secrecy absolutely display a certain attraction to both the people involved (secret carriers) and those excluded from them. Moreover, the religious secret is likely to develop a 'black hole potency', as Marc Teeuwen put it, that might serve as a telling example of the processes of attraction that are witnessed in religious contexts.¹³⁹ Accordingly, purity could serve as an attractor motivating religious practice and the corresponding conduct of life in general. Certain roles within a perhaps institutionalized context (offices) might display attraction beyond the fact that individuals find the prestige of the office in question attractive.

Another type of attractor is constituted by *perceptions* mediated by condensed signs in combination with the description/expression of certain *feelings* and *experiences* mediated by the senses. Here, the possibility of excess as an extraordinary experience might be a part of in-corporealized (embodied) religion as well.¹⁴⁰ Also, religious *spaces*, perhaps in form of holy or sacred places that is, certain *sites*, and, correspondingly, holy and sacred times, are constituted and function as attractors and the most visible manifestations of religious attraction, one might think, for instance, of pictures of Muslims

138 On object language level, these may be described as resulting from an impact of the divine rather than as a gain achieved by choosing or buying a particular ethic on the religious marketplace, as for example in the thinking of Philo of Alexandria; see Rabens, "Philo's Attractive Ethics on the 'Religious Market' of Ancient Alexandria," 346 and 347: "[...] Philo finds a way to describe figuratively how such a religious-ethical transformation happens: 'just as one who comes near the light is straightaway illumined, so also is filled the entire soul of him to whom god has appeared' [...]. Philo here speaks of god's empowering presence as the motor of change in a person and not so much of moral obligation. knowledge and wisdom are central agents in this process, aiming at the person's being 'full of every good' [...] numerous further passages could be discussed as evidence of the sometimes overlooked fact that for Philo an intimate relationship with the divine empowers religious-ethical life."

139 See chapter on Secret. On the attraction of secrets regarding Mithraic and Christian communities in Late Antiquity compare Jonas Bjørnebye, "Secrecy and Initiation in the Mithraic Communities of Fourth Century Rome," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practice. Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty*, eds. Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012).

140 Also compare the attraction of the exotic as described by Jason BeDuhn that, according to him "forms and essential antecedent of the development of a sense of distinct religions and thus religious pluralism." Jason BeDuhn, "Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion' in Third Century Iran," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, eds. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley. Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 262.

circumambulating the Ka'bah. The particular directedness of religious space, thus, directs human beings.¹⁴¹

Knowledge provides a powerful attractor. Following the lead of Pascal Boyer, Harvey Whitehouse described the 'cognitive optimum' as a universal attractor position in the field of religion, an attractor around which cultural concepts will be liable to congregate.¹⁴² Boyer himself analyzed counterintuitive concepts as likely to attract attention.¹⁴³ Cho and Squier describe 'dynamic attractors' or 'centroids' within a space of concepts—a region in which all varieties of concepts are clustered, relative to some scale. Here, it well might be the case that these clustering concepts do not share anything in an identical manner, but are, nevertheless, in the cluster in question, objects and expressions of a process of attraction. This is independent of people's intention towards these concepts.¹⁴⁴ But below, and, in fact, in spite of this most general level defined by minimal counter-intuition, certain more complicated phenomena also display attracting dynamics.¹⁴⁵ *Narratives*, forms, and even dogmas (not least

141 See chapter on Space. Also compare the role of materially pre-structured forms such as the temple of Borobudur and its effect on the Buddhist pilgrim as described by Stec and Sweetser: "Walking upwards through the structure of the monument and through the sculptural depictions is, in the blend, performatively achieving that same conscious state which would take a Buddhist master years of disciplined, conscious effort to achieve. Just by walking in circles for a few hours and becoming immersed in depictions of the cognitive transformations attained in the Buddhist world, pilgrims attain that cognitive state. The cognitive work is done 'for free' by the monument and pilgrims leave the site as good as bodhisattvas, the living Buddha." Kashmiri Stec and Eve Sweetser, "Borobudur and Chartres: Religious spaces as performative real-space blends," in *Sensuous Cognition. Explorations into Human Sentience: Imagination, (E)motion and Perception*, edited by Rosario Caballero und Javier E. Díaz Vera (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 270.

142 See Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 29.

143 See Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas. A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 121.

144 "A good example of a centroid in Buddhist epistemology is the idea that language functions conventionally rather than corresponding to objective referents in the world. This pragmatic view of language is formulated differently over time in response to evolving environments, and also exhibits stronger and weaker versions. While these intricacies may be vague or unknown to the adherents, the system of thought itself is describable by means of clustering into components, which is quite different from attempting to define what Buddhism is to each individual in a shared uniformity. Despite the variability, it is readily possible to identify a pragmatic language component as a cluster of relatively proximate concepts that are collectively very distant from a correspondingly situated component in any philosophy that affirms, for example, a correspondence view of language and reality." Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013): 378–379.

145 See as a sustained critique of the idea of the cognitive optimum as being minimally counterintuitive Gregory D. Alles, "The So-Called Cognitive Optimum and the Cost of

by providing space, opportunity and even duty to inscribe oneself into) may also function as an attractor, generating interpretation and re-interpretation. Others are the constitution of text corpora in the form of divine or commenting literature. The written word itself as well as the process of *writing* attracts not only individuals, but also other words or writings, perhaps even commentaries. The possibility to stand back and look beyond, thus formally transcending one's standpoint can also display attraction. There seems to be a tendency to consider forms of dealing with religiously specified *transcendence*, or rather, the transcendence-immanence distinction (TID) as especially attractive for research on attraction in the religious field.¹⁴⁶

In his pathbreaking study on tradition, Edward Shils described the "gravitation to the past which is a feature of all cultures." Thus, the past, or rather, tradition as that which links cultures and individuals to the past could be considered as powerful attractors as a device of transcending oneself, either in collectivities or in a privileged relation to the past, providing some "depth in time."¹⁴⁷ "The remoteness from a repugnant present is often one of the features of this attraction; there is also a conviction that a high point in human existence was attained not in the past as such, not in the past continuous with the present, but in a particular epoch, place, and sphere of human life."¹⁴⁸ Though the fact of the presence of a long-standing tradition may be attractive to people in certain (challenging) situations (it might be unattractive for the very same reason), *tradition* rather might serve as a powerful attractor by the process of orienting ideas, patterns, customs individuals and collectivities and guiding actions that are not at the free disposal of both of individuals or societies of individuals. What is more, tradition basically expresses the recursivity that manifests the process of attraction involved in the dynamics of religion.¹⁴⁹ Also, truth as introduced by the 'Mosaic distinction' (Jan Assmann) may serve as an attractor that displays some irresistible appeal.

Religious Concepts," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 18 (2006). However, the 'cost and gain' calculus employed by Alles instead (*ibid.*, 341 f) still seems to lay too much emphasis on the market model of mental processes, thus missing the strata of religious attraction as a combination of manifold processes, including physical and mental ones.

146 On transcendence as a process of transcending and as a contact phenomenon see chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction. Compare also Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 56, 67.

147 Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1983), 212. See chapter on Tradition.

148 Shils, *Tradition*, 207.

149 See chapter on Tradition.

Of course, *material* elements cannot be neglected, forms; religious objects such as images,¹⁵⁰ books, buildings, clothing, relic stupas and so on. However, as Peter Flügel's abovementioned work on Jain relic stūpas and corresponding phenomena of statues in the Greek and Roman context shows, the influence displayed by material items is not related to their attractiveness, but rather, to their auratic attraction that causes an in-formative dynamics.

It is also the *dynamic* element itself, that has an attractive effect, or, sometimes on the contrary, the *stability* of religious institutions and doctrines that are attractive in order to counter the experience of contingency. Or rather, it is the particular interplay of dynamics and stability that provides attraction. All the above-mentioned attractors are likely to give a reliable (meaningful) order of the contingent field of possibilities, thus rendering their field of effect religious.

Attraction and the attractor cannot be decoupled in statements like 'excess is attractive for x because of a [insert some anthropological assumption here]' where excess is the attractor and the realized orientation of individuals towards it is the attraction. These attractors as a starting point for scientific description should be described as to be closely related to the notion of attractor not as a final state, but as an expression of the *process* itself. This has severe consequences for description. The possible attractors in the field of knowledge for instance¹⁵¹ are: canonizing,¹⁵² dogmatizing, but not 'the' canon, or 'the' dogma. It is the same in the field of experience: beauty or excess as such is not attractive, but the process of 'beautification' (for example: staging beauty¹⁵³ or giving rules for beauty) or going to excess (crossing boundaries in excess) is an

150 On the 'power of images' within a religious visual culture see David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze. Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 258–259.

151 To follow the four 'dimensions' of the CERES structure at this point; see Volkhard Krech, "Relational Religion. Insights and Challenges after 12 years of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe," in *Stepping Back and Looking Ahead. Twelve Years of Studying Religious Contact at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg Bochum*, edited by Maren Freudenberg, Frederik Elwert, Tim Karis, Martin Radermacher, Jens Schlamelcher (DHR 13) (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 30–48.

152 On canon as a possible attractor compare Marksches, *Das antike Christentum*, 96 f.

153 See Kloft's account on the attractive capacity with regard to the well-staged unusual splendor and sensory impressiveness of the Mystery Cults: "Die Anziehungskraft der Mysterienkulte gründete nicht zuletzt auf ihrer fremdartigen Prachtenfaltung, die das Ungewöhnliche, das nicht Alltägliche in bunten und ansprechenden Aufzügen zu inszenieren verstand." Kloft, *Mysterienkulte der Antike*, 107.

attractor. For the field of action the attractor is ritualizing but not 'the' ritual, it is social caring¹⁵⁴ but less (institutionalized) diacony or social welfare.

This explanation of religious attractors has further consequences for questions about religious *material*. Religious material is generated by a process of attraction that leads to dynamic structures. Hence, it is not a simple black stone or a picture of the Virgin at a certain place that is the material attractor but the process of attraction and repulsion that combines stone and believer auratically to a distinctive (material) actual entity (or, as in actor-network theory, an actant).¹⁵⁵ The material item is, therefore, not the attractor but the medium of *material attraction* as a process.

Here, however, to counter the impression that an overtly materialistic standpoint is being taken, an important addition must be made concerning the role of ideas, reflections, theories, dogmatics in religion. In the process of attraction in the religious field, 'idealist' and 'materialist' aspects are closely intertwined. The directedness related to the process of attraction is a necessary precondition for *meaning*. Without directedness, given possibilities for action evaporate into arbitrariness. In general, an ascription of meaning only takes place if a process (to which a certain meaning is attributed) escapes mere contingency and randomness. The dynamics of attraction, as guided by certain propensities, is thus also a meaning-generating process. As the attribution of religious meaning is a special kind of *ascription process*, the same holds true for the subject of the study of religion. Seen as attraction, religious dynamics make sense, i.e. not only for the religious, but also for the scholarly observer who is hence being able to identify the objects of their study.

3.3 Attraction and Contact

Of course, there is always a variety of attractors in the religious field. The directed *fields* of propensity condense in clusters, for certain real dispositions of action exist. In Searle's terminology, this meta-stable (foam-like) structure is the network as guided by the background. This still leaves lots of blank space, which in this framework represents the unrealized possibilities. The field of attraction is not only geographical but rather cosmological in nature. This is to

¹⁵⁴ Following Luhmann's definition, social caring (*Diakonie*) is the process, by which religion as a subsystem of society claims competence in other fields and draws dynamics (energy) and, not at least, possible clients (perhaps the poor from the field of economics) from there. Thus, by personalizing structural problems of the social, religion in social caring displays attraction. The process, however, is at the same time demarcating as it prevents the absorption of the religious sphere into, for instance, politics, see Niklas Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 58.

¹⁵⁵ See Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 70–71.

say, it is structured by propensity with regard to every aspect of human existence, whether that be psychological, social or historical or indeed any other facet that could conceivably be named. The embodiment of attraction consists in the directedness of religious space in which the devotee might dwell and cross as an element of the process of attraction. This conclusion finds parallels in Tweed's description of religions as a 'dwelling' for they do

more than autocentrically orient individuals in terms of bodily axes and personal memory. They do more than situate embodied persons in domestic space and familial history. Dwelling practices also position the religious in longer time frames and wider social spaces. Homemaking does not end at the front door. It extends to the boundaries of the territory that group members allocentrically imagine as their space, but since the homeland is an imagined territory inhabited by an imagined community, a space and group continually figured and refigured *in contact with others*, its borders shift over time and across cultures.¹⁵⁶

Religious attraction in directed fields of propensity, therefore, establishes a particular time/space filled with meaning, for it offers cosmographies as well as chronographies for both the use of the religious and the use of the scholar of religion. It is because of these fields of propensity that contact, thus, may lead to further expansion or adaption of meaning.

Religions not only map the contours of the terrestrial, subterranean and celestial realms; they also orient devotees temporally and spatially by creating cosmogonies and teleographies that represent the origin and destiny of the universe.¹⁵⁷

Here, metalanguage and object language follow parallel patterns. What Tweed calls the 'teleography of religion', we may translate as the attraction within the religious field. So, with reference to another metaphor, Tweed holds that interpreters of religion should hydrodynamically follow the flow in a vectoral

¹⁵⁶ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 110 [my emphasis].

¹⁵⁷ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 116. Compare Tweed's characteristic of religion: "... religions are processes in which social institutions [...] bridge organic constraints [...] and cultural mediations [...] to produce reference frames [...] that orient devotees in time and space" (173).

field,¹⁵⁸ which can also be described as the field or as in chaos theory the *basin of attraction*, the set of initial conditions which lead to long-time behavior that approaches the attractor.¹⁵⁹ These regions can vary greatly from system to system.

Attraction processes manifest themselves as *expressions* of the experience of directed paths within the religious field. The interrelatedness of experiences and their linguistic expressions has to be stressed, for the latter are the real subject of the scholar's work.¹⁶⁰ The real dispositions are responsible for the emergence of a network of traditions. Propensities lead to condensations and new possibilities in a creative process ("evolution"). This means that realized condensations of religious traditional networks (as final states) are not attractors, but religious traditional networks as processing attraction, as germs of crystallizing and objectively possible events, are. They form a dynamic network of paths. This pathfinding might be called the auratization of the attractor. But they still allow the possibility of decoupling oneself from a certain path, above all in the 'fusion of horizons' (or rather, *model forms*) that takes place in situations of contact. Describable attractors emerge, reinforce or lessen and change in the interdependent dynamic process. Here, certain condensations develop their own gravity as the attraction of the greater mass. Such condensation directly leads to a higher propensity and contains therefore some self-inductive *intensification*.¹⁶¹ As Alfred N. Whitehead puts it: the dynamics of religious development consist "in an increase of emphasis."¹⁶²

This process of intensification might be described via the metaphor of a whirlpool—itself a conspicuous visualization of an attractor. A whirlpool

158 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 171. The examination of vectors seems to be increasingly popular in the study of religion, see for example Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice*, 11: "Rather it is a matter of grasping the vectors of this reality in an era of multiple cultural encounters, and the profound transformations that these encounters entail." Of the same opinion is Peter Brown when he insists that it is the scholar's task to ask for the vectors of change in religious orientation Peter Brown, *Authority and the sacred. Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xii. Vectors here seem to be another suitable model to grasp the directedness of religious dynamics that is expressed by attraction.

159 Edward Ott, "Basin of attraction," *Scholarpedia*, 1, no. 8 (2006): 1701.

160 See chapter on the Senses. This follows Luhmann's idea that the social dimension of religion starts when the experience of the individual with transcendence or holiness is transgressed in communication. This is done in a certain material expression that is: in writing.

161 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

162 Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making. Lowell Lectures 1926* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 19.

combines intense dynamics with persistent stability, displaying a grave influence on all entities in its surroundings. To put that whirlpool-like dynamic into a short two-word slogan: *religion sucks*. The pictured suction of religion can be expressed by a model: following the higher propensity in the network of paths some privileged ones become attraction-‘highways’ (*Einbahnungen*) evolving and strengthening with the increase of propensity.¹⁶³ These privileged paths direct materially: anything that is getting close enough to the attractor remains close even if its position is slightly disturbed. The personal emphatic conversion of the individual, as well as the seemingly banal clubbing that resulted in the spread of antique mystery cults as a socially attractive highway, are special cases of this process. These main paths are the stable elements that are both visible enough and appropriate for scientific description. Here, some syncretism of force under the influence of certain types of attractors becomes possible. An attractor is the dynamic core of such a condensation process and both core and path strengthen each other through interplay process. This process of interplay can be described as a merging of propensities to form condensed regions of possibilities. In the philosophy of organism, this is described as the evolution of eternal objects that may become relevant for any subsequent process of realizing further actual entities.¹⁶⁴

Apart from the already stated advantages above, this theory has a few additional benefits. First, on the material or rather, ontological level, the model is more easily able to describe the phenomenon of loss of attraction: not as a revolution of behavior due to a sudden new idea but as a modification of the field of attraction due to background influences, mostly caused by other attractors. Secondly, this notion of attraction could also be used to clarify the idea of the *contact dimension* which is crucial for the approach of the КХК. It allows us to stress the fact that contact does not take place (in form of being attracted) between two stable entities a and b which then exchange or do not exchange some items between themselves. Rather, it is the other way around, in the sense that a and b themselves are only constituted by means of contact (attraction). The contact situation originates attractors, by which religious traditions condense. Attraction, interpreted as aura and propensity, is thus a process that is basically independent of—but not unrelated to—human beings being or feeling attracted and expressing their attractedness by a free choice.

163 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

164 See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York/London: The Free Press, 1979), 39–40.

4 Conclusion: Attraction Revisited

The metalanguage description of the dynamics in the history of religions relies on the elaboration of suitable models that allow an adequate picture of what is going on. In order to explain religious phenomena, the choice of model is of utmost importance. Within the scholarly study of religion, attraction is among the most underrated concepts in this regard. Though some concepts and some notions of attraction are not unrecognized in the study of religion, the concept as used so far, though it may be suitable for certain situations of time and space, is largely unsuitable for more generalized description across a variety of spatial-temporal situations.

Thus, the concept must be re-evaluated and reformulated. Religious attraction is more than attractiveness. The motivational and intentionalistic approach is reduced in applicability to a comparatively small temporal and spatial phase of the overall process of religious attraction. Rather, attraction as a process *allows for* certain situations defined by spatial and temporal particularity that may be characterized by intentional choices of attractive items by rationally deciding individuals. Attraction is inseparably related to situations that is, to particular *background* and *networks*, which *auratically* display a particular discernable *propensity*. As such, religious dynamics develop a gravitating capacity that attracts ideas, habitus, practices, experiences, and objects in a densifying movement.

Each of these items, and the list I provided is by no means exhaustive, may attract and integrate the others into their attractive process. Attraction processes may cluster in such a way that a processual superstructure becomes discernable consisting of elements in proximity and which remain close to each other even if disturbed by other forces. These attraction processes may strengthen each other mutually, thus enlarging the attraction of the whole. As such, on a meta-level, a dynamic entity may be discerned as an *attractor* and provided with the name of a particular religion in metalanguage description. However, as Volkhard Krech reminds us: "An attractor is not an entity as such, but consists of several elements that are forced to behave and act through attachments. Thus, an attractor is not just an aggregate of its circulating elements, but both more and less; it is more than the sum of its elements due to the mutual forces between them; and it is less than the sum of its elements, because each element is more complex than just tracing the attractor."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Volkhard Krech, "Introduction to the annual КHK conference 'Modes and Models of Religious Attraction. Part II: Knowledge and Action' (25–28 July 2011)," 2.

Religious attractors consist of partly religious or religiously described elements. They are not entities, but they determine and, thus, discernably indicate the particular dynamics of what may be called a historical religion (a 'religion in history').

Attraction, thus, provides a model that describes the basic processes involved in the dynamics of religion. The model of the attractor additionally allows an important further perspective on the subject of the study of religion. It is not mere movement, but involves *recursive* elements. Its dynamic stability and yet discernable appearance supplements scholarly metalanguage with a suitably non-essentialistic tool for further scrutiny of the particular *dynamics* of religion and religions.

Dynamics and Stability: Potentiality, Bipolarity, Metastability

Some Theoretical Perspectives on the Conceptualization of Dynamics and Stability in the Study of Religion

Scholarly paradigms and theories are [...] as dynamic as their objects [...]

BOCHINGER/RÜPKE



1 Introduction: Dynamics and the Dynamic Scholar

The Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) ‘Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe’ was established to explore an understudied and, in fact, rather underestimated perspective in the study of religions. Its title indicates an ambitious enterprise, as it combines five difficult notions. Jonathan Z. Smith, for instance, “cannot think of two more difficult terms than ‘history’ and ‘religion.’”¹ However, there is more. The emergence, formation, and establishment as well as the stabilization and possible decline of religious tradition are, according to this underestimated perspective, a matter and a result of certain processes of contact between traditions that may already be considered religions or which may only later emerge as such. Thus, religions are studied in terms of a dynamic aspect that, accordingly, appears prominently as the first word in the title of this scholarly endeavor.

There is an ambiguity with the title of ‘Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe’ that is worth mentioning here at the outset. In English, the notion of dynamics is a *plurale tantum*. Accordingly, the ambiguity refers to the question of whether to understand the notion of dynamics in the singular or in the plural sense that is, whether research is to be conducted

1 Jonathan Z. Smith, “In Comparison Magic Dwells,” in *Imagining Religion. From Babylon to Jamestown* (Chicago/London: Chicago University Press, 1982), 20.

on the (prime) movement of the history of religion in general or rather, if there are many different kinds of dynamics that can be discerned within the history of religions. The German title of the КHK, *Dynamiken der Religionsgeschichte zwischen Asien und Europa*, thus, clarifies the ambiguity in favor of the second possibility. This is, after all, very much in line with the well-established suspicion in which general ideas are held in the current scholarly discourse in the field of religious studies. The diversity of subjects contained within such a large area of research suggests a diversity of dynamics related to the history in question. The pluralistic stance is, nevertheless, somehow juxtaposed with unity in the title itself, for there is, however, both in the German and in the English title of the КHK, still a tendency towards a greater unification, not least in the sense that is not about the religious *histories* (*Religionsgeschichten*) that take place in its geographical scope, but rather about *the history* (*die Religionsgeschichte*) of religion as a whole. Accordingly, to some scholars, not least in the КHK itself, the question of whether the diverse possible dynamics in play here might follow a common pattern is worth following. Otherwise, might it be possible to build a notion of dynamics that is particular for Eurasian religious history or even the history of religion—if not for the phenomenon of religion as such? It is, perhaps, the particularity of its dynamics that makes religion distinct from other social phenomena.

The notion of dynamics alone, however, cannot claim any outstanding innovativeness. Within the history of the study of religion, the notion was even in danger of being considered utterly discarded in general scholarship, thanks to the influence of Robert Ranulph Marett's theory of 'dynamism'.² In the work of Marett and associated thinkers, dynamics are closely connected to the notion of power. A belief in (pre-)animate power is held to be a precursor of the belief in gods, and, thus, the experience of religion is held to be based on an emotional crisis of humiliation due to the 'power of awfulness' as being awe-inspiring.³ The connection between dynamics and power which originated in studies of the Grecian context remains highly influential in the current usage of the notion. Nonetheless, given the cautiousness of scholarship in religious studies vis-à-vis the earlier concepts, one might have expected that the concept would have been latterly expunged from scholarly discourse. However, on the contrary, the notion remains common, if notorious, in the field. Any approach that claims relevance in the field claims to account for the dynamism of its object of study. Moreover, if the object of study is held to be 'dynamic', this also

2 On Marett see Martin Riesebrodt, "Robert Ranulph Marett (1866–1943)," in *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Axel Michaels (München: Beck, 2004).

3 See Riesebrodt, "Robert Ranulph Marett," 181.

renders the process of research a dynamic enterprise—as opposed to more ‘conservative’ approaches focusing on stable or even unchangeable essential aspects of the objects.⁴ As Thomas Tweed put it: “[S]cholars, like transnational migrants, are constantly moving across.”⁵ The mobility of the scholar examining a dynamic subject should easily morph into mental agility concerning social/political movement. The dynamism of the object, thus, neatly corresponds to the progressiveness of both the scholarly approach and, last but not least, the scholar who practically applies such an approach.⁶ Characterizing the supposedly new and innovative, if not revolutionary, approach in scholarship that his book claims to be part of, David Chidester’s enthusiasm in the introduction to *Religion: Material Dynamics*, published in 2018, verges on the panegyric:

The book participates in the revolution that has liberated materiality—embodiment and the senses, objects and their social lives, exchange, and power relations, media and mediation, and all the forces and fluctuations in the production, circulation, and consumption of things—as the stuff of religion that demands the attention of the study of religion. [...] Indicating a remarkable multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary

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- 4 Take for instance the following article: Heidi A. Campbell, “The Dynamic Future of Digital Religious Studies,” in *Stepping Back and Looking Ahead: Twelve Years of Studying Religious Contact at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg Bochum*, eds. Maren Freudenberg, Frederik Elwert, Tim Karis, Martin Radermacher, and Jens Schlamelcher. DHR 13 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023). Krech and Nagel, however, remind us of the fact that it was the social sciences in particular which, following Marx’s verdict, tended to treat religion as the epitome of the static, associating any dynamics linked to religion only with trends toward the abolition of religion, such as secularization and privatization, see Volkhard Krech and Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, “Religion in Bewegung. Semantische und strukturelle Aspekte religiöser Dynamik,” in *Theoretische Ansätze und Konzepte in der Forschung über soziale Bewegungen in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, eds. Helke Stadtland and Jürgen Mittag (Essen: Klartext, 2014), 423.
- 5 Thomas A. Tweed, “On Moving Across: Translocative Religion and the Interpreter’s Position,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70 (2002), 253. Tweed continues: “Scholars continually move back and forth between inside and outside, fact and value, evidence and narrative, the living and the dead, here and there, us and them.”
- 6 See for example Manuel Vázquez’ emphatic self-description regarding the problem of ‘textualism’ in his ‘materialist theory of religion’: “Standing [sic!] with Marx, I also emphasize the dynamic nature of praxis against the contemplative and ‘poietic’ (in the Aristotelian sense) force of textualism [...] Text should not be treated as ‘fetishes’, acting independently of the practices by which we produce, circulate, consume, and authorize them.” Manuel A. Vázquez, *More than Belief. A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 232. Therefore, the notion of dynamics becomes some kind of universal remedy. Stressing the dynamic nature of things, thus, also might serve as an antidote to the danger of—by studying religious phenomena—acting religiously (in using the object as a ‘fetish’).

enterprise [...] this grounded and dynamic range of inquiry creates openings in religious studies through the study of religious materiality.⁷

However, the omnipresence and persistent acclaim for the notion of dynamics in current scholarship seems to express a self-evidence that relieves its users from defining it or, at least, explaining what is meant by dynamics in their studies. 'Religion' and 'history', following Smith, are commonly accepted as being difficult notions, leading to endless struggles about their 'correct' usage; 'dynamics', in contrast, is not even that. To consider something as 'dynamic' does not seem to require justification. It is conspicuous how little time and space is spent in scholarly publications on one of the, if not *the*, most basic notion. Thus far, 'dynamics' has been used as a key to unlock a supposedly new and better perspective on things, but it is not yet used as a concept. It goes without saying that except for some slightly unsatisfying lists of associated terms,⁸ the reader does not find a definition or even a reflection on the notion of dynamics in Chidester's supposedly 'dynamic' book. The notion is not even considered worthy of an appearance in the otherwise extensive index.⁹

Therefore, the first question to be examined is what is possibly meant by the concept of dynamics when used in the study of religion? If little attention is given to that, as is the case too often, the question inevitably arises of what kind of model of thought this presumably self-evident use of the notion implies. The ever-present possibility, however, of simply abolishing the notion does not seem viable. 'Dynamics' does indeed cover an important aspect of the way the object of study should be conceptualized. The lack of reflection turns out to be a neglected problem of a discipline that surely cannot be accused of being too lax and uncaring in its focus on self-reflection and self-control when it comes to applying notions and concepts that evolved in another context. Given this, it seems a far more interesting task to examine what notions the scholar of religious studies actually *maintains* and for what reasons rather than contemplating which notions are to be abolished.

If anything, the notion of dynamics is not only the product of another field of thinking but also a key concept in a different discipline, namely, the natural

7 David Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics* (Oakland: University of California Press 2018), 2.

8 "[O]ur exploration [...] has been [...] about dynamics—power, energy, force and motion [...]" Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 206.

9 To the concerned reader, it somehow comes as a relief, then, that Chidester cheerfully admits that his book titled 'Religion' is not about religion at all: "Studying religion, in this sense, focuses attention, not on religion, but on the material conditions of possibility for negotiating the human." Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 3.

sciences and, above all, physics. Modeling a key notion of research on the example of another field, especially in the case of modeling notions to be used in the Humanities after notions used in natural sciences, provides both bold possibilities to be exploited and serious constraints to be taken into careful consideration. In the following, I aim to scrutinize a useful notion of dynamics that helps to gain a better picture of what is going on in the field of religion, that is, a notion that is more than a sign of goodwill towards the phenomena (or the academic community guarding these phenomena) or the expression of the scholar's self-acclaim as being innovative, dynamic and progressive, such as to be found in Chidester's book: "[T]he future is already present in the material study of religion."¹⁰

2 'Dynamics' in the Study of Religion

I take my starting point from two seminal texts of reference that were repeatedly discussed in the meetings of the KHK, namely Thomas Tweed's monograph *Crossing and Dwelling. A Theory of Religion*¹¹ (2006) and Manuel A. Vásquez' article *Studying Religion in Motion* (2008).¹² In both texts, the notion of dynamics is of considerable conspicuousness. With regard to contemporary scholarship, the inclusion of the notion of dynamics (and, opposing it, stability) into the number of key concepts of the study of religion, thus, seems to be well justified.

Now, if the notion is thus prominent, is it correspondingly concise? Not in terms of content, anyway. Reading Tweed and Vasquez, however, the impression is given that the notion of dynamics is once again some kind of operative signal for the author's good intention to provide something new for the audience, in contrast to the old 'static' teachings on both theorists and theorized.¹³

10 Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 12. See Břetislav Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft. Plädoyer für eine empirisch fundierte Theorie und Methode* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 149: "Wer nicht kreativ, flexibel, dynamisch und innovativ ist, den gibt es eigentlich nicht, und es spielt keine Rolle, ob es sich dabei um eine Hausfrau, einen Wissenschaftler oder den Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten handelt."

11 Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling. A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

12 Manuel A. Vásquez, "Studying Religions in Motion: A Network Approach," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008), 151–184.

13 It is the material turn in particular that forces its matadors to cleanse themselves of any suspicion that they are dealing with static phenomena, such as objects conveying fixed meaning. The turn to objects and the dynamic approach must be reconciled. See David Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the study of religions," in *Religion and*

Tweed, for instance, claims: “But my understanding of theory departs from all five types since I reject a presupposition they all share, even the constructivists’ theory building and the critical theorists’ power analysis—that the theorist and the theorized are static.”¹⁴ “All religions are mobile” states Vasquez apodictically, and furthermore, claims that “it is a modern prejudice to see religion as essentially static.”¹⁵ Religious life, as Tweed points out, “is about movement although most theories offer little help in talking about religion’s dynamics.”¹⁶ This is all the more lamentable for, as Vasquez puts it: “If we accept that religion is as dynamic as any other realm of human activity, then, the task is to evaluate the types, rates, genealogies, causes and vectors of that mobility.”¹⁷ Tweed’s definition of religion entirely relies on the dynamic aspect, prioritizing aquatic metaphors: “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.”¹⁸ Not without reason, Chidester claims that “the study of religion has become the study of flows, the study of religion in motion through the circulations of people, objects, technology, money, images of human possibility, and ideals of human solidarity.”¹⁹ So, we have a hydrodynamics of religion.²⁰ The hydro-part of this is neatly illustrated by means of metaphorical reference, but what about the dynamic part of that notion?

Material Culture. The Matter of Belief, ed. David Morgan (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 68: “Time and action, performance and practice make the study of material culture much more dynamic, stressing both the changes in objects over time, their own biographies, and the role that placement, use, and reception each play in understanding what an object does. It is material practice that becomes the actual focus point of the study. Objects and spaces are not static, with abstract meanings encoded within them. Indeed, their ‘meanings’ are often not singular or intellectual meanings at all, but rather the stories of their travels through time.”

14 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 8.

15 Vásquez, “Studying Religions in Motion,” 157. Compare Janico Albrecht, Christopher Degelmann, Valentino Gasparini, Richard Gordon, Maik Patzelt, Georgia Petridou, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke, Benjamin Sippel, Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli, and Lara Weiss, “Religion in the making: the Lived Ancient Religion approach,” *Religion* 48 (2018), 586–587: “In our view, what are usually represented as static (or even crisis-ridden) ensembles of religious symbols, beliefs and practices are better understood as complex dynamic processes, as the interaction between historical agents and their changing material and spatial environments. In a word, religion is to be viewed as ever in the making.”

16 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 5.

17 Vásquez, “Studying Religions in Motion,” 157.

18 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 54.

19 Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 8.

20 Vásquez, *More than Belief*, 291.

That most theories offer little help here in evaluating the types, rates, genealogies, causes, and vectors of that mobility is quite true, mainly for the following reasons. First, there is something Tweed, Vásquez, and Chidester have in common, not only with regard to each other but with most approaches that put the notion of dynamics into a central position in the study of religion. All of them lack an explanation of the notion of dynamics as such. A common understanding of the notion is, therefore, somehow taken for granted: religion is mobile and moving. Accordingly, as a second point: the impression that the notion of dynamics is merely used as a political sign. By emphatically referring to it, an author proves that he is on the politically correct side of theory-building, standing out against static, essentialist, and, therefore, orientalist forms of theorizing 'over the heads of the phenomena'.

Tweed's and Vásquez's attitudes, though their basic conceptual approaches are more sophisticated than others, are by no means unusual for the use of the notion of dynamics, especially in religious studies and the theoretical reflection on it.²¹ The integration of the concept into an overarching conceptual scheme does not prevent us from failing to grasp its foundational importance. Another characteristic of Tweed's theory is that to him, dynamics is only one of three other basic characteristics, the other ones being 'relation' and 'position.'²² Vásquez proposes the alternative trinity of fluidity, connectivity, and complexity.²³ Although Vásquez considers it a correction of the shortcomings of Tweed's theory, it is a mere reformulation.²⁴ In both approaches, I find

21 See Sven Bretfeld's description of the state of affairs in cultural and religious studies: "Das Wort 'Dynamik' hat sich in jüngerer Zeit zu einem zentralen Begriff kulturwissenschaftlicher Forschung entwickelt. In einer sich immer schneller globalisierenden Welt, in der das Verschmelzen von Kulturen zur Alltagsrealität gehört, gleichzeitig aber kulturelle, politische und religiöse Grenzziehungen immer stärker die öffentliche Diskussion bestimmen, wird das Aufbrechen ideologischer Konstruktionen voneinander getrennter Kulturböcke zum wissenschaftlichen Paradigma und zur politischen Anforderung. [...] Stichworte wie Dynamik, Fluss und Netzwerk sowie Attribute mit den Präfixen trans- und cross- prägen einen Gutteil der religionsgeschichtlichen Forschung. Ausgangspunkt ist dabei die Prämisse, dass Religionen nicht als übergeschichtliche Entitäten zu fassen sind, sondern sich permanent verändern, neu lokalisieren und dabei stets neue Wechselbeziehungen eingehen." Sven Bretfeld, "Dynamiken der Religionsgeschichte: Lokale und translokale Verflechtungen," in *Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 423.

22 See Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 6–7.

23 Vásquez, "Studying Religions in Motion," 153.

24 In his monograph *More than Belief* Vásquez offers scholars of the study of religion an approach which, as he puts it, "for the lack of a better term, I will call 'structured and structuring dynamism.' This approach provides a different, possibly complementary, angle to Tweed's theory of religions in motion [...] without falling into the radical anti-structuralism implicit in flow metaphors." Vásquez, *More than Belief*, 310.

that this theoretical position of dynamics is, in fact, a twofold reduction of the notion: *firstly*, in limiting dynamics to movement, and *secondly*, in reducing dynamics to a mere aspect of a threefold complex. To me, the three concepts both authors propose can only be explained by recourse to a further, to an unlimited notion of dynamics.

Last but not least, it seems to be severely reductionist to examine only the dynamics of *religion* in the singular without taking the dynamics of *religions* in the plural into account—their mutual influences, interrelations, and interplays. ‘Studying *religion* in motion’ or developing ‘a theory of *religion*’, thus, is most likely to neglect a fundamental feature in the history of religions and, by neglecting it, the examination of the emergence, formation, and persistence of the religious field in general. The dynamics of religion are not least characterized by the dynamics of *contact* that occurs between religious traditions.

Their criticism of the earlier scholarship of religious studies notwithstanding, basic features of the dynamics of religions were well-known about fifty years before Tweed and Vásquez, and some of them were even known better.²⁵ Though harshly and justifiably criticized in other parts of his thinking about religion,²⁶ phenomenologist Gerardus van der Leeuw has already put himself in favor of a dynamic interpretation of religion that takes the interplay with other religions explicitly into account:

Auch die Religionen mit ausgesprochen eigenem Charakter stehen nicht für sich abgesondert da. Sie sind keine in sich geschlossenen Systeme, sondern lebendige, wachsende und absterbende Wesen, die nur in einer fortwährenden Wechselwirkung mit anderen Religionen bestehen können. Wir nennen *dies* die Dynamik der Religion [...].²⁷

25 Though, as Harvey Whitehouse so beautifully and gruesomely put it “most humanities disciplines have their traitors’ gates festooned with the heads of currently discredited ancestors” (Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity. A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2004), 171), there may be still some faithful Falada (as in Grimm’s Fairy Tales) among those heads who is able to give—at least at some point in time and in certain matters—some good advice.

26 Vásquez’ own critique on van der Leeuw’s phenomenology of religion characterizes his thinking as “beset with a dismissal of context, embodiment, and material” and, moreover, willfully embracing the essentialist trap and, thus, paving the way for Mircea Eliade. Vásquez, *More than Belief*, 99.

27 “Even those religions that have a pronounced distinct character of their own are no solitaires. They are no closed-up systems, but rather living, growing and declining beings that can only last in constant interaction with other religions. We call *this* the dynamics of religion [...]” (my emphasis). Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), 208.

It is the prolific and distinct religious traditions that emerge *from* the interaction of, that form in the interaction *with*, and that maintain *in contrast to* other religious traditions. The stability of a religion is related to, and even dependent on, the dynamic interplay with other religions. Of course, van der Leeuw's description has constraints of its own. Whether religions really can be fruitfully described as living beings with a particular physiognomy, *Gestalt*, or as characters sharing the circle of life is a matter of doubt.²⁸ More important here are the formal elements used to describe religion. Any religion, van der Leeuw insists, is never self-contained but rather the result of an interchange with other religions that, in turn, are elements from other processes of interchange.²⁹ The comparison of religions to living beings might seem less questionable if the essential relation of a living being to its environment is taken into consideration. Religions, accordingly, cannot be neatly separated from their environment. Movement, above all the movement of growing and declining, is both moving and being moved. Any historical religion is not one but rather many religions.³⁰ Accordingly, any historical religion consists of many religions that may, nevertheless, for the sake of demarcation, well develop an ostensive character of their own. For van der Leeuw it is important to underline that religions that become self-conscious—perhaps via the challenge of another religion—are inherently reformatory (“Auch die Reformation ist jeder bewußten Religion inherent”),³¹ thus reacting to and adapting themselves to the influences of the environment. Though the use of the notion of ‘reformation’ in this context may be criticized as evidence of a Protestant bias,

28 See van der Leeuw's earlier description in his phenomenological *opus magnum*: “Eine historische Religion ist eine Gestalt, ein Organismus. Aber ihre Züge sind keine festen, starren, sie sind in fortwährender Begegnung; sie sind nicht gemacht, sondern gewachsen, und sie wachsen immer weiter.” Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1956), 689.

29 “[...] die universale Erscheinung, daß eine Religion nirgendwo für sich selbst besteht, sondern immer das Ergebnis einer Vermischung mit anderen Religionen ist und ihrerseits wieder zu neuer Vermischung führt.” Van der Leeuw, *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 208.

30 “Jede historische Religion ist nicht eine, sondern mehrere; natürlich nicht in der Weise, daß sie die Summe verschiedener Gestalten wäre, sondern in der Weise, daß verschiedene Gestalten in ihre Gestalt hinein-, und zu dieser Gestalt zusammengewachsen sind. Das gilt nun von den großen, sog. Weltreligionen in ganz besonderem Maße.” Van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 692.

31 Van der Leeuw, *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 210. Compare van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 698: “Jede Religion ist immerfort *reformanda*, trotzdem sie auch immer schon *reformata* ist. Die Dynamik des Lebens macht, daß die Religion ihre Gestalt immer ändert; solange sie lebt, wird sie reformiert.”

the basic characteristic of the dynamic of *religion* as a dynamic of *religions* is clearly highlighted in van der Leeuw's considerations.³²

The metaphorical and conceptual potential of the notion of dynamics as movement, interrelation, and potential is utterly wasted if it is reduced to its opposition to statics or, even worse, its political opposition to theories dealing with stable entities. Most importantly, a dynamic concept of religion must not prevent research on the phenomenon of *stability*—not least due to the fact that an idea(l) of stability is often encountered in object language reflections on religion. Object language especially turns to reflections on all that is considered or proclaimed to be everlasting, eternal, and unchangeable.

Therefore, the study of religions is not only (material) dynamics. On the contrary, dynamics and stability have to be considered as necessarily interrelated and, in most cases, combined in the phenomena examined. Dynamics, however, taken in the more general sense, including potentiality, are the underlying process for both phenomena of stability and instability. To me, instead of limiting dynamics to movement and considering it to be only one element out of three, it seems more fruitful to examine the entangledness of—to use Tweed's categories—movement, relation, and position *via dynamics*. It is a certain idea of dynamics—which is not reduced to movement—that *interrelates* these three themes to a fruitful *conceptualization* of religion. What is needed, therefore, is a more general conceptualization of dynamics.

3 Towards a General Notion of Dynamics

Scholars should no longer be content to merely treat dynamics as a simple word to the basic insight that change, a sequence of changes then called 'process', evolution, or else something 'dynamic' is happening all the time in the course of history: rather we should strive for a complete notion that realizes the full potential of the idea.³³ Nevertheless, the more sophisticated attempts

32 It should not remain unmentioned that van der Leeuw already made the claim for dynamics as a characteristic not only of its main subject but also as one of, if not *the*, most crucial characteristics of the scholarly discipline itself: "Die Religionsphänomenologie ist vor andern Wissenschaften dynamisch. Sobald sie aufhört, sich zu bewegen, hört sie auf, zu arbeiten." However, as a stark contrast to current dynamic enterprises, van der Leeuw related his claim of dynamics to the permanent need of correction of his enterprise: "Ihre unendliche Korrekitionsbedürftigkeit gehört zu ihrem innersten Wesen." Van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 798.

33 Reading the editor's introduction to the volume titled 'Dynamics of Religion' one forms the impression that the authors mean precisely that: "Religion is a human, historical,

to define this notion basically rely on this. Peter Slater in his book *The Dynamics of Religion* from 1979 “[...] proposes a model for conceptualizing changes in religion which should help us to understand better our own development and that of others of different persuasions.”³⁴ As contemporary scholarship in the person of Hubert Seiwert has clearly acknowledged, connecting dynamics to the idea of change results in significant problems for the anti-essentialist dynamic approach itself. It may lead into the ‘trap of essentialism’ courtesy of the implied separation of form and essence in the concept, above all, as the difference between changeable data and the unchanging theoretical concept used to interpret the data—for example, the concept of religion.³⁵

The idea of equating dynamics with change might also lead to a systematic underestimation of the considerable efforts of the dynamics necessary to keep a religious tradition static or stable.³⁶ “[T]enacious traditionalism,” Aziz Al-Azmeh reminds, was and is “a specific form of representing change, whereby actual or apparent repetition is construed as conservation.”³⁷ This stabilizing

social and cultural phenomenon. As such, religious ideas, practices, discourses, institutions, and social expressions are in constant change.” Christoph Bochinger, Jörg Rüpke, “Introduction,” in *Dynamics of Religion. Past and Present*, eds. Christoph Bochinger and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 1. On the epistemologically dubious notion of ‘constant change’ see Volkhard Krech, “Relational religion: manifesto for a synthesis in the study of religion,” *Religion* 49 (2019, 6): “However, something and thus religion cannot be in a constant change. Religion has been in the making only during the beginning of socio-cultural evolution. If there would not be any established core (in the linguistic sense of an intension), religion could not be identified in its historical variety (in the linguistic sense of extension). Historicity means that the lines of development and dynamics of religion are recorded by reconstructing previous states of morphogenesis. In turn, morphogenesis means the establishment of constant structures, while the content is varying. As a result, diachronic and synchronic perspectives must be connected by understanding processes and structures as complementary modes of observation.”

34 Peter Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion. Continuity and Change in Patterns of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 1.

35 See Hubert Seiwert’s article in the very same volume, “The Dynamics of Religion and Cultural Evolution: Worshipping Fuxi in Contemporary China,” in *Dynamics of Religion. Past and Present*, 12.

36 On the object language level, the necessity to interrelate dynamics and stability is, for instance, expressed in the interrelation between static and dynamic time, such as in Zoroastrian cosmogonic sources, see Kianoosh Rezania, “Zurvan: Limitless time or timeless time. The question of Eternity and time in Zoroastrianism,” *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute* 68 (2008), 60. Also see with regard to the alteration of dynamics and statics in Yašt 13, 53–58 Kianoosh Rezania, *Die zoroastrische Zeitvorstellung. Eine Untersuchung über Zeit- und Ewigkeitskonzepte und die Frage des Zurvanismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 74–77.

37 Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 40.

dynamic, in turn, might be the reason for the possibility of qualifying at least some dynamics in the history of religions as being characterized by ‘reduced speed’ as compared to the fast-changing fields of politics, economy, and society. This particularity, for some, makes religion a privileged field of study.³⁸ A notion of dynamics used to describe and analyze the history of religions, however, should be capable of grasping phenomena of stability of traditions, practices, or institutions despite the onslaughts of time, or rather, change. So, the definition that something, perhaps religion as a system “[...] is dynamic if it changes in time. It is dynamic if its outputs depend on its history [...]”³⁹ covers much of its scope, but, ultimately, only part of the notion involved.

However, the idea can—nevertheless—be used as a starting point. In relating dynamics and movement while talking definitively about religion (‘religion is about movement’), Tweed associates the notion of dynamics closely with its use in *physics*.

A new field of science called ‘dynamics’ was first proclaimed by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in his 1694 treatise *De primae philosophiae emendatione et de notione substantiae*. In naming it thus, Leibniz sought to give his concept of force an independent ontological status to proclaim that it should be studied by its manifestations in nature. Here, Leibniz explicitly opposes the concept of corresponding ideas in Scholasticism as pure force, claiming for a certain activity or entelechy as being midway between the faculty of acting and acting itself.⁴⁰ The notion, therefore, can well claim a modern Western intellectual origin.

In classical physics, dynamics is part of technical mechanics. Mechanics is the theory of the movements of *bodies* on (defined) courses and can be divided into two broad fields. The study of the forms of movement in time and space is called kinematics, and the relation of these movements with causes is called

38 “Die Bedeutung der Religionsgeschichte lässt sich daher mit wenigen Worten umreißen. Unabhängig davon, ob es der jeweiligen Generation ersichtlich ist oder nicht, findet der Historiker eine natürliche Hierarchie seiner Stoffe vor, angeführt von Literatur, Kunst und Religion. Während Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft zumeist schnellem Wandel unterliegen, weisen die drei erstgenannten Stoffe eine gewisse Konstanz auf. Sie ‘bilden’ und wirken dauerhaft—zumindest ihrem Anspruch nach. Dies gilt insbesondere für Dissidenz. Dennoch unterliegen auch sie Konsum und Verschleiß, dies aber mit vermindertem Tempo.” Christoph Schmidt, *Pilger, Popen und Propheten. Eine Religionsgeschichte Osteuropas* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014), 9.

39 Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, “Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013), 380.

40 See Max Jammer, *Concepts of Force. A Study in the Foundation of Dynamics* (Mineola: Dover, 1999), 160.

dynamics.⁴¹ Accordingly, in the proper scientific sense, 'dynamics' is the *theory of the forces of change in movement*. In consequence, the counterpart of dynamics is not stability but rather the field of statics in the branch of mechanics, which deals with the analysis of forces in physical systems in a state of static equilibrium.

The introduction of a notion that emerged from early modern natural science to the Humanities is easy to explain, as it is an all-time dream of the historical sciences to understand the courses of time in order to describe phenomena properly, that is, by means of causality, neatly scrutinizing cause and effect. The notions of *contingency*, or rather, *events* are somewhat disturbing to this idea. Dynamic theories in this sense have considerable difficulty in explaining phenomena of chance, even if they only appear in object language descriptions, for example, instances such as epiphanies, *deus ex machina*-phenomena, or the idea of God's unfathomable causes. Moreover, the idea of solid bodies being moved or moving should ring alarm bells for any scholar who emphatically denies the solidity of an entity named religion.

Considering the generally acknowledged fact that in history there is no instance of a religious tradition that may claim solidity or isolation as physical bodies can, it is all the more important to find a notion that describes the dynamics of contact, not in terms of the notion of dynamics in physics, that is, the movement of solid bodies.⁴²

In fact, this use of the notion of 'dynamics' in physics (which is, of course, also not as uncontested as I presented it) is already a reduction of the complex meaning associated with the Greek notion of *dynamis*. The broadness of this early use proffers significant explanatory and illustrative potential still in the earlier and broader use. First of all, the differentiation between and the relation of kinetics and ontology must be taken into consideration. As always, this problem was discussed in Greek philosophy, for example, by Parmenides and Heraclitus, regarding the opposition and the relation of being and becoming.

41 See Michael Wolff, *Geschichte der Impetustheorie. Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der klassischen Mechanik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 16.

42 In this regard, David Morgan's salvational definition "I am defining a body not as a static, self-contained reality, but as relational, that is, as defined by the configurations of forces, interests, applications, history, and assumptions that operate within and through it" (David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye. Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2012), 68) may lead to the question if, given that the body in religions is indeed a set of relations, it would be more sensible and adequate to do without the notion of body that, as such, insinuates a solid or static entity.

The pre-philosophical kinetic notion of *dynamis* in the most basic meaning denotes the *facilitation of processes* as such. Therefore, it comprises not only one, but rather two aspects: possibility and process, the second being the result of the first.⁴³ *Dynamis*, accordingly, is prior to process and movement, but inseparably related to them: it is not some pure potentiality.

The notion of *dynamics* came to preeminence a little later. The famous Platonian notion of *dynamis* is an ontological structure that defines our potential in relation to our *possibilities*. In “The Republic” (*Politeia* 477 c–e), Plato defines the potential as the ontological feature that makes something possible. In itself, *dynamis* cannot be observed with regard to observable elements, such as color or form (σχῆμα). As such, its main characteristics are directional in relation to the (realized) possibility. The strongest of all these potentials, according to Plato, is *episteme* (ἐπιστήμη), insight or understanding. We therefore have, according to Plato, to look for dynamics to gain ‘a robust social epistemology’ (as claimed by Manuel Vásquez).⁴⁴ So here, in Plato, *dynamis* is a *relational* feature that gives *direction* to a certain result that in turn *indicates* the *potential*. Thus, it is not a ‘one-sided-directedness’; it might be characterized as *vectoral*, including both the starting and the ending point of the vector.

The Platonic structure of explanation was clarified, differentiated, and expanded by Aristotle, who, in his *Metaphysics* Θ (1046 a 11 f.) laid emphasis on the point that there are, in fact, two basic forms of *dynamis*, that is, the potential to affect, to *be effective*, and the potential of *being affected*.⁴⁵ In Latin translation, these basic forms are denoted as the *potentia activa* and the *potentia passiva*. The forms are distinct, though closely interrelated: consider the process of fire melting iron and iron being melted by fire.⁴⁶ So, as Max Jammer has put it,

[i]n contrast to our modern terms ‘force,’ ‘power,’ ‘activity,’ the Greek word *dynamis* signifies, therefore not only transitive action or transeunt activity, but also passive susceptibility and receptibility. As ‘heat’ can act on an object and make it warm, but can itself be reduced to coldness by another cold body, thus any other *dynamis* implies for the Greek mind both directions of activity. It is this double meaning that made *dynamis* a *terminus technicus*.⁴⁷

43 See W. Wieland, *Die Aristotelische Physik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

44 Vásquez, “Studying Religions in Motion,” 179.

45 The idea is well found in Plato as well, see *Sophistes* 248 c 8.

46 See (with reference to the third chapter of Aristotle’s *Physics*) Walter Bröker, *Aristoteles* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1987), 72–73.

47 Jammer, *Concepts of Force*, 34.

As *dynamis* consists of both the *potentia activa* and the *potentia passiva*, Aristotle employs an ontological concept of *dynamis* rather than a merely kinetic definition. In Aristotle's thinking, as such, *dynamis* expresses 'being' as 'being possible'. In contrast, being as 'being realized' is called *energeia*. Therefore, to obtain an energetic result, one has to be in a dynamic position. This means *dynamis* is not a mere empty or formal possibility that waits to be realized in some transcendent zone, but it also has some positive characteristics in its ontological structure with regard to what Plato called the *episteme*. This ontological possibility gives an entity its *meaning* in the sense of *indication*.⁴⁸ An entity is dynamically structured by pointing at its potential. The potential, in turn, has to be understood with regard to the conditions of its possible (future) realization. These conditions, however, do not have to be present at every moment, though the *dynamis* is *directed* towards them as they are inseparably related to them as the conditions of possible realization.⁴⁹ Dynamics, thus, is also vectorial (as in Plato), a triadic structure consisting of a starting point, a goal, and the *substratum* (*hypokeimenon*) that is undergoing this process.⁵⁰

Additionally, in *Metaphysics* Δ (1019 a 23) one finds among the list of the four meanings of the notion of *dynamis* the more accurate description that *dynamis* is potentiality in the emphatic sense, that is, *effectively* and *methodically* be able to do or cause something, thus stressing the relational bond that is expressed as dynamic (ἐτι ἡ τοῦ καλῶς τοῦτ' ἐπιτελεῖν ἢ κατὰ προαίρεσιν).⁵¹ In this sense, 'being qualified to' adds some substantial characteristics to the phenomenon in question and indicates a meaningful *telos* for the phenomenon. Aristotle also recognizes the interrelatedness of dynamics and stability by stating that the potential to preserve by not (or only slightly) being affected, i.e., stability, is one aspect of the notion of *dynamis*.

48 See Martin Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie. Marburger Vorlesung Sommersemester 1924*, ed. Mark Michalski (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2002), 300.

49 Michael-Thomas Liske, "Inwieweit sind Vermögen intrinsische dispositionelle Eigenschaften? (Θ 1–5)," in *Aristoteles Metaphysik. Die Substanzbücher (Z, H, Θ)*, ed. Christoph Rapp (Berlin: Akademie, 1996), 258, see also 272: "Aristoteles wird also gemeint haben: In die Definition eines Vermögens haben die westlichen Außenbedingungen seiner Realisation einzugehen."

50 See with reference to *Physics* I, 6–7 and *Metaphysics* XII, 1–2 Otfried Höffe, *Aristoteles* (München: Beck, 1996), 106.

51 On the notion of καλῶς in this context see Liske, "Inwieweit sind Vermögen intrinsische dispositionelle Eigenschaften?," 274: "'Gut' (καλῶς, 1046 a 17) kann hier nicht bloß meinen, daß das Vermögen zu einem ausgezeichneten Resultat führt, sondern muß auch meinen, daß es sich besonders wirkungsvoll, sicher, leicht und schnell verwirklichen läßt, sonst wäre die Qualifikation beim Vermögen, einer Verschlechterung widerstehen zu können, überflüssig."

This meaningful indication is important for a further conclusion drawn by Aristotle, that there is also a differentiation between reflected *dynamis* (*dynamis meta logou*) as being directed toward both the matter and its counterpart and unreflected *dynamis* (*dynamis aneu logou/alogos*) as some kind of blind natural power (δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τῶν δυνάμεων αἱ μὲν ἔσονται ἄλογοι αἱ δὲ μετὰ λόγου. *Metaphysics* 1046 b1). This means that *dynamis* indicates a *twofold phenomenon that has a logical* (or rather, mental) *and a physical side* (or pole) *to it*.⁵² It is this point that has not been given due consideration in contemporary reasoning regarding the dynamics of religion. There are interesting questions to be raised about their relationship.

The short and by no means exhaustive excursus to Greek philosophy, of course, is not an end in itself but is done in order to discern the heuristic potential of the notions of dynamics and stability for the description and analysis of religion.⁵³ If religions are to be described as dynamic entities, the Greek notions provide the scholar with an explanatory surplus for analyzing the subject matter that well goes beyond the unsatisfying and simplistic equation of dynamics and change and the questionable adaptation of the notion of dynamics signifying the kinetics of solid bodies from physics.

After all, it is not the *stabilization* processes of religious traditions that should be kept as one focus of the scholarly endeavor.⁵⁴ Dynamics in the sense of spatial expansion of a tradition, for instance, cannot be automatically equated to change as this might well include processes of stabilization.⁵⁵ Adaptation to change might be the reason for a tradition's stability.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the

52 On the characteristics of the *dynamis meta logou* see not at last Martin Heidegger, *Aristoteles, Metaphysik Θ 1–3. Vom Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft*, ed. Heinrich Hüni (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1981, 130 f. (§ 14)).

53 For an exhaustive philosophical discussion of Aristotle's concept of *dynamis* see Ludger Jansen, *Tun und Können. Ein systematischer Kommentar zu Aristoteles' Theorie der Vermögen im neunten Buch der Metaphysik* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016).

54 Compare with regard to the contact between Buddhism and Christianity, and in particular its stabilizing effects Stephen C. Berkwitz, "Dynamics and Stability in the Encounters between Asian Buddhists and European Christians," *Entangled Religions* 5 (2018), 2, 13. Stability, here, is a matter of (and inseparable from) dynamics: "The result of such contacts frequently led to the dynamic re-imagining of what 'Buddhism' represents and includes as both an idea and a social fact. Interreligious encounters frequently led Buddhists to alter their religion on their own terms but in dialogue with the values and views of European Christians" (26).

55 Here, the notion of stability as stabilization seems to be preferable to 'robustness' as it includes the processual and interrelated character of the dynamics/stability dichotomy, see Cho and Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," 381–382.

56 See Jason Neelis' characterization of the formation and spread of Buddhist communities: "Many examples from Buddhist manuscripts, inscriptions, and archaeological artifacts

notion of change has to be specified first with regard to the perhaps interrelated processes of *growth* and *decay*.⁵⁷ The *potentials* also must be discerned, for instance, the potentials with regard to the possibility and actuality of spatial movement. However, this is also true for *vitality* in the sense of being able to find suitable reactions to challenges of the environment and here, of course, to those challenges displayed by other religious traditions. One final important aspect of dynamics is the tradition-building processes of self-reference and retrospection which simultaneously constitute the background for possibilities of future action (*propensity*).

Thus, taking the Greek origins of the notion of dynamics into account to develop a more sustainable concept, several points are to be stressed: first, the *potentia activa* and *potentia passiva* distinction may prove suitable as an instrument for the description of situations of religious contact and the prevailing dynamics consisting of actions of and effects on the contacting traditions.⁵⁸ Thus, the notion might cover the 'push and pull' factors of the historical process. What is more, the Greek concept adds the aspect of *potentiality* as an essential part of the notion of dynamics. It also presents the notion as an interplay of a particular *distinction*. Regarding teleology, it points to the *directedness* involved in the notion and its *vectorial* or indicational structure. Ultimately, it hints at a certain kind of *bipolarity* of the notion including a mental and a natural (material) pole.

[...] illustrate economic, social, and political catalysts for the formation and expansion of the Buddhist *saṅgha* from the time of the Buddha in the fifth century BCE to the end of the first millennium CE. As the *saṅgha* consolidated its position within and outside of ancient India, Buddhist monks and nuns frequently participated in social and economic dynamics, despite ascetic ideals of withdrawal. Considerable literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence demonstrates that Buddhist institutions played key roles in political legitimization, management of hydraulic systems, and development of interregional road networks for long-distance trade. Routes for commercial exchanges of high-value commodities and cross-cultural interactions have served as conduits for transregional Buddhist mobility, which fluctuated with changing economic and political conditions. An ability to change with shifting conditions of material support and to appeal to wide audiences was a very significant factor in successful Buddhist transmission." Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks. Mobility and Exchange Within and Beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*. DHR 2 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 311.

57 On the relation of decline, transformation, and stabilization in contemporary mainstream Christianity and Charismatic Christianity see Maren Freudenberg, "Dynamics and Stability in Globally Expanding Charismatic Religions. The Case of the Vineyard Movement in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland," *Entangled Religions* 8 (2019), par. 2.

58 Berkwitz stresses the reactive potential of Buddhism to the challenge of Christianity in order to not overemphasize the *impetus* of Christianity as a motor of modernization processes, see Berkwitz, "Dynamics and Stability," 14.

To me, it seems a promising enterprise to think about the dynamics of religion along the lines of this concept derived from Greek philosophy, especially with regard to the fact that the notion of dynamics is, in most cases, not explicated at all or/and associated with the use of the notion in mechanics. The last point on the bipolarity of dynamics is of particular importance for the study of religion and the question of the validity of the material turn in the discipline. It may be true that there is no such thing as an immaterial religion. Religion is unable to be done without things, places, or bodies, but it is also unable to operate without theories of materiality *on the object language level*.⁵⁹ In religion, there is no material pole without a mental pole: there is no materiality without meaning.⁶⁰ Any concept that is employed in the hope of grasping the particular 'dynamics' of religion has to include the bipolar aspect of the objects of research, be it words, texts, or material objects.

4 Aspects of Dynamics

As such, dynamics might be provisionally characterized by relation, direction, potential, bipolarity, and, not least, by meaning. Here, the interrelation of *potentiality and meaning* is of particular importance. The interrelation is strongly underestimated in current notions of dynamics if the notion is conceptualized at all. To generalize an observation of Peter Slater's: if we fail to take into account variations of meaning, we shall never understand the dynamics of religion.⁶¹

59 This would be my reformulation of the editors' assumption about material religion as to be presented in the journal 'Material Religion'. Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Crispin Paine, S. Brent Plate, "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion," *Religion* 40 (2010), 210. Things, places, and bodies are not simply there. Therefore, in order to fulfill the editors' claim for theories that take materiality seriously, it might be helpful to look at the object language theories that make the material religiously meaningful.

60 Karl-Heinz Kohl describes 'sacred objects' (*sakrale Objekte*) correspondingly as follows: "Besser als an jedem anderen Beispiel läßt sich an ihm der Vorgang der Generierung von Bedeutungen nachzeichnen, belegt die Geschichte der Religionen doch, daß nahezu jeder Gegenstand in den Rang eines Symbols des Heiligen erhoben werden kann. Nicht von seinen materiellen Eigenschaften, sondern allein von den individuellen und kollektiven Erfahrungen, mit denen er einmal verknüpft war, hängt ab, ob er als ein das Transzendente verkörpernder Gegenstand: als sakrales Objekt, angesehen wird." Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge. Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (München: Beck, 2003), 10.

61 Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion*, 31.

As the notion includes the elements of potentiality and meaning, the excursus to the use of the notion of *dynamis* in Greek philosophy allows a more refined conceptualization of dynamics with regard to three major aspects concerning the specific direction of the dynamic process. It comprises three dimensions. Lacking better terminology, I will call them horizontal, vertical, and *intensifying* dynamics. It goes without saying that these aspects are closely interrelated in reality but differentiated in the following for analytical clarity.

4.1 *Horizontal Dynamics*

Horizontal dynamics can be considered to be related to the first thing that comes into mind with regard to the notion of dynamics, that is, movement, or rather, change in the flux of time and or change of place in space. The notion of 'expansion', such as the idea of the 'expansion or spread of Christianity or Islam in late antiquity' (*Ausbreitung*), often held to include geographical areas, individuals, groups, and texts that are reached, is one element and meta-linguistic manifestation of horizontal dynamics, which is already to be found conceptualized on the object language level. Examples include, for instance, the writings of Origen and Tertullian regarding the rapid expansion of what they consider to be Christianity. Horizontal dynamics can, accordingly, also be related to object language considerations on the dynamics a religious tradition considers *itself* to be subject to. In the case of Buddhism, Stephen Berkwitz states:

The very notion of the *sāsana* suggests that the expansion of Buddhism was the result of the Buddha's efforts to proclaim a universal path for liberation from worldly suffering. Admonishing his monastic followers to go out and preach for the good of the many, for the welfare of the many, and for the happiness of the many, the Buddha is depicted as having instructed them to travel in different directions and to proclaim the life of a renunciant. The expansion of Buddhism is modeled after this early injunction to spread the Buddha's Dharma to all beings, since all beings are otherwise subject to suffering and repeated existence in the cycle of birth and death.⁶²

It is important to highlight the ideas and notions that are connected to the aspect of horizontal dynamics. The notion of expansion contains the idea of

62 Stephen C. Berkwitz, "The Expansion of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia," in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke. DHR 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 224.

something becoming more extant, broader, or bigger in terms of covering geographical space. Sometimes expansion is linked to an idea of inevitability, not only because, as may be argued on the object language level, the spread of truth cannot be stopped, but because the notion and metaphors of dynamics employed here on the metalanguage level involve such a similar kind of expansion as, for example, describing dynamics in language more normally used for water. Richard Foltz, for instance, describes the spread of religious ideas, in particular Buddhist ideas, as follows: “The existence of trade routes and constant commercial activity linking diverse cultures from ancient times meant that religious ideas (like technology, and other aspects of culture) could easily spread along trade networks that spanned Eurasia. Indeed, like running water finding open channels, this spread was probably inevitable.”⁶³ The description of the horizontal dynamics of expansion via aquatic metaphors is likely to turn pejorative on both object language and metalanguage level—see, for example, the metaphor of flood, which evokes associations of imminent danger and thoughts of dikes and draining. Moreover, the idea of an ‘explosive’ expansion that overwhelms space might be an epitome of the dynamics involved in the history of religions. In any case, the spread and migration of religious ideas as well as of people adherent to a religious tradition is an example of temporal *and* spatial horizontal dynamics. As such, it does not come as a surprise that religious dynamics are considered to be everywhere and anytime, rendering the study of religion a necessarily dynamic enterprise.

The common notion of horizontal dynamics, however, is deeply dependent on a model of spatial movement, that is, the movement of something (a body) from a to b. It is dependent on the primary metaphor that change (of state) is motion.⁶⁴ Even the more detailed and sophisticated notion of the spread of religious traditions via ramification⁶⁵ is also closely related to the idea of spatial movement.⁶⁶ This model of movement, given the idea of the arrow of time, is also present in considerations of temporal change, allowing for the emergence of popular philosophical paradoxes such as Zeno’s *paradoxon* of Achill and the tortoise.

The idea of the ubiquity of horizontal dynamics in this sense is not wrong *per se*, but it becomes misleading if it is considered to be the *only* possible use

63 Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road. Premodern Patterns of Globalization* (New York/Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9–10.

64 See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 263.

65 Compare Shils, *Tradition*, 280.

66 To reimagine theories as itineraries used for travelling purposes, as Thomas Tweed does (see Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 8, 13), therefore, well suits to the aspect of horizontal dynamics, but is likely to miss the other aspects of dynamics.

of the notion. Apart from the fact that the use of words like 'expansion' and 'spread' creates problems of its own,⁶⁷ there is another vital point to be mentioned. As the reference to Plato and Aristotle shows, it is this kind of directedness that *dynamis* is the basis for change, indicating the directedness of the temporal flux. However, as being directed, the metaphor of a flow is badly in need of some additional explication in order to evade the danger of "totally disembedding religious flows," presenting them as some kind of pure activity without boundaries and directions (*Fluss ohne Ufer*).⁶⁸ Dynamics in the context of religion are intrinsically directional. Vasquez is quite right in pointing that out, though the decisive point is a different one.

In common usage, horizontal dynamics are not only linked to the flux of time or rather the extension to another future. However, the general notion of dynamics indicates timely extension in *both* directions of the time scale. Employing this notion, thus, might provide a more adequate picture of the specific processes related to the dynamics of religion: dynamics that include the aspect of potentiality indicate back to its beginnings. The dynamics of a religious tradition are retrospective and prospective as Tweed puts it,⁶⁹ or, drawing on basic notions of phenomenology, it *extends* protentionally *and* retentionally. In Edmund Husserl's philosophy of time(-consciousness), temporality is closely related to potentiality and (temporal) dynamics to potential.⁷⁰ Here, potentiality implies time by means of retentional and protentional indication, i.e., by being related to both the past and future. To Husserl, any constitutive process in time works via protention which constitutes the future as such in an empty manner and fills it accordingly.⁷¹ In Popper's terminology, it is

67 See Berkwitz, "The Expansion of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia," 222, 234.

68 Vásquez, "Studying Religion in Motion," 178.

69 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 5.

70 On Husserl's notion of potentiality see Klaus Wiering, *Husserls Begriff der Potentialität. Eine Untersuchung über Sinn und Grenze der transzendentalen Phänomenologie als universaler Methode* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1984).

71 "Jeder ursprüngliche Prozeß ist beseelt von Protentionen, die das Kommende als solches leer konstituieren und auffangen, zur Erfüllung bringen." Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins (1893–1917)*, ed. Rudolf Boehm. Husserliana x (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1966), 52. Also compare: "Wir müssen die Zusammenhangsstruktur in jeder Erscheinung und die die alle Erscheinungsreihen einigende Struktur verstehen. Im kontinuierlichen Fortgang der Wahrnehmung haben wir, wie bei jeder Wahrnehmung, Protentionen, die sich stetig erfüllen im neu Eintretenden, eintretend in der Form des urimpressionalen Jetzt. So auch hier. In jedem Fortgang äußeren Wahrnehmens hat die Protention die Gestalt von stetigen Vorerwartungen, die sich erfüllen, und das sagt: Aus den Hinweissystemen der Horizonte aktualisieren sich gewisse Hinweislinien kontinuierlich als Erwartungen, die sich stetig erfüllen in näherbestimmenden Aspekten." Edmund Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918–1926*, ed. Margot Fleischer. Husserliana xi (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1966), 8.

dependent on the relevant propensity.⁷² Likewise, any presence is an extension to the past as a relation to something past *as* past or, rather, as a fulfillment of a protention. Any retention as an extensive continuum is a retention to another one, thus rendering the continuum steady.⁷³ There is, accordingly, no 'point' in time, but rather, temporal directedness (extension) depends on the potential in question. To transfer this to the subject of religion: as a consequence, religion's temporal dynamics do not consist only of movement forwards but also movement backward, leading to a re-stabilization of the present.⁷⁴

Likewise, the spatial spread of religions is by no means unidirectional. This is not only the case for the possibility of potentially spreading in all directions at the same time, restricted only by geographical obstacles. There are also analogous 'retentional' phenomena in matters of spatial spread. The distances to the original place of a religious tradition, which are achieved in the process of spreading, have *repercussions* on it that also contribute to the dynamics of the tradition in question.⁷⁵

In the religious field, horizontal dynamics are, therefore, no one-way street, neither movement to the stars nor to the future alone. To put that in a seemingly paradoxical way: temporally, the dynamics (of religion) change the religious meaning of things not only in prospective but also in retrospective. Dynamics does not only mean change in the future; it also changes the past.⁷⁶ Spatially, religious traditions dynamize both forward and backward. From my point of view, the retentional perspective is largely underestimated in current approaches to the explanation of the concept of dynamics.

4.2 *Vertical Dynamics*

However, despite this suggested reintroduction of the neglected retentional perspective in temporal horizontal dynamics, the notion of dynamics would be underestimated if it is merely reduced to change in the sense of temporal or, say, horizontal sense that includes ideas of spatial spreading and expansion. Regarding dynamics, *it is not all about religion and space*. After all, there is also

72 See chapter on Attraction.

73 Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, 29.

74 See Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, 32–33. See chapter on Tradition.

75 See for example the intensifying effects of Swedish Pietism (being exported via the Swedish Prisoners of war to Swedish Siberia) on the Swedish homeland itself. Compare my article Knut Martin Stünkel, "Halle—Stockholm—Tobolsk and back stronger than ever. Curt Friedrich von Wreech and his Wahrhaftige und umständliche Historie von denen schwedischen Gefangenen (1725/1728)," *Entangled Religions* 14, no. 1 (2023).

76 See chapter on Retrospection.

a form of dynamics that concerns the different levels, or, to put it geologically, the strata of the phenomenon in the situation in question that cannot suitably be described by spatial movement. Aristotle's insistence in his *Physics* on the fact that there are processes of growth and decay that must be considered as well as kinetics hint towards this important aspect of a full-fledged notion of dynamics. However, it would be premature to consider vertical dynamics to be describable as akin to a tree with its roots and branches which mostly grow vertically rather than horizontally. Such dynamics, related to the idea of growth, would be nothing but horizontal dynamics shifted to a vertical axis, change as being measured in the change of extension.

Accordingly, vertical dynamics have to be carefully scrutinized. Within the work of the КХК, Volkhard Krech has analyzed these dynamics by introducing an 'evolutionary scheme' that conveys five major levels: the physical, the organic, the psychic, the social, and the cultural level. It is important to notice, however, that these levels do not describe a certain 'evolutionary progress', or rather, a course of time, but are all present at any given point of time. In the first place, this does not mean anything more exciting than the rather un-idealist fact that the physical and the organic level are also present in times of ambitious cultural achievements. However, the presence of interaction between these levels inaugurates some particular dynamics as well. Krech describes the special 'vertical' dynamics of this scheme as follows: "The transfer between the different levels consists of processes of attraction and repercussion. First, each level is attracted by the following one. Second, by being attracted, the respective level gets shaped by the repercussions of the subsequent level, e.g., psychic by social processes, and social by cultural developments."⁷⁷ The attraction displayed here may be described as challenges and responses as a certain claim for reaction. Modifications of levels, for example, on the material or physical level, cause reactions on the subsequent level, for instance, as a lack of food influences the (proper) work of the organic and so on. In turn, an increase in effort to find food has repercussions on the material level. In the same manner, a sociality that is based on plenitude gives rise to corresponding ideologies and institutions that have certain effects on the social layer in return. This is, however, no one-way directed process from a more fundamental as in materialism or idealism. Strange ideas that emerge on the cultural level shape the 'lower' levels as well as famines or natural catastrophes at those levels above.

The mutual effects of the various strata on each other are of salient importance for an adequate picture of what is going on in the field of religion, as

77 Volkhard Krech, "Attraction in the Context of Religious Evolution," (unpublished КХК-Paper, 2011), 18. See chapter on Attraction.

religion cannot be reduced to a process happening on just a single level. For example, the cultural complex of asceticism obviously has its repercussions on the organic level. “We also have cogent accounts of how culture—in the form of language, the built cultural environment, modes of production—shapes basic human cognition, as well as the manner in which human cognition powerfully constrains the forms that culture can take.”⁷⁸ Moreover, the senses, as the perceiving interface that transcends the individual, are modeled according to religiously meaningful assumptions.⁷⁹ The inner dynamics of religion might be analyzed with regard to this scheme, that is, the emergence of religious ideas and their repercussion on the various levels of the evolutionary scheme.

To denote this dynamic process as the interrelation of strata, Krech introduces the notion of “axial rotation” (*Achsendrehung*) as developed from the work of Georg Simmel. Simmel introduces the notion in his last book *Lebensanschauung* while analyzing the interrelation of life and ‘ideal worlds’, their emergence, and the mutual influence between the two. Though ideal worlds emerge from the ‘lived life of humans’, ideal worlds still can have profound effects on lived life. Simmel describes this process as a significant ‘turn’ (*Wendung*) as a result of life’s own dynamics which leads to the domination of a level beyond that of lived life.⁸⁰ As such, dynamics of life perform a threefold

78 Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China. Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 263. Slingerland adds: “The alternative to the Blank Slate of strong social constructivism is not the naked ape of 1990s evolutionary psychology but rather a tool-equipped, built-environment-inhabiting organism shaped by both genes and culture, and navigating a physical world co-structured by physics, chemistry, biology, and culture.”

79 See chapter on Senses. These dynamics are also at the core of David Morgan’s scholarly endeavor concerning the phenomenon of visual culture: “What concerns me is the ways in which biological acts of seeing are deeply inflected by culture, how seeing is disciplined or trained over time to perform in certain ways. This happens in the way parents teach children, but this training is a medium for conveying and instilling practices and techniques shared with contemporaries as well as foregoing generations going back many centuries.” Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 60.

80 It seems that in Simmel’s description, life and ideal forms are interconnected by means of their respective model forms that, if completed, ultimately make sense: “Es sind zunächst Erzeugnisse des Lebens, wie all seine anderen Erscheinungen, seinem kontinuierlichen Lauf eingeordnet und dienend. Und nun geschieht die große Wendung, mit der uns die Reiche der Idee entstehen: die Formen oder Funktionen, die das Leben um seiner selbst willen, aus seiner eigenen Dynamik hervorgetrieben hat, werden derart selbständig und definitiv, daß umgekehrt das Leben ihnen dient, seine Inhalte in sie einordnet, und daß das Gelingen dieser Einordnung als eine ebenso letzte Wert- und Sinnerfüllung gilt, wie zuvor die Einfügung dieser Formen in die Ökonomie des Lebens.” Georg Simmel, “Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel,” in *Gesamtausgabe Vol. 16*, eds. Gregor Fitz and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), 244–245.

process of transcending: they have the tendency to overcome their own conventions and routines, they constitute ideal worlds, and, ultimately, they introduce the domination of dogma and institutions as the manifestations of ideal validity.⁸¹ By transcending through axial rotation, life introduces the possibility of self-evaluation via self-reference.⁸²

To Simmel, accordingly, axial rotation is the most obvious and, accordingly, best to examine in religion. Regarding religions, axial rotation comes into play with the generation of 'ideal forms' from vital processes, which, in turn, influence the vital processes after they are established. Thus, the physical influences the cultural, and the cultural shapes the physical, particularly owing to the tendency of the latter toward absolutism.⁸³ The 'systemic universalism' (Parsons) of religion can therefore be described as rotating around its own axis. It is important to note, however, that the rotation process does not merely consist of the change in hierarchical importance but is a permanent, continuous process of mutual influence and resonance.⁸⁴

Vertical dynamics thus consist of the interplay between (analytical) strata. Summarizing his considerations on the five-layer evolutionary scheme, Krech describes the effects of vertical dynamics as follows:

This model might explain the emergence of religious ideas and, at the same time, may help to understand their impacts on the social and psychic level. In addition, this evolutionary model provides us with the possibility of multiperspective analysis. We are able to explain religion as a cultural realm generated by psychic and social processes and in turn are able to understand its impact on them. For, we might explain methods of achieving religious salvation as an expression of physical needs, and at the same time are able to understand salvation techniques as a 'magical' inscription of religious ideas into material objects and the body

81 See Volkhard Krech, "Die 'Soziologie der Religion'—neu gelesen," in *Georg Simmel und das Leben in der Gegenwart*, eds. Rüdiger Lautmann and Hanns Wienold (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 343.

82 Compare the three-level model of transcending in the chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

83 See Krech, "Attraction in the Context of Religious Evolution," 15.

84 "Was man in der ethnologischen und vielfach in der antiken Welt mit Verwunderung und oft mit Ehrfurcht wahrnimmt: wieviel dichter, fast bis zur Kontinuität, das Leben von religiösen Vornahmen besetzt ist, dies quantitativ ungeheuerliche Durchwachsenheit des Lebens durch das Religiöse—hängt doch eben damit zusammen, daß die Religion noch nicht ihr, dem Leben mit seinen täglichen Begehrungen und Interessen gegenüber, ganz reines Fürsich-Sein gewonnen hat; nachdem freilich das letztere geschehen ist, flicht sie sich wieder in das Leben zurück." Simmel, "Lebensanschauung," 287.

or explain certain religious ideas as the articulation of a specific psychic perception and at the same time understand the latter as ‘mystical’ experience, and so on.⁸⁵

This rotation, however, does not have to have only one stable axis but may also take place between any of the other levels. It does not have to be symmetrical with regard to a just distribution of the five layers—this would, for example, mean that religious dynamics can only take place in the human psyche. The scheme also explains why there may be *acteurs* in the dynamics of religion that are not human beings: for example, religious concepts which in turn may be expressed in material objects which cause or shape psychic, social, or cultural dispositions that, by human action, influence the environment.

4.3 *Dynamics of Intensification*

Of course, vertical and horizontal dynamics are closely interrelated. Events in one regard, such as migration, clearly have effects on the other and vice versa. Whereas horizontal and vertical dynamics basically describe two distinguished forms of dynamics of *interrelation*, the third and final form is basically *self-relational*. This final form might be termed the *dynamics of intensification*. This aspect of dynamics deals with phenomena of intensification and reduction of tension. The dynamics of intensification are predominantly characterized by its mandatory and *expressive* character—first of all, as being embodied—whereas horizontal and vertical dynamics are characterized by their *generative* quality.

Within the research program of the KHK, the term ‘dynamics’ “[...]” was understood first of all as a description of the *occasionally self-escalating* interplay of production, reproduction, and change of semantics and social structures. The term dynamics indicates an (inwardly and outwardly occurring) *intensified* development and change of semantics and social structures in the history of religions.”⁸⁶ The intensification of a dynamic process becomes most observable in structural condensation, such as the emergence and maintenance of institutions on the one hand, or, on the other hand, processes the dissolution of institutional structures. Most importantly, intensification of this kind is characterized by the bipolar interplay of two aspects, namely semantics

85 Krech, “Attraction in the Context of Religious Evolution,” 18–19.

86 Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions—Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 32.

and structure. The structure is condensed in institutionalized structures, the former constantly reshaped and reinterpreted by circulating semantics.

The notion of dynamics, thus, describes the *intensification* or the possible *decline* of *self-reference*. These dynamics are most clearly manifested in the emphatic relationship of a religious tradition to itself as a religious tradition.⁸⁷ It is, therefore, closely related to the notion of *stability*. It is also related to the notion of *contact* as the trigger of self-reference. Intensifying expressions of self-reference are to be expected and are mostly triggered by situations of contact between different traditions. Contrasts increase intensity.⁸⁸ To put that into a short thesis: *Contact triggers intensifying self-referential dynamics that cause stability. Or: in the history of religions, contact triggers intensifying self-referential dynamics that cause the stability of religions.*

This process is of supreme importance for the study of the history of religions, for it, in turn, provides the identifiable material for the scholar that makes the study of religion as an *episteme* in the Platonic sense possible. So, it is not only the case that religions are essentially mobile and moving. *When we talk about religion, we talk about an intensifying process of self-reference.*⁸⁹ According to Alfred N. Whitehead's theory of religion, there are four main elements that define a religion based on its historical or social development. These elements are externally expressed in human history as ritual, emotion, belief,

87 See chapter on Tradition. Compare also the level of formal transcendence in the chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

88 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

89 The *BuddhistRoad* Project at the Center for Religious Studies in Bochum (Germany) examines a corresponding phenomenon originating from religious contact on the macro-level, concerning nodes or locals of relative import and significance in a certain geographical network. It is described by the theoretical model of a 'feedback loop' which "[...] means a movement or wave of influence(s) emanating from one node to another in a circular or recurring fashion (a loop), so that the influence from the original wave comes back to its origin but with something added. This added information, which normally comes back in a slightly distorted form to the original output, has its immediate origin in the second or receiving node, which, for its part, is the product of the interplay between the feedback loops of a whole string of interconnected nodes. As such, the feedback loop can be understood as a primary, engendering force behind a given oscillating process, i.e. a back-and-forth-movement of data, material goods, ideas, practices, rituals, etc." *BuddhistRoad* Team, "Dynamics in Buddhist Transfer in Eastern Central Asia 6th–14th Centuries: A Project Report," *Medieval Worlds* 8 (2016), 129–130. Cho and Squier generalize the self-recurring/self-referential process even to the very level of 'religions': "Buddhism as a doctrinal system is a process of interaction and adjustments in a feedback loop—for example, the original nonsubstantialist orientation of Buddhist doctrine leads to the dispersive pressure to reconcile it with other tenets such as karma and the continuity of the self, which in turn leads to adjustments that reassert the system's nonsubstantialist orientation." Cho and Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," 382.

and rationalization. Whitehead writes: "The dawn of these stages is gradual. It consists in an increase of emphasis."⁹⁰ The common thread between these elements which signify an increase of emphasis is that they are expressions of *self-reference*.

As the dynamics of intensification is a necessary element in the dynamics of religions, its stabilizing effects become characteristics of the processes in question as well. In the following, I aim to provide some hints to possible conceptual frameworks that might grasp some aspects of what is going on in the dynamics and stability of religions.

5 Six Forms (*modi*) of the Dynamics-Stability Relation

Stability is not a counterpart of dynamics but is rather a necessary aspect of dynamics itself. A whirlpool or a tornado is nothing but movement, but, nevertheless, can be described as a stable entity. It can be indexically denominated and, accordingly, be given a stable name or described as a notion. The main problem, given the proposition that everything is in flux, is how best to describe the point where one may reasonably speak about stability while examining a certain field or period of time. That there must be some kind of stability, be it on the phenomenal level or on the level of description, is a necessary claim for all scholarly approaches, thus fulfilling the requirement for possible reproduction of results. Contemplation of stability, therefore, leads to the epistemological question of what constitutes an object that can be recognized in the scientific process. This is an object that is an obstacle⁹¹ to the all-embracing flux of time.⁹²

90 Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 18. The dynamics of intensification is also somewhat hinted at by Tweed (see Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 54, 70–71). However, as I am not convinced that religions may be described in every case and every circumstance as a confluence of organic-cultural flows that "intensify joy," I shall prefer the Whiteheadian notion of intensifying emphasis. The possibility of intense joy is of course, not excluded.

91 In German: *Gegen-stand* in the sense of *Wider-stand*, that is: resistance. On the concept of *Gegenstand* in this sense see Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge*, 119.

92 Jörg Rüpke stresses the precarious state of the objects of the study of religion: "In short, it is religion in the making that comes under scrutiny [...]. Only rarely do such actions, or rather transactions [...], attain permanency as objects and written texts or solidify into what is conceptualized as networks and organizations. It is only in such exceptional cases that they begin to resemble what we consider 'religions' [...] and are inclined to reify." Jörg Rüpke, "Religious agency, identity, and communication: reflections on history and theory of religion," *Religion* 45 (2015): 5. In the following I would argue that it is precisely this meta-stable state as dynamically stabilizing self-recursivity that allows for the possibility of an academic discipline 'religious studies'.

The notions of dynamics and stability are, therefore, closely interrelated. In fact, they do not make sense without the other. Religion, religions and the history of religions are characterized by the interplay of dynamics and stability. On object language level, for instance, one finds a telling example in Daoism. In the imaginary of the Dao, the Dao itself is often represented as a wheel.⁹³

In the Daoist classic *Laozi* [...], the imagery of the Way (*dao* [...]) is linked to the root metaphor of water and was rendered by means of the ‘wheel’ simile [...] that conflated the ideas of motion and stillness [...]. The conflation of motion and stillness was, on the one hand, the primary characterization of the cosmic ‘matrix’ called *dao* (the Way) and, on the other, exemplified the soteriological path of early (and late) Daoists: to be clear and quiet amidst the turmoil of changes and transformations.⁹⁴

In consequence, equilibrioception is represented by both ‘doctrine’ and practice, becoming a marker of dynamic stability of a religious tradition.

There are several major ways to understand *stability* as well as the opposing instability within a dynamic phenomenon. As it—at least to my understanding—makes no sense in the study of religion to separate the material object from the hermeneutical process, theory has to provide a ‘unified’ *model* to combine the physical and the mental pole of the processes which have generative and intensifying aspects—and, of course, also their opposites as manifested in decay and decline. Here are six suggestions on the relationship of dynamism and stability based upon the theoretical considerations presented above, each illuminated by the writings of a different theorist.

5.1 *Retrospect Stability of Possibilities/Propensities*

The first mode I propose for the interrelation of dynamics and stability refers back to the more general notion of dynamics as *potential*. If the Aristotelian

93 On the image of the wheel as both object and process in Daoism see Hans-Georg Möller, *In der Mitte des Kreises. Daoistisches Denken* (Frankfurt/Leipzig: Insel, 2001), 33: “Wenn das Dao als ein Rad, das Rad eines Wagens, dargestellt ist, so zeigt diese Darstellung zunächst einmal, dass das Dao nichts bloß Statisches ist, nicht etwas, das sozusagen ewig nur stillsteht, sondern etwas, das, wenn es auch seine Form nicht ändert, sich trotzdem bewegt. Das Rad ist nicht nur ein Ding, es ist auch ein Vorgang: es ist Drehung und Bewegung. Das Rad läuft, es ist ein Ablauf, ein Prozess.”

94 Alexandra Cuffel, Licia Di Giacinto, and Volkhard Krech, “Senses, Religion, and Religious Encounter. Literature Review and Research Perspectives,” *Entangled Religions* 10 (2019): 10. The authors relate the interplay of dynamics and stability here to a sense of balance achieved by meditative practices that may be described in bodily language and expressed in bodily gestures.

notion of *dynamis* is employed, it is not only religious traditions actually *realizing* their potential in history (*energeia*) that is important for a general theory, but also the *potential background* that allows the possible realization (*dynamis*) in the Aristotelian sense. As concerns the definition of dynamics this means: the potential to be in a state of change—to be within the *basin of attraction* in the case of phenomena of attraction.⁹⁵ This basis provides the *stability* that is needed, not least, for scientific identification of its own phenomena. The background, as related to the *situation* at hand, provides conditions that *in retrospect* must be considered as stable.

This mode of the dynamics-stability interrelationship has attracted some philosophical elaboration, particularly on the part of thinkers seeking to explore religious attraction. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the notion of propensity is of some help in dealing with religious attraction. As Popper said, propensities do not inhere to objects but are properties of certain situations that give rise to certain tendencies to be realized.⁹⁶ Thus, propensities, provided that the background in question is stable, display a tendency towards *stability*, at least regarding statistics of possible cases.⁹⁷ This may allow us to explain processes and even make predictions.⁹⁸ In the case of religions, one might assume that, if certain conditions are present as a background, there seems to be an attraction acting on humans, ideas, or objects that is a discernable and describable stable phenomenon that may be denoted in an explanative manner as the formation of, for instance, on the macro-level, Christianity, Manichaeism or Islam. This is, in fact, rather the condition of the very possibility to describe the process as triggered by the motivation of

95 See, for example, the stability of Zoroastrian oral tradition of Avastan poetry as expressed in a 're-composition in performance', using certain possibilities stemming from a particular pool with regard to audience and situation of performance: "Bei der avestischen Dichtung als einem mündlichen Dichtungssystem scheint vor allem die 'Rekomposition in Performance' maßgebend gewesen zu sein. Jeder Dichter hat versucht, die vorhandenen Liedermodule nach den Bedingungen seiner Performance und den Anforderungen seiner Zuhörer neu zu gestalten. Zu beachten ist, dass in diesem Dichtungssystem nicht nach dem Original zu suchen ist. [...] In der Zeit, in der die Tradition lebendig war, müssen die Lieder ständig rekomponiert worden sein. Die verschiedenen Variationen galten somit nicht als richtig oder falsch. Eine Version wurde vom Zuhörer akzeptiert, nicht wenn sie mit dem Original völlig übereinstimmte, sondern wenn sie den Anforderungen einer guten Dichtung gerecht wurde." Kianoosh Rezania, "Von der altiranischen Dichtung zur Yasna-Liturgie. Über die Kanonisierung der liturgisch avestischen Texte im Zoroastrismus," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 18 (2010): 202.

96 See Karl Popper, *Realism and the Aim of Science*, ed. W.W. Bartley III (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 359.

97 Karl R. Popper, *A World of Propensities* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), 12.

98 See Popper, *Realism and the Aim of Science*, 350, 358.

individuals.⁹⁹ It is the attraction-displaying situation that introduces and changes the propensities/possibilities that are continuously actualized.

This idea corresponds well with the ideas of classical phenomenology. In Husserlian phenomenology, potentiality is related to actuality by means of a frame of possibilities that consists of possible actualizations fitting within it but is otherwise indefinite. It is, however, then defined by the actualization that occurs. That is to say, it cannot be otherwise than as realized by the particular actualization, introducing a necessary but contingent relation between potential and actualization, or rather, a stable (temporal) relation.¹⁰⁰ This relation, above all in object language considerations, then may be interpreted as causality or, on a more practical level, as the idea that things cannot be otherwise.

If any, retrospective stability is something often to be claimed by religions on the object language level, whereon religions regard themselves as *traditions*. Though the past itself is changed in the course of time, either via slow development or in reaction to sudden events, the tradition itself stabilizes via the incorporation of the prevailing answers to the challenges met.¹⁰¹ They are, in this sense, actualized possibilities, which are objective tendencies to be realized in the sense of a propensity. Thus, dynamic (re-)actions stabilize traditions, or rather, change does not destabilize traditions. On the contrary, it is *because of change* that a tradition may stabilize by realizing its propensities; tradition and innovation thus are closely interrelated.¹⁰²

5.2 *Stability of the Chain of Interpretation*

As regards the *horizontal aspect* of dynamics, the relationship between dynamics and stability must cover sequential phenomena. To provide the conceptual bridge between both counterparts with regard to the flux of time, the concept of an *attractor* proves most suitable. Attractors denote the analytically discernible processes of attraction in the course of events. Within the inexhaustible possibilities of reality, the attractor forms and orders processes with respect to the complex conditions of the processes' particular environments or their

99 See chapter on Attraction.

100 Compare Wiegerling, *Husserls Begriff der Potentialität*, 18.

101 Slater as well stresses the temporal aspect of the specific dynamic of religions, claiming that "The dynamics of religion must be understood by reference to the present interplay of past and future considerations. [...] The weight of tradition has always been recognized, but not the counterweight of hope." Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion*, 3. Slater, however, in the course of his argument tends to overemphasize the future aspect of religious temporality (based on the category of hope) at the expense of the dynamically stabilizing interplay of the three ekstases of time (see, for example, *ibid.*, 8–9).

102 See chapter on Tradition.

basin of attraction. Attractors are centers of clustering movements that follow certain propensities which may be described as gravitations to their prevailing position. As such, attractors indicate recursivity.¹⁰³

To elaborate further, a notion developed by Charles Sanders Peirce proves useful: the so-called *dynamic* (or *dynamical*) *object*.¹⁰⁴ To Peirce, the dynamic object is the 'real' object that stubbornly resists immediate insight and, therefore, is the motivating trigger for future interpretation processes.¹⁰⁵ In the world, the dynamic object "exerts a continual veto power over the signs that cluster around the immediate object."¹⁰⁶ Being suitable for grasping literary fiction like Hamlet, this dynamic object might be fictional, but it nevertheless conveys meaning¹⁰⁷ and, what is more, 'acts' by *generating interpretation*.¹⁰⁸

A religious attractor is a *dynamic object* generating a *chain of signs* (of *immediate objects*)¹⁰⁹ that—while reaching for a full understanding of the object

¹⁰³ See chapter on Attraction.

¹⁰⁴ See for a discussion of the concept of 'dynamic(al) object' in Peirce Carl R. Hausman, "Peirce's Dynamical Object: Realism as Process Philosophy," in *Conversations on Peirce: Reals and Ideals*, eds. Douglas R. Anderson and Carl R. Hausman (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ See Peirce's explanation in his letter to William James from 14 March 1909: "We must distinguish between the Immediate Object,—i.e., the object represented in the Sign,—and the Real (no, because perhaps the Object is altogether fictive, I must choose a different term; therefore:), say rather the Dynamical Object, which, from the nature of things, the Sign cannot express, which it can only indicate and leave the interpreter to find out by *collateral experience*. For instance, I point my finger to what I mean, but I can't make my companion know what I mean, if he can't see it, or if seeing it, it does not, to his mind, separate itself from the surrounding objects in the field of vision." Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings. Volume 2 (1893–1913)*, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 498.

¹⁰⁶ Robert S. Corrington, *An Introduction to C.S. Peirce. Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 1993), 144.

¹⁰⁷ See Francesco Bellucci, "Exploring Peirce's speculative grammar: The immediate object of a sign," *Sign System Studies* 43 (2015): 403.

¹⁰⁸ "[W]hat counts as a dynamical object is the way the object fits into or functions in relation to interpretation. It can be a prior immediate object for a developing interpretation, and as such, it functions dynamically. But underlying all these strands of interpretations, and all these related immediate objects, is externality, the inevitable function of the inexhaustible condition of thought in general." Hausman, "Peirce's Dynamical Object," 98.

¹⁰⁹ As an example of this see the chain of succession in early Christian churches, perpetuating true faith in direct relation to the founding figure of Christianity and thus, as a process, leading to stabilization. Jan-Markus Kötter, "Stability and threat to the order of the church. Some thoughts on the personalization of the church in Late Antiquity," *InterDisciplines* 2 (2011): 48.

though never reaching 'it'—describes the very process of *attraction*.¹¹⁰ On the religious object language level, the significance of interpretation as inseparably related to a dynamic object¹¹¹ is exemplified by the idea of the possibility of connecting to the divine through 'inspired interpretation'. In her analysis of the Book of Jubilees Hindy Najman writes:

Rather than thinking of interpretation of texts and the development of prophecy, we should consider it one of many forms of revelation in preexilic and postexilic texts. Throughout the Second Temple period and beyond we have texts that continue to claim that they are able to connect with the divine via heavenly journey, conversation with angels, and inspired interpretation of older authoritative prophetic texts and/or traditions.

By doing so, these texts themselves connect inseparably to the divine. In her conclusion, Najman characterizes *Jubilees* as follows:

Jubilees participates in prophetic discourse by attaching its origin to Mosaic recording and angelic dictation. Thus, the text is presented as a revelation insofar as it is the earthly copy of an already established divine and heavenly original. This is done by emphasizing the role of the exemplar in generating and sustaining new discourses in Judean traditions from Second Temple times. Thus, the exemplar is himself the prophet who receives and transmits inspired tradition.¹¹²

110 Helmut Pape characterizes the relation of the dynamic object and an attractor correspondingly as follows: "[M]y thesis is that the dynamical object of a sign acts analogously to a final cause. Or, to use a piece of terminology from physics and chaos theory, the dynamical object resembles to some extent to what is called an 'attractor'. This implies that the dynamical object is embodied into the logical structure of semiotical forms: its job is to structure sign-processes in such a way that some relational form properties analogous to those of purposes, goals, aims that govern human conduct become effective. The semiotical concept of the object is consistent with there being real, independent objects because this can be done in such a general way that their form allows objects to be dynamically parts of sign-processes, regardless of what changes in their properties might occur." Helmut Pape, "C. S. Peirce on the Dynamical Object of a Sign: From Ontology to Semiotics and back," (unpublished manuscript, Paper presented at the КHK Workshop 'Dynamics of Signs', 24 October 2013), 4.

111 See Helmut Pape, *Erfahrung und Wirklichkeit als Zeichenprozeß. Charles S. Peirces Entwurf einer Spekultativen Grammatik des Seins* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 315.

112 Hindy Najman, *Past Renewals. Interpretative Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 197, 203.

In religious studies, one might refer to a canonic text that generates commentaries, or which is intended to generate commentaries as part of its own development.¹¹³ The immediate object, here, consists of the previously made interpretations of the dynamic object. As a consequence, the attractor is the *generating process*, not to be fixed into an object-like state, but which provides an impulse and motivation for further inquiry. The ‘stability of the chain of interpretation’, thus, does not insinuate that the object or the prevailing interpretations are stable, but rather that their interrelation, the chain is as such.¹¹⁴ The generative and intensifying aspect of attractors seen as dynamic objects, or rather, attraction¹¹⁵ as, in this sense, dynamics might well be related to the old philosophical notion of *dynamis* which is, according to Plato and Aristotle, the potential of realizable possibilities (with certain propensities) of some entity or in our terms actual *interpretations* of a certain object. Thus, the notion of dynamics *via attraction* becomes more precise and definable than simply ‘becoming’ as an opposite feature of ‘being’. The Peircean idea is also likely to throw some doubt on the supposedly stable material things the study of religion has often turned to.¹¹⁶

Dynamics becomes a metaphor for a description of religious history that moves beyond causal determination (a becomes b because of c), which is itself a common misunderstanding of the notion of *evolution*. The correct dynamical formalization would be the following: b evolved from a because it later

113 See in the case of Ancient Chinese canonization processes Licia Di Giacinto, “The Early History of the Confucian Canon, Successes and Failures of the First Closure,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 18 (2010): 141: “A[n] important [...] factor for text authority was the continuous acceptance of a given text within the community. [...] A criterion for certifying the ‘canonicity’ of a text was the existence of commentaries.”

114 Compare Helmut Zander’s notion of stability: “Stabilität [...] läßt sich nur konstruieren, indem vermeintlich unveränderliche Bestände immer wieder an neue Kontexte angepaßt, also reinterpretiert und insoweit verändert werden.” Helmut Zander, *‘Europäische’ Religionsgeschichte. Religiöse Zugehörigkeit durch Entscheidung—Konsequenzen im interkulturellen Vergleich* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 48.

115 See chapter on Attraction.

116 Gesche Linde notes an important point as regards materiality: “[T]he material things of our surroundings we naturally take for existent, and for stable, are rather the products of successive steps of interpretation: They are much more fluid, so to speak, than we use to think. They are results of negotiations between my former self and my present one, or between myself as a interpreter and some supposed other, the speaker. This also means that our possibilities to reconstruct the meanings physical artefacts might have had in the past, or to ‘converse with the subjects of our research’, as Clifford Geertz put it, are limited.” Gesche Linde, “Semiotic Objects and Physical Artefacts. A Peircean Approach to Cultural Semiotics,” (unpublished manuscript, Paper presented at the KHK Workshop ‘Dynamics of Signs’, 24 October 2013), par. 11.

has become, or was interpreted as c. This formula integrates the *retentional* perspective. Furthermore, material objects can be examined as *energetic* ones (*energeia*) in the sense of being a realized possibility (propensity) of interpretation. Attraction, therefore, holds a privileged position in reflections on religious dynamics—my suggestion would be that it is the form that illuminates most of the dynamic processes that might be called religious.

5.3 *Stability of Dynamic Bipolarity*

To Aristotle, the external conditions of its realization must be included in the definition of a *dynamis*.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, as indicated in *modus* 1 of the dynamics/stability interrelation, the notion of *realization* as introduced here is two-fold: in the sense that ‘realization’ means both a) to actualize, to make true (real as a physical process) and b) ‘to realize’ in the sense of becoming aware of. This second meaning introduces an agenda of self-reflection (‘consciousness’) that leads to (intellectual) densification and stabilization—to an *intensification* of expression.¹¹⁸ The most important insight is the following: all dynamics as the realizations of possibilities are always *bipolar*.¹¹⁹ Put into a geometrical model: *dynamics are always elliptical*, consisting of two focal points.

It is at this point, that Alfred North Whitehead’s philosophy of organism can suitably be combined with Aristotelian insight toward a unified conceptualization of dynamics.¹²⁰ In his *Enquiry into the Principles of Natural Knowledge* Whitehead characterized the basic bipolarity of nature as follows.

There are two sides to nature, as it were, antagonistic the one to the other, and yet each essential. The one side is development in creative advance, the essential becomingness of nature. The other side is the permanence of things, the fact that nature can be recognized. Thus nature is always a newness relating objects which are neither new nor old. Perception

¹¹⁷ See Liske, “Inwieweit sind Vermögen intrinsische dispositionelle Eigenschaften?,” 272.

¹¹⁸ On the ‘densification’ or crystallization of Buddhist identities as a result of the dynamics of interreligious contact see Berkwitz, “Dynamics and Stability,” 27. Citing Fukun Habian and Angarika Dharmapāla as examples Berkwitz claims: “Their respective writings about Buddhism and Christianity are significant examples of how interreligious contacts could lead to the intensification of notions about Buddhist identity, morality, and truth.”

¹¹⁹ Gesche Linde hints at the bipolarity connected to the Peircean notion of the dynamic object, see Gesche Linde, “Experience as Interpretation. A Peircean Approach to practical Theology,” in *Religion: Immediate Experience and the Mediacy of Research. Interdisciplinary Studies, Concepts and Methodology of Empirical Research in Religion*, eds. Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Christopher P. Scholz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 162.

¹²⁰ Tweed recognizes Whitehead as a fellow collaborator in the “description of dynamic processes.” Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 57.

fades unless it is equally stimulated from both sides of nature. [...] Thus essentially perception is an awareness of events in the act of passing into what has yet never been. But equally perception requires recognition. [...] [T]he recognition in perception requires the recurrence of the ways in which events pass.¹²¹

Natural events can only be perceived and recognized in a combination of becoming and permanence. This, too, sheds some light on the operations of religions, as religion is not all about movement; rather, it is about movement and standing still. The very foundation of religion, as Whitehead himself claims, relies “on our apprehension of those permanent elements by reason of which there is a stable order in the world, permanent elements apart from which there could be no changing world.”¹²² Religion, thus, is a way of describing the possibility of order and stability in a changing world that can only be identified as such by means of a stable order. In general, Whitehead’s thinking claims for a mediated and, in fact, mediating interplay of change and conservation as the basic characteristics of reality:

There are two principles inherent in the very nature of things, recurring in some particular embodiments whatever field we explore—the spirit of change, and the spirit of conservation. There can be nothing real without both. Mere change without conservation is a passage from nothing to nothing. Its final integration yields mere transient non-entity. Mere conservation without change cannot conserve. For, after all, there is a flux of circumstance, and the freshness of being evaporates under mere repetition. The character of existent reality is composed of organisms enduring through the flux of things.¹²³

Whitehead characterizes his own intellectual endeavor as a philosophy of organism, building on the shift from materialism to organic realism (organism).¹²⁴ The dynamics of materialism, thus, are replaced by the dynamics of organism. Organisms, as the actual elements of reality, consist of both aspects of dynamics and stability. Organisms operate in the direction of (vectorially

121 Alfred North Whitehead, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (New York: Dover, 1982), 98.

122 Whitehead, Preface to: *Religion in the Making*.

123 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World, Lowell Lectures 1925* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 201.

124 See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 309.

to) themselves as a 'superject' of this directional progress (self-realization, self-transcendence); the operations are not directed from the organism as a *subject*.¹²⁵ Accordingly, the notion of 'organism' is basically an indicator for *self-transcending* actual entities.¹²⁶

Moreover, organisms guided by both 'the spirit of change' and 'the spirit of conversation' are characterized by yet another expression of *bipolarity* (or *dipolarity*). 'Change and stability' are parallels to 'physicality and mentality'. Concerning bipolarity, Whitehead writes:

Each actuality is essentially bipolar, physical and mental, and the physical inheritance is essentially accompanied by a conceptual reaction partly conformed to it, and partly introductory of a relevant novel contrast, but always introducing emphasis, valuation, and purpose. The integration of the physical and the mental side into a unity of experience is a self-formation which is a process of concrescence, and which by the principle of objective immortality characterizes the creativity which transcends it.¹²⁷

The notion of concrescence denotes something very basic to Whitehead's thinking and is explained in *Process and Reality* as the 'production of novel togetherness'. 'Concrescence' thus describes the process of many growing into one. Whitehead adds: "These ultimate notions of 'production of novelty' and of 'concrete togetherness' are inexplicable either in terms of higher universals or in terms of the components participating in the concrescence."¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Whitehead coins the notion of 'superject' in order to describe the situation when a subject is carried beyond its internal becoming and, by means of this self-transcending process, therefore is no longer a subject but rather a *superject*. As such, it becomes the object of still later subjects' prehensions. Thus, superjects are expressions of process. Once an occasion has become fully actualized, it becomes an objective datum for those occasions which follow it. "An actual entity is to be conceived both as a subject presiding over its own immediacy of becoming, and a superject which is the atomic creature exercising its function of objective immortality. It has become a 'being'; and it belongs to the nature of every 'being' that it is the potential for every 'becoming.'" Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 45.

¹²⁶ "And also it is to be noted that every actual entity [...] is a creature transcended by the creativity which it qualifies." Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88. Whitehead here relates this note to Spinoza's idea of substance being *causa sui*, thus reaching transcendence because of reasons of immanence.

¹²⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 108.

¹²⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21–22.

Concrescence realizes creativity (dynamics) as self-formation, and is, thus, superjectively self-transcending.

Reality, thus, as an effect of realization, consists of a *physical and a mental pole*, or to put this another way, of physical inheritance and conceptual reaction—a pair that together generates a new *contrast*. Of course, the two separate poles are stressed here for analytical reasons. There is obviously no dualism of mind and matter, although it may be described that way in object language text. Moreover, the presence of a mental pole does not necessarily involve consciousness in this conception of bipolar dynamics.¹²⁹ The five-layer scheme proposed for understanding vertical dynamics, for instance, clearly indicates that there are in fact levels in between the ‘mental’ and the ‘physical’ pole of an intensifying dynamic process. However, there is more to it than simply saying that any contrast cannot prevail without the contrasted.¹³⁰ The parts of a bipolar relation only make sense by mutual reference, which does not merely say that they are not explainable without the other but rather that the process between them, the (rotating) mutual reference, *generates meaning* as interpretation or expression.¹³¹ The introduction of ‘emphasis, valuation and purpose’ (meaning) due to the fact that ‘physical inheritance is essentially accompanied by a conceptual reaction’ means the introduction of *intensification*. The integration of the mental and the physical pole provides a concrescence that may be characterized as an axial rotation: it is not only the mind informing the body but also concerns the repercussions of the information received. Something like this might be indicated in Tweed’s definition: ‘Religious life is about movement’ means both that something is moving and that (in re-flection) someone is moved, the dynamics thus being *intensified*.

Intensification is, thus, a particular self-formation—among which the formation of an emphasized self is an extreme case—, allowing for something which Whitehead, somehow surprisingly, calls ‘feeling’.¹³² Usually, feelings

129 See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 248.

130 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

131 Here, the dynamic of display and concealment regarding the phenomenon of secrecy as examined by Robert Ford Campany in Chinese esoteric practice might serve as an example: in the esoteric arts, there is a basic tension between reclusion and recognition. These opposing tendencies imply and reinforce each other, leading to an increase in emphasis. Concerning secrecy, it is not enough simply to hide something, the fact of something being hidden must be recognized, or rather, realized as well, thus involving both the physical and mental pole in order to make sense. Compare Robert Ford Campany, “Secrecy and Display in the Quest for Transcendence in China, ca. 220 BCE–350 CE,” *History of Religions* 45 (2006): 294, 336. Compare chapter on Secret.

132 Compare Morgan’s notion of feeling with regard to material culture as an important device of religion: “[M]aterial culture, and the arts generally, are ways of generating, transmitting, refining and sharing feeling. Material culture, and visual culture as subdivision

are subsumed under the 'subjective' side of human experience, as opposed to 'objective' facts. 'Feeling' here is a technical term denoting the way actual entities appropriate data in order to make them their own in the process of concrescence.¹³³

Thus an actual entity is essentially dipolar, with its physical and mental poles; and even the physical world cannot be properly understood without reference to its other side, which is the complex of mental operations. The primary mental operations are conceptual feelings.¹³⁴

Dynamics, thus, is the conceptual appropriation of data to a creative new unity which can be considered to be the agenda of the actual entity as a superject. Mental operations, therefore, are not secondary to physical occasions, rather they are co-original (*gleichursprünglich*).

The process of bipolar contrasting intensification may lead to certain 'ideal forms' which are the main elements of mental operations involved in any actual occasion (*actual entity*). In *Process and Reality*, these forms as pure *potentials* for the determination or appropriation of facts¹³⁵ are called 'eternal objects'. As potentials, these eternal objects are the dynamizing elements in processes. "An eternal object is always a potentiality for actual entities, but in itself [...] it is neutral as to the fact of its physical ingression in any particular entity of the temporal world."¹³⁶ Due to its neutrality in content, ideal forms or eternal objects may be used as schemes or model forms in self-reflection but also in situations of contact. Whitehead describes the bipolar dynamics involved in any process as follows:

Thus the process of becoming is dipolar, (i) by reason of its qualification by the determinateness of the actual world, and (ii) by its conceptual prehensions of the indeterminateness of eternal objects. The process is constituted by the influx of eternal objects into a novel determinateness of feeling, which absorbs the actual world into a new actuality.¹³⁷

of it, is not principally the expression of ideas or doctrines, but rather the cultural production, circulation, and reception of felt-knowledge. This means that images and their uses should be examined for the ways in which they help to create forms of sympathy, empathy, antipathy, and apathy—feeling with, feeling into or as, feeling against or other than, and feeling not at all." Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 147.

¹³³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 164.

¹³⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 239.

¹³⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 22.

¹³⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 44.

¹³⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 45.

As a technical term denoting the unification of a manifold into one new actuality, a 'conceptual prehension' *feeling* is highly suitable for the description of the dynamics in the history of religions. In the abovementioned sense, dynamics generate new *contrasts*¹³⁸ by introducing stable elements, providing them with both continuity and novelty. In his own considerations on religion, Whitehead states: "The novelty which enters into the derivate instance is the information of the actual world with a new set of ideal forms. In the most literal sense, the lapse of time is the renovation of the world with ideas."¹³⁹ Novelty, thus, is not achieved by making things more fluid but rather by the introduction of new stabilizing conceptual elements (feeling) that serve as the focal points for re-interpretation. Movement is generated by the introduction of stable elements and not by their dissolution.¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, with regard to the history of religions, it may be assumed that dogma or canon generates dynamics in its three forms: horizontal, vertical, and intensifying.

Translated into Aristotle's words, Whitehead's insight indicates that, in particular in religion, *dynamis* is always *meta* and *aneu logou*. Not least, this holds true for the scientific description of religion. There is no material without meaning and no meaning without the material strata. *The realization of religion is both putting it into existence and realizing it as such*. In other words, there is no material level of religion without the interpreting mind, be it on the object level (ascribing meaning) as well as on the (scientific) meta-level of the describing scholar. In his theory of religion *Religion in the Making* Whitehead expresses this bipolar interrelation as follows: "It is the genius of religion to point at the facts and ask for their systematic interpretation."¹⁴¹

5.4 *Stability of Dynamic Trails*

To explain the decisive feature that may furthermore combine and interrelate dynamics and stability and to partly answer the question of what might guarantee the stability of a dynamically described entity named religion, I shall refer to psychology, in particular to a theory of psychodynamics, developed by the German *Entwicklungspsychologe* Hans Thomae (1915–2001).¹⁴² In some sound agreement with the current state of the art in religious studies, dynamic

138 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanende Distinction.

139 Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 113–114.

140 "The things which are temporal arise by their participation in the things which are eternal." Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 40.

141 Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 51.

142 For a biographical sketch see Manfred Gogol, Andreas Kruse, and Georg Rudinger, "Hans Thomae zum 100. Geburtstag," *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 6 (2015): 574–576.

psychology holds the inner life of human beings to be a dynamic context defined by the interplay of certain forces, opposing 'static' psychology that considers inner life a certain state. However, the reference to this theory does not mean that I try to explicate religion as a psychological phenomenon, but rather that I wish to use the formal features of Thomae's psychological theory as a model for the description of the interplay of dynamics and stability found in religion.

Thomae takes his point of theoretical departure from the insight that the key to the description and explication of human behavior is not *structure* in the first place but rather process (*Geschehen*).¹⁴³ In his *magnum opus* 'Das Individuum und seine Welt. Eine Persönlichkeitstheorie' (*The Individual and His World. A Theory of Personality*), Thomae critiques the persistence of antique teachings that view characters as solid and permanent structures in modern theories on personality. In contrast to that, and in accordance with recent currents in the study of religion, Thomae emphasizes his own dynamic approach.¹⁴⁴ This basic insight must sound very appealing to scholars of religion who are very aware of the fact that religion is about movement and is, accordingly, not to be characterized by static structures only, let alone by unchanging 'essential' features.

However, the basic dynamics that Thomae sees underpinning character are not without order to provide some constancy, as this character of human existence is furthermore qualified by its basic directedness (*Gerichtetheit*). To Thomae, direction serves a fundamental explanatory feature: without it, he argues, basic notions of psychology cannot be explained satisfactorily.¹⁴⁵ It is directedness that makes the human being 'propulsive' and, thus, self-transcending.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, these (psycho-)dynamics are not blind and undefined activities, they rather do fixate and are unlikely to depart that *trail* of

143 See the chapter "Personality as Process" (*Persönlichkeit als Prozess*) in *Persönlichkeit. Eine dynamische Interpretation*, ed. Hans Thomae (Bonn: Bouvier, 1981), 11–13.

144 "Was sich dem Beobachter an einem anderen Menschen zeigt [...] das ist Geschehen, Ereignis, Ablauf, Handlung, Veränderung. Dieses einer Person zugehörige [...] Geschehen gilt es auch, bei der diagnostischen bzw. theoretischen Bemühung um die Erschließung individueller Welten zu bewahren." Hans Thomae, *Das Individuum und seine Welt. Eine Persönlichkeitstheorie* (Göttingen: Hogreve, 1968), 403.

145 Thomae, *Persönlichkeit*, 16: "Danach [...] muß die Gerichtetheit als Grundqualität menschlichen und darüber hinaus lebendigen Daseins, der Vorgang der Richtung als ein Grundvorgang gelten, ohne den Tatbestände, wie z.B. Integration, Gestalt, Ganzheit gar nicht sinnvoll verstanden werden können."

146 Thomae, *Persönlichkeit*, 26–27: "Es ist ein propulsives, das Dasein ständig über sich hinaussteigerndes Moment, das hier lebendig wird."

direction (*Bahnung*) which provides for their full development.¹⁴⁷ This trail is the manifestation or realization of the directed process. With regard to religious practice, one may think of ritualized behavior and canon-building processes here.¹⁴⁸

Additionally, and most suitably fitting for a contact-based perspective on the dynamics in the history of religions, Thomae states that the creation of these trails of direction is dependent on two basic aspects, namely internal processes of maturing and external *situations of contact*.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, it is the ‘polarity’ of process and directedness that makes human behavior.¹⁵⁰ The trail of directedness is psychologically elevated (transcended) into an ‘ideal situational scheme (*ideales Lageschema*)’, which then is applied independently of the situation the individual is currently in.¹⁵¹ Thus, trail-making (pathfinding) stabilizes. It is, as such, a stable intentional structure that has evolved from the directed process and thus provides the main instrument for a meta-level perspective. Or, in Thomae’s words, it makes the individual ‘see’ in order to design, describe, and control their environment.¹⁵² It is the schema that makes sense of experiences and even allows them as such.¹⁵³

In the above, we can recognize another example of the basic bipolarity of the dynamic process, in which the mental (designing, controlling) pole is in

147 See Hans Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Psychologie 1944–1984* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1985), 112: “So wenig schwebt jene Dynamik überhaupt im luftleeren Raum, daß sie jede Bahn fixiert und nicht mehr verläßt, die ihr einmal volle Entfaltung verlieh.”

148 Correspondingly, Dirk Werle considers tradition (see chapter on Tradition) a phenomenon that can be described as paved trails in a particular library, rendering a multitude of texts to a non-contingent association of texts (“Traditionen sind so etwas wie gebahnte Wege durch die Bibliothek, innerhalb derer die Bücher aufeinander verweisen, sind spezifische, nicht-kontingente Gruppierungen von Texten.”) Dirk Werle, “Was ist Tradition?,” in *Tradition und Traditionsverhalten. Literaturwissenschaftliche Zugänge und kulturhistorische Perspektiven*, eds. Philip Reich, Karolin Toledo Flores, and Dirk Werle (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2021), 44.

149 See Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 117: “Immer aber erscheint dann das Antriebsgeschehen als eine konkrete Bahn, in der sich die Lebensdynamik für eine Weile zu manifestieren vermag. Und immer ist die ‘Bahnung’ abhängig von der Artung des psychophysischen Gesamts durch innere Reifungsvorgänge wie durch Begegnungen.”

150 “Die Polarität von ‘Lebendigkeit überhaupt’ und geformter, in bestimmte verpflichtende Richtung weisender Lebendigkeit [...] macht also erst das aus, was wir spezifisch menschliches Verhalten nennen.” Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 124.

151 Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 121.

152 Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 120.

153 Compare Thomae, *Das Individuum und seine Welt*, 586.

itself an expression of the dynamic process as such.¹⁵⁴ Thomae's idea of path-finding dynamics as a fundamental for self-reflection adds an important element to a conceptualization of dynamics, and, complementarily, stability. To wit, *stability* denotes a *fixation of a certain directedness of a dynamic process in certain trails* (Bahnen), which makes it possible to describe the fixated process as a whole, both on the object-level (self-)description and on the scientific meta-level description.¹⁵⁵ Trails manifest propensities and display attraction.¹⁵⁶

Of course, trailmaking remains a process on the micro-level. Stability as a product of fixing a trail might be described as a conservative form of dynamics. Trails are fixed by contact, as in Thomae's theory. Conservative dynamics, therefore, might, for instance, be identified in stereotypical behavior towards others or 'the other' in general.

On the physical macro level, the stability of dynamic trails can be related to mutually reinforcing processes found in the contact of the religious field with other societal fields. In the case of the contact of religion and economy, Foltz has described this process for the horizontal dynamics of Buddhism which like 'running water found open channels' formed trade routes. Foltz continues as follows: "But the religion-trade relationship was mutually reinforcing. For example, the expansion of Buddhism brought an increasing demand for silk, which was used in Buddhist ceremonies, thereby further stimulating the long-distance trading activity that had facilitated the spread of Buddhism in the first place."¹⁵⁷ Via a process of mutual reinforcement, an element of

154 "[...] das gemeinte konkrete Antriebsgeschehen ist Anzeichen für die Richtung, in der sich die 'Lebendigkeit überhaupt' auf Grund einer bestimmten inneren und äußeren Lage manifestieren kann. Es ist somit sehend gewordener 'Ausdruck' einer auf eine spezifische 'Stufe' gehobenen Lebendigkeit." Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 115.

155 Compare the concept of pathdependency (*Pfadabhängigkeit*) which argues that there are cultural fixings that shape subsequent developments. I would argue that not only the starting points, but also the trails of the development might become fixated (not as determination, but as a discernable path that is followed in a majority of occasions). Nevertheless, with both the stability of trails and trail-dependence, Zander's reminder remains valid: "Das bedeutet nicht, ontologische Festlegungen für eine Kultur zu treffen, sondern historisch kontingente und im Prinzip reversible, jedoch stabile Festlegungen anzunehmen." Zander, *'Europäische' Religionsgeschichte*, 50.

156 Thomae discusses the behavior potentials of a person as a selection from a range of possible responses, asking for the order of probabilities for the different response classes. Due to a 'principle of economy' certain responses that turned out to be useful in meeting a problem situation are retained, possibly resulting in fixation and rigidity (see 183), thus providing a propensity of reaction. Hans Thomae, "Conceptualizations of responses to stress," *European Journal of Personality* 1 (1987): 177.

157 Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 10. On the dynamic mutual interrelation of a network of well-built infrastructure and the spread of religions in the Roman Empire see Christoph

intensification is added to the horizontal dynamics of expansion. Moreover, at least for some people, this also had effects on the vertical level which can be seen in transformations on the cultural and physical levels through evolutions in costume in order to fulfill the obligations of Buddhist ceremonial practices. Another example of the interrelation of dynamics and stability in the form of dynamic trails at work in the history of religions may be found in Aziz Al-Azmeh's description of the emergence of Islam in late antiquity. Here, Al-Azmeh suitably employs the element of potentiality in his analysis of the realized process:

In contrast to the diffusionist model often provided for the genesis of the Muslim religion, and its search for constitutive origins in previous monotheistic religions or in more generally Semitic terms, the model here adapted is polygenetic, with an emphasis on local and autochthonous forces and processes which, once their geographical and social remit had widened under imperial auspices, joined a historical flow that had already been firmly in place, and realized, under central control, a number of possibilities available in the structure of polytheism, as it had been the case before.¹⁵⁸

Thus, the dynamics of Islam's emergence can be described as realizing the propensities provided by the background of monotheism, a process that is stabilized by trails that are themselves further supported and intensified by political circumstances, dynamizing the vertical dynamics of the actors involved.¹⁵⁹

Auffarth, "Menschen reisen zu den Göttern, Götter reisen zu den Menschen. *Religio migrans* in Abonuteichos und am Schwarzen Meer," *Phasis* 18 (2015): 32: "Vielmehr bieten die gut ausgebauten Infrastrukturen für Militär, Verkehr, Handel, Migration die Wege für die Ausbreitung von Kulturen. Andererseits bestimmen Kriterien des 'Marktes', welche Kulte und wie sie dargeboten werden müssen, um Anklang beim Publikum zu finden. Eine Angleichung und Verdichtung führt zu einer neuen Qualität von Religion." Accordingly, Auffarth fittingly re-interprets the notion of *Reichsreligion* (Religion of the Empire) as a certain space preserving a dynamic potential by guaranteeing religious mobility by providing the infrastructure for travel and exchange: "[D]as Reich [bietet] die Infrastruktur in Form von Handels- und Reisewegen, die pax Romana des militärischen Schutzes und gefahrlosen Reisens, verhältnismäßige Toleranz." (*ibid.*, 39).

¹⁵⁸ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 40.

¹⁵⁹ "Militarily powered, this religion of an external proletariat came to be immediately transposed, by empire in Damascus and Baghdad, to the most advanced terminus reached by Hellenistic political theology in which the one universal empire mirrored the one God. It was thus that the microcosmic and elementary re-enactment of the oecumenical late antique move from henotheism and monolatry to monotheism took place among the Arabs." Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 41.

5.5 *Stability of Reproduction, Stabilization as Permanent Re-stabilization*

The notion of stability, having fallen victim to ideological misuse (indicating 'bad' and, indirectly, via contrast 'good' attitudes towards the phenomena), had to be reintegrated into the Humanities via the reception of physics in social sciences. In Niklas Luhmann's thinking, the notion of *dynamic stability* may be of some utility to the field of religious studies.¹⁶⁰ Luhmann's dynamic stability is embedded in a theory that deals with the perpetual renewal of elements of a certain system. From Luhmann's *Soziale Systeme*:

This theory is not concerned, like the classical theories of equilibrium, with returning to a stable state of rest after the absorption of disturbances, but with securing the constant renewal of system elements—or, more briefly, not with static but with dynamic stability. All elements pass away. They cannot endure as elements in time, and thus they must constantly be produced on the basis of whatever constellation of elements is actual at any given moment. Reproduction thus does not mean simply repeatedly producing the same, but rather reflexive production, production out of products.¹⁶¹

Stability, seen from the perspective of this theory, is not the achievement of a resting position but rather consists of guaranteeing the reproduction of certain temporal elements with regard to the prevailing constellation at a given point in time. This approach makes the production 'reflexive'. Stability is not a mere repetition but consists of a *chain of production*; one former production being the basis of the later one (reproduction). With regard to the dimension

160 As Christoph Kleine put it, to a certain degree the question for the possibility of a stable society and the examination of the techniques of social differentiation that stabilize societies is the very basis of Luhmann's thinking. Christoph Kleine, "Niklas Luhmann und die Religionswissenschaft: Geht das zusammen?," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 24 (2016): 52.

161 Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz, Jr. with Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 49. "Dieser Theorie geht es also nicht, wie klassischen Gleichgewichtstheorien, um Rückkehr in eine stabile Ruhelage nach Absorption von Störungen, sondern um die Sicherung der unaufhörlichen Erneuerung der Systemelemente, oder in kurzer Formulierung: nicht um statische, sondern um dynamische Stabilität. Alle Elemente verschwinden, sie können sich als Elemente in der Zeit nicht halten, sie müssen also laufend neu hervorgebracht werden und dies aufgrund der Konstellation von Elementen, die im Moment aktuell ist. Reproduktion heißt also nicht einfach: Wiederholung der Produktion des Gleichen, sondern reflexive Produktion, Produktion aus Produkten." Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 79.

of time, reproduction thus also indicates the presence of a retentional process. Accordingly, a religion or religious tradition as a self-referential system reproduces religious elements at a given point in time on the basis of its former elements, thus stabilizing itself.¹⁶² Religious traditions adapt themselves to their own instability.¹⁶³ It is a seemingly paradoxical idea that the cause of stability here is the fundamental instability, which, nevertheless, allows religious traditions to react to the situation it is in by kick-starting the process for the appropriate reproduction of elements. One might call this a stability of *evolution*, which at once reacts to or interprets and also changes its environment.¹⁶⁴ In Luhmann's words: "Anything that can be built on such restless foundations must be able to change fluctuation into stability."¹⁶⁵ In other words, it must generate dynamic stability. A stable system that is unable to communicate with the situation would disintegrate into the flux of time.

With reference to Jan Assmann's characterization of Egyptian religion having moved from being an implicit to an explicit one, Luhmann characterizes the decisive development in the evolution of religion as a 'care for consistency' (*Konsistenzpflege*):

In this new way, religion became a system that reproduced itself, its own boundaries, and its own history. It continually reactualized its own recursions. In short, it became an autopoietic system. Religions' semantics were completely reformulated, becoming a doctrine that could be fixed in writing.¹⁶⁶

Another example of continual reactualization is the Pentateuch texts in Jewish tradition. These texts stabilize a certain community by means of their authority, but not because they are considered to be immutable:

¹⁶² See chapter on Tradition.

¹⁶³ Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 50 correspondingly describes the "system's internal orientation towards its own instability." See Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 80.

¹⁶⁴ Compare the processes of constant redefinition and constant reinterpretation in Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion*, 70–71.

¹⁶⁵ Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 52. "Was auf so unruhigem Untergrund gebaut werden kann, muß Fluktuation in Stabilität überführen können." Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 82.

¹⁶⁶ Niklas Luhmann, *A Systems Theory of Religion*, trans. David A. Brenner with Adrian Hermann Stanford (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 192. "Religion in diesem neuen Sinn wird nun zu einem sich selbst und die eigenen Grenzen und die eigene Geschichte reproduzierenden System, das seine eigenen Rekursionen ständig reaktualisiert, kurz: zu einem autopoietischen System. Die religiöse Semantik wird komplett reformuliert. Sie wird eine schriftlich fixierbare Lehre, eine Dogmatik." Luhmann, *Die Religion in der Gesellschaft*, 267.

The [...] Reworked Pentateuch-texts are a case in point. The evidence we have challenges the ideal of the immutability of sacred and authoritative texts and reveals a reality of texts being changed, revised, and corrected in the course of their compilation and transmission. [...] In other words, a text may remain authoritative primarily because of the changes because then it keeps up with the developments taking place in the society and thereby remains relevant for the community.¹⁶⁷

It is entirely appropriate that the adaptability of the text grants its overall stability.¹⁶⁸

In a dynamic situation, stability is not achieved by opposing dynamics but via the very ongoing dynamic *process* of stabilization that is, as such, dependent on the changing environment of the entity that is to be stabilized with reference to the environment: "Religion then found stability in itself and precisely in the difference that separated religious meaning from other kinds."¹⁶⁹ Here, one might additionally claim that it is not only the reference to the *other religion* that stabilizes religion but also, and rather in the first place, the reference to the *other religion* in a situation of religious contact that generates the processes of self-stabilization that results in a solid dogmatics. The increase of self-reference, the shift from other-reference to self-reference, thus, becomes an indicator of the evolution of religion.¹⁷⁰

In Luhmann's sense, continual reactualization of self-recursions, otherwise known as *autopoietic* systems, are systems defined by communication and the interaction of meaning, whose basic processes are self-generated and self-regenerating from within. The interactions and self-definitions of the content of the communication define the system. As a consequence, dynamic structures emerge which define the horizon of possible adaptations from the outside, that is, from environmental changes: "It is structures [...] that must make possible the connectivity of autopoietic reproduction if they do not

167 Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila, "Introducing Changes in Scripture," in *Changes in Scripture. Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period*, eds. Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 6–7.

168 See Hans Debel, "Rewritten Bible, Variant Literary Editions and Original Text(s): Exploring the Implications of a Pluriform Outlook on the Scriptural Tradition," in *Changes in Scripture*, eds. Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2011).

169 Luhmann, *A Systems Theory of Religion*, 191. "Die Religion findet jetzt Halt an sich selbst und ebendeshalb auch an der Differenz, die religiösen Sinn von anderem Sinn trennt." (Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 266).

170 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

want to give up the basis for their own existence, and this limits the domain of possible changes, of possible learning.”¹⁷¹ Thus, self-reference allows for contact with the environment by means of ‘structure’. But structure, here, means the limited or selected possibilities available.

Accordingly, *the propensities of possible answers to challenges emerge and display a certain attraction that, in turn may lead to dynamic trails that stabilize through reproduction. The interfaces of the systemic processes of reproduction with the challenging environment can be considered to be model forms.*

The directed reproductions of self-realization stabilize dynamic systems and open them for future, possibly challenging events. For the prospect and the sake of its future, religions by definition built on insecure foundations retentionally rewrite their own pasts. At this point, the preeminence of contact in this process becomes obvious. Without unexpected challenge—transcending the limits of the current re-actualization—no directed re-actualization is necessary, or even possible.¹⁷² A challenge is answered through a re-actualization directed by self-reference. Accordingly, in a situation of contact between one tradition and another, the traditions themselves become possible objects of self-observation. On the basis of this self-observation, the other tradition is conceptualized with a degree of rigidity.

5.6 *Stability of Contingent Contact*

These considerations on the dynamic stability of reproduction, thus, link up with the issue of contact in the dynamics of the history of religions. Dynamics is the *realization or materialization of inherent possibilities*. The possibilities available are determined by the background of the situation in question or, in our terminology, the ‘basin of attraction’ or the potential *dynamis*. This is to say that dynamics are dependent upon their propensities (directedness).¹⁷³

171 Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 36. “Strukturen müssen [...] die Anschlußfähigkeit der autopoietischen Reproduktion ermöglichen, wenn sie nicht ihre eigene Existenzgrundlage aufgeben wollen, und das limitiert den Bereich möglicher Änderungen, möglichen Lernens.” Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 62.

172 “Therefore without an aspect of surprise there would be no structural formation because nothing would happen for other things to link onto.” Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 288. “Ohne Überraschungen gäbe es deshalb keine Strukturbildung, weil nichts vorkäme, was zu verknüpfen wäre.” Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme* 391.

173 This directedness creates sense as a chosen—or realized possibility. Compare Luhmann: “Meaning allows no other choice than to choose. Communication grasps *something* out of the actual referential horizon that it itself constitutes and leaves *other things* aside. Communication is the processing of selection.” Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 140. “Sinn läßt keine andere Wahl als zu wählen. Kommunikation greift aus dem je aktuellen Verweisungshorizont, den sie selbst erst konstituiert, etwas heraus und läßt Andres beiseite. Kommunikation ist Prozessieren von Selektion.” Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 194.

It also means that dynamics, as the realization of possibilities, indicate a creative process, not only in the emphatic sense of the creation of something new but also the emergence of something different than before. Novelty, hence is a special case of the above—or better, novelty can be considered a regulative idea of description. Dynamics, in this sense, describe the kind of change that is necessary to identify a certain tradition. Thus, the dynamics of a religious tradition cannot be described as merely an undifferentiated explosion in time and space but rather as *directed realizations*, which primarily gain direction or its directedness from ‘the other’ (tradition)—through the *contacts* that make its environmental conditions. Dynamics, thus, is also constituted by the prevailing situation.¹⁷⁴ This leads to the seemingly paradoxical idea that a dynamic process gains stability *because of* rather than despite its contingency.

This is, above all, the case in situations of *contact of religious traditions*, which are, at first, a contact with something previously unknown. Participants in the situation have to deal with contact cognitively and linguistically, adapting their existing mental and linguistic frame as necessary. Here, the main example is the introduction of names or salient notions as *ostensive*, or rather, to use Saul Kripke’s term, *rigid designators*, is of some assistance.¹⁷⁵ The referent of a name as well as the meaning of a concept is determined by the situation of its introduction. Content-wise, the concepts in question are usually left largely blank, though they are framed by the circumstances of their situation-related acquisition. The result of the stabilizing dynamics of a contingent contact is a model form.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the introduction of notions in concrete contingent situations, that is, in situations of contact provides them with relationships of *situation-related necessity* and, accordingly, *stability* of a strong kind.

174 Compare Volkhard Krech, “From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back: Some Methodological Considerations on Comparative Perspectives in the Science of Religion,” in *The Dynamics of Transculturality, Transcultural Research—Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, eds. A. Flüchter and J. Schöttli (Cham: Springer, 2015), 64: “Within the religious field, religious diversity as well as religious contacts and transfer processes enabled as a result thereof are key conditions for triggering dynamics in the history of religions. A plural situation can arise or actively be promoted either through the import and export of religious traditions, for instance as part of trade relations, during imperial expansion, or through religious innovation and reformation from the inside outwards. Religious contacts challenge religious traditions to differentiate themselves, position themselves, and establish an identity and thus promote the controversy of the religious field inwardly and outwardly as well as the demarcation of boundaries. But equally, religious contacts can also lead to an explicit or creeping amalgamation of elements from various traditions.”

175 See Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 3–4.

176 See chapter on Model Forms.

This might be shown with regard to the stabilizing effect of tradition. Tradition is generally considered to be an essential feature of religions. To Pascal Boyer, for instance, the stability of tradition depends on the contingent situation of the introduction of the traditional category in question: “[T]he main hypothesis here is that in the process of acquisition of a traditional category, the definitional features are replaced with memories of specific situations, contrary to what happens in the acquisition of most ordinary terms. [...] Traditional interaction implies that some people supplement a vague and unconstraining common stereotype with memories of singular ostensive designations.”¹⁷⁷ Most representations of tradition (that is *as traditional*) are episodic and thus occasion-bound; as a consequence, traditional knowledge is generated with regard to the episodic character rather than on theoretical interferences or general principles.¹⁷⁸ The process of tradition, as a consequence, requires reiteration in the sense that specific communicative situations are repeated. This can be termed the situation of ostensive designation.¹⁷⁹ The categories of traditional interaction “are anchored to memories of singular situations rather than associated with mental definitions.”¹⁸⁰ Therefore, to use Boyer’s terminology, even ‘systems of beliefs’ are to a great extent triggered and determined by concrete situations and the corresponding processes of concept acquisition. This results in a stable relationship to time, more commonly known as tradition, which has been acquired through the dynamics of contingent contact.

The definiteness of a religious tradition, therefore, relies on the impact of the other (mostly of the other tradition but also of other ‘fields’ such as politics, etc.).¹⁸¹ It is, thus, a synergetic process of a cooperation toward realization. One may formulate the general idea that it is contact (of horizons of

¹⁷⁷ Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication. A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 42.

¹⁷⁸ Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 43.

¹⁷⁹ Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 126.

¹⁸⁰ Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 79.

¹⁸¹ On the stabilizing effects of an emergent Islam on other religious traditions compare Stroumsa: “In a world endowed with a great social and religious complexity, the constant interaction and transformation of ideas and persons is the default option, as it were, and permanent fluidity is the essential rule. This is how one should conceive the interface between religious traditions in the Near East, an interface in which Islam was born. One should insist on the flow of religious ideas between communities. The formation of Islam and its early conquests restructured religious communities in the Near East and permitted the stabilization of both religious ideas and boundaries between communities.” Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 149.

possibilities) within the ongoing process that *constitutes the actual entities that might be examined as stable phenomena*.

The stability of contingent contact as an interplay of dynamics and stability is not restricted to the field of religion but is also, in effect, at the intersection of other societal fields. In the case of Sri Lankan medieval kingship, Steve Berkwitz has shown how the dynamic input provided by Buddhist notions of divine kingship, borrowed from the language and notions of Hindu tradition, helped to stabilize both the rule of Sri Lankan kings and Buddhism itself as the reservoir of ideas and notions to interpret and propagate this rule. As Berkwitz put it:

What is abundantly clear, however, is that kingship in medieval Sri Lanka was greatly expanded by the dynamics of cultural interactions and exchanges, creating new images of power and sovereignty to enhance the image of the Sri Lankan king within the larger pan-Indic context in which it operated. Notions of divine kingship and bodhisattva kingship were incorporated and adapted to fit local religious and cultural circumstances. These adaptations contributed to the stability of local expressions of Buddhist kingship by making Sri Lankan rulers comparable, if not superior to, other royal rivals and allies in terms of their fame, power, and virtue.¹⁸²

Thus, the dynamic contact between Buddhist and Hindu traditions, on the one hand, and Buddhist and local traditions adapting Buddhist ideas, on the other hand, had a stabilizing effect, not least by generating new models (model forms) for Buddhist kings' self-reflection.¹⁸³

182 Steve Berkwitz, "Divine Kingship in Medieval Sri Lanka. Dynamics of Traditions of Power and Virtue in South Asia," *Entangled Religions* 8 (2019): 46.

183 "These cultural flows back and forth across the Palk Strait ensured that a variety of Indic strands of kingship were introduced into Sri Lanka. These dynamics of cultural encounters and cultural exchange generated new models for enacting sovereignty through processes that involved both local inflection and trans-local imitation [...]. Ideas and rites associated with Cōla kings, including divine kingship, eulogistic writing, and the *abhiṣeka* consecration, took on new significance in Sri Lanka, transforming what it meant to be a Buddhist king. Interactions with the Pallavas and other kingdoms in South India were also sites for enlarging local notions of kingship and sovereignty in Sri Lanka. Particularly central to these new formulations was the conflation of king and god in the representation of political and moral authority. Sri Lankan Buddhists eagerly adapted notions of divine kingship in an apparent effort to enhance the fame and power of their kings, in manners similar to predominantly Hindu communities in the Indian subcontinent." Berkwitz, "Divine Kingship in Medieval Sri Lanka," 5.

6 Metastability: A General Notion of the Dynamics/ Stability-Relationship

The crystallization of a certain religious worldview, namely a manifest expression of religious insight (*episteme*) in word, artifact, or deed, must also be described as a *dynamic process*. This process is triggered by expressions of interpretation, that are intensifying dynamics, for these are structured and guided by key concepts and their context of indication (*Verweisungszusammenhang*). The coexistence, or rather, the contact of these concepts, thus, may lead to a contest between attractors, namely between the notion and the specific indicational context. This thus provides some insight into the interrelationships of attraction processes, their influence upon each other, and their special dynamics.

To sum up, with regard to the perspective of religious knowledge, the main agents of this process are not human beings but *notions*. What is important about these notions is their indicational or self-transcending capacity, which is their potency in serving as a center of connectability (*Anschließbarkeit*). Thus, the notion provides not only a spatial perspective in its role as a center of attraction at a given point of time but also some *temporal* perspective. It might be conjectured that the more possibilities of indicational connections a notion provides—a lack of defined content but a multiplicity of indicating trials—the more it is likely to become a center of attraction and a promoter of a textual attractor. Given material form, this would be a religious text and its contexts, its commentaries, continuations, and refutations.

Given the basic bipolar structure of any dynamic process, I would additionally like to defend the following claim: the really interesting dynamic process is *not* the genealogical evolution of a phenomenon, be it a material object, a ritual, a word, or a concept. Rather, it is the retentional or retrospective *intensification*, or rather, “densification” of the phenomenon in the course of *self-referential interpretation*, which is caused/triggered and catalyzed—or prefigured—by contact.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Compare Jan Assmann's thoughts on the relation of connectability and canon-building by means of a *realizing retrospection* on a *dynamic potential*: “Wir stoßen hier auf eine typische Struktur: die besondere Anschließbarkeit oder Nachahmbarkeit dessen, was nach neuen und zugleich nachvollziehbaren Regeln konstruiert ist, die Beziehung zwischen Formstrenge und Anschließbarkeit. [...] Erst durch den klassizistischen, imitierenden Rückgriff, durch *mimesis*, *aemulatio*, *imitatio* [...] verwirklicht das kanonische Prinzip seine Funktion einer Form kultureller Erinnerung: als Fluchtpunkt der retrospektiven Orientierungssuche. [...] Kanonisierung ist kein zufälliges Rezeptionsschicksal, sondern die Erfüllung oder Einlösung einer im Werk selbst durch Formstrenge und Regelbildung angelegten Potenz.” Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 108.

The problem with metaphors borrowed from natural sciences is that they only prevail up until a certain point. They can provide perspectives but not self-sufficient models of explanation for the Humanities. This is all the truer for the notions of 'dynamics and stability' when used as guiding metaphors for understanding. Among the notions to avoid are ideas that might be related to the concept of stability in thermodynamics. In thermodynamics, stability signifies some kind of an ending point of a given process, relating the notion of stability to the notion of solidification, or, to use the biological notion, to congealment—which all too easily becomes a euphemism for death. A closed system is directed towards thermodynamic equilibrium, thus making the system stable. This gives rise to the idea that formerly 'living' religion in developing certain stable structures, such as ritual, liturgy, dogma, or canon, has come to the endpoint in a development process. Arguments such as this might well serve as a rhetorical device for interested groups to justify reform within religions, but they are not adequate for the scholarly observer. The thermodynamic description does not describe a realistic evolution but rather suggests that we should consider the subjects of our research as closed systems. As we know, the process of canonization might be described as a contact phenomenon, thus expressing some ongoing inter-relational process of attraction with the stable form of the canon. This is an expression of the process and absolutely cannot be considered as the end of such.

In order to denote stability in the study of religious phenomena, I therefore propose the introduction of yet another notion borrowed from natural sciences that may shed some more light on the processes examined: that of *metastability*. It has the potential to serve as a significant link to illustrate the ever-popular challenge concerning the relationship between object language and metalanguage, flux on the level of the object, and stability on the interpretative level. The notion of 'metastability' denotes a rather precarious state of affairs, likely to transform itself with 'catastrophic'—in the sense of 'revolutionary'—results. This is particularly true with regard to the reflective mind of the observer, who realizes that the process is essentially unstable and, in fact, likely to collapse.

The notion of metastability itself was coined by the founding father of physical chemistry, Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932). Its first introduction, here, bears some decisive reference for its adaption for the description of religious phenomena. In his *Studies on the Formation and Transformation of Solid Objects* (1897), Ostwald used the notion to describe chemical systems that have a limited field of stability and might change under the influence of energy.¹⁸⁵

185 Wilhelm Ostwald, "Studien über die Bildung und Umwandlung fester Körper," *Zeitschrift für physikalische Chemie* XXII (1897).

The notion appears in the context of what later was called Ostwald's Rule (*Ostwaldsche Stufenregel*), namely that a system does not immediately transform itself into the most stable condition, but rather it moves to the least stable possibility first. *When leaving a given state and transforming to another state, the state that is sought out is not the thermodynamically stable one but the state nearest in stability to the original state.* What is interesting about this rule is, that it is not a universal law but rather a *propensity* of natural processes.¹⁸⁶ Accordingly, metastability provides observable stability within fundamentally unstable processes.¹⁸⁷

Religious traditions under the conditions of contact can be described as metastable entities, denoting a precarious state of stability within dynamic processes. The state is reached via reflection. Indeed, somehow, everything is in flux, but certain states of stability are reached in contact situations. Above all the kind of stability reached via meta-language evolving out of object-language in this contact situation, i.e., one tradition realizing itself and the competing other. Metastability is reached elliptically by activation of the mental pole of a physical process via contact.¹⁸⁸ This is the reflective, i.e. *meta-* (one might say *transcending*) stability which produces (religious) meaning and which might at last provide the origin of such 'stable' things as dogma. The ultimate meta-stable sign is not solidity but rather fluidity that respects challenge just as dogma reproduces itself for each new environment. Metastability characterizes the products of contacts that are used for reproduction, thus producing a stability of the chain of interpretation. It is also meta-stable in the sense

186 See Terry Threlfall, "Structural and Thermodynamic Explanations of Ostwald's Rule," *Organic Process Research & Development* 7 (2003).

187 See chapter on Attraction.

188 On the interrelation of the physical and the mental pole in a situation of contact, generating a meta-stable state in the case of architectural artefacts i.e. Japanese Christian church building see Beate Löffler, "Acculturated Otherness. Christian Churches and Wedding Chapels in Modern Japanese Society," *Entangled Religions* 5 (2018): 319–320: "What was introduced to Japan from Western culture in general to church buildings in particular were sets of cultural codes of homogeneous foreignness from the outside and high heterogeneity from the inside. It was a moment in time that allows observing, in retrospect, the interrelation of change and perpetuation in religious contexts. In the Christian sense, tradition was kept by the mission projects themselves and the work of the individual missionaries. Yet the creation of new communities had a strong dynamic element that shifted not only the biographies of individuals as well as the built and social space of neighbourhoods, but the balance of a whole society. Furthermore, it shifted the meaning of the building form 'church.' Löffler concludes by stating: "In the end, the acculturation of Christian church architecture in Japan showcases the inconstancy of complex religious systems in transfer between regions and cultures. This allows for integration and adoptions and shows religious systems as highly adaptable entities" (ibid., 340).

that it now allows scientific description, that is, for a scientific metalanguage that converges with the emerging metalanguage of the contacting traditions. This self-description gives rise to the development of certain paths of behavior, which may be examined as such. As such, stability in the form of the metastability described here fulfills a vital role in the research process.

7 Conclusion: Bipolar Metastability in Contact

A suitable notion of dynamics in the study of religion has to fulfill a double task: it first must do justice to the interplay between dynamism and stability that allows for both religious insight and scholarly research. Dynamics is, therefore, always dynamics *and* stability. However, it also has to include both the physical and the mental pole of religions as it is specific for the religious field that materiality is never without meaning—that is coded by the distinction of transcendence and immanence.¹⁸⁹ Simply relating ‘dynamics’ to change or movement, thus, is insufficient, to be altogether silent about using the notion of dynamics as a mere brand to characterize one’s own (dynamic) enterprise.

The current state of the discussion on the dynamics in history as well as in the study of religion might be replenished with a new conceptualization of the notion of dynamics that takes the Greek origin of the concept into closer consideration. This notion explicitly takes the interplay of dynamics and stability as well as the bipolarity of these processes into account. Based on this notion, I have further suggested the introduction of the concept of metastability to the scholarly description and analysis of dynamics in the history of religions. So far, the reflection on an adequate notion of dynamics in the study of religion has led to the following (provisional) definition: *metastability denotes the intricate stability achieved by the self-reference of a dynamic process that, retrospectively, is guided by its prevailing potential.*

Metastability, thus, serves as the indispensable ground for possible action. The most obvious cases of meta-stability, thus, can be described as the products of an observer i.e., both of the scholarly observer of the history of religious traditions *and* of the object-language observer who is trying to cope conceptually with a given situation of religious contact that triggers self-reflection. It is this meta-stable state as dynamically stabilizing self-recursivity that allows for the possibility of an academic discipline of ‘religious studies’. As such, situations of contact are manifestations of the bipolar dynamics of the history of

189 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

religions. The *bipolar* dynamics of religion and the history of religions are stabilized by the mental pole via self-reference.¹⁹⁰

However, it is still an intricate stability, as it is triggered by contingent challenges. As ever, situations of contact are important instances of such challenges, as situations of contact with other religious traditions play a major, if not decisive, role in giving rise to self-reference and, accordingly, to the emergence of meta-language that allows second-order observation and critique within a religious tradition itself. The process, thus, arrives at a metastable state that provides the observing scholar with concrete phenomena to be examined.

Metastability denotes *reflected stability* as a reaction to the open potentiality (dynamics). Metastability is adapting stability in relation to the dynamics. The interplay of dynamics and stability takes place in relating (oneself) to potentiality.

Inherent possibilities of a prevailing religious tradition, realized as ideal forms, might be characterized as model forms (*Formulare*)¹⁹¹ or schemes, which might communicate with the other in situations of contact, for they convey certain blank spaces as interfaces which may blend schemes and therefore lead to an ‘explosion’ of (new) meaning in both of the contacting horizons of possibilities—or, to put it in Whiteheadian terminology: they prevailingly allow for new contrasts.¹⁹² This process might suitably be expressed as a concrescence of directedness in a contact situation, opening a new, or rather, a different trail of interpretation.

Originally, the idea of meta-stability was introduced by observing a sequence of events in natural sciences. Correspondingly, ideas of paths or reproduction indicate dynamic stability in the course of time. In the religious field, the temporal and recursive expression of dynamic metastability is the idea of *tradition*. Tradition is considered to be a vital element of any religion. The corresponding concept of tradition as used on the level of scholarly metalanguage should be able to refer to these basic functions as a vital element of religions and the way religions relate themselves to history. This shall be addressed in the following chapter.

190 By introducing Mani as the ‘inventor’ of a concept of religion, Jason BeDuhn describes the specific element that Mani used to make the religiod a religion: a *theory of religious plurality*, see Jason BeDuhn, “Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of ‘Religion’ in Third Century Iran,” in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, eds. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley. Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 266, 274.

191 See chapter on Model Forms.

192 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

Tradition

Tradition, Recursivity, and Not Identity

1 Tradition's Recursivity

1.1 *An Uncontested Yet Improper Key Concept*

As a key concept, tradition succeeded in past times and still prevails in most areas of human culture.¹ It is a constitutive element of religion in particular: “A sense of tradition as normative is a basic element in all religious systems, whether or not formal concepts of tradition exist.”² The emphasis on tradition does naturally vary across different religions, although it is never outright irrelevant.³ It is similarly a constitutive element in the field of religious studies, both as a subject and also for methodological reasons. The scholarly aim to contextualize one’s subject finds its diachronic expression in the examination of the tradition the subject is supposedly, and preferably, explicitly located in. The well-established idea⁴ that traditions are not historically given or genuine but rather invented⁵ does not delegitimize tradition in the first place. Rather, it confirms the overall importance of the concept and the need societies

1 An earlier version of this chapter was presented in an internal Käte Hamburger Kolleg workshop on the notion of tradition on June 23, 2014 (Title: Tradition (and Innovation) and Transcendence (and Immanence)—Some structural resemblances).

2 Paul Valliere, “Tradition,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004), 9268.

3 Siegfried Wiedenhofer, “Tradition, Traditionalismus,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland. Band VI: St-Vert*, eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhard Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 613.

4 See, of course, the collected volume from 1983, here quoted in the edition: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and particularly Hobsbawm’s programmatic Introduction: “Inventing Traditions,” *ibid.*, 1–14.

5 Every known religious tradition includes and cultivates invented traditions: “In fact, the trend of inventing ancient historical lineages seems particularly prevalent in the world of religion [...] And whereas Hobsbawm and Ranger point to the eighteenth century as the time when traditions began to be invented on a massive scale, the invention of sacred traditions appears to be a perennial motif in religious history.” Olav Hammer and James R. Lewis, “Introduction,” in *The Invention of Sacred Traditions*, eds. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

have for diachronic self-legitimization and authorization.⁶ In this regard, it is not by chance that the much-maligned notion of ‘religion’ in careful scholarly descriptions is often replaced by that of ‘religious tradition’, or rather ‘Islamic/Buddhist/Shamanic tradition’, or even, to use W. Cantwell Smith’s notion, ‘cumulative tradition’.⁷

As it is proper for a genuine key concept, tradition’s place in the humanities is, however, disputed and often modeled. “Like most anthropological categories, ‘tradition’ is not a proper theoretical concept.”⁸ This is also the case for tradition as a concept used in the study of religion. Starting his ambitious attempt to establish the notion of tradition as the overarching concept for cultural theory, Siegfried Wiedenhofer characterizes tradition as remaining “to this day one of the theoretically least well-explored concepts.” It is employed only in highly specific situations or in pejorative contexts, and thus, the term reflects no less than “the tensions and contradictions in modern thought, generating a contest between no longer reconcilable (dogmatic, rationalist, romantic, positivist, hermeneutic, constructivist) concepts of tradition.”⁹ Nevertheless, the concept of tradition has generated few scholarly disputes on the presence of the notion in religions, unlike concepts such as purity or transcendence, which are highly contested. This is despite the fact that, according to Wiedenhofer,

6 On the invention of Christianity as a matter of religious sense-making see William Arnal, “The Collection and Synthesis of ‘Tradition’ and the Second-Century Invention of Christianity,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011). Also compare the critique on the scientific and political instrumentalisation of the discovery of the invented tradition by the ethnologist Karl-Heinz Kohl: “[...] [D]ie Relativisten unter den Ethnizitätstheoretikern [machen es sich] zu leicht, wenn sie glauben, daß durch den Nachweis der Künstlichkeit und der rezenten historischen Genese ethnischer Gruppen das Problem bereits gelöst sei. Auch wenn sie auf nichts anderem als erfundenen Traditionen beruhen sollten, werden ethnische Gruppen, sobald sie sich erst einmal als solche ausgebildet haben, zu realen Größen, zu geschichtswirksamen Faktoren.” Karl-Heinz Kohl, “Ethnizität und Tradition aus ethnologischer Sicht,” in *Identitäten. Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität* 3, eds. Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Frieze (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), 284. This reminder is also valid for national, and, of course, religious traditions.

7 William Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 156. On the replacement of ‘religion’ with ‘tradition’ see Robert Ford Campany, “On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China),” *History of Religions* 42 (2003), 293.

8 Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication. A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vii.

9 Siegfried Wiedenhofer, “Tradition—History—Memory. Why do we Need a Complex Theory of Tradition,” in *Tradition and Tradition Theories. An International Discussion*, eds. Torsten Larbig and Siegfried Wiedenhofer (Berlin: Lit, 2006), 376–377.

the notion of tradition has been a fundamental concept of Christian theology since the second century onwards.¹⁰ One may question whether tradition is the most basic characteristic of a religion, but not that it is a basic characteristic.¹¹ Neither religious traditions nor the study of religion can do without a notion of tradition.¹² This is remarkable, given the present notioclastic state of the field. There is something there in the idea of tradition, even for the hyper-critical discipline of religious studies.¹³

10 Wiedenhofer, "Tradition—History—Memory," 380.

11 This is even acknowledged nowadays in philosophical contexts that are proud of their critical potential and have, before, considered tradition to be exclusively subject of theology: "Damit ist T[radiation] ein kulturelles Grundphänomen, das, mit Sprache und Schrift gegeben, alle Lebensbereiche, von Sitte, Brauch und Ritual über Lebenserfahrung und Gewohnheitsrecht bis hin zu Lehrüberlieferungen, bestimmt. Als ein zentraler Begriff reüssiert 'T[radiation]' schließlich in fast allen Bereichen menschlicher Kultur, auch wenn Schwerpunkte des Literaturbestandes in den Bereichen des Juristischen, Religiösen und der Literatur liegen. Mit dem Übergang von der schlicht gelebten T[radiation] zur T[radiations]-Kritik bzw. reflektierten T[radiations]-Pflege wird 'T[radiation]'—komplementär zu 'Rezeption'—zum hermeneutischen, philosophischen und wissenschaftlichen Problem in den vielfältigsten Hinsichten und zu einem gängigen Grundbegriff. [...] In besonderer Weise gilt T[radiation] als konstitutives Moment von Religion und entsprechend als Grundbegriff aller religiösen, theologischen und religionsphilosophischen Diskussionen. [...] Indem offenbar T[radiation] im Zuständigkeitsbereich vor allem der Theologie angesiedelt wird, taucht der Begriff in den älteren philosophischen Wörterbüchern nicht und in neueren nur teilweise auf." Volker Steenblock, "Tradition," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 10 St–T, eds. Joachim Ritter und Karlfried Gründer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 1315–1317.

12 In a presentation at the KHK, "The Distinction 'Religion/Tradition'. Material Observations from two different contexts concerning Islam" ([unpublished Paper], 2015), Levent Tezcan, with regard to the current migration and integration debate, has shown that a significant distinction between religion and tradition is made in situations of conflict. This is, above all, when religion is challenged by normative legislation (for example the headscarf debate or the question of forced marriages). To Tezcan, "Many controversies over Islam taking place in public debates in Germany can be summed up in one single statement: 'This is only tradition, not the religion.'" (9) The statement is used both on object language and on metalanguage level. Elements that contrast legal requirements, thus, are described as 'only tradition', having nothing to do with religion proper. "[The] distinction between tradition and religion plays a strategic role in the discourse on [the] 'integration of Muslims'" (12). As it refers to the things transmitted, this distinction, however, does not exclude that religion itself is diachronically structured as a tradition.

13 Even in the current "half-life of its former glory," Grieve and Weiss suggest, "tradition is a fundamental category in the historical and comparative study of religion." Gregory P. Grieve and Richard Weiss, "Illuminating the Half-Life of Tradition. Legitimation, Agency, and Counter-Hegemonies," in *Historicizing 'Tradition' in the Study of Religion*, eds. Steven Engler and Gregory P. Grieve (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2005), 1.

To avoid misunderstandings, here are some preliminary remarks. First, of course, I do not suggest that all traditions are religious as such. However, the particular relationship and indeed affinity of religion and tradition must be explained. Here, the reference to a tradition might be considered a decisive step in the formation of a religion, providing diachronic stability in the face of change. Stability and dynamics here are, of course, closely interrelated, thus providing the basic elements of a tradition.¹⁴ Secondly, in the following, I take my point of departure from a somehow 'emphatic' notion of tradition in the sense of denoting the *process* of something being *handed down within a certain group* of people, which *emerges as a group by this very process*. I am, therefore, not concerned with tradition as a complex, or a history of motifs, or *topoi* (as in the "tradition of angels in Mediterranean cultures"). Neither is my focus on the *traditum* of tradition, the things being handed down, but rather on the process of doing so.¹⁵ Third, to be conscious of one's own tradition, thus, is a certain, and, as I would argue in the following, scientifically relevant stage in the internal process of 'handing down'.¹⁶ Thus, scholars could use the object language conceptualizations of this process as the starting point of metalanguage analysis of religious phenomena.¹⁷

As a key concept in the humanities, among scholars, the notion of tradition is also subject to profound disagreement regarding its concise definition. Even the classical modern authors on the subject, Eisenstadt¹⁸ and Shils,¹⁹ elaborate extensively on the conceptual difficulty of giving a definition of

14 Helmut Zander as well stresses the interplay of dynamics and stability in his notion of tradition: "Vielmehr verstehe ich Tradition als Sonderfall von Transformation; als Prozesse der Weitergabe und gleichzeitigen Transformation historischer Gegenstände, der eine diachrone 'Identität' ermöglicht. Meines Erachtens dokumentiert das religionshistorische Material, dass partielle Stabilität und gleichzeitige Veränderung konstitutive und unabdingbare Bestandteile von Traditionsprozessen sind." Helmut Zander, *'Europäische' Religionsgeschichte. Religiöse Zugehörigkeit durch Entscheidung—Konsequenzen im interkulturellen Vergleich* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 48.

15 Boyer already stressed the fact that the study of tradition cannot start from a conceptual *traditum* in form of a certain worldview: "The actual study of traditions, as complex phenomena of memorization which integrate specific gestures and actions as well as utterances [...] cannot start from the assumption that the expression of underlying theories or conceptions is the principal aspect of traditional actions." Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 108.

16 Compare James Alexander, "A Systematic Theory of Tradition," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (2016), 3. The process of tradition, in fact, requires, self-recursivity as a basic feature, but it may well be unconscious in everyday action.

17 See chapter on Object Language and Metalanguage.

18 S.N. Eisenstadt, *Tradition, Change, and Modernity* (New York: Wiley, 1973), 119f.

19 See the chapter on "The Meaning of 'Tradition'" in Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1983), 12–21.

tradition. Let me, therefore, contribute to this looming difficulty and start by introducing a formal definition of tradition as an object of scholarly study:

Tradition is the scientifically describable expression of the fact that most groups put themselves into a relationship to time. Or, to put it in even more abstract terms: Tradition denotes the process by which a (religious) group temporalizes itself.

Now, as usual, in any attempt of a definition, every single word above may be disputed for a good reason, above all the assertion that relating oneself to time is indeed a 'fact'.²⁰ I do, for example, take the shift away from the nominal meaning of tradition as a body of cultural artifacts and practices to the verbal meaning (passing on and handing down) for granted.²¹ Hence, the former can be considered as the objectivation of the latter. For the moment, I would request clemency in my definitions of the notions used here and for the reader's forbearance. I am interested in the structure of the process indicated here.

However, I would lay some emphasis on the idea that tradition should not be considered as a set of supposedly unchangeable materials but as a process. The decisive fact of tradition is the special relationship of an item, for instance, a pattern of behavior, a belief, or even a material object, to changing times.²² First, as Edward Shils has argued, items of tradition—above all events, practices, and institutions—present or imply patterns or images of actions "[...] requiring, recommending, regulating, permitting, or prohibiting the re-enactment of those patterns."²³ Second, on a more basic level, those practical actions only emerge and are stressed in a context of change i.e., within a process that is, in itself, a necessary and decisive element of the traditional

20 As to the concept of group here I would, according to the findings in the chapter on Attraction claim that groups are not necessarily composed of exclusively human members. Compare also Jörg Rüpke's notion of a group in this context: "Given the critique of many concepts of 'religions,' it is important to stress that being considered a group does not imply an organized association, but simply points to any situational grouping of actors (not only living humans) and includes even 'imagined societies,' to which the individual ascribes him- or herself or from which the contemporary observers distance themselves." Jörg Rüpke, "Religious agency, identity, and communication: reflections on history and theory of religion," *Religion* 45 (2015): 11.

21 See Wiedenhofer, "Tradition—History—Memory," 379.

22 The relation is far from being unambiguous as Boyer with regard to traditional poetry of the Fang has noted: "Now the fact that story-telling has changed in content and relevance does not mean that it is not traditional; conversely, the fact that it is traditional does not imply that it conveys the same representations and has the same effect on successive generations." Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 9.

23 Shils, *Tradition*, 12.

item in question.²⁴ Tradition thus includes “all that a society of a given time possesses,”²⁵ but these possessions are subjects of tradition only with regard to another point of time, either in the present or in the future.

The formal definition given here is intended to illuminate some important structural elements of tradition. The first part of the definition expresses our indelible hope that scholarly metalanguage indeed may have contact with the material it is talking about and, further, that scholarly metalanguage is able to express its findings in a generally acceptable way—that is, with regard to both its objects and the scientific community. Without this claim, no science of any form would be possible. The second part of the sentence, however, comprises at least three major claims that are to be evaluated regarding the material. These claims are the *recursivity*, the *relationality*, and the *temporality* of the notion of tradition as a suitable instrument for the description of (religious) processes and its decisive elements.

1.2 *The Temporality of Tradition*

The *temporal* aspect involved in the concept of tradition should come as little surprise.²⁶ Think of an everyday definition of a notion of tradition. For good reasons, one might argue that tradition denotes the transmission of something from the past to the present (with the prospect of transmitting it to the future as well).²⁷ “Any evocation of tradition marks an attempt to forge a connection

24 On the threatening aspect of change in the form of possible decay and the ‘conservation strategies’ of the cultural construction of time see Aleida Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition. Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer* (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 1999), 18–19.

25 Shils, *Tradition*, 12.

26 Shils, however, critiqued the fact that this aspect of tradition was lost to the social sciences of his time: “Tradition is a dimension of social structure which is lost or hidden by the atemporal conceptions which now prevail in the social sciences. [...] Although there are undoubtedly other reasons, the ‘here and now’ postulate of much of modern science, and, not least, of the more systematic and theoretical social sciences, has led to an oversight. The temporal dimension is obscured by the concept of equilibrium, stressing as it does the immediately present functions of each of the variables in the system.” Shils, *Tradition*, 7.

27 See for example Psalm 78,2–4: *I will utter dark sayings of old; Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.* Continuity, however, is not the most fundamental element of tradition, but is rather primarily established by the basic process of tradition, namely of relating the past to the present and the future. Alexander, “A Systematic Theory of Tradition,” 10. Anyway, the continuity claimed by tradition is another significant marker of tradition’s basic temporality.

with the past.”²⁸ As such, however, the definition is not entirely satisfactory as some further qualification of the process is needed in order to denote the specifics of tradition.

To do so, certain significant metaphors are employed. Some of these can be traced to the etymology of the word ‘tradition’. The very word tradition, originating from Latin, refers to the act of *handing* over, thus introducing the metaphor of *handing* down something.²⁹ Not least, here, the *relational* idea of an interplay seems prevalent in this term, which itself highlights the technical process of transmission. The word ‘tradition’ also contains the notion of ‘gift’ via the verb ‘to give’ (*dare*). The popular metaphor of a ‘chain’ of tradition characterizes the supposed strength of the relationship of the (distinct) parts of the chain, that is, the giver and the recipient—though the metaphor also allows for an alternative interpretation where the chain represents a severe constraint of one’s actions: as being fettered by and chained to an (authoritative) past.³⁰

The explanatory force of these metaphors prevails in scholarly descriptions of the temporality of tradition. According to Simon Bronner, tradition consists of a “[...] temporal process (*traditio*) of handing down valued material, often cast in intergenerational time, and the handy or practical knowledge (*traditum*) associated with this process that exists in the present but was inherited from the past.”³¹ Likewise, the opening lines of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*’s article on tradition refer to etymology: “The word tradition comes from the Latin *traditio* (handing over), which derives from the verb *tradere* (hand over, deliver). Tradition corresponds closely to the Greek *paradosis*, which also

28 Grieve and Weiss, “Illuminating the Half-Life of Tradition,” 3.

29 A classical Chinese equivalent might be 授 shòu: to give, to hand, to hand over. Its earliest graphological definitions are: ‘to transmit from hand to hand’ (from the *Shuowen jiezi*), and, finally: ‘to confer upon’; ‘to deliver over’; ‘to transmit a teaching’; see Grégoire Espeset, “Elementary Notes on ‘Tradition’ in Ancient & Modern Chinese,” (unpublished KHK-Paper, 27 October 2014), 2.

30 The ‘chain’ metaphor is, therefore, different from a possible Chinese metaphor that connects to the past more smoothly: “The binomial used in modern Chinese as an equivalent for the Western word ‘tradition’ is 傳統 chuántǒng. This is actually an ancient compound, which originally denoted continuity in succession (for instance, dynastic). To the word chuán [...] is attached the word 統 tǒng, which originally meant ‘a thread of silk’ or perhaps ‘the tip of a thread,’ then came to evoke ‘succession,’ dynastic or otherwise political or lineage-based; ‘unification’ and ‘to unify’; ‘a principle’; and the verbs ‘to control,’ ‘to govern.’” Espeset, “Elementary Notes on “Tradition,” 2.

31 Simon J. Bronner, *Explaining Traditions. Folk Behavior in Modern Culture* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press 2011), 40 f.

comes from a verb (*paradidomi*) meaning 'hand over'.³² Above all, the terms express interaction and communication between agents in the context of the transmission of something to someone.³³ Even the synchronic process of teaching, thus, implies diachronic processes: in the present situation, a teacher transmits knowledge learned from and learned in the past to a pupil for future use (or, at least, consideration).³⁴ The introduction of the metaphor of the hand as in 'handy' or 'handing' further adds a spatial sense of personal proximity, a closeness that allows touch or, at least, being within immediate view.³⁵ It also suggests something that might be gripped. Something that is given, perhaps as a gift, "involve[s] the personhood of the human being in a much more crucial way," demanding a certain response.³⁶ In general, as Aleida Assmann has pointed out, tradition can be understood as a special form of communication that does not consist of a synchronic mutual exchange of information but

32 Valliere, "Tradition," 9267.

33 Wiedenhofer, "Tradition—History—Memory," 380. See the comparison between Latin *traditio* and Chinese *Zhuan* as provided by Licia Di Giacinto and Christian Frevel, "Tradition," (unpublished KHK Paper, 2015), 13.

34 On the temporality of teaching (with reference to Augustine's *De magistro*) see Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Der Atem des Geistes* (Moers: Brendow, 1990), 105–113. See also Walter Burkert's provisional definition of religion by defining teaching as a vital element of religious traditions: "Man könnte sogar versuchsweise Religion als ein autogenes, sich selbst regenerierendes, seit unendlich langer Zeit fortgeführtes Traditions- und Erziehungssystem betrachten, das von Generation zu Generation Menschen so formt oder verformt, daß sie ihre Formung oder Verformung weitergeben." Walter Burkert, *Kulte des Altertums. Biologische Grundlagen der Religion* (München: Beck, 2009), 44.

35 Compare Adorno's notion of tradition: "Tradition kommt von tradere, weitergeben. Gedacht ist an den Generationszusammenhang, an das, was von Glied zu Glied sich vererbt; wohl auch an handwerklich Überlieferung. Im Bild des Weitergebens wird leibhaftige Nähe, Unmittelbarkeit ausgedrückt, eine Hand soll es von der anderen empfangen. [...] Jene Unmittelbarkeit des Von-Hand-zu-Hand ist in den sprachlichen Ausdrücken für Tradition bloßer Rückstand im gesellschaftlichen Getriebe universaler Vermittlung, in dem der Warencharakter der Dinge herrscht." Theodor W. Adorno, "Über Tradition," in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaftskritik 1* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1997), 310. The idea of the immediacy of tradition, however, is highly questionable, as there is the mediation by itself (self-reference) that plays the decisive role in the concept of tradition.

36 Wiedenhofer, "Tradition—History—Memory," 380. In his article on "Tradition" Wiedenhofer stresses the persistent aspect of the concept of tradition with regard to the process of handing over and the gift (*Gabe*), that even prevails today: "[...] [E]in Fond dieser archaischen Übergabesemantik [ist] als ständiger Hintergrund (bis in die Gegenwart hinein) bewahrt worden: darunter insbesondere der moralische, rechtliche, werthafte und verpflichtende Charakter der übergebenen Gabe." Wiedenhofer, "Tradition, Traditionalismus," 609. On the intricate relationship of gift and heritage see Werle, "Was ist Tradition?," 42.

is rather characterized by vertical (and vectorial) transfer that is qualified by the elements of memory and authority.³⁷ Tradition can also be described as part of the communicative housekeeping of societies, designed to maintain the continuity of a given society's stock of knowledge.³⁸

Both the process of transmission and the things transmitted might be further qualified as a hierarchically interpreted (and, thus, declining) movement from the idealized past to the present, which inevitably cannot live up to the standards of the past. Additionally, the things/matters transmitted have to be meaningful and valued in order for them to be worthy of being handed down. Here, tradition is often associated with the (legal) process of inheritance and the obligatory effects attendant on that process.³⁹ Tradition is both commitment and duty, thereby leading to certain social obligations. A more sophisticated approach, however, might add that this transmission also provides the present with possibilities or—to put it more critically—with certain constraints on future action.⁴⁰ “It is rather the case that an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past

37 See Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition*, 64: “Tradition läßt sich deshalb als ein Sonderfall von Kommunikation auffassen, bei der Nachrichten nicht wechselseitig und horizontal ausgetauscht, sondern vertikal entlang einer Generationenlinie weitergegeben werden. [...] Traditionsmodell [sind] von den Strukturen des Gedächtnisses und der Autorität bestimmt.”

38 See (with reference to Thomas Luckmann) Ilja Srubar, “Tradition als Kommunikationsform,” in eds. Blahoslav Fajmon and Jaroslav Vokoun, *Interdisziplinäre Traditionsforschung. Motive und Dimensionen* (Münster: Lit, 2016), 91.

39 For example see Andreas B. Kilcher’s “Introduction: Constructing Tradition in Western Esotericism,” in *Constructing Tradition. Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, ed. Andreas B. Kilcher (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), ix: “[...] in the construction of their own traditions, both pre-modern and modern esoteric paradigms [...] claim to represent or restore an ancient, primordial wisdom tradition as a kind of ‘secret knowledge’. [...] In this sense, the questions of heritage and tradition, of origin and genealogy are crucial to the foundation of any esoteric knowledge. It defines, and moreover legitimates itself, through its origins, its ancestry, and its means of esoteric transmission.”

40 Dirk Werle additionally hints at some rather disturbing possible elements of tradition regarding the word’s etymology: tradition as surrender and the relationship of tradition and traitor (treason): “Schließlich eröffnen sich innerhalb des Wortfeldes zwei etwas beunruhigende Bedeutungsdimensionen: ‘traditio’ bedeutet auch ‘Auslieferung’; das, was da übergeben wird, ist damit außerhalb der Verfügungsgewalt des oder der Übergebenden. Und jemand, der eine traditio vollzieht, ist ein traditor, das aber bedeutet neben ‘Lehrer’ vor allem auch ‘Verräter’: Man kann auch Dinge ausliefern und übergeben, die eigentlich überhaupt nicht für die Auslieferung und Übergabe bestimmt waren, Tradition kann auch etwas Unrechtmäßiges, Illegitimes sein.” Werle, “Was ist Tradition?,” 38.

has made available to the present.”⁴¹ As such, tradition contributes decisively to the construction of individuals or, rather, acting subjects.⁴²

In any case, as a first step of analysis regarding tradition, one has to examine the basic processes these metaphors are thought to best express. Consequently, it is apparent that the everyday definition always includes all dimensions of time in the concept of tradition. Tradition establishes a *diachronic context*, often connected to an authoritarian narrative. Accordingly, tradition might be characterized as constitutively bearing a diachronic aspect. However, this seemingly harmless general characterization has important consequences. Introducing a diachronic context means introducing a religious/historical version of the ‘myth of the given’, a philosophical, and in fact, anti-phenomenological notion coined by the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars. It denotes the *introduction of objects* as external entities that one must deal with.⁴³ This introduction, however, is not confined to material objects, which are only the most obvious expression of the objectivation process active within a tradition. Moreover, this concept of tradition introduces ‘*the*’ past of ‘*a*’ religion, i.e., ‘*the*’ history of ‘*a*’ religion on which ‘*it*’, tradition, contemplates. Edward Shils has also analyzed the normativeness of the ‘attachment to the given’ in the context of tradition with regard to social patterns.⁴⁴ The attachment to the given, here, becomes most pointed in the role of the teacher who, by transferring ideas, practices, patterns, or customs, fulfills a temporal role by linking the past to the present and, ultimately, to the future.⁴⁵

Accordingly, *tradition is the particular way a religious group objectifies time to a history and can be considered mandatory and binding for all the members of the group*. Tradition as relating to the past, therefore, claims for objectivity.

41 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 2007), 223.

42 See Grieve and Weiss, “Illuminating the Half-Life of Tradition,” 7.

43 See Wilfrid Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” in *Science, Perception and Reality* (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991), 140.

44 “There is more to it than the mere givenness of tradition. Human beings become attached to the given. It becomes to them the ‘natural way’ to do things. Being ‘natural’ is nearly the same as being normative and obligatory, once a pattern is accepted as ‘natural.’” Shils, *Tradition*, 200.

45 “What they first perceived as given became the norm of the conduct of teachers in this relationship to students. From being externally given, the pattern becomes part of the individual’s practice and part of the image of himself as a teacher—half descriptive, half normative. In this way past practices persist while appearing as if their connection with the past, if noticed at all, is entirely secondary to their ‘naturalness’ and their ‘rightness.” (Shils, *Tradition*, 201).

This, in turn, might be the reason for its claims for *authority*; examples include concepts such as eternal recurrence or history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*).⁴⁶ By establishing a particular past, present, and future, a sense of continuity is established, thus objectifying time by opposing it to the mere arbitrariness of events. However, it is also a sense of sense, that is, *sense* that is established and preserved by objectifying time in this way. As such, tradition introduces stability to the dynamic flow of time.⁴⁷ Contemplating tradition's particular temporality and its effects Steven Engler compares tradition to a virus, "reproducing itself by diverting the agency of hoist cells towards its own replication, so that the activity of those cells becomes no more than an echo—a reproduction aimed at nothing beyond further reproduction—of the agency of the virus itself. Idealized tradition is always already 'the given'. The acts that constitute its reception and transmission invoke a pure agency that transparently reproduces the past in the present, ensuring its future reproduction 'as is' (i.e., 'as was' and 'as will be')." ⁴⁸

To modify Santayana: those who remember the past as a tradition condemn themselves to relive it.

As such, the objectification process introduced by the establishment of a tradition is very much in accordance with the needs and theoretical requirements of the scholar of religion. Replacing the concept of religion with 'religious tradition', therefore, does not, at last, follow an empiricist *desideratum*: that there be objects to identify and to use as data. As the example of Smith shows, objective observability here is the key feature of the new notion: "By 'cumulative tradition' I mean the entire mass of *overt objective data* that constitute the historical deposit, as it were, of the past religious life of the community in question: temples, scriptures, theological systems, dance patterns, legal and other social institutions, conventions, moral codes, myths, and so on;

46 Engler has lucidly pointed out that the authorization process connected to tradition also works for the scholar of religion in his main competencies: namely: analysis and comparison: "'Tradition' embodies the alleged continuity that legitimizes claims of authoritative transmission within religions and that justifies the types of analysis and comparison that form the core of the academic study of religion." Steven Engler, "Afterward: Tradition's Legacy," in *Historicizing 'Tradition' in the Study of Religion*, eds. Steven Engler and Gregory P. Grieve (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2005), 358.

47 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

48 Engler, "Afterward: Tradition's Legacy," 373–374.

anything that can be and is transmitted from one person, one generation, to another, and *that an historian can observe*.”⁴⁹

The notion of time involved here needs a little further explanation. Its temporal structure differs from the common understanding of the flux of time that is illustrated by the ‘arrow of time’. This arrow indicates that time is considered to be only one-directional, moving continuously from past to future.⁵⁰ The notion of time, which plays a role in the concept of tradition, rather imagines tradition as a basically recursive process comprising an interplay of retrospective and prospective (projectory and trajectory) aspects.⁵¹ To put it in less abstract terms, the temporal aspect of tradition introduces a process of time that might be described as moving like a boomerang: the past ‘determines’ the possibilities of choices in each present moment so that the present of the past is manifested by future possibilities. It is this notion of time that is the

49 Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 156/7 (my emphasis). As Smith claims in the following, it is possible to make a sweeping claim that by using the notion of cumulative tradition (and the complementary ‘faith’) it is well possible to conceptualize and describe anything that has ever happened in the religious life of mankind (see 157). In Smith’s considerations, however, tradition seems to be prior to faith, as it provides the individual’s faith with the meaning that constitutes faith as such: “A man’s faith is what his tradition means to him. Yet it is, further, what the universe means to him, in the light of that tradition” (159) and “[...] the materials of a cumulative tradition serve each generation as the ground of a transcendent faith that they persist.” (160).

50 As a critique of this idea and a reformulation of the historical dimension involved in the process of modernization and tradition see Eisenstadt, *Tradition, Change, and Modernity*, 358. Aleida Assmann has pointed out that the modernist critique on the notion of tradition as being opposed to the progress of time depends on this rather restricted understanding of time: “Das Wort ‘Tradition’ hat hier keinen Platz, weil jede Bewegung vorwärtsgerichtet ist und deshalb eine ernsthafte Beschäftigung mit der Vergangenheit ausschließt. Um die Vergangenheit braucht man sich in diesem Zeitregime auch nicht zu kümmern, da sie von selbst vergeht. Sie ist keine Ressource, sondern eine Bremse und Verhinderung von Zukunft, Bewegung und Fortschritt.” Aleida Assmann, “Arbeiten am Traditionsbegriff,” in *Tradition und Traditionsverhalten. Literaturwissenschaftliche Zugänge und kulturhistorische Perspektiven*, eds. Philip Reich, Karolin Toledo Flores and Dirk Werle (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2021), 48.

51 See Frevel’s description of traditions: “Tradition stehen in einem permanenten formativen Prozess variierender Reproduktion, retrospektiver Reformation und innovativer Addition. Durch die Selbstausslegung werden Ambivalenzen und Kontroversen diskursiv dynamisiert und so eine produktive, innovative, lebens- und glaubensfördernde Rezeption der Schrift erst ermöglicht.” Christian Frevel, “Vom Pathos zur Patina. Das Neue im Alten Testament und das Innovative der Tradition,” in *Die Theologie und “das Neue.” Perspektiven zum kreativen Zusammenhang von Innovation und Tradition*, eds. Wilhelm Damberg and Matthias Sellmann (Freiburg: Herder, 2015), 49–50.

precondition of the interrelation of time and movement.⁵² Further, this notion of time is to be found in Martin Heidegger's phenomenological thinking.⁵³

A further expression of this process is to be found in the historian, philosopher, and conceptual history matador Reinhart Koselleck's idea of the interplay of the 'space of experience' including the experiences of others and the 'horizon of expectation' (*Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont*) as a suitable heuristic instrument for the discussion of the particularity of historical time. These notions might be usefully employed in the history of religions as well. Koselleck's discussion raises a number of interesting points regarding the inhomogeneity of time, which defies the notion of time as a continuous flux. According to Jonathan Z. Smith, it is precisely the "juxtaposition, the incongruity between the expectation and the actuality, that serves as a vehicle of religious experience. The normal expectation has been suspended, and the unexpected intrudes, relativizing all previous modes of thought."⁵⁴ The inhomogeneity of time results from the *tension* between experience and expectation. On the one hand, expectation retrospectively forms experiences, and on the other, experiences destroy expectations.⁵⁵ In his paper on the internal

52 As Kianoosh Rezania shows, intense reflection on time as the very precondition for movement is to be found in Zoroastrian sources. See Kianoosh Rezania, *Die zoroastrische Zeitvorstellung. Eine Untersuchung über Zeit- und Ewigkeitskonzepte und die Frage des Zurvanismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 114–115: "Wenn angenommen wird, dass nach der zoroastrischen Kosmogonie die Schöpfung am Ende der ersten Periode bzw. am Anfang der zweiten Periode der profanen Zeit in Bewegung gesetzt wurde, stellt sich die Frage, warum in GbD. 1.36 zu Beginn der materiellen Schöpfung von der profanen Zeit gesprochen wird. Meines Erachtens besagt die Stelle, dass die Bewegung Zeit voraussetzt, und daher die profane Zeit geschaffen wurde. Dies bedeutet, dass die profane Zeit die Bewegung erst ermöglicht. Eine potenzielle Bewegung gibt es bereits seit der Erschaffung der profanen Zeit, jedoch realisiert sie sich in der Schöpfung erst am Ende der ersten Periode der profanen Zeit [...]. In der zoroastrischen Kosmogonie ist die profane Zeit nicht mit Bewegung gleichzusetzen. Die profane Zeit steht mit ihr in einem kausalen Verhältnis: Sie ist lediglich die Bedingung der Bewegung und gilt als Bedingung für die Ermöglichung jedes Geschehens. [...] Die begrenzte Zeit ist die Bedingung der Bewegung und die Bewegung manifestiert ihre Begrenztheit. In der zoroastrischen Kosmogonie zeigt sich die profane Zeit in der Schöpfung und deren Bewegung, ihre Begrenz[t]heit ist durch die Gestirnenbewegung wahrzunehmen."

53 For example see Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition*, 2–5. On Heidegger's notion of time see Charles M. Sherover, *Heidegger, Kant and Time* (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1971).

54 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory. Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 301.

55 Reinhart Koselleck, "'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont'—Zwei historische Kategorien," in *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000), 358.

dialectics of tradition, Heiner Roetz emphasizes this aspect by pointing out that the process of transmitting is not a clear-cut enterprise.⁵⁶ The handing down process inevitably includes some frictional losses, for in order to be passed on to the next generation, elements of tradition ‘have to be understood anew and interpreted anew’, not least when external conditions have changed. Thus, the tension described by Koselleck and Roetz constitutes a *temporal difference* in the present that allows the emergence of a normative notion of tradition among a certain group, that is, a norm dictating how things *should* develop in contrast to how they *in fact* develop.

At times, and especially in modern times, the tension gets stronger and is, thus, giving rise to attempts to invent one’s own tradition.⁵⁷ However, as Hobsbawm himself argues, “There is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the ‘invention’ of tradition in this sense,” namely in a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past.⁵⁸ The phenomenon of the invention of traditions occurs more frequently in times of rapid transformation of society, such as in the past two centuries. Hobsbawm’s insight, although it may be used for political ends, is in danger of failing to grasp the basic characteristic of tradition: its temporality. As Martin Beckstein has lucidly put it: “Traditions do not come into being by invention; they require one successful tradition act.” A tradition act is the passing of ‘tradition material’ to a recipient by a ‘tradent’.⁵⁹ So, it is not only invention that is needed, but more importantly, also action is needed. This then means that time is dealt with diachronically. Not least, tradition as

56 Heiner Roetz, “Tradition and Dissent. Some Remarks on the Internal Dialectics of Tradition,” (unpublished KHK-Paper, 2015), 3.

57 Roetz, however, describes certain ancient Chinese critiques of tradition (the ‘invention argument’) correspondingly: “The *invention argument* [...] is formulated in post-classical times in the *Huainanzi* and in Wang Chong’s *Lunheng* [...]. Anticipating Hobsbawm’s ‘invented tradition’ theorem, it states that since ‘the vulgar world esteems the old and despises the present’, those who ‘make teachings’ prefer to put these in the mouth Huang Di and Shen Nong. Wang Chong has ridiculed thoughtless transmitters who simply repeat what they have received from their teachers, without ‘mental creativity’ and unable to decide whether something ‘is or is not’, as ‘Postmen delivering letters.’” Heiner Roetz, “Tradition, Universality, and the Time Paradigm of Zhou Philosophy,” *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (2009), 364–365. On Wang Chong’s critique in more detail see Heiner Roetz, “Tradition, Moderne, Traditionskritik. China in der Diskussion,” in *Kulturelle und religiöse Traditionen. Beiträge zu einer interdisziplinären Traditionstheorie und Traditionsanalyse*, eds. Torsten Larbig and Siegfried Wiedenhofer (Münster: Lit, 2005), 145–146.

58 Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” 4.

59 Martin Beckstein, “The Concept of a Living Tradition,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 20 (2017): 496.

action is something that has to ‘work’ to prevail and persist.⁶⁰ After all, the fact that traditions may be ‘invented’ by someone does not affect tradition’s basic temporal structure as diachronic self-reference. To set aside the question of agency for the moment, the invention of tradition is only the most obvious occasion on which groups or individuals consciously relate themselves to time. As remarked by Rolf Lessnich, the analogous but much less popular in scientific discourse idea of the invention of innovation, or, to put it more sardonically, the invention of invention, is not less a vital expression of the time-relatedness of the complementary concepts of tradition and innovation than the idea of invented traditions.⁶¹

To me, the introduction of the tension of opposing elements and their dynamic interplay, as described here regarding the notion of tradition seems to be a suitable appropriation for the concepts of *relationality* and *contact*. Another author, the sociologist Ulrich Oevermann, described the *Eigenlogik* of social time as an interplay of two basic oppositions that display a certain hierarchy. The first is the opposition of the present, defined as the praxis of life here and now, which can only be experienced in moments of crisis, and the past, defined as the sphere of reconstruction or, rather, the future as the hypothetical generalization of the past. This first opposition of past and present includes the second opposition of past and future, thus making the mere succession of moments a belated operation of ordering.⁶² Considering the relational dialectical structural aspects of social structures in the widest sense, tradition and ‘innovation’ may thus be a good starting point for further research.

The temporality of tradition needs some further explication in relation to the question of *authority*. Here, William Arnal has discerned an important process closely connected to the process of inventing tradition that might be transferred to the temporal process of relating oneself to time as well. This is the process of *laying claim* to something in the past, whether it be artifacts, events, stories, sayings, or so on.⁶³ Laying a claim, thus, provides tradition with emphasis, intensifying its particular meaning. The process of laying a claim,

60 “No tradition could long be sustained if it brought about obvious and widespread misfortunes to those who practice it; a tradition has to ‘work’ if it is to persist. A tradition which repeatedly brings disaster, or which repeatedly turns out to be obviously wrong, will not persist.” Shils, *Tradition*, 203.

61 Compare Rolf Lessnich, “Tradition,” in *The Bonn Handbook of Globality*, eds. L. Kühnhard and T. Mayer (Cham: Springer, 2019), 958.

62 Ulrich Oevermann, “Ein Modell der Struktur von Religiosität. Zugleich ein Strukturmodell von Lebenspraxis und von sozialer Zeit,” in *Biographie und Religion. Zwischen Ritual und Selbstsuche*, ed. Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1995), 55.

63 Arnal, “The Collection and Synthesis of ‘Tradition,’” 201.

however, is reciprocal: once established, the thus claimed past authoritatively claims the present and the future. ‘Remember! Trust! And Obey!’, are the commandments of tradition as a guiding praxis, as Paul Valliere puts it.⁶⁴

Tradition, once established, can claim normative authority because of its age—to put it bluntly, because it is old.⁶⁵ Here, the quality of being old can be related to the mere fact of having survived a long time and, thus, having proven capability. However, it is also related to the idea that things past were better or superior to those things present, for example, in the myth of the Golden Age or the idea of the unspoiled origin of things. This piety towards the past because of its “sheer pastness” engenders the normativity of the pattern of the past.⁶⁶ *Nota bene*: This is not my definition but is also sometimes found on the object language level, such as the idea of a ‘venerable tradition, unchanged and unad-ded’. It goes without saying that such an observation might work in the context of an object language self-description, but that unchanging self-preservation is rather difficult to find in historical data.⁶⁷ Rather, a “[...] religious tradition, is

64 Valliere, “Tradition,” 9268. The complementary commandment to forget should also not be neglected. As Ernest Renan pointed out in 1882, certain groups (communities) stick together through common remembering and common forgetting. Accordingly, Guy Stroumsa has described this interrelation as the most important feature of religious groups relating themselves to time, and of the dynamics in the history of religion: “There exist two major illnesses of religious memory: atrophy, or amnesia, when there is too little of it, and cancer, when it overgrows and leaves no place for forgetting and building of the new. An essential character of religious memory is its elasticity. The elasticity of religious memory in scriptural religions is provided by their system of hermeneutics and by the interaction between the two systems of memory. The constantly changing balance between remembering and forgetting, between the old and the new, is the secret motor of transformation in religious history.” Guy G. Stroumsa, “Religious Memory, between Orality and Writing,” *Memory Studies* 9 (2016): 339.

65 Hubert Cancik, “Tradition,” in Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, Karl Heinz Kohl (eds.), *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe. Band v: Säkularisierung-Zwischenwesen*. Register, pp. 244–251 (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln: Kohlhammer 2001), 248.

66 See Shils, *Tradition*, 206.

67 Even the most seemingly promising candidates for such an unchanging tradition do not prevail if put to the test. In the case of the Pentateuch text, for example, the picture is quite different. The editors of the volume *Changes in Scripture. Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period* summarize the findings of the volume as follows: “What is important for the present volume is the often-assumed link between authoritative status and textual immutability. It has become increasingly clear that maintaining the exact wording of a composition was not regarded as essential. The aforementioned Reworked Pentateuch-texts are a case in point. The evidence we have challenges the ideal of the immutability of sacred and authoritative texts and reveals a reality of texts being changed, revised, and corrected in the course of their compilation and transmission. In some cases the development towards being an authoritative text seems to go hand in hand with the changes. In other words, a text may remain authoritative primarily

the historical construct, in continuous and continuing construction, of those who participate in it.”⁶⁸ Nevertheless, I take this idea of the unaltered permanence of tradition as the *most manifest indication of temporality*. The reverence of old or persistent entities and the reference to them is a clear indication of the constitutive temporal structure of the concept of tradition. There are, however, two other elements that must be taken into consideration, for the mere fact of being old does not fully display authority. The old, to be considered traditional, must also provide a *link*, that is, a relation to an *origin*. The notion of tradition, therefore, does not merely include temporality but also continuity—rendering tradition “as the other of various forms of semantic rupture.”⁶⁹ The reverence of an origin (‘originality’) is somehow related to and consequently still influential on the present. Hence, the implicit notion of origin links the idea of tradition to the religious, for tradition now may be defined as the *relational* bond to the divine origin of the religious tradition in question, showing its relevance (authority) for the individual in a self-reflexive process. This *relationship* could be the very thing that renders tradition religious. It is understood, also, that there may be examples of cases where precisely the opposite may be true. Claims of authority may well originate from contrasting and, thus, challenging the old and establishing something that is considered new. The relationship to time, however, remains untouched.

1.3 *Relationality and Recursivity of Tradition*

This is the temporality of tradition. To me, the two other claims of the formal definition *relationality*, above all, *reflexivity/recursivity*, seem to be of higher structural significance and, therefore, more important when it comes to the relationship between tradition and transcendence, and, ultimately, to the relationship of tradition and religion. The self-evident temporality of tradition is, perhaps, the most significant indicator of tradition’s relationality and recursivity.⁷⁰

because of the changes because then it keeps up with the developments taking place in the society and thereby remains relevant for the community.” Hanne von Weissenberg/Juha Pakkala/Marko Marttila, “Introducing Changes in Scripture,” in: *Changes in Scripture. Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period*, edited by Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala and Marko Marttila, pp. 3–20 (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 2011), 6/7.

68 Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 165.

69 Engler, “Afterward: Tradition’s Legacy,” 357.

70 There is some evidence for an ostensive distinction between notions of time and tradition on object language level, thus relieving the idea of tradition from its predominately temporal association, see the Zoroastrian three eternal creative principles of space (*gāh*),

The temporality of tradition indicates the inclusion of the fourth dimension into the perhaps otherwise three-dimensional religious field. Now, the other two notions highlight the fact that tradition gains its identifying, contrasting, or legitimizing function within the dynamics of religions at the point when *self-reference* occurs in the process. Thus, we can say that all temporal explications of the process of tradition rely on a concept of *recursivity* of the form that

a. some subject (an individual, but primarily and more likely a group) *reflects upon itself* (as being influenced/determined by the past)

and, also

b. that (in a moment of crisis) the past becomes obvious as a *constitutive element of the present and the future*.

Tradition is self-communication, talking to oneself about oneself: first in the sense of communicating oneself via a certain praxis; second in the sense of self-reference, thus in religion through commentaries, exegesis, and critique; and finally, in the sense of communicating the prevailing form of self-reference to others.⁷¹

Therefore, this form of self-reference can be considered to be the fundamental process within tradition, even *before* temporality comes into play. Accordingly, it is not only in times of crisis that traditions have to become (self-)reflexive; rather, it is the very process of tradition.⁷² Now, to put oneself into a *relationship* to this basic process, for example, by introducing a notion of tradition to be affirmed or rejected and, accordingly, as well introducing a relational opposition, indicates the emergence of a second-order reflection *transcending* un-reflected existence—thus, as it is in the case of *formal transcendence*.⁷³

Thus, the formal concept of transcendence comes into play here. The reflective process involved in tradition is closely connected to the grounding transcendence-immanence distinction (TID) as the main promoter of

time (*zamān*), and tradition (*dēn*). See Rezania, *Die zoroastrische Zeitvorstellung*, 134: “Aus dem Blickwinkel der Kosmogonie sind diese drei Days die Schöpfungsdimensionen, die der Schöpfung zugrunde liegen. Aus der Perspektive der Geschöpfe sind sie die schöpferischen Aspekte des Ohrmazd, die sich in der Schöpfung zeigen und durch die die Schöpfung wahrzunehmen ist. Die zoroastrische Kosmogonie kennt nicht nur Raum- und Zeitdimension, sondern auch eine ‘Dimension der Tradition.’”

71 See the threefold reflexivity of the collective memory as described by Jan Assmann (Jan Assmann, “Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität,” in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, eds. Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 15).

72 Compare Siegfried Wiedenhofer, “Zu einer interdisziplinären komplexen Theorie der Tradition,” in eds. Blahoslav Fajmon and Jaroslav Vokoun, *Interdisziplinäre Traditionsforschung. Motive und Dimensionen* (Münster: Lit, 2016), 16.

73 See chapter on the Transcendence Immanence Distinction.

religious processes. The emergence of tradition as a concept is at least structurally equivalent to the emergence of a notion of transcendence as formally indicated in Benjamin Schwartz's formal definition of transcendence: 'to stand back and look beyond'. In his article 'The Age of Transcendence' Schwartz has introduced the notion that, to my mind, proves to be very useful for a better picture of the formal function connected to the notion of tradition. As Schwarz puts it: "The word 'transcendence' is a word heavy with accumulated meanings, some of them very technical in the philosophic sense. What I refer to here is something close to the etymological meaning of the word—a kind of standing back and looking beyond—a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and a new vision of what lies beyond."⁷⁴ Apart from the fact that both the notions of transcendence and tradition are 'heavy with accumulated content', the formal aspects of the notion of transcendence become most obvious and, as such, comparable to a formal determination of the notion of tradition. If 'to stand back and look beyond' means 'to question the actual and come to a new vision' then the *temporal* and, indirectly, the *recursive* structure of the notion of transcendence and thus its close resemblance to the notion of tradition becomes obvious.

Schwartz defines the notion of transcendence formally as a process: *standing back and looking beyond* as *questioning* the actual. Thus, the notion denotes the persistent human capacity to reflect (permanently) on their everyday practice. The possibility of standing back and looking beyond also introduces a potentially critical perspective on these everyday practices in question—permanent self-control.⁷⁵ As a consequence, the formal notion of transcendence implies a second-order observation. Moreover, the second-order observation of oneself establishes an eminent intellectual potential, as Heiner Roetz has put it. This is to say that by transcending oneself, one opens up to a non-exclusive relationship with others.⁷⁶ Contact, therefore, is closely related to self-reference; a self-reference that is, in most cases, manifested not by philosophical reflexivity but rather by tradition.

Though at this stage it is still underdefined, one may, nevertheless, argue that this *formal* notion of transcendence involves an idea of self-conscious

74 Benjamin I. Schwartz, "The Age of Transcendence," *Daedalus* 104 (1975): 3.

75 See for example the 'reflective traditionalism' as a permanent mediation process of closeness and distance to tradition in classic Confucianism in which conservatism and progressiveness are complementary, see Hubert Schleichert and Heiner Roetz, *Klassische chinesische Philosophie. Eine Einführung* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2009), 24.

76 Heiner Roetz, "Der konfuzianische Humanismus und sein Ursprung aus dem Geist der Traditionskritik," in *Menschenbilder in China*, eds. Lena Hennigsen and Heiner Roetz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 45.

reflexivity, which is too intellectually specific to grasp the basic processes of human 'being-in-the-world'. Generally, life conduct in the every day is not characterized by self-reflective or recursive attention to each and every action someone performs. In the same manner, tradition is not conspicuous, pushy, or obstreperous with regard to everyday action. However, the notion of transcendence also has the potential to operate at a more basic level: it may be used to examine phenomena of speaking and acting, of basic cultural expressions on a 'pre-critical' level.⁷⁷ This *basic* notion of transcendence and the relational process implied may be considered as the evolutionary ground from which formal transcendence and, ultimately, *specified* transcendence, transcendence in a 'religious' sense might emerge. As such, the notion refers to 'religioid' material in the sense of Georg Simmel. Religioid material has the potential to become religious material through the course of a recursive process without necessarily actually *having to become* full-fledged religious material. Thus, the vital task is to examine and describe the turning point when religioid material becomes, or rather, might be described as full-fledged religion in a scientifically justified manner. The formal notion of transcendence in the sense of Schwartz may be considered an important intermediate stage in this evolutionary process. Therefore, what can be termed the religioid space must be measured in order to examine religion. Roughly speaking, the evolutionary process comprises three basic steps: basic, formal, and strong transcendence. Accordingly, one might say that three corresponding forms of tradition can be found, namely habit, custom, and specified tradition, possibly as a matter of dogmatic consideration.

The preceding considerations on the formal structure of tradition become relevant for a bottom-up approach. I am basing my argument on the assumption that the introduction of a (formal) notion of transcendence does not only necessarily presuppose the complementary notion of immanence but also a dynamic interplay between the two notions.

Accordingly, the main guiding question is not if there is anything akin to a specified transcendence found in another religious tradition. Rather, scholars should examine how the process guided by the distinction between transcendence and immanence operates. Above all, they have to systematically examine the point when basic transcendence turns into formal transcendence and when formal transcendence turns into strong transcendence. This is the point when *within the self-reflexive process* the assumption emerges that strong transcendence, belief in the influence of a world beyond, is a suitable answer

77 See chapter on the Transcendence Immanence Distinction.

to one's questions. A mutual exclusion between the notions of transcendence and immanence as an extreme case of their interrelation is nothing but a 'late' possibility born of a high level of self-reflection. It cannot be considered as a starting point from which other variants of the distinction emerge.

An example of this is the process of *authorization*, which Christian Frevel introduced to the discussion of the КHK on tradition.⁷⁸ Authorization, which here refers to the authority claims that are advanced in a given source, is basically a process of *self-authorization* active through certain means. These means comprise asserted authorization, such as explicit reference to sources or figures, attributed authorship, reference to certain modes of transmission, allusions to rites and practices handed down from the past, explicit imitation of stylistic features of pre-existent sources, and claims to be part of canonical texts. There is also implicit authorization, for example, generic statements such as 'it has been said' or allusions and implicit quotations of sources and figures.⁷⁹ Authorization might even be performed through the employment of formal aspects of a text, such as preserving a specific language, the shape of scripture, or the specific materiality of a book.⁸⁰ As an 'internal' method of establishing and gaining authority within a given source, authorization indicates self-reference and recursivity. A religious text that quotes a given source or the sayings of an eminent figure at the same time authorizes itself and attributes authority to that source or figure. On the level of a religious group, the external process of the ascription of authority, indicated by the notion of *authoritativeness*, hints at the recursive process as well. Authorization, however, as the *self-reference in the form of a self-empowerment* of texts plays a decisive role in religious dynamics.⁸¹ These processes of self-reference indicate the presence of formal transcendence denoting religioid material.⁸²

78 See Di Giacinto and Frevel, "Tradition," 6–10 (chapter on "Tradition and the authority-interface").

79 On quotations as an act of authorization see Webb Keane, "Religious Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 61. Also compare on quotations as authoritative and authorizing Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 89.

80 See Di Giacinto and Frevel, "Tradition," 8.

81 Compare the self-esotericization of texts in Chinese esoteric literature as observed by Robert Ford Campamy. Here, texts mobilize a number of means to empower and esotericize themselves, not at least by employing "multiple self-narratives and busy metastatements." Robert Ford Campamy, "Secrecy and Display in the Quest for Transcendence in China, ca. 220 BCE–350 CE," *History of Religions* 45 (2006): 297–301, in particular 300.

82 See the processes of self-reference involved in the authorization of the Qur'an: "This movement to increasing awareness, textual self-reflexivity and cumulative self-reference in Muḥammad's proclamations describe fairly an evolution by which the Qur'an was constituted, and gain additional sustenance if one bears in mind that the earliest revelations

The relationship between texts and claims for authority, here, has certain dynamics that connect the key concepts of attraction, tradition, and secrecy in a significant manner. In his study *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Frank Kermode with reference to early Christian material observes the following interplay: "Once a text is credited with high authority it is studied intensely; once it is so studied it acquires mystery or secrecy. The tradition undergoes many transformations, but is continuous; revivals of learning did not destroy but fostered secrecy [...]."⁸³ The attraction of the text as being authoritative, thus, fosters interpretations that require the text to be read as a paradox open proclamation of concealed content. The fact that texts generate commentaries (interpretations) about their concealed content self-enforces the stability of the process of constantly re-establishing self-reference.⁸⁴

Frevel and Di Giacinto describe the process of tradition fittingly as *reconfiguration*: "The key-point through which religions bring into play the innovation factor in their own tradition-discourses is reconfiguration. For whatever godly message or body of knowledge inherited from the past is subject to interpretation, and the interpretative efforts mix elements from the past and from the present. The relation between canon and commentary (or content and interpretation, or canon and exegesis) is paradigmatic in this sense. A commentary interprets a text of the past, but the interpretation absorbs the messages of the present. Even a quotation from an inherited source does not necessarily imply the reiteration of an old argument since the argument made in the quoted text and the point of the quoting source may even contradict each other. This reconfiguration is the trigger of changes since every reconfiguration will bring into play new elements that may even clash with what has been said in the past. A vivid example of this paradoxical process is Confucius' statement 'I transmit and do not create'. The Confucius of the *Analects* presents himself as the inheritor of the sageness of the past (exemplified in the classics). At the same time, he assigns a new meaning to ancient words by finally creating a

displayed no tangible concern with self-authorization and no traces of consistent self-referentiality, while later the Book was to put forth powerful arguments for its own canonical status allied to partial disqualification of earlier scriptures." Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014), 434.

83 Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy. On the Interpretation of the Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

84 On the phenomenon of texts acquiring authority via the existence of commentaries in the case of Ancient China see Licia Di Giacinto, "The Early History of the Confucian Canon, Successes and Failures of the First Closure," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 18 (2010): 141.

new ethical system.”⁸⁵ Tradition, thus, dynamically stabilizes itself by means of generating interpretation and permanent reproduction, that is, through (textually) fertile self-reference within a process of recursivity.⁸⁶

This point brings us back to the form of tradition as a process. Examining tradition and the emergence of the concept of tradition (rather than the notion) bears some epistemological and terminological significance for studying religion. The relationality and reflexivity of tradition introduce processes of self-identification on the object language level (a tradition conceptualizing itself) that might be used as a starting point for metalanguage scholarly identification via general notions. This structural isomorphism of tradition may serve as a *tertium comparationis* for the scholarly study of religion. Here, it is the ‘concepts of recursivity within recursive structures’ as developed by Christian Frevel one has to scrutinize.⁸⁷ The subsequent ‘densification’ of tradition, above all, the process by which tradition becomes a *normative* element of (religious) conduct and, thus, is progressively shaped into a certain (dogmatic, canonical) form, could be used as a comparative device in scientific metalanguage, opening up possibilities for the normative impact of tradition. Accordingly, it is not the content of tradition that might be compared but rather the process indicated by tradition that is likely to bring about comparative results.

However, there is another problem in this notion of tradition that must be tackled. *Tradition is the scientifically describable expression of the fact that a (religious) group relates itself to time. Or: tradition denotes the process by which*

85 Di Giacinto and Frevel, “Tradition,” 11. Compare the corresponding in the Book of Job as described by Christian Frevel: “The book of Job emerges from the ‘intellectual tradition,’ refers to it and develops it further. By reflecting traditions, it modifies traditions and constitutes new traditions. While Job challenges positions of the psalms by his reflections on his experience and empirical knowledge, the book of Job also argues using the Psalter against Job’s positions. Overall, the theology of psalms is not refuted in the book of Job. It is quite the opposite, and more often the psalms form the rhetorical, sapiential and theological foundation of the argumentation in the book of Job. It is neither acceptance nor rejection, rather dialogue and argumentation. Within this discourse, scripture (not only psalms, but torah and prophets too) is incorporated, known by heart as well as in written form.” Christian Frevel, “Telling the Secrets of Wisdom. The Use of Psalm 104 in the Book of Job,” in *Reading Job Intertextually* (Library of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 574), pp. 157–168 (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 167.

86 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

87 See Frevel, “Vom Pathos zur Patina,” 36: “Durch die Fortschreibung, die sich retrospektiv auf vorgegebene Tradition bezieht, diese paradigmatisch verdichtet und durch die literarischen Adaptionsprozesse transformiert und aktualisiert, werden die Prophetenbücher selbst zur Tradition und zum Kommentar der Tradition.” Compare Di Giacinto and Frevel, “Tradition,” 11.

a (religious) group temporalizes itself. The problem is indicated by the admittedly vague expression of *a (religious) group*. When and how does religion come into play? This definition could apply to any group at all, as presently written. Is tradition intrinsically religioid or rather, religion traditional?

The answer lies in the theme of transcendence and the processes related to it. The recursive process is a self-transcending one that can further serve as a 'pathfinder' for the emergence of formal or strong transcendence. To put that into a strong assertion: *recursivity (self-reference) is religioid 'material' per se. Self-reference is the religioid as manifested within tradition.* Self-reference introduces something that might be called the agency of objects—that is, one might argue that self-reference, as indicated by authorization of certain texts, 'inspires' objects to have an agency of their own.⁸⁸ From here, it is merely a small step to conceive of entities that act on their own independently of human action, thereby transcending and defying human powers. The introduction of superhuman entities hence provides a simple indication of a gradual development that occurs in this basic process, which has the 'supertranscendent' as the utmost possibility.

From this stance, recursivity finally introduces or perhaps inspires both gods and churches. The expression 'a (religious) group' in the definition can be understood as formally indicating the social entity which is, in a strong sense, the very result of this process (*auto-poiesis*), despite the fact that in a certain semantic sense, it is also the agent of the process. There is a close relationship between the analytical categories of 'group' and 'tradition'; not least it is the group rather than the institution, for example, that practices a tradition or acts in a traditional way. Tradition is the communicative process by which a group constitutes itself by establishing its specific relationship to things past, comprising certain abilities, habits, norms, narratives, and objects that are in the present considered relevant for the future of the group and its members.⁸⁹

88 Shils correspondingly describes the 'tradition of accumulated interpretation' as a "increasingly self-contained, self-generating tradition." Shils, *Tradition*, 95.

89 In her discussion of Philo's conceptual revolution in linking the written law of Moses and the law of nature, Hindy Najman introduces the useful notion of the 'interpretative community' for this temporal process designating a tradition: "Just as the Pentateuch contains rules but is not reducible to a code of rules, so too the Pentateuch is written but is not reducible to a piece of writing. For it must be read within what we might call an interpretive community. This is a community which inherits and transmits interpretive traditions—what Philo calls the 'traditions of the fathers'—and which is also actively engaged in producing new interpretations. Thus Philo says that Scripture must be read along with the instruction of a priest or elder, and he says that he himself always combines his own ideas with the traditions he has heard. To abstract the Pentateuch from the life of the interpretive community of Israel, one might argue, would run the risk of obscuring

Not least, tradition establishes a diachronic community as a metastable relatedness between its supposed members. The relationship is established by the selection of relevant issues and the emphatic ascription of religious dignity to them, thus making them distinctive for the group.⁹⁰ The selection and the particular emphasis placed upon the issues chosen have a tendency to become codified in institution, ritual, narration, and texture.

This formulation has some consequences for scholarly research. Of late, there have been numerous occasions on which scholars have enthusiastically discovered an ‘invention of tradition’ within their particular field of study. Though often assumed to be an intentionally guided process by certain interests, mostly with regard to the concept of identity, it is, in fact, only the most visible expression of a fundamental social process. Although such work often misses the point in introducing what can be termed a conspiracy theory of tradition-building, the discovery of invented traditions may nevertheless serve as a hint to further important structural features of tradition. For “It is only very rarely that people consciously wish to create traditions and even in these cases they are not likely to succeed.”⁹¹ I argue that, due to its basic recursive structure, the ‘invention of tradition’ does, in fact, happen all the time, thus rendering the concept of inventing a tradition basically trivial. Tradition is not subordinate to invention; rather, tradition and invention are interrelated processes.⁹² To put it in another way, the term ‘invented tradition’ thus is a pleonasm and

the true significance of the Pentateuch. Indeed, part of the motivation for Philo’s authorial productivity may be precisely to make more widely available the interpretive context within which he thinks the Pentateuch should be read, while emphasizing the importance of the Jewish community that provides that context through its interpretive life.” Hindy Najman, *Past Renewals. Interpretative Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 117.

90 Compare Gershom Scholem, “Offenbarung und Tradition als religiöse Kategorien im Judentum,” in *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 95.

91 Karl Raimund Popper, “Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition,” in *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 168. Also compare *ibid.*, 166: “[...] [I]t is one of the striking things about social life that *nothing ever comes off exactly as intended*. [...] there are always certain unwanted consequences of our actions; and usually these unwanted consequences cannot be eliminated. To explain why they cannot be eliminated is the major task of social theory.” Popper’s point here is also relevant as regards the explanation of religious dynamics via an intention-based notion of attraction. See chapter on Attraction.

92 On this point compare Christian Frevel, “Tradition of reform as reform of tradition: some considerations on the relation of religion and reform,” *Acta Theologica* 32 (2021): 174–175, 185.

can therefore be safely removed from scholarly discourse.⁹³ “Indeed, tradition implies recursivity, and recursivity allows reflexivity. Reflexivity, in turn, bears the potential for a critical re-assessment of one’s own body of knowledge [...]. Accordingly, there is no contradiction between tradition and innovation or tradition and criticism.”⁹⁴ The concept of tradition is grossly underrated when it is reduced to being ‘merely’ an invented tradition—or when its unmasking as such is treated as an event in itself.

The paradox of a group being the agent of its own emergence does not, I hope, indicate a logical fallacy but rather hints at the specific reflexive, relational, and retrospective time structure contained within the phenomenon of tradition.⁹⁵ Consideration of such, however, may be helpful in preventing the scholar from engaging in a fruitless search for origins. Instead, they should turn attention to the self-enforcing *retrospective* process in play when examining tradition. Therefore, the scholar may well investigate any claim to authenticity as it emerges in object-language discourse, but to seek authenticity itself is barking up the wrong tree.⁹⁶

1.4 *Tradition and Contact*

In conclusion here, let me first spend a few words on the precarious relationship between philosophy and tradition. Notwithstanding the insistence of Johann Georg Hamann and his pupil Johann Gottlieb Herder on the cultural and even linguistic importance of tradition,⁹⁷ dictionaries of philosophy hold

93 See Engler, “Afterward: Tradition’s Legacy,” 365–366: “In an important sense, all tradition is genuine and all tradition is invented. [...] ‘Genuine’ and ‘invented’ are extremes on a spectrum and, as always, the work of creating, legitimizing, maintaining, negotiating, and altering social relations takes place in the contested middle ground. An overly sharp distinction between the passive reception of a tradition identical to that of the past and the active construction of strategically innovative tradition imposes a naïve conception of intentionality and action, ignoring the complex realities of hegemony and ideology, by which human activity both shapes and is shaped by structural constraints.” The over-emphasis on human intentionality, thus, seems to be permeating the discussion on the key concepts of the study of religion.

94 Di Giacinto and Frevel, “Tradition,” 11.

95 The basic relational aspect of tradition is characterized by Gerschom Scholem as follows: “Die Tradition ist eine der großen Leistungen, in der die Beziehung des menschlichen Lebens auf seine Grundlagen realisiert wird.” As this statement may well be related to a formal characteristic of the process of tradition, Scholem’s following sentence indicates the religiosification of the formal structure: “Sie [the tradition, KMS] ist die lebendige Berührung, in der der Mensch die uralte Wahrheit ergreift und über alle Geschlechter hin in der Zwiesprache des Gebens und Nehmens sich mit ihr verbindet.” Scholem, “Offenbarung und Tradition als religiöse Kategorien im Judentum,” 120.

96 See chapter on Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.

97 See Wiedenhofer, “Tradition, Traditionalismus,” 633–635.

tradition primarily to be a matter of critical debate, not of systematic analysis. In the Age of Enlightenment, tradition was a problem rather than a key concept.⁹⁸ The notion appears in a temporal context that may be described as the problem of progress, that is, the basic opposition between past and future found in its tension that constitutes the present.⁹⁹ Another, more neutral expression would be the idea and the problem of innovation: does tradition allow or even conceptually recognize new elements?¹⁰⁰ Hobbes, in chapter XLVI of the *Leviathan*, examines the *Darknesse from Vain Philosophy and Fabulous Traditions* and criticizes “Traditions which they call the unwritten Word of God” as nothing “but old wives fables,” and most likely to suppress true philosophy.¹⁰¹ Tradition from Bacon and Locke onwards up to Marx is castigated as the main obstacle to future progress, opposing rational or reasonable ways of looking at the world and guiding future action.¹⁰² Tradition, in this regard, is held to be opposed to critique. There are significant correspondences to modern approaches from the religious field, above all in Jewish and Protestant contexts.¹⁰³

98 See Steenblock, “Tradition,” 1318.

99 See Russell T. McCutcheon’s corresponding critique on the use of the ‘rhetoric of traditionalism and progress’ in the study of religion. Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion. The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 177–180.

100 The same opposition of tradition and innovation is found in the description of Greek art by Tonio Hölscher, introducing the opposition between tradition and history via the work of Lysippos: “Das Bewußtsein der eigenen Innovationskraft korrespondiert dem Abbruch direkter Schultradition, der historischen Distanz zu Vorgängern und Vorbildern sowie dem abstract-reflektierenden Verhältnis zur Kunst überhaupt. Die Äußerungen des Lysipp beruht auf der Vergangenheitsform der Geschichte.” Whereas tradition in Greek art is decried as follows: “Kunst erscheint hier als ein Schatz fester Kenntnisse, die man von den kollektiv begriffenen Vorfahren lernen konnte, die also von Generation zu Generation unter dem Schutz der Götter weitergegeben wurden; das muß diachron, und wahrscheinlich auch synchron, eine relativ starke Kohärenz des künstlerischen Bewußtseins bedeuten. Die Aussagen bezeigen die Vergangenheitsform der Tradition.” Tonio Hölscher, “Tradition und Geschichte. Zwei Typen der Vergangenheit am Beispiel der griechischen Kunst,” in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, eds. Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 117, 129.

101 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 473.

102 On the close relation of tradition and segmented societies with regard to the emergence of a religious system see Fritz Stolz, *Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (UTB), 2001), 75.

103 Compare Tillich’s collected volume on the tradition-critical aspect of Protestantism containing interconfessional (Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) contributions: *Protestantismus als Kritik und Gestaltung*, ed. Paul Tillich (Darmstadt: Otto Reichl Verlag, 1929). On an attempt to reconcile tradition and critique in modern Judaism the work of the liberal rabbi Max Wiener see Knut Martin Stünkel, “Judentum als traditionelle

The supposed opposition of tradition and progress has been criticized in philosophy and recent scholarship as a regressive approach to the phenomenon. Adorno, for instance, recognizes the critical attitude towards tradition as the very medium of its preservation.¹⁰⁴ Edward Shils put it this way, “A mistake of great historical significance has been made in modern times in the construction of a doctrine which treated tradition as the detritus of the forward movement of society. It was a distortion of the truth to assert this and to think that mankind could live without tradition and simply in the light of immediately perceived interest or immediately experienced impulse or immediately excogitated reason and the latest stage of scientific knowledge or some combination of them.”¹⁰⁵ For religious studies, this opposition is considered an inadequate approach, for “equating the notion of tradition with (destructive) anti-rationalism and reactionary traditionalism does distort the social, psychological and historical circumstances of social processes of learning.”¹⁰⁶ However, even the critique itself, which is valid in contemporary self-defining attitudes and teachings (‘Be yourself’¹⁰⁷ that is, claiming for an imaginary

Kritik. Der Beitrag Max Wieners zum Bild des Jüdischen im Gespräch der Religionen,” in *Bilder des Jüdischen. Selbst- und Fremdzuschreibungen in 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Juliane Sucker and Lea Wohl von Haselberg. *Europäisch-Jüdische Studien Beiträge* 6 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013).

104 Adorno, “Über Tradition,” 318 (“Das kritische Verhältnis zur Tradition als Medium ihrer Bewahrung [...]”).

105 Shils, *Tradition*, 330. Regarding religious doctrine, Shils even discerns a critique-promoting element in tradition i.e., the need to interpret and comment texts and practices from the past: “The tradition is continuously subjected to rational criticism. Hitherto unsolved problems are discerned and resolved; critics who would reject the tradition of interpretation are confronted by reasoned argument—not always only by that—and refuted. The process of rationalization—clarifying, refining, and making logically consistent—itself modifies the tradition and therewith the meaning of the sacred text itself. The tradition of religious belief, particularly that current among the learned, has of course dogmatic elements but the tradition itself is not rigidly unchanging.” Shils, *Tradition*, 95. Compare also Srubar, *Tradition als Kommunikationsform*, 105. Srubar claims that the knowledge stored by tradition is never only subject to mere reproduction, but always has to deal with new variables, thus changing the tradition.

106 Cancik, “Tradition,” 244.

107 On this popular claim see Kurt Röttgers, *Identität als Ereignis. Zur Neufindung eines Begriffs* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 346: “Es gibt nichts Langweiligeres als der Aufforderung zu folgen: sei du selbst, sei ganz du selbst. Erstens bleibt in einem trivialen Sinne einem Menschen ohnehin nichts anderes übrig, wenn er denn nicht dem Wahnsinn verfallen ist, ein anderer zu sein als er ist. Zweitens aber, und das ist wichtiger: im sozialen Prozess ist diese Aufforderung auf Erstarrung ausgerichtet: laß dich nicht ergreifen, laß dich nicht verführen durch den Anderen, setze dein Eigenes keiner Erfahrung der Fremdheit aus.” The insistence on one’s identity, therefore, may lead to the paradoxical

entity called identity), nevertheless confirms the recursive, relational, and temporal structure of the phenomenon: that something from the past at present prevents, or rather, misdirects future action. The same holds true for the philosophical attempts to defend traditions as necessary elements of human conduct or as a necessary basis for communication with oneself and with others (Herder, Hegel). According to Karl Popper, the “creation of tradition is similar to the creation of scientific theories.”¹⁰⁸ This is meant as praise, and, in a similar praiseworthy manner, traditions function as important intermediaries between persons and institutions.¹⁰⁹

All these considerations given above seem to favor the examination of endogenous factors of the dynamics of religious history—quite in contrast to the KHK’s overall aim to examine exogenous factors as the decisive elements in the history of religions. If one takes the definition for granted, the question of the trigger of this recursive process inevitably arises. The process implies some internal dynamics and push factors to be examined but does not exclude external pull factors influencing tradition-building. It is here that the *contact dimension* might come into play, although this does not preclude the possibility that processes of ‘standing back and looking back’ may occur without a full-scale contact of religious traditions. However, it is very likely that occasions when tradition becomes relevant, conspicuous, or, perhaps, even recalcitrant are induced by outside influences—in the sense that something is experienced that somehow does not conform to everyday expectations and practices. Self-reference via tradition in religion is primarily induced by situations of contact, either with another religious tradition or another field of human conduct (political, economic etc.).¹¹⁰ To Shils, the ‘confrontation with [an] alien religious tradition’ is a major challenge to any tradition, leading to adaptations and refutations that, of course, modify the tradition itself.¹¹¹ As every

result that the very same ‘progressive’ people who criticize tradition as being a device of congealment by emphasizing identity claim for the very same congealment anyway.

108 Popper, “Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition,” 175–176.

109 Popper, “Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition,” 179. Beckstein describes the function of traditions as follows “Traditions are intermediaries [...] that push personnel towards running institutions properly.” (Beckstein, “The concept of a Living Tradition,” 494) Compare also *ibid.*, 504: “The tradition lives on, whereas institutions are born dead. By way of having its material handed down, received, and adapted to changing circumstances, the tradition permanently presses for re-institutionalization; it counteracts the finality proclaimed by legal fixation and thus counteracts political closure.”

110 See Di Giacinto and Frevel, “Tradition,” 9, 12–13.

111 Shils, *Tradition*, 98. Shils lists processes of addition, amalgamation, absorption, and fusion as types of results of the contact of traditions, not excluding the possibility of conflict here held to be compatible with these processes (*ibid.*, 275–280).

major tradition is a “product of the confluence of contributory traditions, not only at its origin but in the course of its history,”¹¹² the situation of contact is the rule than the exception in the formation and persistence of a religious tradition. This opens up another prospect with regard to scholarly methodology: To avoid essentializing when reflecting on the function of tradition within cultures, scholars must stress the situation-related element of tradition. Tradition, therefore, should not be examined in abstract terms but as closely connected to concrete situations of contact.

If the previous considerations are valid, some re-evaluation of the concept of tradition has to take place accordingly. To wit, we can state that if tradition functionally emerges in a situation of contact, it does not prevent *transfer processes* but rather *allows them*. As temporal self-reference triggered by contact, tradition is an entirely dynamic, meta-stable process. Scholarship has previously recognized tradition's seemingly paradoxical adaptability to change in moments of challenge or crisis: “In critical situations, however, when the outward authority or inner coherence of tradition is at stake, religious traditions can demonstrate a vitality that contrasts sharply with their apparent inertia at other times.”¹¹³ This vitality in tradition, however, does not exclude the possibility of essentializing one's tradition in order to prevent transfer. Demarcation via tradition-building, however, is a second-order phenomenon: tradition's primary function is to relate oneself to the other tradition and, therefore an important communicative element in the first place.¹¹⁴

The structural resemblance of tradition/innovation and transcendence/immanence refers to a self-referential process within the dynamics of the history of religion that provides the ‘natural’ starting point for scholarly examination. Additionally, an adequate description of the emergence of a religious field was among the foremost objectives of the KHK research consortium. Given that the metaphor or concept of a ‘religious field’ can be used as a suitable instrument for description, these two notions, tradition and transcendence, both of them grounded in recursivity, indicate in their particular interplay the *temporal* and the *spatial* aspects of the field, that is the space-time (*‘Raumzeit’*)¹¹⁵ of

¹¹² Shils, *Tradition*, 97.

¹¹³ Valliere, “Tradition,” 9278.

¹¹⁴ See the often described fact that the ‘theme’ of contact that is, what is, on object language level, described to be in contact (nationality, class, religion etc.), is a matter of adaption to the situation at hand: “Über Zugehörigkeit und Solidarität entscheidet das jeweilige Gegenüber.” Bernhard Streck, “Die Stiftung von Gruppenidentität als ethnologisches Problem,” *Sociologus* 42 (1992): 101.

¹¹⁵ See chapter on Space.

the religious (*des Religiösen*).¹¹⁶ In order to avoid unhelpful associations and to generalize these notions and their associated structures, I suggest introducing the notion of ‘texture’ here.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the notions and their texture provide immense heuristic potential that can be exploited further. The multidimensional textures of religion can be described as constituted by recursive processes known as tradition and transcendence. However, it is *recursive processes* that are inappropriately referred to in the popular notion of ‘identity’—itself, in fact, a political and ideological slogan.

2 Tradition and Identity

In scholarship, the close relationship between the concepts of tradition and identity is often taken for granted.¹¹⁸ The relationship, however, is likewise often considered one wherein one concept is merely instrumental for the establishment of the second, thus indicating a hierarchy that renders identity preeminent—not only as a subject of study but also on the systematic level. It is claimed that tradition can be defined as a cultural construction of identity that is aimed at permanence, thus giving identity its systematic dignity.¹¹⁹

In the following lines, I would like to question this definition, taking my point of departure from an event in the ongoing work of the КНК. In May 2017, the КНК hosted a workshop on the subject of tradition. Admittedly, it seems quite natural for somebody trained in philosophy to cavil at the basic question of any scholarly enterprise. In general, philosophers do not answer

116 Recursivity introduces a logical binary code, which ‘carries a need for religion on its back’ (see Luhmann, *Religion der Gesellschaft*, 78–79).

117 In correspondence to Frevel’s notion of the biblical texts as a ‘texture of tradition’ in Frevel, “Vom Pathos zur Patina,” 42, compare *ibid.*, 50: “Die Bibel ist mit der Metapher ‘Text’ gut beschrieben, verstanden als textur, als Geflecht, in dem Traditum und Traditio so ineinander verschränkt oder besser verwoben sind, dass Text und Kommentar nicht ein Innen und Außen der Tradition beschreiben. Der hermeneutisch diskursive Prozess der Selbstauslegung ist ein inhärentes Moment von Tradition.”

118 See for example Arnal’s close association of the processes of inventing (Christian) tradition and of building a (Christian) identity. Arnal, “The Collection and Synthesis of ‘Tradition,’” 199. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the joint workshop ‘Self-reflective Traditions’ of CERES (Ruhr-University Bochum) and the Hebrew University Jerusalem (HUJI) on 18 and 19 May 2017, organized by Eviatar Shulman and Carmen Meinert.

119 See Gritt Klinkhammer, “Tradition,” in *Metzler Lexikon Religion. Gegenwart—Alltag—Medien. Band 3: Pragmatismus-Zombie*, eds. Christoph Auffarth, Jutta Bernard, and Hubert Mohr (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 519: “Tradition ist danach eine auf Dauer gestellte kulturelle Konstruktion von Identität.”

the question but question the question. I am most happy to fulfill that very cliché carping on about some notions found in the workshop brief on “Self-reflective Traditions.”

The workshop brief invited presentations to examine the way “we approach our subject matter, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of our own perspectives.” That sentence conveys a strong scientific ethos manifested in two basic claims: on the one hand, the *aim to identify* is a genuine scientific enterprise; on the other hand, *self-control* via the estimation of weaknesses and strengths is an expression of intellectual honesty. Moreover, the brief reflected on the intricate relationships of object language and metalanguage. It assumed ‘tradition’ to be “a valuable concept in order to bridge the gap between the real life of religion and the theoretical account we hope to provide of it.” I agree on this point. Tradition as a metalanguage concept emerging from object language might be a strength if the concept of tradition is properly developed. Nevertheless, the brief continued that the notion additionally may serve as a pathfinder, for it might lead “us toward the questions of religious identity that we intend to be at the heart of our discussion.” If this claim were intended to mean that the idea of (religious) identity is to be questioned, I would gladly follow. If it is intended to answer the question of what identity—in this case, religious identity—is, I am out.

In the following, I would like to develop that thought further. I ultimately conclude that questions of religious identity, and, in fact, the question of religious identity as such, are best answered by abolishing the notion of identity from scientific discourse and leaving it to the political (and, ultimately, polemical) discourse where it truly belongs for the time being.¹²⁰ I am not the first to argue as such; at least in philosophy and sociology, there have been many brave and lamentably unsuccessful attempts to get rid of the notion.¹²¹ As early as 2006, Siniša Malešević unmasked *Identity as Ideology*, the former being a normative strait jacket as today a person is expected and required to have an

120 See Francis Fukuyama, *Identity. Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition* (London: Profile, 2018), 123. Fukuyama’s argument, however, that the notion of identity is to be maintained in discourse because it is too much a part of the way that modern people think about themselves, is for many reasons not convincing, last as thinking about oneself as a slave or a subject (*Untertan*) has very long been part of the way that people thought about themselves as well.

121 Compare Dietmar Kamper, “Die Auflösung der Ich-Identität,” in *Austreibung des Geistes aus den Geisteswissenschaften*, ed. Friedrich Kittler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1980). See also the furious attack on the ‘plastic word’ identity by Lutz Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität. Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2000).

identity.¹²² Earlier still, in their lucid article ‘Beyond Identity’, Brubaker and Cooper argue that “the social sciences and humanities have surrendered to the word ‘identity’” and “that this has both intellectual and political costs,” and “that we can do better.”¹²³

And so we should. Following Brubaker and Cooper, I want to combine my critique of the notion of identity with an alternative suggestion. The notion of *tradition*, in this context, proves to be a more adequate and more promising alternative candidate in explicating the social and religious phenomena the notion of identity is thought to address. Accordingly—in order to be not overly formal or timid—I would suggest reformulating the following sentences of the workshop brief in a less conceptually pretentious way, leaving aside the philosophically overburdened and politically dangerous notion of identity:¹²⁴

Religions have many ways in which they look at and reflect upon themselves, and the process of self-reflection forms an important aspect of those traditions and of the process behind their development. We thus ask how traditions know who they are? How do they define themselves? How do they speak of continuity in face of change, acknowledging themselves [not: their identity] along the way?

So, the focus of attention moves from the chimera of identity to the much more important phenomenon of self-reflection or recursivity, hence from a focus on a fictitious entity to the examination of auto-referential processes. The “sense of religious identity” the brief claims is, therefore, an object language phenomenon but is not a suitable description on the scholarly meta-language level. I do not deny that object-language claims for identity exist in abundance and may be described, but I would strongly deny the need to adopt such claims or the corresponding notion in scientific meta-language.

¹²² Siniša Malešević, *Identity as Ideology. Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 23.

¹²³ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1.

¹²⁴ The original passage of the brief ran as follows: “Religions have many ways in which they look at and reflect upon themselves, and the process of self-reflection forms an important aspect of their identity and of the processes behind their development. We thus ask how traditions know who they are? How do they define themselves? How do they speak of continuity in face of change, acknowledging their identity along the way?”

2.1 *A Concept Lost to Postcolonialist Furor*

In the humanities, and especially in religious studies, postcolonial and deconstructivist approaches have wreaked havoc upon most notions of scholarly metalanguage formerly applied without due caution. Though there have inevitably been cases in which the child has been thrown out with the bathwater (particularly with regard to the concept of religion itself, which is almost habitually banned in religious studies),¹²⁵ leading to absurd and misguided conclusions, this was a necessary enterprise of self-reflection and self-control. There is, however, one notion deeply rooted in 'Western' philosophical tradition that seems to have escaped such attention. This is the notion of identity. Why is it this of all 'evil' Western notions, itself heavily burdened with occidental theological and philosophical encumbrance, that is now so lovingly conserved by those who pride themselves on having unmasked all other apparently innocent analytical tools of scholarly discourse?

The field of religious studies should always take care of employing this notion. According to Hubert Knoblauch, there is an alarming ambiguity to the notion of identity if used as a scientific concept, as it is both the artificial product of a scholarly debate and has also moved into everyday language. This means that the notion has gained public resonance and lost precision. This, in turn influences the scholarly notion, which has become more emphatic and less concise.¹²⁶ Both developments render the notion more difficult to analyze, let alone criticize.

In his seminal study *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor analyzed the emergence and the development of the notion of identity in detail.¹²⁷ By writing a history of modern identity from Homer onwards, Taylor answers the question "[...] of what it is to be a human agent: the sense of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern

125 See for example Timothy Fitzgerald, "A Critique of 'Religion' as a Cross-Cultural Category," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997): 91–110. See the more differentiated approach suggested by Max Deeg, "Religiöse Identität durch Differenz und Ab[g]renzungsdiskurs als indirekte Anerkennung von Gemeinsamkeit: chinesisch-buddhistische Apologetik und ihr 'Religions'begriff," in *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, eds. Peter Schalk, Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, Christoph Kleine, and Astrid von Nahl (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2013), 204–205, 222.

126 See Hubert Knoblauch, "Religion, Identität und Transzendenz," in *Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaft. Vol. 1: Grundlagen und Schlüsselbegriffe*, eds. Friedrich Jaeger and Burkhard Liebsch (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2011), 349.

127 The sources of the concept of identity used in the American academic discourse in psychology and sociology have been examined by Philip Gleason, "Identifying Identity. A Semantic History," *The Journal of American History* 69 (1983), 910–931.

West"¹²⁸ by exploring the conditions within which modern identity arose. Therefore, not only did Western modernity dissolve the firmness of traditional identities, but rather, Western modernity introduced something like 'identities' in the first place.¹²⁹ The conspicuously 'Western' context of the emergence of the notion seems to have somehow escaped the otherwise never-tiring attention of the '*Diskurspolizei*', perhaps courtesy of the political usefulness of the notion.¹³⁰

Admittedly, users of the concept of 'identity' already recognize that it clashes with reality. Most scholars clearly acknowledge the dubious nature of identity, above all in these 'postmodern' times. Plurality, the rapidity of change, and the fragility ('flexibility') of self-images have claimed their due. However, scholarship has reacted to this challenge not by questioning the notion but by introducing further auxiliary notions such as 'patchwork identity', 'plural identity' or the 'facets of identity', or even 'multiple identities'.¹³¹ It seems that the notion is rarely questioned.

Given this fact, one might ask for the pragmatics that maintain the use of the notion in scientific research. What is the *scientific* gain if an individual or a group is claimed to search/maintain/transmit/defend 'their religious identity' instead of simply search/maintain/transmit/defend 'their religion'? A close relationship, even a sense of belonging, seems to be already indicated by the possessive pronoun. Perhaps, if the additional entity is introduced, scholars have to worry less about an adequate description of what is meant by

128 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), ix.

129 See Bernd Estel, "Identität," in eds. Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, and Karl Heinz Kohl, *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe. Band III Gesetz-Kult* (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln: Kohlhammer, 1993), 206–207.

130 Thomas Bedorf, however, reminds the enthusiasts of identity that even in the political sphere the notion is highly questionable: "Die Identitäten, die in den politischen Konflikten im Spiel sind, sind *provisorische Kohärenzen*, die weder vollauf begründbar noch bruchlos darstellbar sind. Daß die Anerkennung einer Identität Gerechtigkeit herstellt, ist eine *produktive Illusion*, die nie ohne Verknennung zu haben ist." Thomas Bedorf, *Verkennende Anerkennung. Über Identität und Politik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), 213.

131 Compare for example Tatjana Schnell, "Religiosität und Identität," in *Multiple religiöse Identität. Aus verschiedenen religiösen Traditionen schöpfen*, eds. R. Bernhardt and P. Schmidt-Leukel (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2008), 163 f. On this stipulation of identity as 'multiple' see Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'identity,'" 1. See also *ibid.*, 30: "And the assignment of individuals to such 'identities' leaves many people—who have experienced the uneven trajectories of ancestry and the variety of innovations and adaptations that constitute culture—caught between a hard identity that doesn't quite fit and a soft rhetoric of hybridity, multiplicity, and fluidity that offers neither understanding nor solace."

the notorious word 'religion'. The modern mind seems more aligned with the notion of identity, and so, that notion can be taken for granted.

The advantage of this wording might be rhetorical, political, or perhaps ideological. In any case, it has no scientific justification if science and scholarship are to generate better knowledge, albeit provisionally. The usage of the word 'identity' at once conveys positive associations regarding the emphatic turn towards what is really one's own, i.e., an implicit apotheosis of authenticity, individuality, and particularity. "Identity grows, in the first place, out of a distinction between one's true inner self and an outer world of social rules and norms that does not adequately recognize that inner self's worth or dignity."¹³² Identity is considered something extremely valuable in times that are interpreted as, for various reasons and by various means, prone to alienating the individual or groups from themselves and thus inflicting a severe loss. In this sense, the notion of identity as a positive social norm also acquires a religious and often distinctly Christian connotation, being related to notions of redemption and salvation.¹³³ As a consequence, this loss is described as a potential cause of severe suffering. Accordingly, this lost treasure of identity must be regained and meticulously protected. It is possible that the structural resemblance between the religious practice of confession and the emphatic turn towards one's political/cultural/ethnic/gender/professional identity seduces scholars into active employment of the notion in their supposedly descriptive scholarly meta-language.¹³⁴

Use of the words 'religious identity' closely associates religion with that which is basic to an entity—hence, as generally understood, its identity. As an 'identity' of this sort, religion is then made essential to the individual in question. If the well-being of the individual or group is the ultimate aim, then religion, of course, would be a part of that. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that those with stakes in religion would gladly adapt a scholarly

132 Fukuyama, *Identity*, 9–10. See also *ibid.*, 25: "Individuals come to believe that they have a true or authentic identity hiding within themselves that is somehow at odds with the role they are assigned by their surrounding society."

133 "[...] Identität muß sein. Im Sprachgebrauch unserer Tage ist sie eine positive soziale Norm, welche die Stillung des Hungers auf Erlösung des Unidentischen der alltäglichen Erfahrung suggeriert. Schon eine Identitätskrise, geschweige denn ein Identitätsverlust sind ein Makel, sie machen Appetit auf mehr Identität." Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität*, 36.

134 See Peter Berghoff, "Identität," in *Metzler Lexikon Religion. Gegenwart—Alltag—Medien. Band 2: Haar—Osho-Bewegung*, eds. Christoph Auffarth, Jutta Bernard, and Hubert Mohr (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 71: "Darüber hinaus ist kollektive Identität zu einer modernen Bekenntnisformel geworden, mit der sich Individuen zu einem Kollektiv—einer Ethnie, Nation oder regionalen, kulturellen oder religiösen Gemeinschaften—bekennen."

notion that promotes religion smoothly and with the moral content of the word 'identity'. The question inevitably arises as to why a scholarly discipline that has taken well-founded issues with essentialist interpretations of its main subject and essentialism, in general, should then employ a notion that conveys an essentialist meaning.¹³⁵

At this point, I would not yet question the value of the notion for political or even ethical purposes. As has been known since 1966, "Identity is the original form of ideology" (*Identität ist die Urform von Ideologie*).¹³⁶ Accordingly, it must be treated as such. But this is not the task of the present study, which deals with the notion as used by scholarly metalanguage. However, as a concept of scholarly metalanguage, the notion is likely to cause misconception and confusion. The search for identity in the humanities and cultural studies has become a search for the Emperor's new clothes and, moreover, it is used to veil political aims.¹³⁷

In a nutshell, the quest for identity is basically a quest to be able to say about oneself whatever one wants to, unhindered by outward influence or force. Given the normative aspect of 'identity' in modern times, Straub's insight, that in principle, a person might talk about anything to denote his or her identity ("Im Prinzip kann eine Person über alles Mögliche sprechen, um ihre Identität inhaltlich zu kennzeichnen.") is, therefore, not a formal description allowing appropriate concretization, but rather the ultimate rationale for introducing the notion as a sense-making device.¹³⁸

If modernity indeed genuinely gives rise to two crucial questions—"Who am I?" and "Who are you?"—, the understandable need to answer these questions in a satisfactory way does not justify the reformulation of the question into "What is my/what is your identity?" The reformulation introduces an additional concept that is, as involved in such an important query, likely to develop a life of its own. It also does not justify the interpretation of the answer to such a question as a declaration of identity.

135 Niethammer argues that postulates of identity are both essentialistic and constructivistic, the essentialist meaning, nevertheless, being the primary one, see Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität*, 43.

136 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in *Negative Dialektik/Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Gesammelte Schriften 6* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1998), 151.

137 See Malešević, *Identity as Ideology*, 3: "[I]dentity has become a powerful ideological device wielded as much by academics as political entrepreneurs, social movements or state institutions. The fact that until very recently identity was almost unquestioned as a categorical apparatus of social analysis, as well as in ordinary life, is itself a good indicator of its omnipotent ideological status."

138 Straub, "Personale und kollektive Identität," 91.

2.2 *The Idea of Identity*

The concept of identity, as used in the humanities today is closely connected to the problem of intercultural, or rather interreligious, hermeneutics *and* the postcolonial and deconstructivist critique of these hermeneutics.¹³⁹ While one-sidedness in the hermeneutical use of concepts has been rightly criticized, the aim to give both sides a voice has triggered questions for identity: mutual understanding is only to be achieved if each partner can definitely/reliably say who they are. It should be evident that these self-reflective processes are only activated if the side in question is challenged or motivated.¹⁴⁰ The supposed need for a concept of identity is a phenomenon resulting from a situation of contact.

Let me start with a preliminary definition: *identity is a mode of thought that allows the neutralization of difference by means of an assertion, which, at the same time, is considered a condition for difference and manifoldness.* The ambiguous nature of the concept, thus, is made obvious, as it contains apparently mutually exclusive aims. Of course, there are ways to reconcile these aims by showing that the concept is employed in situations of conceptual conflict and proposing a solution on a superordinate level. Nevertheless, is the concept of identity really a promising candidate for this kind of task?

One can distinguish three basic concepts of identity. Their interrelatedness is a matter of discussion, although the third and chronologically latest one seems to have gained some preeminence in intellectual history. None of them, however, qualify for a paramount position in humanities research. The first one is an indispensable element of elementary logic but provides no explanatory value with regard to content.

First, in formal logic, there is the principle of identity *principium identitatis*, expressed in the formula $a \leftrightarrow a$, alternatively $a \equiv a$, or $\forall x (x = x)$. As such, the

139 Gleason describes the affinity between Eriksonian identity and primordialist ethnicity accordingly. "The linkage has important implications for the viewpoint of advocacy, for the intimate association thus established between personal identity and ethnic heritage makes plausible the argument that ethnic cultures require some sort of official recognition if the self-esteem of individuals is not to suffer damage. The respect for the dignity of the individual demanded by the democratic ideology is thereby extended to cover ethnic cultures that sustain the sense of personal self-worth." Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 921.

140 "Doch gerade wenn es um ein wechselseitiges Verstehen geht, zeigte sich sehr bald, daß ein Bemühen darum nicht von Erfolg gekrönt sein kann, wenn nicht jeder Gesprächspartner von seiner Seite zu sagen weiß, wer er ist. Es stellt sich die Frage nach der Identität." Hans Waldenfels, "Vorwort," in *Religion und Identität. Im Horizont des Pluralismus*, eds. Werner Gephart und Hans Waldenfels (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), 7.

principle is a prime example of a tautology.¹⁴¹ This has been clearly recognized in the history of philosophy. According to John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (IV, 7, §§ 4, 10 f.) the *principium identitatis* has a certainty, and it is, accordingly, a *principium certitudines* according to rationalist philosopher Christian Wolff. For Locke, however, it is a 'trifling proposition', lacking any intellectual value: it lacks sense. Thus, the principle of identity is "[...] not of use to help men forward in the advancement of sciences, or new discoveries of yet unknown truths."¹⁴² The logical concept of identity simply does not promote scientific progress, which, according to Locke, is the ultimate aim of scientific inquiry.

This is the main problem with any notion of identity in scholarly discourse outside the field of formal logic. Identity is nothing but a tautology. As such, it profits from the formal certainty of logic, but it also suffers from its inevitable defects concerning its content, as Ludwig Wittgenstein unsurpassably has shown in his *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus: Tautologies and contradictions lack sense*, although they are not nonsense (*Tautologie und Kontradiktion sind sinnlos*).¹⁴³ Moreover, as *the propositions of logic are tautologies* (*Die Gesetze der Logik sind Tautologien*), the communicative, explanatory, and explorative value of tautologies is highly questionable. *Therefore, the propositions of logic say nothing* (*They are the analytic propositions*) (*Die Sätze der Logik sagen also nichts. (Sie sind die analytischen Sätze)*).¹⁴⁴ According to Wittgenstein, tautology is the center of all assertions without any substance. Furthermore, in logic, we cannot claim existence, and identity is not a relationship between

141 As usual, Fritz Mauthner is far less polite to the *principium identitatis absolutae* than others, claiming that the tautology $A = A$ is either nonsense or an instrument of deceit: "Und weil er [the assertion $A = A$] so unbedingt gewiß scheint, darum muß auch jede Philosophie gewiß sein, die logisch aus ihm herausgesponnen wird. Wie denn Fichte seine Wissenschaftslehre aus ihm herauszuspinnen versuchte. Nur daß sich nichts aus ihm herausspinnen läßt. Es sind nämlich zwei Fälle dieser identischen Gleichung möglich; in dem einen Falle, in dem der vollständigen Tautologie, ist der Satz wirklich richtig, aber so leer, daß er außerhalb der Logik schon den Verdacht des Blödsinns erregen müßte; in dem anderen Falle, wo auf den beiden Seiten des Gleichheitszeichens nur gleiche Werte stehen, wo zwei Werte gleich genannt werden, weil für das menschliche Interesse ein Unterschied nicht besteht oder nicht nachzuweisen ist, da ist durch Berufung auf $A = A$ dem Betrüge und der Selbsttäuschung Tür und Tor geöffnet." Fritz Mauthner, *Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Neue Beiträge zu einer Philosophie der Sprache, Erster Band A-Intuition* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1980), 1.

142 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding with the Second Treatise of Government* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2014), 588.

143 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Tagebücher 1914–1916. Philosophische Untersuchungen*. Werkausgabe Band 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 43.

144 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 70.

objects.¹⁴⁵ Tautologies are self-sufficient; they provide the conditions for their truth to be *independent of reality*. This independence renders them very useful for ideological means. Their truth is prior to comparison with reality, as they do not say anything but simply show. In employing a notion of identity, the reality-independent *certainly* of a tautology is claimed, a certainty that is as suitable for scholarly self-assurance as it is for political claims of any sort.

In order to convey any meaning, assertions have to be more than analytical. They have to be synthetical ($a = b$), thereby defying the concept of identity. Therefore, it might not come as a surprise that Wittgenstein, in a postcard to Bertrand Russell considered identity to be Satan personified: "Identity is the very Devil!"¹⁴⁶

In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein analyzed the notion more closely, with regard to the motivation of its usage and the structure of its application:

"A thing is identical with itself."—There is no finer example of a useless sentence, which nevertheless is connected with a certain play of the imagination. It is as if in our imagination we put a thing into its own shape and saw that it fitted. We might also say: "Every thing fits into itself."—Or again: "Every thing fits into its own shape." While saying this, one looks at a thing and imagines that there was a space left for it and that now it fits into it exactly.¹⁴⁷

The concept of identity expressed in the useless assertion 'a thing is identical with itself' manifests the invention of a particular and emphatic relationship of the object with itself.¹⁴⁸ The merry 'play of imaginations' (*Spiel der*

145 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 49, 67, 62. See Wittgenstein's 'casual remark' TLP 5.303: "Beiläufig gesprochen. Von *zwei* Dingen zu sagen, sie seien identisch, ist ein Unsinn, und von *Einem* zu sagen, es sei identisch mit sich selbst, sagt gar nichts" (62).

146 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Cambridge Letters. Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, eds. Brian McGuinness and G.H. von Wright (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 41.

147 "Ein Ding ist mit sich selbst identisch."—Es gibt kein schöneres Beispiel eines nutzlosen Satzes, der aber doch mit einem Spiel der Vorstellungen verbunden ist. Es ist, als legten wir das Ding, in der Vorstellung, in seine eigene Form hinein, und sähen, daß es paßt. Wir könnten auch sagen: 'Jedes Ding paßt in sich selbst.'—Oder anders: 'Jedes Ding paßt in seine eigene Form hinein.' Man schaut dabei ein Ding an und stellt sich vor, daß der Raum dafür ausgespart war und es nun genau hineinpaßt." Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 350 (216), translation by Hacker/Schulte.

148 Eike von Savigny comments: "a und b kritisieren, daß mit 'ein Ding ist mit sich selbst identisch' eine Beziehung erfunden wurde. Die Kritik geht also weiter als in PU 215—ein

Vorstellungen) surrounding the concept of identity Wittgenstein speaks about may also be witnessed in the scholarly application of the concept. As such, the notion of identity expresses the intention that the object be given room, or rather, a suitable space in which it may fit without doing harm to its genuine shape. Identity thus expresses a phenomenological desire: to perceive the object genuinely as what it is. Identity is, thus, predominantly an instrument of self-assertion on the part of the examining scholar. It, therefore, fulfills the supreme methodological aim of cultural studies—that the field be non-shaping in its general approach, giving room to the objects of examination to unfold themselves genuinely.

Wittgenstein's thoughts on identity are often mentioned in scholarly literature, but mainly as a curiosity. I think that they should be taken seriously, above all, in the main field in which the notion occurs, the humanities, and particularly in religious studies.¹⁴⁹ I would argue that the basic senselessness and scientific infertility of assertions of identity are things to keep in mind when discussing the heuristic value of the notion in scholarly discourse. Above all, the main problem of the application of the notion of identity is to discern its scientific merit aside from its logical function. This merit can only be achieved by disputable additional assumptions.

The two other basic concepts are genealogically interdependent. The second, thus, is the notion of identity as developed in the process by which critical philosophy became German Idealism, whilst the third is a modern consequence of the second. This second notion is derived by Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, establishing the epistemic use of the notion as signifying the pure consciousness of the recognizing subject, the primordial-synthetic unity of perception (*das reine Bewußtsein der Identität des erkennenden Subjekts, die*

höchstens als einstelliges Prädikat klares Prädikat wird als Spezialfall eines zweistelligen aufgefaßt—: Es gibt nicht einmal ein klares einstelliges Prädikat, sondern nur Vorstellungen, die man sich bei dem Satz macht, der ja die Form einer Aussage über einen Sachverhalt hat. (Das Argument gegen die Existenz der Beziehung ergibt sich aus dem Zusammenhang: 'Identisch mit sich selbst' ist kein lehrbarer Ausdruck, weil jedes Ding in die Beispielreihe gehört.)" Eike von Savigny, *Wittgensteins Philosophische Untersuchungen. Ein Kommentar für Leser. Band 1: Abschnitte 1 bis 315* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1988), 260.

149 Peter Wagner tried to transfer Wittgenstein's skepticism on the notion of identity to the social sciences, obviously with little result given the ongoing popularity of the notion in the field, see Peter Wagner, "Fest-Stellungen. Beobachtungen zur sozialwissenschaftlichen Diskussion über Identität," in *Identitäten, Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität 3*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Friese (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998) 44–45.

"*ursprünglich-synthetische Einheit der Apperzeption*").¹⁵⁰ This idea reaches full bloom in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's philosophy of identity, which was developed in several works authored post-1800. This intellectual development is both the process of something formal (i.e., senseless) becoming meaningful (and regarding the third notion: no sense at some point becoming 'good' sense).¹⁵¹ The philosophy of identity, taking Spinoza's monistic thinking as an example, strives to reach a point of indifference between nature and mind and to reach a unity between subjectivity and objectivity. For Schelling, this is *Vernunft*, reason itself. It describes the implicit appearance of the Unconditional in the individual. In sum, for these thinkers, philosophy is the reconstruction of absolute identity with God that was lost in the Fall. There is a clear theological influence on this notion of identity, notably the Fall of Man and his final redemption. In Schelling's system, absolute identity is defined as the state in which the individual is simultaneously truly itself while mediating the general and the concrete. Thus, the realization of absolute identity is religion.¹⁵² Religion as the prime location identity, therefore, can only be described. It can neither be replaced nor criticized by philosophy. There are some features of the modern emphatic use of the notion of identity which bear a clear resemblance to the above.

In sum, the notion of identity has made a journey from logic to ethics, whereby the certainty of logical assertions is transferred to the moral interpretation of identity statements. The notion of identity resonates with Christian theology, imbuing the notion with a sense of sin and redemption.¹⁵³ As an aside, for Schelling the material parallel of absolute identity is gravity. Thus, the heaviness and the attraction of the notion is understandable: identity is heavy stuff—or a black hole, not only for language but also for any intellectual efforts.¹⁵⁴

In his great study, *Oneself as Another* (*Soi-même comme un autre*) (1990) Paul Ricoeur made a distinction that offers the hope that the notion of identity might be preserved for scholarly discourse.¹⁵⁵ According to him, there are two major meanings of the notion. On one hand, there is logical identity derived

150 On Kant's idea of identity with regard to his practical philosophy see Manfred Sommer, *Identität im Übergang: Kant* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988).

151 On this process as described by Schelling see Alexander Grau, "No Entity without Identity'. Schellings Identitätsbegriff im Lichte analytischen Denkens," *Kant-Studien* 90 (1999).

152 See Patrick Leistner, "Schellings Identitätssystem und die Religion," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 56 (2014): 332.

153 See Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität*, 54.

154 Leistner, "Schellings Identitätssystem und die Religion," 336.

155 See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago/London: Chicago University Press, 1994).

from the Latin *idem*. On the other hand, there is the notion associated with the Latin *ipse*, designating continuity through time but without the assertion of an unchanging core. Ricoeur explicated this notion as narrative identity, a coinage that has gained some intellectual fame.¹⁵⁶ It is also used in examining the notion of tradition, linking the individual to a narrative that extends in time and includes and structures one's past and future as a model form of life-conduct.

Aside from in philosophy proper, identity gained its most devout followers in sociology and psychology, who spearheaded the adaption of the notion into the humanities. The sociological and psychological key concept of 'identity' closely relates to the historical socio-cultural conditions of modernity. The ambiguity and supposed plurality of modernity is a necessary condition for the notion of 'identity' to make analytical sense. To some scholars, it should only be used in this context in order to prevent ethnocentric 'nostrifications' if applied to other contexts in time and space.¹⁵⁷ To Charles Taylor, for instance, Martin Luther's religious motivations did not result from any struggles concerning his identity.¹⁵⁸ The notion gained its preeminence in the psychoanalytical writings of Erik H. Erikson, who relates the introduction of the concepts to personal experiences of crisis. So, even in its introduction, identity is already in crisis: the identity crisis which, according to Erikson, replaced hysteria as the historical signature of the era. Through identity, the individual reassures himself of the continuity and cohesion of his life conduct.¹⁵⁹ When related to continuity and cohesion, identity relates to time in a particular manner as either a later ascription or an ascription in retrospection. In any case, the notion of identity, against the fear of a radical loss, thus gained a normative content.¹⁶⁰

156 See for example MacIntyre's considerations on the role of a narrative in the concept of identity (See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 218). Also compare Assmann's notion of the 'Great Tradition' (such as the Homeric Epics for Greece) as an integrative force of collectives (Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 276). Assmann's notion here already indicates that the notion of identity might suitably be replaced with a confined notion of tradition.

157 Jürgen Straub describes the limited range of the applicability of the notion 'identity' as follows: "Der Identitätsbegriff beruht auf historischen und soziokulturellen Voraussetzungen, die seine Anwendbarkeit und Geltung begründen und zugleich begrenzen. Die verbreitete Universalisierung zumindest des hier interessierenden Identitätsbegriffs ist höchst fragwürdig. Sowenig wie alle Menschen Praktiken der biographischen und historischen Selbstthematisierung im uns geläufigen Sinne kennen, so wenig sollten Identitätsprobleme kurzerhand in den Rang eines anthropologischen Phänomens erhoben werden." Jürgen Straub, "Personale und kollektive Identität. Zur Analyse eines theoretischen Begriffs," in *Identitäten, Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität* 3, eds. Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Friese (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), 89.

158 See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 28.

159 See Straub, "Personale und kollektive Identität," 75, 84.

160 Straub, "Personale und kollektive Identität," 85–86.

Though structurally important, scholars consider identity as something fluid. Modern 'personal' and 'collective' identities are described as non-substantial but intersubjective social phenomena. They are described as a result of social interactions, evolving from the demands of the environment in the form of communication.

Despite the claim that identity is a non-substantial, communicative construction, the notion of identity as employed in both psychology and sociology still proscribes the introduction of an additional entity 'identity' as a basic center for the ascription of meaningful action, integrating (personal) characteristics, (personal) history and (personal) conduct of life.¹⁶¹ As such, the notion provides an arena for the contesting claims of the individual and the group. Moreover, this introduction still draws its motivation from the intention to profit from its logical certainty. Both in social interaction and in observation and description, 'personal identity' makes the individual, and 'collective identity' makes a group addressable (identifiable), not least self-addressable.

2.3 *Identity and Identification*

On a fundamental level, the need for a concept of identity as a reference to oneself arises in a *situation of challenge* in which the way of life of an individual or a group, often of the individual within a certain group, is questioned by the presence or polemical assault of the other. To explain the popularity of the notion in scholarly discourse, however, another aspect of identity must be taken into account.

In 1983, historian Philipp Gleason published a semantic history of the notion of identity in American academic discourse. Gleason traced the notion back to two major sources in psychology and social sciences to produce an explanation of why the concept of identity has been invested with such great intellectual significance and moral seriousness alike, making it one of the "most appealing moral terms of our time."¹⁶² To him, "the word *identity* was ideally adapted to talking about the relationship of the individual to society as the perennial problem presented itself to Americans at midcentury. More specifically, *identity* promised to elucidate a new kind of conceptual linkage between the two elements of the problem, since it was used in reference to, and dealt with the relationship of, the individual personality and the ensemble of social and cultural features that gave different groups their distinctive character."¹⁶³ Accordingly, 'identity' came in handy in particular discursive situations in

¹⁶¹ See Knoblauch, "Religion, Identität und Transzendenz," 349–350.

¹⁶² Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 913.

¹⁶³ Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 926.

promising to connect separate fields of inquiry in order to allow a more unified theory of the social world.

In contemporary discourse in the humanities, the notion of identity continues to display its appealing gravity. The use of the concept of identity is a matter of intellectual fashion (Talcott Parsons).¹⁶⁴ Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Frieze notice an epidemic spread of the word 'identity' in everyday language that increasingly claims attention in cultural sciences.¹⁶⁵ The notion as a "contemporary key concept" seems to display an irresistible attraction not only for intellectuals but also for those of those who consider them scholars in the first place.¹⁶⁶ There are even claims for seniority in dealing with the concept and theme of identity on behalf of a certain religious tradition.¹⁶⁷ The sociologist Konrad Thomas describes the 'magic tint' of the notion in public discourse, where it is straightforwardly 'conjured' as something extremely valuable—above all when it is opposed to imperialistic challenges, be it in the political or tacitly political sense of scholarly attitude towards the objects of research.¹⁶⁸

However, why does this magic tint apply to scholars, too? As Gleason put it, the notion encodes magical promise and names itself the philosopher's stone in promising a better future at a certain time.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, there were other

164 See Estel, "Identität," 194.

165 Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Frieze, "Einleitung," in *Identitäten. Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität* 3, eds. Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Frieze (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), 11.

166 Estel, "Identität," 193.

167 For example, see Michael A. Meyer, *Jüdische Identität in der Moderne* (Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag, 1992), 10, who claims that Jews in the modern world long before sociology and psychoanalysis contemplated the subject of identity.

168 Konrad Thomas, *Zugehörigkeit und Abgrenzung. Über Identitäten* (Bodenheim: Syndikat, 1997), 7.

169 Summarizing the role of the social sciences in the middle of the twentieth century Gleason states: "These developments testify to the belief, widely held by layman as well as by academic intellectuals, that the social sciences could unlock the secrets of the human condition. This belief goes a long way toward explaining why identity caught on so quickly in the 1950s. Although the word had been used in the vernacular sense for a long time, the kind of identity talked about by psychologists and sociologists seemed to refer to something deeper, more mysterious, and more important. It was a matter of universal concern, since everyone had an identity, but to fathom its involvement in harrowing 'searches' and agonizing 'crises' one had to call on the special expertise of the social scientist. The association of the term *identity* with the social sciences thus added to its intellectual cachet, making it part of the conceptual equipment of the approach that offered best hope of solving the problems besetting American society." Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 923.

reasons as well.¹⁷⁰ To put it polemically, the notion allows the scholar, otherwise bound in their ivory tower, to be politically correct. It is not only the desire to be on the correct political side; this tendency has its roots in the scholarly praxis itself. Once again, the connective power of the notion plays a role. The notion of identity promises to establish a strong linkage between the scholar and his object of study, their efforts justified by the object examined itself. Scholars use the concept for the *purpose of identification*. It is in the scholar's intricate relation to the objects of their study that Harrison White's basic assumption, "Identities spring up out of efforts at control in turbulent context," holds true.¹⁷¹ In the turbulent context of contemporary religious studies, the notion of identity is of great help in finding a footing that can bring orientation by identifying the scholar's objects of study. In logic, the *principium identitatis* displays certainty. Nevertheless, the understandable effort to put one's research on solid ground through identification is, in most cases, supplemented with an ethical or political aim that involves the emphatic prosopopoeial notion of identity.¹⁷² It is also used to help the conceptually oppressed to get their share. Concerning the emphasis the notion is employed with, it serves as an occasion of secular epiphany. However, the notion is a Greek gift, and hence, other 'cultures' should have declined this present from Western theology and ideology.¹⁷³

170 See Malešević, *Identity as Ideology*, 31: "The astonishing popularity of the concept comes primarily from the fact that 'identity' has historically and ideologically filled the role that the three other major social concepts have vacated—the concepts of 'race' 'national character' and 'social consciousness'."

171 Harrison C. White, *Identity and Control. How Social Formations Emerge* (Oxford/Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1.

172 On the dependence of the idea of collective identities on the process of identification see Straub, "Personale und kollektive Identität," 102 and Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 132: "Kollektive Identität ist eine Frage der *Identifikation* seitens der beteiligten Individuen. Es gibt sie nicht 'an sich', sondern immer nur in dem Maße, wie sich bestimmte Individuen zu ihr bekennen. Sie ist so stark oder so schwach, wie sie im Denken und Handeln der Gruppenmitglieder lebendig ist und deren Denken und Handeln zu motivieren vermag." The use of words here points again at the Western philosophico-theological origin of the notion: decisional confession expressing belonging leads to a 'living' community.

173 Pleas for caution in the use of the notion have passed almost unheard, such as Gleason's appeal to historians: "The final point to be emphasized is the obvious one that historians need to be very careful in talking about identity and highly critical in assessing the ways others talk about it." However, the examples for the 'legitimate' ways of talking about it Gleason lists in the following basically are suggestions to abolish the notion and to use those that are already there, such as 'name'. So, identity may "[...] mean no more than that a person or group is known by a certain name, but it is also being used in reference to the distinguishing characteristics marking whatever is known by that name or to the ensemble of cultural features that collectively constitutes the larger reality with which a person or group is identified through a certain name." Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 930.

The notion of identity is, without any doubt, politically useful as it refers to an 'entity' that is both absolutely certain *and* extremely difficult to grasp with regard to its concrete content. As a matter of emphatic reference, it stabilizes a community and empowers it against the onslaughts of historical contingency. It has been clearly recognized that any forms of collective identity, and predominantly national identities, have a strong ideological tinge.¹⁷⁴ It should not come as a surprise, then, that the overall motto of Aldous Huxley's dystopian world state is 'Community, Identity, Stability'. Genetic identity herein is the basis for collective identity and, thus, the guarantee for the other two elements. However, the very same thing holds true for cultural, social, and religious 'identities'. Likewise, the scholarly community of today stabilizes the concept of identity within scholarly metalanguage through common agreement on its applicability and functionality.

I argue that the scholarly career of the notion of identity is based upon a confusion between the scientifically justified aim to identify objects and the misguided tendency to treat identification (*Identifizierbarkeit*) as a quality, or even the substance, of the object itself. This quality or substance is called 'identity'. Herein, the objects of study can themselves set the standards of identification via expressing their 'identity'. That is, they answer the question 'Who are you?' by saying who they are. Thus, they perform an act of self-referential identification. And they do so if asked. Therefore, to the joy of the researcher, proper scholarship and political ethics are reconciled if the scholarly need for identification of an object is confirmed by the object itself expressing its 'identity'.

Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* lucidly describes this process of identification. To him, "to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus."¹⁷⁵ The problem of identification, thus, arises in a context of being addressed as something in contrast to something else, taking place in a "space of splitting."¹⁷⁶ The identificatory process of being addressed in a certain space defined by its relation to the other; however, according to Bhabha, does not unveil an 'identity'. Rather, it produces an image (called 'identity') the individual identified is supposed to live up to: "Finally, the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity [...] It is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the

174 See Reinhard Kreckel, "Soziale Integration und nationale Identität," *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 4 (1994): 14.: "Wann immer also einer Nation eine eigene 'Identität' beigemessen werden soll, habe wir es mit einem ideologisierenden Sprachgebrauch zu tun."

175 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), 63.

176 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 63.

subject in assuming the image."¹⁷⁷ In sum, regarding the notion of identity, "We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with the discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics."¹⁷⁸

Thus, identity as a misunderstanding of identification provides the scholar with a sense of *authorization*. Identity authorizes further action, in the case of the scholar, it allows speaking with authority about his objects of study. On the object language level, the notion of identity also allows authoritative speech—speaking about oneself and merging this speech with an ethical imperative.¹⁷⁹

To begin with, there is the expression '*their* or *its* identity'. Given the reflexive nature of identification, the expression 'one's identity' is pleonastic. It is even the case that pleonasticity may be increased, such as in expressions like 'one's *own* identity', or, ultimately, 'one's own *true* identity'. Moreover, it even has the tendency to be hypostasized. 'Identity', at first simply a relational term, has become an entity of its own.¹⁸⁰ This attitude is prosopopoeial, at least, as a new player is introduced into the narrative; the story might even be told in the form of a quest, of being on a search for one's identity. Here, the phenomenon of reification, quite intensely studied in the case of the reification of notions such as race or nation, again emerges, though in this case, it is conspicuously *not* analyzed by the users of the notion. If, furthermore, the final aim of the search is attributed to be one's *true* identity, even elements of a (religious) zeal are introduced that defy challenging questions as the search for truth or the

¹⁷⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 64.

¹⁷⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 71.

¹⁷⁹ Niethammer maliciously points at the close relationship between the use of the notion of identity and the degree of public attention a scholar might expect; an attention that would severely suffer if the notion is reduced to be a mistranslation of identification: "Man stelle sich den Flop vor, wenn jemand versuchte, deutsche, jüdische, weibliche, schwarze oder albanische Identität in eine Frage nach ihrer Identifizierbarkeit oder nach entsprechenden Identifikationspraktiken rückzuübersetzen. Statt einem Rauschen der Medien umgäbe ihn die Stille eines Eremiten." Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität*, 42.

¹⁸⁰ The superfluosness of the notion becomes clear if one considers a typical scholarly assertion like, for example: "Historians of other periods have noted something similar: that even modern groups seeking to define themselves and their identity in the present do so by inventing or laying claim to an ancestral identity which unifies, identifies, and gives them august (or respectable, or congenial) roots." Arnal, "The Collection and Synthesis of 'Tradition,'" 199. One might, therefore well ask, what is really lost by simply leaving out the references to the pseudo-entity of 'identity' ('... seeking to define themselves in the present do so by inventing or laying claim to an ancestry which unifies ...').

search for oneself is one of the holiest tasks of individualization. Moreover, one could argue that the question of one's identity might itself be a product of the history of religions, in this case, the European history of confessionalization, thus giving the concept of identity the tint of a confession.¹⁸¹ The hypertrophy of the notion of identity, for example Goffman's three notions of a social, a personal, and an Ego-identity, might be a sign of the reduplicative power of the notion. Yet it still says no more than at the first time the notion was introduced.

3 Conclusion: Toward Self-Referential Tradition

The confusion of identity and identification, however, might give a hint of a more promising direction of dealing with the process intended to be expressed with these notions.¹⁸² In his 1977 *The Function of Religion* (*Funktion der Religion*), Niklas Luhmann describes the intrinsic relationship between the notions of identification and identity. To Luhmann, any social or psychic system operating in a meaningful way experiences itself as being involved in the process. Only by this reference to itself is the system sensible for its environment. At the same time, self-reference closes the meaningful process through identification by means of a circular process; thus, 'identity' is constituted as the form that is persistent in internal relations. The process of (self-referential) identifying, thus, is prior to the form of identity, the mere expression of the internal relation.¹⁸³

In Luhmann's analysis, there appears to be a relationship between the concepts of *time and identity*. In fact, despite all logical controversies, in the humanities the paramount field where the notion of identity is applied is the phenomenon of change, history, and, ultimately, time. The emerging questions of so-called 'personal identity' are found as a matter of debate quite early in philosophy, with Heraclitus and Thomas Hobbes as the most prominent examples. These two thinkers confirmed the close relationship between 'identity' and change, or rather, of the problem of self-reference and time.

181 See Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft. Gegenstände und Begriffe* (München: Beck, 2003), 145.

182 On this confusion see Hubert Seiwert, "What constitutes the identity of a religion?," in *Identity Issues and World Religions. Selected Proceedings of the 15th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions*, ed. Victor C. Hayes (Sturt Campus: Bedford Park, 1986), 3. While on the one hand, there is no 'historical identity', as there is no real identity at all, there is, on the other hand, quite clearly 'historical identification' on both object-language and metalanguage-level.

183 Niklas Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), 23.

As Heraclitus' assertion famously expresses, one cannot jump into the same river twice. Hobbes' Ship of Theseus, renewed in all its detail over the years, is still the same ship at all times.

If one examines the use of the notion of identity phenomenologically, one might reach the conclusion that the notion is used to establish and signify a point of reference when dealing with the problem of time or change. This self-referential 'point' has the tendency to become an object of emphatic relation ('MY/OUR (true) identity').¹⁸⁴ Especially if the change was experienced as a violent one, performed by outside influence, the possibility of self-reference has to be defended at all costs against the onslaughts of time as a solid core to cling on.¹⁸⁵ As this establishment of a (para-religious) idol was one step too far, the discussion must move one step back to the *process of self-reference*.

Regarding identity, culturalist warnings must be taken seriously. To avoid dealing with unnecessary entities and to prevent applying thoroughly 'Western' concepts to other cultures, one needs a notion, that combines the phenomena of self-reference and change (time). As the process of 'tradition' appears to be a general cultural phenomenon, the notion becomes a suitable and non-oppressive candidate.

Being destructive is a fun thing to do regarding language and notions, at least in the field of the humanities. Constructive work on notions is far less entertaining. However, to only deconstruct without due attention to construction does not contribute to the process of scholarly development. It thus violates the most important rule of reasonable scientific research, at least according to Charles S. Peirce: "Upon this first, and in one sense this sole, rule of reason, that in order to learn you must desire to learn, and in so desiring not be satisfied with what you already incline to think, there follows one corollary which itself deserves to be inscribed upon every wall of the city of philosophy: do not block the way of inquiry."¹⁸⁶

184 Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, thus, fittingly described 'identity' and 'self-realization' (*Selbstverwirklichung*) as quasi-religious metaphors (Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Religion und Modernität. Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 193).

185 This idea was criticized by David Hume: "For when we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable and interrupted objects, our mistake is not confin'd to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions." David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge with an Analytical Index (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 255.

186 Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (8 volumes), Vol. I–VI, eds. Charles Hartshorn and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1931–1935; Vol. VII + VIII, edited by Arthur W. Burks, (Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap, 1958), here *Collected Papers* 1.35.

Let me, then, in the following, give a brief outline of a theory intended to replace the notion of identity in scientific discourse with a functional interpretation of the notion of *tradition*. Brubaker and Cooper are correct in stating that given the range and heterogeneity of the work done by 'identity' in the social sciences and the humanities today "it would be fruitless to look for a single substitute."¹⁸⁷ The basic process of self-recursivity as the core idea of identity could, however, be expressed in the humanities by a single notion. Admittedly, the modern notion of identity is often supposed to be a counter-concept to the constraints implied in tradition—the fact that tradition and its social constraints prevent the individual from being 'really him/herself'. The pursuit of one's identity thus becomes an expression of an emancipatory process. The function of the notion of identity, however, can be expressed more suitably by a functional notion of tradition without having to postulate a superfluous additional entity to be pursued on object language and metalanguage levels. Ultimately, the replacement might serve as an emancipation as well from the political pitfalls contained in the emphatic notion of identity.

As stressed before, the notion of identity is often employed to identify objects and to profit from the authority that has evolved from the logical identity statement.¹⁸⁸ Now, these aims are precisely the ones that led scholars such as W. Cantwell Smith to replace the notion of 'religion' by the notion of '(cumulative) tradition', for it is tradition that provides the scholar with objective historical data that even shape the faith of the individual, and, thus, provides it with religious meaning.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, tradition also fulfills the functions that the notion of 'identity' performs with regard to scholarly methodology. However, this is not the only reason why tradition seems to be a better conceptual choice than identity.

The emphatic obligation related to the notion of identity can also be found in the notion of tradition, as it is etymologically associated with the idea of a gift. As a descriptive tool, the latter notion is more suitable for grasping contexts, in this case the diachronic one. The process expressed by identity is more egocentric or, rather, less dependent on a certain historical and social context.

The main advantage of the concept of tradition is formal. At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced a formal definition of tradition: *tradition is the scientifically describable expression of the manner in which a (religious) group relates*

187 Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'identity,'" 14.

188 Ultimately, it is this authority that grounds the notion of identity sharing the 'aura of cognitive authority surrounding the social sciences' that Gleason discerned, see Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 922.

189 See Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 160.

itself to time. Or, to put it in even more abstract terms: *tradition denotes the process by which a (religious) group temporalizes itself*. If anything, the notion of identity is likewise instrumental regarding its formal aspects. To start, I would suggest examining a reinterpretation of one expression of the *principium identitatis*, i.e., of the formula $a \leftrightarrow a$. The formula contains some heuristic value if one considers the double-arrow as expressing the semiotic idea that *a* points at itself—that, on a very basic level, some kind of self-reference is intended to be expressed.¹⁹⁰ The formula expresses the idea that *a* is referring to *a* as *a*. By means of a (self-)reflection *a* performs a process of formal ‘transcendence’.

Therefore, what is looked for in scholarly contexts are not incidents of ‘identity’ but identifiable moments of self-reflection (formal transcendence). Now, to apply it to the field of the humanities, this basic form of self-reflexivity (‘reaching out and coming back to oneself’) can be related to temporal terms. The concept of the ‘arrow of time’ is of little use here. One rather has to consider a notion of time developed in phenomenology in the 1920s, vividly described as the ‘boomerang’ idea of time.¹⁹¹ By examining future options, human beings come back to themselves in experiencing these options to be constituted by the past. The notion of tradition, therefore, might be used here to express this reflexive process, indicating the holistic and processual nature of what was formally called the individual’s identity. As Jan Assmann has suggested, without knowledge, consciousness, and reflection, there is no identity.¹⁹² The same holds true for tradition. Given these forms of self-reference, tradition is established via formal (self-)transcendence for both the individual and groups.

Accordingly, the real justification for replacing the concept of ‘religion’ with the concept of ‘tradition’ in scholarly metalanguage is not only to prevent the usage of a highly-disputed term while at the same time having to refer to a certain unit of examination. Rather, the concept of tradition, such as in ‘Christian tradition’ or ‘Buddhist tradition’ can be used to indicate the basic process of self-reference intrinsically connected to a religion via processes of formal transcendence. This formal transcendence may later develop into religiously specified transcendence.

190 It is this self-reference or recursivity that, though the philosophical and the socio-psychological notion of ‘identity’ might be considerably different, connects both approaches.

191 See Charles M. Sherover, *Heidegger, Kant and Time* (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1971), 204–205.

192 Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 130.

In his influential considerations on the notion of tradition, the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre fittingly defined a living tradition as “an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”¹⁹³ An argument is not only a conflict, but also rather a discursive struggle based on the validity of arguments. An argument, in this sense, may well achieve the form of a commentary or a response. In any case, discursivity requires formal transcendence of one's own position. So, if challenged, a tradition engaged in a process of self-defense of its values and virtues is a permanent discursive self-reference. As an argument, moreover, it is both self-communication and communicating itself in time and with others. In tradition, an individual or a group is communicating what it is all about. To embody continuities of conflict, therefore, means that tradition continuously works on itself to be communicated as itself.¹⁹⁴

Therefore, tradition does not only relate to the past. To apply an idea of Alfred North Whitehead: the notion of tradition refers to the fact that there is a process of repeated realization (i.e., self-referential identification), leading to a partial reproduction of patterns.¹⁹⁵ This reproduction is qualified by intensification that is expressed in a certain ‘character’ or ‘style’.¹⁹⁶ As a process, change is not something that happens to an identity but an intrinsic characteristic of tradition, allowing us to speak meaningfully about individuals as realization-processes.¹⁹⁷ In the most recent interpretation of identity as an ‘event’ (*Ereignis*) by the philosopher Kurt Röttgers these realization processes are performed via the possible connectabilities of communication.¹⁹⁸

193 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222. Compare Lessnich: “The *traditum* is not passed on according to a simple sender-recipient model, but through a dialogical interaction in which the recipient always responds and makes the necessary changes. Tradition is a border, constantly crossed in both directions.” Lessnich, “Tradition,” 959.

194 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

195 The necessity of understanding identity as a process is repeatedly stressed in literature, see Waldenfels, “Vorwort,” 7 or Kippenberg and von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 145.

196 See Rolf Lachmann, *Ethik und Identität. Der ethische Ansatz in der Prozeßphilosophie A.N. Whiteheads und seine Bedeutung für die gegenwärtige Ethik* (Freiburg/München: Alber, 1994), 149.

197 Compare Manfred Sommer's transitional interpretation of the notion ‘Identität’ with regard to Kant's philosophy “Identität im Übergang ist Selbsterhaltung im Lebensvollzug,” Sommer, *Identität im Übergang*, 9.

198 Röttgers, *Identität als Ereignis*, 340. Also compare Reinhard Schulze's notion of tradition as conventionalizing ascriptions of meaning by rules of usage, the latter being the possible subject of occasional change: “Traditionen, verstanden als spontane Ordnungen, beruhen damit auf Einzelhandlungen der Individuen als ungewollte und ungeplante Struktur. [...]”

This idea includes individuals as well as groups or societies. At the same time, as Luhmann has suggested, the temporal reflexivity expressed by tradition as self-reference allows communication with the environment, perhaps modifying the available choices for action. Tradition, therefore, is to be interpreted as a self-reflective interface between an autoreferential system and environment, and as a flexible tool to deal with internal and external challenges. “[T]he ways of thinking and acting that constitute the material of a tradition must [...] stand in a relation of equivalence—not identity or similarity.”¹⁹⁹ And here, the *contact dimension* comes into play: self-reference, as expressed by tradition, cannot do without reference to others.²⁰⁰ Firstly, as a trigger to incite the process of self-reference, and, then, secondly as a matter of demarcation and differentiation in which self-reference transcends, or put alternatively, objectifies itself. The result of the temporal objectification process is the tradition in question.

The notion of tradition as referencing to others and continuously transcending itself provides a better picture than the rigid reference to oneself as a fundamental core of one's own as expressed in the notion of identity—or at least, a less ideologically implicated one. Traditions, as they deal with temporal contingency are more likely to cultivate a tradition of self-critique than ‘identities’ that are more likely to develop an idea of self-affirmation or self-apotheosis.²⁰¹

Die spontane Ordnung, die als Tradition konventionalisiert wird, unterliegt also einem konstanten Wandel, der durch die unkoordinierte Anwendung von Gebrauchsregeln erfolgt. Trademe ändern sich durch die Interaktion von konventionalisierten Regelgebräuchen und unkoordinierten Regelbrüchen.” Reinhard Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam* (Basel: Schwabe, 2015), 175.

199 Beckstein, “The Concept of a Living Tradition,” 491.

200 See Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 604: “Reine Selbstreferenz im Sinne eines ‘nur und ausschließlich auf sich Beziehens’ ist unmöglich.” The interface function is described as follows: “Durch Selbstreferenz wird rekursive, zirkelhafte Geschlossenheit hergestellt. Aber Geschlossenheit dient nicht als Selbstzweck, auch nicht als alleiniger Erhaltungsmechanismus oder als Sicherheitsprinzip. Sie ist vielmehr Bedingung der Möglichkeit für Offenheit. Alle Offenheit stützt sich auf Geschlossenheit, und dies ist nur möglich, weil selbstreferentielle Operationen nicht den Gesamtsinn absorbieren, nicht totalisierend wirken, sondern nur mitlaufen; weil sie nicht abschließen, nicht zu Ende führen, nicht das telos erfüllen, sondern gerade öffnen” (ibid., 606). Accordingly, the ‘self’ of the ‘self-reference’ is not to be considered as the totality of a closed system as in ‘pure’ logical identity, but rather the process of unfolding this self-reference into a meaningful communicative system (i.e., a process that objectifies the self as an irreplaceable self in the first place).

201 On the Confucian tradition of a post-conventional consciousness that is a tradition of tradition-critique see Heiner Roetz, “Tradition, Moderne, Traditionskritik,” 135. To a

Reflections on the notion of identity may indeed allow identification of one's weaknesses, as the inviting paper of the 2017 conference of the KHK suggested. To my mind, this weakness is the eagerness to identify in a legitimate and non-oppressive way. This is done by asking the objects of study for their identity, thus establishing an emphatic relation not only to the subject of study but also to the proposed subject towards itself. However, identity and scholarly identification are not the same thing. As argued above, identity is an unsuitable analytical concept—although it does serve the interests of political discussion. Consequently, the notion of identity must be treated with Occam's razor. Hence, the notion of tradition might be applied to provide a more adequate picture of the dynamics in the history of religion.

certain degree, Roetz' concluding remark ("Jedes Bemühen um 'kulturelle Identität' und Treue zum Herkommen, das diesen nicht-traditionalen Aspekt der eigenen Tradition nicht in Rechnung stellt, würde unterbieten, ja gefährden, was es zu bewahren vorgibt." (ibid., 158)) also holds true for other traditions, but also on metalanguage level as the scholar is no longer forced to foster the impression of traditions having and at the same time having to defend an invariable core of themselves.

The Transcendence/Immanence Distinction

Religion as Contrast

1 Introduction

As recursivity is a vital element of tradition processes that are a necessary element of religion, the formally transcending process connected to it should become the subject of further conceptual scrutiny.¹ This leads to a discussion of the decisive code of religious communication, the distinction of transcendence and immanence (TID) that already played a role in the discussion on the key concept of tradition.

There are many reasons why transcendence has a bad name in the field of cultural and religious studies. For some, the notion seems an epitome of 'Westernness', thus rendering it completely unsuitable for purposes of description, analysis, explanation, and comparison of non-European or non-Christian religions.² To argue for a notion of transcendence as a key concept of the study of the dynamics of religions might, therefore seem challenging. The heuristic potential of the notion, however, seems to me unnecessarily wasted if the notion thus disappears entirely from the scholarly discourse on religious phenomena and the history of religions, even though the critique of it has been well-founded in places.

1 A first version of this chapter was elaborated over the course of a working group of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction (Licia Di Giacinto, Tim Karis, Volkhard Krech, Knut Martin Stünkel) in 2016. During the academic year 2016/2017 with the overarching topic of the TID, parts of the paper were presented repeatedly in the meetings and workshops of the KHK.

2 See William Franke's concise analysis in the preface to his volume on *Transcendence, Immanence, and Intercultural Philosophy*: "'Transcendence' is one of those words like 'God,' or perhaps even 'love' or 'freedom,' that divide us into believers and nonbelievers. For some, it alludes to what underwrites the significance of all our discourses and lends certain of them an especially high degree of meaningfulness. For others, it infects discourse generically and undermines its validity and ability even to make sense, at least in cases where belief in transcendence takes priority and is given prominence. It is remarkable how the most decisive but intractable debates in virtually all fields of study typically can be understood as versions of this divide, which tends to fissure fundamental approaches to knowing in almost any domain." William Franke, "Preface," in *Transcendence, Immanence, and Intercultural Philosophy*, eds. Nahum Brown and William Franke (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), IX.

In my view, the scholarly discussion of the concept of transcendence within the study of religion suffers from a major misunderstanding: scholars fail to account for the manifold gradual distinctions of the concept. Consequently, there is a kind of topological uncertainty as to which level of abstraction which concept is to be employed most adequately.³ The notions of transcendence and immanence that are commonly employed operate on both abstract and concrete levels of description. A notion of transcendence might be considered too abstract if it rests on ontological or metaphysical ideas, such as the distinction between 'Here' (Diesseits) and 'Hereafter' (Beyond, Jenseits). It is similarly too concrete if it is associated solely with the idea of a 'transcendent' God as to be found in the Christian tradition. Both notions generate methodical problems with regard to their applicability: one may criticize both its universal validity and its 'orientalist' consequences found in its imperialistic attitude towards the phenomena in question.

The descriptive potential, however, is founded in the fact that transcendence is an intrinsically relational notion that makes sense only regarding the distinction between immanence and transcendence and its diverse forms or possibilities of application. As William Franke puts it, we tend to "[...] polarize us into proponents and detractors with regard to one term or the other; in fact, there is hardly any sense in speaking of 'immanence' except in contrast to 'transcendence.' The terms form a correlative pair."⁴ Distinction, however, does not mean rigid separation. It is only valid as a contrast when it can unfurl its descriptive and explanatory potential on both object language and meta-language level.

The following considerations are intended to elaborate a concept of the transcendence/immanence distinction that may be operationalized in the examination and description of religious phenomena. It is thus not intended to define or examine a philosophical concept, although philosophical ideas are used to illustrate the concept. Furthermore, the concept of the TID suggested here is intended to provide a tool that may serve in the process of comparison of phenomena, especially religious/religioid phenomena. It may well be the case that certain phenomena may even be identified as being religious/religioid by means of this comparison. As such, the examination of the transcendence/immanence distinction becomes a method of discerning, at which point phenomena turn phenomena that may be fruitfully labeled as 'religious'.

Hence, the question remains of how to use the transcendence/immanence distinction in a relevant comparison and in a valid description of the process

3 Compare the chapter on the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.

4 Franke, "Preface," IX.

of the evolution of religion. To give a very condensed preview of the theories employed: the argumentation is intended to establish the TID as:

- a. the primary religious code (Luhmann)
- b. a process that is mediating and infinite, dynamic and creative (A.N. Whitehead).
- c. a form of semiosis (C.S. Peirce) and a process of contrasting (A.N. Whitehead), as suggested by the process underpinning the distinction between transcendence and immanence.

Here, the assumption of Peter Slater's still holds true: "[W]hat interests us, in the dynamics of religion, is the nature of the transcending process rather than the nature of some transcendent entity."⁵ Therefore, it is these semiotic processes that trigger the emergence of a religious field, and it is processes of transcending that may be used to compare religious traditions. As usual, a contact-based approach prevails here as well, for it is in situations of contact that these semiotic processes become most obvious, via object language reference or critique. The emergence of a specified TID can be attributed to situations of contact between religious traditions.

In the following, I shall first establish the TID as a suitable *tertium comparationis* between traditions. To do so, I present a three-level model of the TID, comprising basic, formal, and specific transcendence. To define the levels of basic and formal transcendence, I will employ Raymond Tallis' and Benjamin Schwartz's considerations. After that, I am going to analyze three textual cases. The first is taken from ancient Chinese material, the second from colonial North America, and the third examines theological speculations from early modern central Europe. In all three cases, object language authors employ the TID in religiously relevant narratives. Furthermore, I would like to specify the TID-based process of transcending with reference to the process of semiosis, and to introduce the Whiteheadian notion of contrast for the explication and further refinement of the TID. Finally, I give some hints on the role of situations of religious contact in the process of transcending.

2 Transcendence/Immanence in Comparison

One of the key challenges for the KHK research project Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe has been to identify suitable *tertia comparationis*, which enable scholars to systematically compare religious

5 Peter Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion. Continuity and Change in Patterns of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 64.

traditions.⁶ Though concepts such as ‘tradition’ or ‘secrecy’ are considerably less contested as *tertia comparationis*, the twin concepts of transcendence and immanence present themselves as promising candidates.⁷

The concept has played a significant role in the work of the КHK, particularly in the context of questions related to religious terms that are characterized by a dichotomous structure or, as a less abstract example, in the case of a comparative study on journeys and passages that start in the realm of the “here and now” and lead to a wondrous, “transcendent” space, evoking, as it were, a spiritual ascent.⁸ Moreover, the КHK has critically discussed the widespread and dubious characterization of China as a “culture of immanence” as opposed to ‘Western’ “cultures of transcendence.”⁹ In some sense, the Chinese tradition, thus, became a test case for the possibility of fruitful application of ‘Western’ scholarly vocabulary.

The present lines are written to both develop and critically engage with the thesis that the TID enables us to gain a comparative perspective on different religious traditions and helps explain the emergence of the religious field. To criticize, however, the hypothesis has to be established. In operationalizing the transcendence/immanence distinction, I assume that religion constitutes itself

6 See Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions—Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke. DHR 1 (Leiden: Brill 2011), 57f. Also compare Krech’s later article. Volkhard Krech, “From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back: Some Methodological Considerations on Comparative Perspectives in the Science of Religion,” in *The Dynamics of Transculturality, Transcultural Research—Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, eds. A. Flüchter and J. Schöttli (Cham: Springer, 2015).

7 On the challenge of selecting *tertium comparationis*, see also Oliver Freiberger, “Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion,” *Religions* 9, no. 38 (2018): 8.

8 The corresponding movement of descent, however, indicating a similar transcending process seems to be considerably older than ascent in some cultural traditions. “[D]escents to the underworld already occur in Homer, but an ascent to heaven is not attested in our Greek sources before the fifth century, and in Israel not before the book of Ezekiel,” and “narratives about descents already preexisted Homer, even if we cannot say for how long.” It is even the case that descents decisively influenced the ideas about ascents: “1 Enoch was not only a pivotal text for descents to hell, but also proved highly influential for ascents to heaven.” Jan N. Bremmer, “Descents to Hell and Ascents to Heaven in Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 341, 344. On the tradition of *katabasis* in the ancient Mediterranean, see also Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom. Esoteric Traditions and the Rise of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 169–183.

9 The КHK conducted a 2011 workshop “Transcultural Perspectives on Immanence and Transcendence,” which focused on ‘immanent transcendence’ as a possible transcultural resource of critique.

through the very act of declaring or approaching something as “religious.” In language borrowed from the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann, it can be said that religion, thus, occurs as communication and that this communication is processed in the form of the transcendence/immanence distinction. The TID is the religious primary code (Primärkode). In this definition of transcendence, there is nothing ‘sublime’.¹⁰ Religion transcends the everyday experiences of the Lebenswelt. Transcendence means to observe the world as if from outside. Accordingly, communication is religious if the immanent is considered from the viewpoint of transcendence, meaning that both immanence and transcendence mutually presuppose each other.¹¹ The code is strongly associated with the distinctions between known and unknown, familiar and unfamiliar, visible and invisible, knowledge and non-knowledge, public versus secret knowledge, and finally, exclusion and inclusion. Religion makes religious sense through the application of the transcendence/immanence distinction. The occurrence of this primary code allows the characterization of a text, a situation, or a space as ‘religious’. Thus, if we find traces of the TID in object-linguistic self-descriptions, we can use these self-reflective conceptualizations as a starting point for the development of specific, material-based metalanguage. This, in turn, provides ample opportunities for empirical studies.

In the following, I would like to follow Volkhard Krech’s ideas on the relationship between religion and transcendence to elaborate further on a model of the TID. Religions provide a special way of dressing and dealing with contingency by means of a duplication of reality that is based upon the distinction

10 On the supposed theological roots of the distinction in Luhmann’s thinking Christoph Kleine reminds us: “Luhmann repeatedly notes that he uses ‘transcendence’ in a non-theological way, entirely disconnected from religious semantics. ‘Transcendence’ in his theory is simply the horizon of an appresented indeterminability that emerges as soon as communication takes place. Because every communication in every social system necessarily selects between what is chosen (presented) and what is rejected or ignored (but still appresented), it produces an indeterminate remainder. The special social function of the religious system is to deal with this fundamental communicative operation of differentiating between the presented and the appresented.” Christoph Kleine, “Niklas Luhmann und die Religionswissenschaft: Geht das zusammen?,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 24 (2016): 48–49.

11 “Zur Bezeichnung der beiden Werte des religionspezifischen Codes eignet sich am ehesten die Unterscheidung von Immanenz und Transzendenz. Man kann dann auch sagen, daß eine Kommunikation immer dann religiös ist, wenn sie Immanentes unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Transzendenz betrachtet. [...] In der Einheit des Codes setzten beide Werte einander wechselseitig voraus. Erst von der Transzendenz aus gesehen erhält das Geschehen in dieser Welt einen religiösen Sinn.” Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000), 77.

between transcendence and immanence.¹² Thus, a certain interpretative pattern is established that guides both theoretical religious knowledge and religious practice, both as possible ritual and conduct of life. On the psychological level, the pattern can also determine moods, motivations, and evaluation systems; on the material level, it provides objects and particular bodies with a certain aura.¹³ The same can be said about the very basic categories of human insight, time, and space. According to Krech, 'religion proper' is concerned with the problem of how to mark transcendence that cannot be represented in everyday experience through immanent means. That is, how to transform the unavailable into something available or the unsayable into something sayable. Religion has to represent the transcendent by immanent signs, thus maintaining it in the communication of society and preventing it from evaporating as a social fact.¹⁴ Religious communication, therefore, is mainly concerned with the transcendence/immanence distinction, mediating permanently between two spheres that are distinct by definition.¹⁵

3 The Basic Structure of the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction

One challenge in examining the transcendence/immanence distinction lies in the fact that unlike other notions the KHK members have examined, the concept consists of a binary (dichotomic) but interrelating distinction, thereby introducing the idea of *Wechselwirkung* (interaction) as well as of process. Hence, one does not examine a noun as a concept but rather a verb. The *tertium comparationis*, in this case, is a creative process—it consists of

12 See Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 89. Compare Krech, *Die Evolution der Religion*, 20: "Religion ist dasjenige gesellschaftliche Subsystem, das für die ultimative Bearbeitung von anders nicht bestimmbarer Kontingenz mithilfe der Unterscheidung Immanenz/Transzendenz zuständig ist."

13 See chapter on Attraction.

14 See Volkhard Krech, *Wo bleibt die Religion? Zur Ambivalenz des Religiösen in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 41. On the relation of representation and transcendence with regard to a concrete case see Thomas Jurczyk, "Representation of Transcendence. The Armenian Letter 'On the Image Fighters' from the Seventh Century CE," *Entangled Religions* 5 (2018): 97–98.

15 See Krech's working hypothesis on religion. "[Religion] wendet die Unterscheidung von Transzendenz und Immanenz an und bearbeitet durch sie den Umgang mit—zumindest tendenziell—als unverfügbar und unhintergebar Geltendem im Unterschied zu Verfügbarem und Disponiblem. Die Differenz von Transzendenz und Immanenz liegt religiöser Kommunikation zugrunde, doch die Konkretion dieser Unterscheidung variiert diachron und im interkulturellen Vergleich." Krech, *Wo bleibt die Religion?*, 42.

ways of dealing with the TID as an instrument for coping with contingency (*Kontingenzbewältigung*).

The TID is not only to be found in religious contexts. Intellectual and cultural history provides further cases that could be described and analyzed through the TID. In philosophy, for instance, the basic interactive dynamic of the transcendence/immanence concept is exemplified in the Aristotelian notion of the Unmoved Mover, as found in his *Metaphysics* Book Λ (1072–1074 b).¹⁶ The ultimate aim of *theoria* is beyond causality; however, as a substance (eternal and unmoved), it is thoroughly action (causation). Transcendence, as the moving force, is inseparably joined to immanence. Thus, the Aristotelian notion might be considered a theological expression of the basic processual character of the transcendence/immanence distinction.¹⁷

One may argue that the leveled development of the TID might be traced with regard to the history of concepts, meaning that the evolutionary aspect plays a role in the explication of the notion(s) of ‘transcendence/immanence’. In antique and medieval times, the Latin noun *transcendentia* appears in practical contexts, such as in land surveying and rhetoric, indicating the transition from one argument to another. In this early period, the word was not yet used to indicate something beyond the human capacity. The fully developed distinction in this sense does not appear earlier than in early twentieth-century Neo-Scholasticism. However, the related verb *transcendere* or *transcendens* acquired this meaning in theological speculation, as can be seen in the works of Augustine. In his *Confessiones*, Augustine describes a spiritual ascent that he experienced together with his mother Monica shortly before her death in Ostia.¹⁸ Through discussion of the prospects for a future eternal life as opposed to the life of this world, and through contemplation of the life of the saints, Augustine and his mother were able to transcend the limits of their minds and obtain a short vision-like experience of higher knowledge on a higher level of existence:

At length we came to our own souls and passed beyond them to that place of everlasting plenty, where you feed Israel for ever with the food of truth. There life is that wisdom by which all these things that we know are

16 On the discovery of transcendence in metaphysical thought see Jens Halfwassen, “Zur Entdeckung der Transzendenz in der Metaphysik,” *ZfF-Mitteilungen* 2 (2002).

17 If one might compare (as Eric Osborn does) the Unmoved Mover to “a magnet in an armchair,” the attractive potential of the basic distinction becomes obvious (Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, first Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 88).

18 Compare also the chapter on Space.

made [...] And while we spoke of the eternal wisdom, longing for it and straining for it with all the strength of our hearts, for one fleeting instant we reached out and touched it.¹⁹

Augustine describes the process of transcending here as requiring a strenuous effort that granted but a momentary glimpse of another sphere, thus laying stress on the distinction between the world here and the world beyond. In a space of everlasting plenty, any limitations and, thus, all differentiations were gone. In the works of Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagita, to transcend means the intellectual effort of transcending even affirmation and negation and, ultimately the principle of contradiction.²⁰ Here, the idea of transcending is connected to the self, which has to be referred to in order that it can be transcended. Therefore, even with regard to the history of concepts, the process expressed by the notion of *transcendere* seems to be a more promising candidate for a diachronic and synchronic examination.

On a very elementary level, the distinction between immanence and transcendence indicates a spatial relation, namely, through the transgression of borders implied in the process of transcending, thus establishing a threefold structure of 'there' and 'here' and the 'border'. The border mediates between the 'here' and the 'there', as part of a dynamic process of interrelation. This transgression is not to be explicated as an anthropological constant or metaphysical speculation but rather as a semantic or semiotic necessity, a necessity that is moreover characterized by indeterminate creativity. Transcendence, thus, can be considered as immanent to actual beings: "Every actual entity, including God, is a creature transcended by the creativity which it qualifies," as Whitehead put it.²¹

Regarding the process of transcending, the counter-concept of immanence is exemplified in mathematical consequence. Perhaps formulated in deliberate opposition to Christian theology, Spinoza's notion of substance famously employed an idea of stern immanence: "Deus est omnium rerum causa immanens, non vero transiens" (*Ethica* I Prop. XVIII). Herein, there is no concept

19 "et venimus in mentes nostras et transcendimus eas, ut attingeremus regionem ubertatis indeficientis, ubi pascis Israhel in aeternum veritate pabulo, et ibi vita sapientia est, per quam fiunt omnia ista [...] et dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, attingimus eam modice toto ictu cordis." Augustine, *Confessions* 1: Introduction and Text, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 113 (IX/10), trans. Pine-Coffin, 197.

20 See Jens Halfwassen, "Sur la limitation du principe de contradiction chez Denys," *Diotima* 23 (1995): 46–50.

21 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*, edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York/London: The Free Press, 1979), 88.

of time or space involved save the inadequateness of the human apparatus of perception: everything is 'given' 'here' 'at once'. However, the very 'adventure of immanence' cannot do without some basic transcendence, as elaborated in the following.

The dichotomic structure of the transcendence/immanence distinction enables its basic function as mediation. It does so via contrast: the transformation of unspecific or absolute complexity into specific complexity. As such, the distinction indicates the processual unity of the contradiction, leading to a unity of opposites. This internally processed basic unity (as *Wechselwirkung*) makes religious assertions guided by the transcendence/immanence distinction religiously meaningful, as something completely unrelated to another would not 'make' any sense. It may be added that the 'internal' process of the immanence/transcendence distinction is supported and intensified in correlation to the complexity of the environment of the system introduced by the distinction. In Luhmann's terms, the difference in complexity will change when the complexity of the prevailing system is increased, and the complexity of the relevant environment will correlate.²² 'Visible' expressions of this process might be the emergence of evermore sophisticated critiques of religion and evermore rigid notions of transcendence that religious thought produces in answer to those critiques.

4 Metaphors of Transcendence

With regard to non-Western religious traditions, the attempt to establish the transcendence/immanence distinction as a key concept for the study of religion may appear problematic. In literature, the notion of 'transcendence' as inseparably connected to the 'Western' idea of religion is even styled as the paramount obstacle to a proper understanding of non-Western cultures or religions.²³ The present approach, however, lays great emphasis on not dealing with transcendence alone but rather examines transcendence and its necessary counterpart, immanence. To be more precise, it examines the relation and interplay between transcendence and immanence as a distinction of a certain kind and, as a process, the *process of transcending*.²⁴

22 Niklas Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), 17.

23 On the Chinese case, see Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China. Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 93 f.

24 For an application on 'non-Western' material see for example Carmen Meinert "Beyond Spatial and Temporal Contingencies: Tantric Rituals in Eastern Central Asia under Tangut

The main obstacle to a fruitful operationalization of this conceptual pair often seems to be that the metalanguage used to describe their relationship is either too abstract or too specific. It is too abstract when meta-physical associations are evoked, such as the distinction between 'here' (*Diesseits*) and 'hereafter' (*Jenseits*). It is too specific when it is constricted to the notion of an other-worldly God in the sense of the Christian or Protestant tradition.²⁵ An analytic operationalization is thus obliged to find a middle way between these two extreme possibilities. On the one hand, premature ontologizations are typically considered to be lacking general relevance; on the other, employing the transcendence/immanence distinction in a more specific way may raise fears of Orientalism—the suspicion that 'Western' concepts are being dubiously applied to non-Western traditions.

However, Kant's famous redefinition of the notions of transcendence and immanence in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 296) indicates a few important considerations. Kant defines 'immanent' as being 'within the limits (of experience)' and transcendent, with a certain derogative intent, as 'to fly over (*überfliegen*) the limits'.²⁶ Thus, transcendence (or, rather, a transcendent maxim) forces us to tear down markers of limitation and to acknowledge a new territory without demarcation. It orders us to overcome boundaries.²⁷ Later in

Rule, 11th–13th C." in *Buddhism in Central Asia ii: Practices and Rituals, Visual and Material Transfer*, eds. Yukiyo Kasai and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2022) and Dylan Esler, *Effortless Spontaneity: The Dzogchen Commentaries by Nubchen Sangye Yeshe*. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 28 f.

- 25 See Dalferth's description of this specified form of the transcendence-immanence distinction: "Divine transcendence is more radical than ontological transcendence and hence accessible only in a purely negative way: we know that we can know anything true only because of it, but we also know that we can never know this truth as such. At best we can know that we cannot know the truth but only some inkling of it according to the principle that the differences are greater than the similarities. We are tied to the ignorance of our immanence and can never penetrate into the transcendence of divine truth." Ingolf Dalferth, "The Idea of Transcendence," in *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, eds. Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 149.
- 26 The metaphor is not purely an idiosyncrasy of Kant's in the context of transcendence, as an example from medieval China shows: "The bird—so light, swift, beautiful, and free, and possessed of the ability to fly—was a primary Chinese symbol of the soul and of transcendence. As such, it figures in funerary art and in literature as well. A person who has ascended to transcendence was termed a 'feathered person,' in recognition of a bird-like capacity for flight not possessed by ordinary, unenlightened mortals." Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence & Divine Passion. The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 92.
- 27 "Wir wollen die Grundsätze, deren Anwendung sich ganz und gar in den Schranken möglicher Erfahrung hält, immanente, diejenigen aber, welche diese Grenzen überfliegen sollen, transzendente Grundsätze nennen. [...] Grundsätze, die uns zumuten,

his work (A 643) he defines ‘immanent’ more visually as ‘local’ or ‘indigenous’ (*einheimisch*), as opposed to ‘over the top’ or ‘high-flying’ (*überfliegend*) use of transcendent ideas.²⁸ Here, the metaphors used emerge as the most important elements of Kant’s definitions, evoking an idea of a spatial sphere as well as a certain dynamic movement connected to the notions. Transgressing one’s borders (limits)—or remaining within them—thus, might be tentatively identified as the guiding metaphor of the transcendence/immanence distinction.

In its use of metaphors, Fritz Stolz’ short article in the Metzler Lexikon Religion on ‘Transzendenz’ is also significant.²⁹ Here, transcendence is associated with an inaccessible space that lies beyond the immediately accessible and differentiated region of reality. Moreover, this space is vertically characterized as more fundamental (*grundlegender*).³⁰ Differentiation and the transcendent space beyond are therefore opposed. These spatial metaphors are further qualified by the notion of ‘border’ or ‘limit’ (*Grenze*) between the accessible and the inaccessible, which, for Stolz, is important for any usage of the notion of transcendence in religious studies. Essentially inaccessible, the space beyond can only be an object of permanent asymptotic convergence. Stolz stresses the particular relationality of the border-meditated spaces by pointing out that there is a vertical and vectorial hierarchy implied, as the relation between the space here and the space beyond is always an asymmetric one. Transcendence, therefore, is related to the idea of limited space. Of course, the mutually limiting spaces do not allow general statements for every religious tradition. Rather, one has to face blurred limits. What is important, nevertheless, is that transcendence may be localized³¹ and that the ideas of space involved here are further qualified, in particular as regards their interrelation.

alle jene Grenzpfähle niederzureißen und sich einen ganz neuen Boden, der überall keine Demarkationen erkennt, anzumaßen. [...] Die Grundsätze des reinen Verstandes [...] sollen bloß von empirischen und nicht von transzendentelem Gebrauche sein. Ein Grundsatz aber, der diese Schranken wegnimmt, ja gar sie zu überschreiten gebietet, heißt transzendent.” Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Raimund Schmidt (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990), 336.

28 “Denn nicht die Idee an sich selbst, sondern bloß ihr Gebrauch kann, entweder in Ansehung der gesamten möglichen Erfahrung überfliegend (transzendent), oder einheimisch (immanent) sein [...]” Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 605.

29 Fritz Stolz, “Transzendenz,” in *Metzler Lexikon Religion. Gegenwart—Alltag—Medien. Vol. 3 Paganismus-Zombie*, eds. Christoph Auffarth, Jutta Bernard, and Hubert Mohr (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 525.

30 “Transzendenz ist ursprünglich ein philosophisches Konzept, welches von dem unmittelbar zugänglichen, differenzierten Bereich der Wirklichkeit einen dahinter liegenden, grundlegenden Raum unterscheidet.” Stolz, “Transzendenz,” 525.

31 See Meinert, “Beyond Spatial and Temporal Contingencies,” 319.

Following Thomas Tweed's metaphoric, religions "interpret limits and promote crossings."³² The spatial metaphors of 'limit' and 'crossing' indicate a process of transcending that may well be two-directional, back and forth, simultaneously far away and as near as possible.³³ The crossing of space that is internally differentiated is closely linked to the idea of transcendence.³⁴ Any expression of a transcending process is thus dependent on spatial metaphors. Spatial metaphors link processes of transcending to the perceivable world, covering a vast array of possible expressions, from concrete locations (mountains, islands) and relational expressions (in/out) to directional terms (here/there).³⁵ As it seems, transcendence/immanence can be associated with spatial metaphors and, perhaps, as a consequence, with processes of movement that involve an asymmetric relation and ideas of borders as mediating elements.³⁶ Transcendence, as Luhmann states, is, first of all, a directive, indicating a transgression of borders.³⁷

32 Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling, A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 138.

33 See Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 158.

34 On liminality, see Volkhard Krech, "Dimensionen des Religiösen," in *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, eds. Detlef Pollack, Volkhard Krech, Olaf Müller, and Marcus Hero (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 72–73.

35 On other possible spatial metaphors from Tibetan sources see Esler, *Effortless Spontaneity*, 38.

36 On the spatial inside/outside distinction between the two 'spaces' of the immanent and the transcendent world in Plato's allegory of the cave, see Dalferth, "The Idea of Transcendence," 148.

37 "Transcendence is for now the provision of a direction and it refers to a crossing of boundaries. But from the outset, territorial boundaries are not what are meant (even when places are being 'sacralized') but rather boundaries to the unattainable, boundaries not only outside but also within the society one is starting from." Niklas Luhmann, *A Systems Theory of Religion*, 55; Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* 79–80: "Transzendenz ist zunächst eine Richtungsangabe, sie verweist auf ein Überschreiten von Grenzen. Aber gemeint sind von Anbeginn nicht territoriale Grenzen (auch wenn Orte 'sakralisiert' werden), sondern Grenzen zum Unerreichbaren nicht nur außerhalb, sondern auch innerhalb der Gesellschaft, von der man ausgeht." Compare Esler, *Effortless Spontaneity*, 39: "Space is used in our Dzogchen commentaries as a vector-term that points to a process of transcending; what is particularly important about the metaphor of space is that it conveys a situation that is limitless and open-ended, just like the transcending process it signifies. We are not dealing with an enclosed space, which by definition is limited, but with the unfathomable expanse of the sky, such as it presents itself on the Tibetan plateau with its vivid skylscapes."

5 The Three-Level Model of Transcendence

Considering the possible ‘Western’ origins of the concept of the transcendence/immanence distinction, it is important to refrain from generalizing definitions of these terms. It is also important not to generalize negations, such as the assumption that these distinctions per se cannot be found in non-Western traditions. Instead, it is more promising to focus on the question of how the dynamic transcendence/immanence distinction can be operationalized for comparative research, or rather, how this distinction can be successfully established as a *tertium comparationis* in religious studies. Unsurprisingly, taking a specific or theologically elaborated form of the TID as a point of reference for comparison is unlikely to generate fertile results. Rather, we require a bottom-up approach guided by a formal understanding of transcendence.

Attempts to produce such a bottom-up approach have been made, often by scholars of the supposedly non-transcendent non-Western cultures. In sinology, for instance, highly productive attention has been paid to the formal structure of the notion rather than its content. As Benjamin I. Schwartz argues in a 1975 article titled *The Age of Transcendence*, a formal understanding of transcendence denotes a process that can be described as standing back and looking beyond. Taking his point of departure from a discussion of the theorem of the ‘axial age’ and the question of possible influences between cultures, Schwartz points at the ‘strain towards transcendence’ in ‘axial movements’ and explains his notion of transcendence as follows:

What I refer to here is something close to the etymological meaning of the word—a kind of standing back and looking beyond—a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and a new vision of what lies beyond. It is symbolized in the Hebrew tradition by Abraham’s departure from Ur and all it represents, by the Buddha’s more radical renunciation, by Confucius’ search for the source of jen within and the normative order without, by the Lao Tse book’s strain toward the nameless Tao, and by the Greek strain toward an order beyond the Homeric gods, by the Socratic search within as well as by Orphic mysteries.³⁸

There can be no doubt that, at least for Schwartz, this notion of transcendence bears some intercultural and comparative potential as he observes its presence

³⁸ Benjamin I. Schwartz, “The Age of Transcendence,” *Daedalus* 104 (1975): 3. Schwartz further explores the question of Transcendence in: Benjamin I. Schwartz, “Transcendence in Ancient China,” *Daedalus* 104 (1975).

from East Asia to Europe.³⁹ It is present whenever human beings act upon their potential to step back from their everyday life and to look upon their circumstances in a self-reflective or even self-critical manner. Transcendence thus indicates self-reference. Alternatively, we can say that the introduction of a notion of transcendence can be regarded as indicating a rudimentary second order observation.

This idea may well be applied to the supposedly purely 'immanent' cultures, such as China. As Heiner Roetz has shown, this self-referential formal transcendence is the very basis of ancient Chinese philosophy—Daoism, Legalism, and, particularly, Confucianism. The emergence of formal transcendence was triggered by a special kind of contact situation, namely an experience of general political crisis that affected all fields of society:

Political, social, and economic changes, the breakdown of the established order and the dissolution of the Zhou kingdom in a series of upheavals and wars shook the established worldview based on the religion of Heaven and the code of propriety [...] of the Zhou. [...] There is no philosophy of ancient China that would not be shaped by the experience of this crisis. All of them begin to look beyond the existing horizons of thought and to rethink 'norms and standards,' detaching themselves from the past and all hitherto accepted authorities and making the step towards 'transcendence' that according to Karl Jaspers constitutes the 'axial age'.⁴⁰

39 See Slingerland's notion of *xin* as conscious reflection being qualitatively distinct, i.e. "not at all on par with perception and digestion." Slingerland, *Body and Mind in Early China*, 121.

40 Heiner Roetz, "Tradition, Universality, and the Time Paradigm of Zhou Philosophy," *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 39, no. 3 (2009): 363. Compare, regarding *Xunzi*, Slingerland, *Body and Mind in Early China*, 112: "What is special about people is that they can transcend their natures through conscious reasoning and individual acts of will, aided by the accumulation of wisdom from the past embodied in the Confucian way." To Jaspers, and, in his wake, Shmuel Eisenstadt, the 'axial age' is decisively characterized by the 'discovery of transcendence' in the form of a 'transcendental breakthrough', thus allowing for comparison between distant cultures and theorizing a general type of human rationality. The axial age theorem has been repeatedly discussed in the meetings of the КНК. For me, Guy Stroumas's stance towards the idea of the axial age seems to be most valid and should be quoted in length: "The fascination with the axial age reflects the similarity of intellectual and spiritual trends and culture heroes, across civilizations seemingly unrelated. This concept is a perfect antidote to accusations of Eurocentrism in an age of globalization. The problem is that the axial age seems to be a *fata morgana*. The riddle of synchrony, as Jan Assmann has argued, evaporates at the mention of Akhenaten, Jesus, or Muhammad, who should obviously belong to the club of 'axial' figures together with Socrates, Isaiah, or Zarathustra. While it sometimes happens that different cultures

Thus, the self-referential transcendence manifested in Confucianism is an expression of the crisis of the Zhou tradition that led it to challenge and question rather than the expression of a self-contained and utterly conservative tradition itself.⁴¹

Schwartz's suggestion that a formal notion of transcendence should be employed and hence used to describe and analyze corresponding phenomena thus does not seem to be utterly misleading.⁴² However, the transcendence/immanence distinction examined here may already seem too abstract and theoretical. In this conception, it appears to be an experience that could only happen to intellectual elites, an experience too far removed from everyday experience and practice of non-elite people. To proceed towards operationalization, this formal criterion of the identification of processes and the "conscious" reflexivity of second-order observation that is implied is too demanding. As an alternative starting point and a necessary supplement to formal transcendence in the sense of Schwartz, we must take yet another step back and begin with an

reach a similar turning point at approximately the same point in time, what really counts, in each case, is the cause (or causes) of this turning point. Moreover, the obvious possibility of diffusionism should be entertained: if chariots and goods could move so easily, ideas could too. But religious change can also be brought about by new technologies. The clearest case is probably that of the emergence and diffusion of script systems. The development of writing, which is directly related to the establishment of empires and huge, centralized societies, entailed the need, for the literate elites, to educate and train new generations of scribes, and eventually the redaction of books, and hence of holy texts, which often remained esoteric, not to be divulged to all and sundry. Religion inscribed in a book has become a portable religion, one that can and will travel. On various occasions in his book, Bellah points to the crucial importance of writing in the evolution of cultures, but fails to grant the topic all the focused attention it requires. The concept of the axial age, then, is misleading. Rather than focusing on one epoch when everything, everywhere, tipped over, it is probably wiser to identify major cultural changes, whenever they happen. New configurations of culture and their social consequences are just as interesting as new configurations of society and their cultural consequences. We are the recipients of the double legacy of Greece and Israel. This may very well be the case, but it is only through the major intellectual remodeling effected by the church fathers (and before them by Philo of Alexandria) and of the medieval Scholastic theologians (who could read Aristotle mostly thanks to the Arabs!) that these two legacies were integrated." Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 25–26.

41 Roetz, "Tradition, Universality, and the Time Paradigm of Zhou Philosophy," 365.

42 Schwartz hints at the relationship of formal transcendence to "the whole realm we call religion." (Schwartz, "Transcendence in Ancient China," 64) Compare also Guy Stroumsa's characterization of Philo of Alexandria as the decisive point of religion at which becomes self-reflexive, see Guy G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice. Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 9.

examination of basic forms of human expression, such as speaking and gesturing. This is not to say that the formal understanding of transcendence in the sense of standing back and looking beyond should not play a role. Rather, formal transcendence should be considered as an important stage within a larger process of transcending, which might itself culminate in ontological notions of the here/hereafter distinction or perhaps a “categorically different” God as the very negation of all human efforts per se, as in dialectical theology or the Buddhist distinction of *lokottara* and *laukika*.⁴³

The level of formal transcendence is of particular significance and interest for scholarly study and it is at this level that the emergence of metalanguage from object language may be observed.⁴⁴

Following Schwartz’s idea, an evolutionary model of the process of transcending may be elaborated. To construct this model, Schwartz’s formal notion of transcendence and the well-known specified notion of transcendence, as found in, for example, Christian theology, must be complemented by yet another notion of transcendence that may serve to discern the starting point of the process. To connect the process of transcending to everyday experience, a very basic concept of the transcendence/immanence distinction must first be deployed. This forms the basis for the more complex, “stronger,” specific concepts of transcendence, which are usually associated with specific religious traditions.⁴⁵

The close association between the notions of religion and specified transcendence must thus be relaxed and disentangled. The notion of transcendence is not to be interpreted in terms commonly associated with (particular)

43 See Kleine, “Niklas Luhmann und die Religionswissenschaft,” 74.

44 This might explain the phenomenon of what Jonathan Z. Smith calls “one of the fundamental building blocks of religion: its capacity for rationalization.” See Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual,” in *Imagining Religion. From Babylon to Jamestown* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 57. Precisely because self-reflecting behavior (critique) and religious (specified transcendence) emerge from the same level of religioformal transcending, the former capacity is always present in what later develops as specified transcendence.

45 For a formal description of specified transcendence, see Volkhard Krech, “Theory and Empiricism of Religious Evolution (THERE): Foundation of a Research Program. Part 1,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 26 (2018): 27: “[R]eligion has to deal with the question of how to designate transcendence, which, in principal, cannot be represented in normal experience, with immanent means—i.e. how the absent can be transformed into the present, the unavailable into the available, the not depictable into the depictable or, by means of the theory of communication, the unspeakable into the speakable. [...] Hence, the religion-specific distinction transcendent/immanent is systematically tied to the societal function of ultimately coping with undetermined contingency.”

religions but, instead, as the emergence of a form of reflexivity and criticism that transcends activities associated with the daily necessities of human beings. The process of transcending does not start within the field of religion proper but rather prior to its emergence.⁴⁶ The focus on specified transcendence, as in Christian theology, often distracts from these phenomena. There are decisive levels of transcendence to be located 'in-between' the extremes.⁴⁷

Therefore, what needs to be captured by the model are examples of 'pre-religious' processes of transcending—in my terminology, basic transcendence. Borrowing a term from the work of Georg Simmel,⁴⁸ these examples can be described as religio-phenomena that serve as the material for examination.⁴⁹

46 See Krech, "Theory and Empiricism of Religious Evolution," 26: "Both societal communication and religion are a matter of transcending—not just, and indeed with regard to the history of religions, generally not at all in the sense of the Christian Western temporal and spatial symbolization of transcendence, but in a universal, modal-theoretical and epistemological sense, namely as the reference to something not in the sphere of experience of here and now. This is due to the transcending character of language as the elementary medium of communication. [...] Based on this general conceptualization, there are many ways of transcending apart from religion: sign processes in general, history, sociality (the consciousness of alter ego), ideal perception of order, future, dreams, surprising events, the arts, etc."

47 Slingerland hints toward this point in his refutation of the characterization of Chinese culture as holistic and purely immanent: "[W]e should avoid the mistake of thinking that anything short of radical difference, or Cartesian ontological dualism, counts as 'holistic' or 'immanent'. One could certainly argue that spirits and other supernatural beings in early China were not conceived of as completely immaterial: spirits are invisible and freed of physical bodies, but—especially as views of qi as a force permeating the cosmos become more prevalent—might be seen as merely very tenuous or diffuse forms of matter. Nonetheless, this spectrum of tangibility/visibility is not continuous: there is a qualitative leap between the mundane world of physical bodies and other concrete, visible objects and the 'numinous' [...] realm of ghost-demons [...] and various spiritual beings and gods." Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China*, 94.

48 See Georg Simmel, *Die Religion*, in *Gesamtausgabe Band 10: Philosophie der Mode* (1905), *Die Religion* (1906/1912), *Kant und Goethe* (1906/1916), *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche*, eds. Michael Behr, Volkhard Krech, and Gert Schmidt (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995), 61–62: "Ich erinnere an das religiöse—oder, wenn das Wortmonstrum gestattet ist: religioide—Moment, das für ein tieferes Empfinden vielleicht in allem Hingeben und Annehmen liegt. Natürlich hat es als rein soziologisches Ereignis mit der Religion als differenziertem Gebiet nichts zu tun. Dennoch liegt in seiner inneren Struktur eine schwer bezeichnbare ideelle Verwandtschaft mit einem Zuge des religiösen Wesens, der aus diesem in den fertig ausgestalteten Religionen als das Opfermoment auskristallisiert ist." Later on in his *Die Religion*, he examines "Religionen, die in der angedeuteten Weise Mischgebilde sind, in denen die Religiosität noch nicht in der Form der Gegenständlichkeit rein zu sich selbst gekommen ist" (ibid., 114).

49 On Simmel's notion, see Hartmann Tyrell, "Das Religioide und der Glaube. Drei Überlegungen zu einer Religionssoziologie der Zeit um 1900," in *Georg Simmel und das Leben in der Gegenwart*, eds. Rüdiger Lautmann and Hanns Wienold (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018).

Religioid material is conceptually connected to religious material proper insofar as it carries the potential to develop into religion but does not necessarily have to develop in that specific direction.⁵⁰ It should be noted here that the temporal priority of the religioid is merely a possibility of the course of historical development rather than a necessity.⁵¹ There is, however, a systematic priority that makes the religioid a *conditio sine qua non* for religion proper. The presence of religioid material can be related to the process of the transcending of the immanent that takes place in life in general. Here, Simmel stressed the idea that transcendence is immanent to life.⁵² Accordingly, as an essential part of life, this immanent transcendence leads to new stages of life—stages that are, in turn characterized by particular forms of transcending, or rather, by the application of the TID.⁵³

Engaging with religioid material in empirical studies enables scholars to describe and analyze possible points of change. Through such, they are able to systematically discern occasions on which a process of transcending, employment of the transcendence/immanence distinction, becomes religion. It may also be used to compare phenomena without having to rely on religiously specified forms of transcendence, which defy comparability. In the case of the transcendence/immanence distinction, on the level of basic transcendence the material to be examined consists primarily of (human) action (speaking, pointing at, gesturing). Due to its inherent dynamic structure, the transcendence/immanence distinction might here permit an examination of an 'internal' process of the concept itself.

Therefore, the process of transcending that such analyses would try to capture can be structured in three main stages: basic transcendence, formal

50 On Simmel's motivation to introduce the notion, see Tyrell, "Das Religiöse und der Glaube," 354: "Simmels Befassung mit der Religion ist nicht von der im 19. Jahrhundert üblichen Art der Suche nach der evolutionär ursprünglichen Religion—sprich Animismus, Ahnenkult, Totemismus u. ä. Simmels soziologische Idee ist es stattdessen, Religion nicht auf (ursprünglichere) Religion zurückzuführen, sondern ihr dort auf die Spur zu kommen, wo sie noch nicht Religion ist."

51 See Tyrell, "Das Religiöse und der Glaube": "Die Genealogie sieht das Religiöse als das der Religion Vorangehende, sie in bestimmter Hinsicht Ermöglichende, auf ihre Inhalte Hinführende; sie nimmt das Soziale als multiple Quellregion des Religiösen, ja setzt auf die Selbststeigerung des (jeweiligen) Religiösen ins Religiöse. Auch wenn Simmel dieser Prozessualität 'historisch' nicht nachgehen will: der in gewisser Weise unsichereren und minder deutlich bestimmten, abgeleiteten Seite ist damit das kausale Prius zugesprochen. Ich mache keinen Hehl daraus, dass die Simmel'schen Idee den Religionssoziologen zu faszinieren vermag. Aber kostenfrei ist sie nicht."

52 See Georg Simmel, "Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel," in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 16, eds. Gregor Fitzi and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), 228.

53 Compare Volkhard Krech "Immanent Transcendence as Sacralization," (Paper for the KHK-Workshop "Immanent Transcendence as a Transcultural Problem," July 2011), 1.

transcendence, and specific ('religious') transcendence. Basic and formal transcendence make up what can be termed the religioïd sphere. In phenomenological terms, the idea is to measure and examine the "religioïd space" before starting with an examination of religion proper.⁵⁴ Here, basic and formal transcendence constitute the pre-religious sphere that may but does not have to, develop into specified religious transcendence. As usual, the three levels have to be considered as mere analytical distinctions that do interrelate in praxis. For example, certain object language level expressions of basic transcendence might be interpreted in terms of specific transcendence if there is an elaborated doctrinal theology.

The basic form of transcendence might be described as follows by relating it to basic human actions in general.⁵⁵ According to Raymond Tallis, in his book *Michelangelo's Finger: An Exploration of Everyday Transcendence*, the most basic concept of transcendence is found in the process or gesture of pointing.⁵⁶ The pointing finger, however, is nothing more than the most obvious gestural expression of the act of pointing, which can be performed by various bodily gestures—a shift of the head, gazing into the distance, and so on. The decisive point is the following: pointing at means abstracting from one's own body through bodily means. By doing so, the pointer virtually creates a mutually shared world: "Pointing is a means of indicating a transcendent

54 While Opitz follows the right intuition in considering (formal) transcendence as a precondition for the possibility of (political) critique, it is premature to identify this (religioïd) level as a 'religious framework' for political thought in ancient China: "Erst aus dieser Perspektive wird die These deutlich, die im Titel dieses Buches anklingt und dem Buch selbst zugrundeliegt: daß sich das politische Denken des alten China—und damit auch der chinesischen 'Achsenzeit'—in der Mehrzahl der Schulen vor einem metaphysisch-religiösen Horizont vollzieht. Gegen diese These spricht auch nicht, daß die Konturen dieses Horizontes in China weniger scharf ausgeprägt sind—bzw. aus heutiger Sicht erscheinen—als in anderen kosmologischen Reichen, etwa denen Ägyptens und Assyriens, bzw. in den postkosmologischen Gesellschaften, wie sie sich in Israel nach dem Exodus aus Ägypten oder in Hellas nach dem Bruch mit dem homerischen Mythos entwickelt haben. Denn auch den chinesischen Denkern dient die Transzendenz nicht nur als Maßstab zur Kritik der politischen Realität, sondern wird gleichzeitig auch als Ursprung jener Normen in Anspruch genommen, die aus der geistigen und politischen Krise führen sollen." Peter J. Opitz, *Der Weg des Himmels. Zum Geist und zur Gestalt des politischen Denkens im klassischen China* (München: Fink, 2000), 11.

55 This follows Tomasello's hypothesis that the beginnings of human communication lie in pointing and pantomiming; pointing being the primordial form of uniquely human communication. See Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 2008), 2–3.

56 See Raymond Tallis, *Michelangelo's Finger: An Exploration of Everyday Transcendence* (London: Atlantic, 2010), xvii–xx. Also compare Hubert Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion. Auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft*, (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2009), 69–70.

world—general, hidden, and shared—and takes us decisively out of our solitary, transient bodies, subject to the laws of nature.”⁵⁷ The gesture, thus, displays a considerable creative power. One should add that it even relieves one from taking one’s person as the grounding starting point of the deixis. The simple, deictic act of pointing at, verbalized in deictic expressions such as “(over) there,” introduces that which is separated from the self as “the other.” Co-originally, this very act also creates the “here” (perhaps “the self”) and the mutually shared “world,” a world that encompasses both the “there” and the “here.”⁵⁸ Spatial metaphors, therefore, play a decisive role from the very beginning of the transcending process.⁵⁹ What is more, the ‘self’ or ‘one’s body,’ is something that is pointed at rather than something pointing. It is only apprehensible in a deixis. Within deixis, a system is established that is dependent on the situation itself, namely, the material circumstances of someone pointing at a deictic center. The act of pointing at is an act of decision, specification, and direction, as it is impossible to point at nothing in particular.⁶⁰ It should, therefore, be stressed that the establishment of a deictic center in the process of pointing is not to be equated with the body of the one pointing. The center exists solely in the deictic situation—an individual may easily point at their own head or otherwise establish a deictic situation of pointing at one’s own body. Pointing, therefore, is the precondition of the body being chosen as a theme.

Pointing at establishes another triadic structure related to the field of social communication: they who point at something, that which is pointed at, and the

57 Tallis, *Michelangelo's Finger*, xx. Later on in his book, Tallis qualifies the shared world further as a commonly shared horizon of possibilities or, perhaps, propensities: “[A]n individual who points dwells in a world rather than being located in a mere environment. A world is a boundless sphere of explicitly shared possibility, not merely an array of material objects encircling the material object that I am an organism.” (ibid., 118–119). See chapter on Attraction.

58 This shared world is different from the immanent world (of the ‘here’), see Dalferth, “The Idea of Transcendence,” 153–154, as it consists of the transcendence/immanence distinction that is in effect. If one cannot use one side of the distinction without the other, as Dalferth argues, it makes no sense to reduce the standpoint (‘here’) to the purely immanent. Thus, the distinction is not drawn in the realm of the immanent; but rather, the distinction is drawn and the realm of the immanent and the transcendent in a basic manner emerge.

59 As an example see the interplay of upward and downward movement in the Meditation on Vajravārāhī as analyzed by Carmen Meinert, “Beyond Spatial and Temporal Continuities,” 347–351.

60 See Josef Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 28.

individual who is shown something by the act of pointing.⁶¹ It draws attention both to the person showing and the person who is shown something. Pointing at can, thus, be understood as the possibility of going beyond oneself and, through the generation of a horizon of perceptual insight, returning to oneself as the origin of this possibility. The act of pointing is a basic yet still complex transcending process. In itself, it actually creates the subordinate possibility of standing back and looking beyond.⁶² It introduces the possibility of observation by objectivation. "Any entity, thus intervening in processes transcending itself, is said to be functioning as an 'object'."⁶³ The process involved so far is transcendent to the entity in question, relatively speaking. At this stage, a form of transcendence has been established. It still has to be examined how and why this particular TID is transformed into a general TID.

However, pointing at is an interconnected process that establishes a triadic relationship, which, in turn, creates an active form of making sense of the world. The introduction of a basic concept of transcendence ("there" [object]), it should be mentioned, goes along with a basic concept of immanence ("here" [subject]). As such, both concepts enter a tense interrelationship ("the world") in distinction. This relationship is not necessarily a strict and dichotomous distinction. Rather, we are dealing with a variety of possible interdependencies.

The employment of a basic form of the transcendence/immanence distinction ('indicating', deixis) on the object language level might be used as a starting point for examination in various religious traditions. It is here, in the act of deixis, that materiality and embodiment are brought into play: "Pointing is the most blatant example of 'deixis', a property that connects signs with the material circumstances in which they occur. It seems to be the place of intersection between the carnal, and, consequently physical, space and the abstract space of discourse."⁶⁴ Pointing, thus, is a form of spatial crossing. Everyday transcendence has the potential to develop into a transcendence of everyday life. As a consequence, when it comes to comparative research in religious studies related to the TID, the guiding research question should not be whether or

61 "Pointing not only exposes one to an especially visible gaze, it is a gesture that invites others to gaze and so to co-opt their self-consciousness to a reductive account of one's own self." Tallis, *Michelangelo's Finger*, 94.

62 "Pointing (to pick up on one of an endless number of puns waiting in the wings) points to something that goes very deep in us; and it is subject, as so many things in human life are, to a multitude of transformations." Tallis, *Michelangelo's Finger*, xxi. Tallis even claims that pointing has indeed played an important part in the elaboration of human consciousness (*ibid.*, 3).

63 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 220.

64 Tallis, *Michelangelo's Finger*, 76.

which “strong” specific transcendences (“Gods”) exist in this or that tradition but how the process of transcending emerges and proceeds.⁶⁵ It should be asked when it is that systematically relevant points are reached where basic transcendence turns into formal transcendence (pointing at becomes pointing out) and formal transcendence turns into specific transcendence and is articulated as such.⁶⁶ It should be noted that this conceptualization is not meant to insinuate an evolutionary process in which “basic” transcendence equals “primitive” forms of religion, and specific transcendence refers to more elaborate religious phenomena. The scholarly interest regarding the TID is not confined to historical processes but should be focused on observing the processing of “religioid material.”

6 The Process of Transcending: Cases from Ancient China, the New World, and Medieval/Early Modern Europe

To look for processes of transcending that can be described following the three-level model seems to be a promising approach to non-European source material. Their examination may lead to a further qualification of the processes. Thus, object language cases in which formal and, perhaps, specified transcendence emerge from a basic transcendence/immanence distinction might illustrate the model best. In some cases, there is also object language reflection on the very process of transcending, such as in the case of theological speculation, for example, in Nicolas of Cusa.

6.1 *Ancient China: Ascending a Mountain and Becoming Immortal*

As a first example of a process of transcending, I turn to early China.⁶⁷ As an influential part of sinological scholarship argues, the region seemingly lacks a specified transcendence in the common understanding of this term.⁶⁸

65 Thus, as Carmen Meinert put it, it might be, for instance, possible to detect and “identify palimpsests of religious meaning attributed to physical space and material objects.” Meinert, “Beyond Spatial and Temporal Contingencies,” 335.

66 Tallis, *Michelangelo's Finger*, 12. See the turning point as identified by Carmen Meinert, “Beyond Spatial and Temporal Contingencies,” 362.

67 I owe the following example and reference material to Licia Di Giacinto.

68 Schwartz argues for the presence of formally transcendent elements, such as wisdom and doubt, at a very early time in Chinese history (see Schwartz, “Transcendence in Ancient China,” 57, 61). Slingerland in questioning ideas about Abrahamic religions as ‘transcendent’ and Chinese culture being ‘immanent’ even goes so far to juxtapose these ascriptions: “Jesus even goes so far as to continue to make himself materially present (to be

However, there are some notions to be found in the sources that do suggest a relationship to transcendence and processes of transcending. For instance, one term often associated with transcendence in ancient China is *xian*, written as 仙 or 僊. The translation of the term into Western languages, however, varies, although it is most commonly translated as “immortal.”⁶⁹ However, Robert Ford Campany, in his introduction to the translation of *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth* by Ge Hong, decidedly adopts “transcendents” and not ‘immortals’ as the graphs do not mean immortal but rather suggest a process of ascension, i.e., a movement upward in space.⁷⁰ Transcendents, “extraordinarily long-lived if not deathless beings whom godlike powers and celestial status were attributed and memory of whom was preserved in oral and written narrative and at cultic sites,” are expressions of the overall ‘quest for transcendence’ taking place in early China even before Daoism and Buddhism start to institutionalize.⁷¹ There were certain arts and methods, techniques of self-transformation such as dietary restrictions, the making and taking of elixirs, regimes of sexual practices, etc., that, properly performed, were thought to produce transcendents (*xian*).⁷²

drunk and eaten!) in the Eucharist offering. This all seems to me about as ‘immanent’ as you can get. In contrast, the Chinese ancestor spirits and silent Heaven seem positively standoffish. This should give pause to anyone claiming that transcendence from this world is some unique feature of the Abrahamic faiths. It also serves as an excellent illustration of how deeply entrenched cultural myths—in this case, of the ‘immanent’ Chinese worldview and ‘transcendent’ Abrahamic one—continue to be maintained in the face of flagrant counterevidence.” Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China*, 98.

69 See Robert Ford Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth. A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002), 3: “This term is often translated as ‘immortal,’ but, strictly speaking, the texts promised neither a once and-for-all immortality nor an escape from time and change into an eternal stasis, as can immediately be seen from the fact that there were distinct degrees or levels of xian-hood as well as from the fact that texts sometimes distinguish xian from those who have ‘merely’ managed not to die [...]”

70 Robert Ford Campany, *Making Transcendents. Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 34. As the notion of ‘transcendent’ may have a Kantian ring, Campany also suggests ‘ascendent’ as an accurate translation. On ascension literature in the early Han period, see also Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God. Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press 2002), 223: “The ascension literature proliferated by appropriating and radicalizing these divinization practices in order to assert the ability of individuals to transcend their roles, the political order, and the word of forms itself.”

71 See Campany, *Making Transcendents*, XIII.

72 See Campany, *Making Transcendents*, XVI–XVII.

The translation refers to a process of ascending the human beings who are denoted with this term perform.⁷³ By 300 CE, the term had become a marker of accomplishment, designating a more or less final status attributed to an individual.⁷⁴ Moreover, Campany justifies his translation by opposing the Hall/Ames thesis, intending “transcendence” not in the philosophical sense defined by them, “but in a more concrete and metaphorically grounded sense of ‘going beyond,’ ‘surpassing in status, excellence, and/or power,’ or ‘ascendancy over.’”⁷⁵ In order to avoid the fallacy of not taking the manifold gradual distinctions of the concept into consideration, Campany relies on grounded and concrete ways of transcendence, i.e., basic ways of employing the TID (that may be treated formally in object language sources).

Here, it is important to notice that the *xian*-seekers of early Medieval China are not socially distant figures, but rather, in their quest for transcendence, emerge from the midst of society and are essentially related to the surrounding society insofar as they refer to and are dependent on the communal setting and the public response of their endeavor. Though mainly (but not exclusively) to be found on the level of the official classes, there was keen interest in transcendents and the associated process of transcending at all levels of early medieval Chinese society.⁷⁶ The cultural values and religious institutions to which they presented alternatives brought them “back to earth.”⁷⁷

However, Campany’s translations and those of others indicate a certain relationship that is significant for the process of transcending in question. They bear metaphorical potential as expressions of spatial relations. It is the relational aspect that is furthermore qualified in definitions of the notions found in object language material.

There are some early definitions of the term *xian* that verify Campany’s translation, in particular with regard to their spatiality. In the early second century comprehensive dictionary, the *Shuowen Jiezi* (‘Explanation of Simple and Compound Graphs’), it reads: “Xian means long life, to leave (depart) as a

73 See Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 5: “In translating *xian* as ‘transcendent(s)’ when it denotes one or more transformed persons, as ‘transcendence’ when it names their exalted status, as ‘transcend’ when it names what they do (the Chinese term is used in all of these ways), I do not mean to suggest an absolute metaphysical difference between *xian* and lesser beings but rather to capture the essential fact about *xian* as portrayed in texts and images: they have ascended to links in the chain higher than those occupied by even the best human beings.”

74 Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 33.

75 Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 5.

76 Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 37–38.

77 Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 4.

xian" (長生僊去).⁷⁸ *Xian*, thus, is associated with a desirable goal, longevity. Furthermore, the process of leaving indicates a certain relationship between a spatial point 'here' that is left for another spatial point ('there').

In the *Shiming* ('Explaining Names') dictionary, believed to date from around 200 CE, the notion is defined as follows: "Xian means to become old without dying. Xian means to move (*qian* 遷); Qian means to enter the mountains."⁷⁹ Most significantly, the *Shiming* associates *xian* with a particular kind of movement that is connected to a certain place, namely mountains.⁸⁰ That is, a certain upward movement is involved in the process associated with *xian*. So, in general, mountains that are characterized by the properties of elevation and isolation were, on the one hand, instrumental in the quest for transcendence. Moreover, on the other hand, they were generally considered to be a suitable contrast to everyday existence as the "abodes of some who had already achieved xian-hood," as they harbored portals to divine realms.⁸¹

A further useful indication to scrutinize the meaning of the term is Wang Chong's (27–100 CE) encyclopedic collection of critical essays, the wide-ranging classical text *Lunheng* ('Disquisitions' or 'Discourses Weighed in the Balance'; first published in 80 CE). Here, *xian* is glossed with the notion of ascension to Heaven:

Huang Ti was a votary of Tao, and subsequently, as they say, rose to Heaven. If his subjects wanted to honour him, they ought not to have styled him Huang, but ought to have given him a title implying his ascension as an immortal.⁸²

The examination of the source material often shows a significant combination of 'spatial' and 'intensifying' dynamics in processes of transcending.⁸³ Here, the process of transcending may be described, on the one hand, as a spatial

78 See Campamy, *Making Transcendents*, 34.

79 See Campamy, *Making Transcendents*, 34.

80 On mountains as a paramount part of Chinese religious landscape, see Thomas H. Hahn, "The Standard Taoist Mountain and Related Features of Religious Geography," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 4 (1988): 147. Campamy characterizes mountains correspondingly "as sites of religious opportunity." Robert Ford Campamy, "Secrecy and Display in the Quest for Transcendence in China, ca. 220 BCE–350 CE," *History of Religions* 45 (2006): 314. Perhaps it is also possible to describe mountains in this sense as spatial opportunities for something to become religious (or, at least, religioid).

81 Campamy, *Making Transcendents*, 43.

82 Lun-Hêng, Part 1. *Philosophical Essays of Wang Ch'ung*, translated from the Chinese and annotated by Alfred Forke, Leipzig: Harrassowitz 1907, 333.

83 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

shift (climbing a mountain) becoming finally an ontological transformation (rising to Heaven) and, at the same time, on the other hand, as a shift from primitive forms of transcending (reaching out for things) to elaborate ones (becoming immortal, spiritual ascension). Basic, formal, and specific forms of the TID, thus, seem to interrelate.

Now, sources from ancient China recount many anecdotes concerning immortals and the attempts of mortal people to reach this state of being. These sources relate immortality to a process of transcending that involves an ascent, not only regarding spirituality but also quite materially an ascent as the process of moving up, a process that is inevitably associated with a mountain. One finds examples of this specific relation in Sima Tan's (d. 110 BCE) and Sima Qian's (died around 86 BCE) *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*, finished around 94 BCE), and here, in chapter 28 of the work, the *Treatise of the Feng and Shan Rituals* (Fengshan shu).⁸⁴ These examples are associated with the contemporary emperor Wu (141–87 BC) of the Han dynasty.⁸⁵ This emperor acted as a cultic reformer, famously driven by his personal striving for immortality and his interest in reconsidering the relationship of heaven and earth and the role of man.⁸⁶ The *Grand Historian* describes the first years of his rule as follows:

When the present emperor first came to the throne, he showed the greatest reverence in carrying out the sacrifices to the various spirits and gods. In the first year of his reign (140 BC), because it had been over sixty years since the founding of the Han, and the empire was at peace, the gentlemen of court all hoped that the emperor would perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices and change the calendar and other regulations of the dynasty.⁸⁷

84 Quoted in the following edition: Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II*, trans. Burton Watson (Hong Kong/New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 3.

85 Cahill characterizes the (at least for T'ang Chinese) as such already larger-than-life-figure (transcending normal rulers) of Emperor Wu as follows: "During the Han, no reign outshone that of Han Wu-ti for military conquest, new government institutions, and religious innovations." Cahill, *Transcendence & Divine Passion*, 143. His self-transcending political achievements, thus, seem to claim for religious continuation, though, as one T'ang poet put it: "Han Wu-ti is a great hero of Chinese history and the model of a successful monarch; yet he failed in Taoist terms because he did not achieve the proper balance between political and religious concerns" (ibid., 156).

86 See Dorothee Schaab-Hanke, "The Power of an Alleged Tradition: A Prophecy Flattering Han Emperor Wu and its relation to the Sima Clan," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 74 (2002): 25.

87 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 24.

The emperor's interest in cultic matters, however, was not unproblematic. There is a certain tension between transcendence and empire as a system of relations to divine powers transcended by withdrawing from the divine-human exchange, resulting in a incompatibility of roles of ruler and transcendent.⁸⁸ Within the following examples, nevertheless, a significant parallel is drawn between the present ruler and the legendary Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) also mentioned in the Lunheng-quote, the creator of the state and primogenitor of all Chinese rulers, and, in fact, the only ancient figure "reputed to have managed to become, as ruler, a transcendent."⁸⁹ The mountain in question is a concrete place, the Taishan, one of China's sacred mountains.⁹⁰ The Feng and Shan sacrifices were exceptional performances as "the most solemn of imperial rites,"⁹¹ addressing Heaven and Earth respectively, as an attempt to bridge the roles of emperor and transcendent.⁹² The Feng ritual was part of a series of mountain offerings, which allowed for both a more political and a more religious interpretation.⁹³ On the one hand, the rites asserted sovereignty over the Emperor's territories and proclaimed his triumphs to gods and men. On the other hand, the rites were also a performed pursuit of immortality.⁹⁴ The Shiji affirms this interpretation by quoting an aged scholar, Master Ding of Qi, who explicitly hints at this connection: "The word feng indicates the concept of immortality."⁹⁵ The word, thus, is pointed out as indicating a special state normally beyond the reach of humans, formally transcending the practice performed there on the mountains. In any case, the rituals were considered as

88 See Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 199–201.

89 Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 202.

90 As it seems, the Feng ritual was always performed on the Taishan, whereas the place of the Shan ritual differs, see *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 9.

91 Schaab-Hanke, "The Power of an Alleged Tradition," 246.

92 Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 203.

93 Hans van Ess here points at the fact that the original meaning of Feng was 'to pile up a hill': "Das im Titel des Traktates an erster Stelle stehende Wort feng heißt in seiner Grundbedeutung 'einen Hügel aufhäufen', von welchem sich dann die bekanntere Bedeutung 'belehnen' ableitet. In unserem Zusammenhang steht es für das heiligste Himmelsopfer am Gipfel des Berges T'ai, zu dessen Zweck aus Erde ein Altar oder eben eine Erderhöhung errichtet wird. Ein neuer Herrscher erhält dann vom Himmel seinen Auftrag—seine Beilehnung." Hans van Ess, "Der Sinn des Opfertraktats feng-shan shu des Ssu-ma Ch'ei," *Archiv orientální. Quarterly Journal of African and Asian Studies* 70 (2002): 126.

94 Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires. Qin and Han* (Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap 2007), 186. Both interpretations were to a certain extent interconnected, as "[...] the acquisition of land and the pursuit of immortality were closely linked, for immortals lived at the edges of the earth or on the peaks of mountains, which only a world-ruling monarch could bring within his realm" (*ibid.*, 21).

95 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 41.

matters of great importance and dignity that only the worthiest emperors may perform. As the *Shiji* notes:

Among those who have received the mandate of Heaven and become rulers, few have been blessed with the auspicious omens telling them that they are worthy to perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices. When these are carried out, there is none among the countless spirits who does not enjoy pure offerings.⁹⁶

The *Shiji* repeatedly stresses the particularity of the rituals, not at least by pointing out that they were seldom performed.⁹⁷ This means that the emperor Wu did not in fact know how to perform them correctly as his advisors gave him different, difficult instructions on how to execute the ritual.⁹⁸ However, he finds the ritual a necessity that must be performed and thus be institutionally reestablished, for the sake of his dynasty and for himself.⁹⁹

The first anecdote related in the *Shiji* concerns a speech given by a magician or master of esoterica (*fangshi*).¹⁰⁰ Li Shaojun was a self-declared expert not only in the techniques for dealing with ghosts and spirits, but also an initiate in the worship of the God of the Fireplace and further well-acquainted with the methods of how to become immortal.¹⁰¹ The *fangshi* were, thus, very likely to (formally) highlight the transcending potential of certain practices. Li Shaojun, or rather, Li the Youthful Lord, is considered to be the most important of the *fangshi*, notorious in historical works but represented positively in

96 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 3.

97 "[...] the emperor had ordered his high ministers and court scholars to discuss the question of the Feng and Shan, but since these sacrifices were so seldom performed and since the last performance had been so long ago, no one knew the proper ceremony to be followed." *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 41.

98 As the *Shiji* relates, "the emperor had thought over the various recommendations which the Confucian scholars and the magicians had made concerning the Feng and Shan sacrifices, but he was troubled by the fact that each said something different and that many of their recommendations were absurd or almost impossible to put into practice." (*Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 43) There is also a pragmatic explanation for this: "The rituals employed in the worship of these places, therefore, were often changed and varied from age to age. It is consequently impossible to give a detailed description of them all here." *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 16.

99 Compare *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 51.

100 On the *fangshi* (also translated as 'man of techniques' or even 'outsiders'), see Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism. Growth of a Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 37–39, 42–45.

101 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 25. See Schaab-Hanke, "The Power of an Alleged Tradition," 246.

later Daoist texts.¹⁰² Li may have had a claim to be transcendent himself, given the extreme longevity attributed to him and the striking disjunction between his apparent and actual age. Accordingly, displaying his intimate knowledge of matters of the glorious past, Li Shaojun told the emperor:

By making offerings to the Spirit of Furnace, the Yellow Emperor *reached things*. He reached things and cinnabar transmuted into gold. He made vessels for eating and drinking out of the gold and he prolonged his timespan, by finally meeting the immortals of Penglai Island in the sea. After that, he performed the Feng and Shan ceremonies (*on the Taishan mountain*) and he did not die. This was the Yellow Emperor, indeed.¹⁰³

If you sacrifice to the fireplace you can call the spirits to you, and if the spirits come you can transform cinnabar into gold. Using this gold, you may make drinking and eating vessels, which will prolong the years of your life. With prolonged life you may visit the island of Penglai in the middle of the sea. If you visit them and perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices, you will never die. This is what the Yellow Emperor did.¹⁰⁴

The way to immortality, transcending human limitations, the master of formula points out, includes alchemical means and a journey to significant places.¹⁰⁵ Here, in Li Shaojun's account, the process of ascending/transcending is associated with certain places, notably Mount Tai and the mysterious Penglai islands. The latter is conspicuously described elsewhere as also being

102 The fangshi can be interpreted as important figures in the process of the emergence of Daoism as a religion, as they contributed to the particular imaginaires from which the religion emerged. See Hans van Ess, *Der Daoismus. Von Laozi bis heute* (München: Beck, 2011), 42. On the relation of the fangshi and Daoists see Robinet, *Taoism*, 43: "The affinity of the subjects studied by the fangshi and those of interest to the Taoists was so great and lasted for so long that the distinction between these thinkers and the Taoists is not easy to make—to the point that many treatises on geomancy and divination that derive from fangshi practices have been incorporated into the Daozang, the Taoist canon."

103 Translation by Licia Di Giacinto.

104 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty 11*, 26.

105 Wolfgang Ommerborn has highlighted the fact that the Emperor Wu is described as being particularly fond of travelling, connecting his cultic reform agenda with spatial movement, thus both using travels as an instrument for increasing his power and implicitly referring to spiritual travels of shamans, see Ommerborn, *Zwischen Sakralem und Säkularem*, 293.

a mountain.¹⁰⁶ Climbing up the mountain and performing the ritual there appears in these extracts as a necessary precondition of the final defiance of death, which has been prepared for through the proper use of alchemical material.¹⁰⁷ By doing so, the imperial adept is able to transcend mankind's common condition and transform longevity into immortality.

At least according to the *Shiji*, this final goal is not described as being categorially out of reach, as it is connected to concrete places, Mount Tai and the Penglai Islands. The process of transcending is always related to space. In the case of Penglai, the *Shiji* reports that on several occasions, rulers sent out servants to find them. However, although the islands could be seen, none of the messengers was ever able to reach them, as they represent a place beyond that cannot be reached by a mere mortal.

men were sent from time to time to set out to sea and search for the islands of Penglai, Fangzhang, and Yingzhou. These were three spirit mountains which were supposed to exist in the Gulf of Bohai. They were not very far from the land of men, it was said, but the difficulty was that, whenever a boat was about to touch their shores, a wind would always spring up and drive it away. In the past, people said, there had been men who succeeded in reaching them, and found them peopled by fairy spirits who possessed the elixir of immortality. All the plants and birds and animals of the islands were white, and the palaces and gates were made of gold and silver. Seen from afar, the three spirit mountains looked like clouds but, as one drew closer, they seemed instead to be down under the water. In any event, as soon as anyone got near to them, the wind would suddenly come and drag the boat away, so that in the end no one could ever reach them.¹⁰⁸

The spatial characteristics of the islands given here are of great importance. Though the islands are reported to be located not far from the human sphere in a concrete place, nevertheless, they cannot be reached or even perceived properly. On one occasion, they are associated with the sky as clouds; on another occasion they seem instead to be submerged in water. The islands, populated

106 As Campany explains, mountains, and, significantly, their geographical counterpart, marshes "were understood as antihuman, extracivilizational, liminal, and hence dangerous zones but also, for those very reasons, as sites of religious opportunity." Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 107.

107 Li Shaojun's speech as documented in the *Shiji* is "the first recognized record of Chinese alchemy." Robinet, *Taoism*, 43.

108 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 14.

with wondrous animals and displaying overwhelming riches and the elixir of immortality with them, are protected from everyday access.¹⁰⁹ The places of the immortals are, in object language description, kept secret. Though visible and it is claimed to be obtainable, they are not directly accessible. Only adepts are able to see the goal and further act as guards of the secret ways to travel there.¹¹⁰ The distinct sphere of the transcendents, thus, is mediated by secrecy in its paradoxical way of being known to be unknown.¹¹¹

Thanks to this quality of being known as unknown, the places of the transcendents remain a goal to be sought, although all efforts are likely to be disappointed. Qin Shihuang sent youths and maidens in his stead, as he was unlikely to reach the island himself. The youths blamed the wind as an excuse for their failure: “‘We were unable to reach the islands,’ they reported, ‘but we could see them in the distance!’”¹¹² As all texts insist, although the islands were unreachable, they could still be glimpsed—or pointed to, in the terminology of transcendence. Some years later, in times of the Han emperor Wu, the islands seemed to have become even more unreachable, though they were still located close by:

The men who had been sent to sea in search of the island of Penglai reported that it was not far away, but that they had as yet been unable to reach it because they could barely make out the emanations which indicated its location.¹¹³

The second example is closely related to the first. As the emperor Wu became more desperate owing to his failure to reach immortality and the poor performance of his magicians, another figure, the ‘man of Qi’ Gongsun Qing, appeared at the court. In his deposition to the emperor, the magician Gongsun

109 “The idea that strange locals in the distant horizons of the known world harbor longevity- or transcendence-inducing substances is as old in China as the goal of transcendence itself. We find numerous references to the hope of finding these mysterious realms, penetrating their veil of mystery and ingesting their marvelous, potent products.” Campamy, *Making Transcendents*, 82.

110 See Campamy, *Making Transcendents*, 124. On the relation of secrets and (the ascension to) mountains as a place and way to gain transcending knowledge in Gnostic teachings see Gedaliahu G.A. Stroumsa, *Another Seed—Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden: Brill 1984), 115–123.

111 See chapter on Secret.

112 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty 11*, 15.

113 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty 11*, 35.

Qing¹¹⁴ referred to a revealed tablet/mysterious passage that he claimed to have inherited from his master, Lord Shen, who, in turn, had received it from his immortal teacher, Master An Qi.¹¹⁵ Questioned by the emperor, Gongsun Qing replied as follows:

Master Shen was a man of Qi who was friendly with the immortal, Master Anqi, and from him he received the words of the Yellow Emperor. He possessed no writings, but only a cauldron inscription which said: "When the Han dynasty comes to power, the months and days shall fall the same as they did at the time of the Yellow Emperor." It further said: "The sage of the Han shall be the grandson or great-grandson of Gaozu. A precious cauldron shall appear and he shall commune with the spirits at the Feng and Shan sacrifices. Of all the seventy-two rulers who attempted the Feng and Shan, only the Yellow Emperor was able to ascend Mt. Tai and perform the Feng!" Master Shan told me, "The ruler of the Han shall also ascend the mountain and perform the Feng, and when he has done this, then he will become immortal and will climb up to heaven!"¹¹⁶

Obviously, the story told, and the advice given to the emperor hit a nerve. As Gongsun Qing suggests, the times of the immortal Yellow Emperor and that of the Han dynasty paralleled each other significantly, making the Yellow Emperor an example to be followed for the current Han ruler, the great-grandson of the founder of the dynasty, Han Gaozu (256–195 BCE). This is particularly crucial in the case of the actions to be taken in order to become immortal, or rather, a transcendent. Making a transcendent of the Han emperor, the master of formula, points out, requires climbing a mountain and performing a ritual there. To a certain degree, the three-level model of transcendence is present in Gongsun Qing's story. The mountain, as a particular place, is of special importance to this process, as Gongsun Qing in his speech to the emperor, emphasizes. It is the place to meet the spirits:

114 On Gongsun Qing and his dubious reputation within the Shiji see Schaab-Hanke, "The Power of an Alleged Tradition," 245. On his relation to the fangshi, see Ommerborn, *Zwischen Sakralem und Säkularem*, 300–301.

115 "The ruler, his advisers, and contemporary readers of the Shi ji narrative would have recognized the name An Qi as that of a reputedly long-lived master of esoterica who was honored by the founding emperor of Qin and who helped inspire eastward sea excursions seeking methods of immortality during that ruler's reign." Campamy, *Making Transcendents*, 118.

116 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 36.

In the world there are eight famous mountains, three of them in the lands of the barbarians and five of them within China. The five in China are Mt. Hua, Mt. Shou, The Great Room, Mt. Tai, and Mt. Donglai. The Yellow Emperor often visited these five mountains and met there with the spirits.¹¹⁷

Obviously not without a personal stake in the matter, Gongsun Qing additionally stresses that in pursuing the goal of becoming a transcendent, there is also stubbornness and some degree of ruthlessness required. Hence, occasional drawbacks and failures should not be laid at the door of the advising magician. The successful Yellow Emperor again sets the example to be followed:

At times the Yellow Emperor made war, and at times he studied the arts of becoming an immortal, but he was distressed that the common people criticized his ways and so he beheaded anyone who spoke ill of the spirits. After 100 years or so he was able to commune with the spirits.¹¹⁸

The inspired Han emperor understandably reacted to Gongsun Qing's account of the concrete prospects for immortality with great enthusiasm. He started a process of ritual reform and performed the Feng and Shan rituals on the mountain in the following years. His ascension, the performance of the rituals, and his return from the mountain were largely secret. The emperor was accompanied by only a single attendant, who was conveniently stricken with a sudden and violent illness and died shortly after.¹¹⁹ Thus, the difference between the world of normal men and the sphere the emperor yearned for is once again apparent.

The hapless servant, however, was not the only victim of the emperor's urge to become a transcendent. Several magicians who failed him suffered severe punishment. Moreover, and most significantly, the emperor was willing to sacrifice fundamental aspects of traditional social requirements to achieve his goal. Even filial piety, the kinship-based cult of the dead, and the importance of family in Chinese culture stood no chance against his desire to transcendence, marking the tension between families and immortals.¹²⁰

117 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 36–37.

118 *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 37.

119 See *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 43–44.

120 See Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*, 202.

When the emperor heard this, he gave a great sigh and said, 'Ah! If I could only become like the Yellow Emperor, I would think no more of my wife and children than of a castoff slipper!' He then honored Gongsun Qing with the position of palace attendant and sent him east to wait upon the spirits at the Great Room, Mt. Song.¹²¹

Transcending, here, also involves transcending social conventions and social constraints. The emperor is not willing to elevate his family to his prospected status but would rather cast them aside regardless. The search for longevity and, ultimately, immortality conflicts against the very basis of Chinese society: "In early medieval China, dying was an event that set off a chain of specific social and ritual processes. Not dying, therefore, amounted to absenting oneself from those processes and from the larger system that sustained them."¹²² In this sense, becoming divine is thus a product of discontinuity.¹²³

Though Emperor Wu was all too willing to follow Gongsun Qing's advice to become immortal, the failures of his previous magicians and the tricks they employed to fool him also rendered him skeptical about the miraculous events Gongsun Qing claimed to have witnessed. Gongsun Qing, therefore, had to justify his approach to the emperor, arguing to him that there is a special state of mind required to approach the path to immortality:

'Are you sure you are not trying the same sort of trick as Shaoweng and Luan Da?' the emperor asked. 'The immortals do not seek for the ruler of men,' replied Gongsun Qing. 'It is the ruler who must seek for them! Unless one sets about the task with a liberal and open-minded attitude, I am afraid the spirits will never appear. When men discuss spiritual matters, their words are apt to sound wild and irrational, but if these matters are pursued for a sufficient number of years, the spirits can eventually be persuaded to come forth!'¹²⁴

¹²¹ *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty 11*, 37. This is a striking example for the reason why "[p]roponents of the goal of transcendence felt compelled to defend it against the charge that adapts were unfilial." Campney, *Making Transcendents*, 54. "In early medieval China," Campney explains further, "dying was an event that set off a chain of specific social and ritual processes. Not dying, therefore, amounted to absenting oneself from those processes and from the larger systems that sustained them" (*ibid.*, 57).

¹²² Campney, *Making Transcendents*, 57.

¹²³ Puett, *To Become a God*, 214.

¹²⁴ *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty 11*, 39.

According to Gongsun Qin, the process of transcending from necessity starts from the immanent sphere, exemplified by the desire of the ruler of men to seek immortals. He also makes an open mind the precondition for the very possibility of contacting beings who are not objects to everyday perception, thus acknowledging the possibility of the other showing itself in the immanent sphere.¹²⁵ It is a process of standing back and looking beyond what the magician advocates, a process that transcends everyday perception. Despite the fact that the authors of the *Shiji*, in general are skeptical about the magicians described and about the validity of their claims, the inclusion of the advice they gave represents a significant series of ideas concerning the possible ways of reaching a transcendent place or sphere by immanent means.¹²⁶ Moreover, their advice and claims were taken seriously by those around them—at the very least, by the Emperor.

The examples of the magicians Li Shaojun and Gongsun Qing as related in the *Shiji* are of specific relevance for the examination of the process of transcending as they paradigmatically combine the forms of the transcendence/immanence distinction. Regarding the three-level model of the TID, the account benefits from a formal analysis. By climbing up a mountain, an individual may reach for the status of a transcendent.¹²⁷ We may interpret the

125 “[The emperor] had been told by Gongsun Qing and the other magicians, however, that when the Yellow Emperor and the rulers before him had performed the Feng and Shan, they had all succeeded in summoning forth supernatural beings and communing with the spirits. He therefore wished to imitate the example of these rulers by getting into touch with the spirits and the immortals of Penglai and achieving fame in the world so that his virtue might be compared to that of the Nine Bright Ones of antiquity.” *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 41.

126 The account of Li Shaojun, for example, and his own claim of immortality is juxtaposed with the laconic mention of his death (“After some time, Li Shaojun fell ill and died.” *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty II*, 26). Gongsun Qing’s later endeavors are described as utter failures: “[T]he reader will get the general impression that Gongsun Qing was nothing but an ignorant and esoteric charlatan who by winning and abusing the emperor’s trust and confidence merely served his own ends.” Schaab-Hanke, “The Power of an Alleged Tradition,” 248, 253–254. Hans van Ess explicitly reads the passages on the Feng and Shan rituals as an outspoken critique on the emperor’s cult of immortality, see van Ess, “Der Sinn des Opfertraktats feng-shan shu des Ssu-ma Ch’ien,” 132.

127 On the relationships between Chinese temples and mountains, see Shawn Arthur, “Wafting Incense and Heavenly Foods: The Importance of Smell in Chinese Religion,” in *Sensual Religion. Religion and the Five Senses*, eds. Graham Harvey and Jessica Hughes (Sheffield/Bristol: Equinox, 2018), 44–45: “[M]any Chinese temples are built to symbolize a sacred mountain. The visitor starts at the bottom of the mountain and works their way up each peak and valley until they reach the summit, which houses the most important deity statue. These temples also have a variety of natural elements such as foliage, fragrant flowers and trees, which together bring in other mountain elements. Why mountains?

mountain as a sign of a processing and directed movement, indicated by the word 'up' that suggests itself.¹²⁸ Accordingly, the directed movement 'up' at the same time presupposes a movement 'down' as a contrast, as well as a relationship between 'up/down'. Regarding the TID, the roughly triangular shape of the mountain can be explicated as manifesting the directions 'up' and 'down' and their relationship, expressing a movement to a certain place that is qualified by directions.¹²⁹ These directions, however, are necessarily relative to a certain standpoint ('up from here' and 'down from here'). The role of spatial metaphors within the object language description of processes of transcending becomes most obvious when the function of mountains as indicative elements in religious narratives is observed.

Basic transcendence, thus, denotes a threefold processual structure comprising an interrelation of directions/directives. This might be, for example, the directive 'up' and 'down', but at a more elementary level, this could be the distinction of 'here' and 'there'. Formal transcendence as the process of standing back and looking beyond denotes the particular ascription of certain notions to the process of basic transcendence. This ascription is performed on the object language level by a self-reflective individual. In the case of the Han Emperor Wu, the notion of immortality is related to the process of ascending, or, specifically, performing an act of basic transcending in moving 'up' the mountain (from 'here'). The directives 'up' and 'down' serve as primary or basic metaphors in the sense of Lakoff and Johnson involved in the process of transcending, thus indicating the formalization of basic transcendence.¹³⁰ Formal transcending here is not yet religious, but it provides the religioid model form¹³¹ of transcending, which may be filled with religious meaning. Puett correspondingly describes, "[t]he practices they [texts of self-cultivation] espoused are to be used not to gain understanding or control of this world but to transcend

Because their peaks are in the clouds (almost like clouds of incense), where immortals live and where one could be physically closer to the gods who live in the heavens (the stars)."

128 As Hahn with reference to the 'ideal' Taoist mountain points out, the directed movement involved is not restricted to the 'up/down' relation, but may also refer to the relation of being 'outside' the Mountain and being 'inside' (a cave), see Hahn, "The Standard Taoist Mountain and Related Features of Religious Geography," 148.

129 On the role of primary metaphors of vertical height in human cognition see Kashmiri Stec and Eve Sweetser, "Borobudur and Chartres: Religious spaces as performative real-space blends," in *Sensuous Cognition. Explorations into Human Sentience: Imagination, (E)motion and Perception* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 272–273.

130 See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 257.

131 See chapter on Model Forms.

it.”¹³² Here, the process of transcending is taken one step further, from the status of formal transcendence that allows for knowledge and control to a realm beyond. The directions of ascension, vertical symbolism, movements of climbing and elevating, and the importance of height in the description of early Christian visions of heaven are corresponding phenomena.¹³³ Such a specified transcendence might be ascribed to the emperor who, by ascending, becomes an immortal (and, perhaps, a god)—though the permeability of the human and the divine sphere clearly differs in this case from other notions of religiously specified transcendence, such as in Christian negative theology.¹³⁴

In retrospect, key figures in the events surrounding Emperor Wu's religious reforms were indeed imbued with religious meaning by later religious traditions. The *fangshi* portrayed in the *Shiji*, above all, Li Shaojun, are often considered as important figures for the proto-history of Daoism as an institutional religion.¹³⁵ Accordingly, in Daoist history, the words of explanation uttered by the two *fangshi* or masters of formula Li Shaojun and Gongsun Qin, in retrospect may be identified as the original scenes of Daoist religion, the turning points of formal into specified transcendence.¹³⁶ Their practices and ideas can be described as the religioïd material that developed into a specified religion. *Fangshi* practices were incorporated into the Daoist canon, and *fangshi* cosmology is a source for Daoist cosmology.¹³⁷ Generally, I would argue that there are no particular turning points at which one level of transcendence becomes another in concrete historical development, but rather only gradual changes that slowly transform one level into the other. There are, however, such well-defined turning points in the retrospection of the tradition in question that may be used in the scholarly description of processes.¹³⁸

The *Shiji* cases, however, also show that the distinction between basic, formal, and specific transcendence is an analytical distinction. Within the material to be examined, the three forms are simultaneously present and closely intertwined. Accordingly, this fact shows that it is not adequate, in order to

132 Puett, *To Become a God*, 221.

133 Compare Jan Bremmer, “Contextualizing Heaven in Third-Century North Africa,” in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, eds. R.S. Boustani and A.Y. Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

134 See Ommerborn, *Zwischen Sakralem und Säkularem*, 378.

135 See Robinet, *Taoism*, 43. Roth translates the notion of *fangshi* as ‘Formula-Scholars’ (Harold D. Roth, *Original Tao. Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 22).

136 Compare chapter on Retrospection.

137 See Robinet, *Taoism*, 44.

138 See chapter on Tradition.

discern its potential as a *tertium comparationis*, to start one's examination of the TID by employing and looking for specified transcendence. To examine religions, one has to examine the way people show (something). The instances of the religioid—basic and formal transcendence—provide a systematic starting point for the examination of processes of transcending in diverse cultures, ultimately leading to discernable religious traditions with a fully semantized notion of the TID.

6.2 *Crossing the Ocean and Performing a Process of Transcending: William Bradford on the Pilgrim Fathers*

The spatial, geographical, and 'intensifying' aspects of transcending processes are not restricted to early Chinese material. Alexandra Cuffel, for instance, has analyzed cases of religious contact in early modern Jewish contexts in Ottoman-ruled Palestine that combine spatial movement and transformation. Having coined the notion of 'religious translocation' for this process, Cuffel examines basic geographical translocations, passing between the world of spirits to the world of the living and vice versa, and even a movement between religious affiliations and the transmigrations of souls.¹³⁹

These translocating, transcending processes are also addressed in the 'Western' tradition. Here, they are also linked to movement. Spatial metaphors are similarly prominent. Transcending, however, does not necessarily involve mountains but can also involve the sea, as the search for the Penglai Islands shows. It also happens not just to individuals but also to groups or communities of people. And, of course, it does not only happen in Asia or Europe but also elsewhere.

A telling example is found in the case of William Bradford (1589/90–1657),¹⁴⁰ a weaver by profession but better known as a passenger of the *Mayflower* and later governor of the New Plymouth colony, in which post he served intermittently from 1621 to his death. Born in Yorkshire and orphaned at a young age, Bradford joined the Puritan community of Scrooby and left England with them for Holland at the age of eighteen. From September to November 1620, he took part in the legendary journey aboard the *Mayflower*, was a signatory of the Mayflower Compact, was one of the original members of Plymouth Colony,

139 See Alexandra Cuffel, "From Geographical Migration to Transmigration of Souls: Negotiating Religious Differences between Space among Jews in Early Modern Safed," in *Locating Religions. Contact, Diversity and Translocality*, eds. Reinhold F. Gleis and Nikolas Jaspert (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 74–75.

140 I owe the reference to this example to a presentation given by Magnus Schlette at the KHK.

and became, moreover, its first and paramount historiographer. The mythical significance of the journey for later American self-understanding is mainly down to Bradford's written account of it. It is celebrated by American historians and literary scholars "[a]s a touchstone for our national mythology, as a central historical document, and as our first great work of literature," thus rendering it "the most important work of the seventeenth century."¹⁴¹

As a religiously engaged writer of a particular history, Bradford was deeply involved in the doctrinal struggles of his time. Not least, his works manifest the drive for self-understanding of a religious group that felt challenged by its environment. In his book *Of Plymouth Plantation* (written between 1630 and 1647), Bradford describes the geographical shift that had taken place, the concrete event of the voyage of the Pilgrim Fathers to America, as an intensifying process of transcending.¹⁴² Within his account, Bradford performs an act of formal transcendence through his reflections on the journey and the descriptions, reasons, and conclusions he gives about it.¹⁴³ This may be concluded from the (theological) motifs and model forms Bradford employs in his narrative. Bradford's exegetical reading of the Bible within the narrative becomes a history that transcends factual events and provides them with religious meaning.¹⁴⁴

The story is about a particular community of Puritans, characterized by its special relationships towards God and the wider world. The community, as Bradford relates, emerged out of necessity, and existed in tension with its environment to an extent that resulted in personal hardships for its members. Supposedly, in reaction to King James I's religious politics, Bradford's Puritan community chose to break with the official church.¹⁴⁵ Bradford describes the process of demarcation as follows:

¹⁴¹ Alan B. Howard, "Art and History in Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 28 (1971): 238.

¹⁴² William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, (New York: Renaissance Classics 2012).

¹⁴³ David Laurence assumes that Bradford "[...] mobilized a rhetorical strategy whose energy arranges a structure of transcendence normally associated with Romanticism." David Laurence, "William Bradford's American Sublime," *PMLA* 102 (1987): 65.

¹⁴⁴ On the relationship between the historical, theological and literary aspects within Bradford's narrative, see Ursula Brumme, "Did the Pilgrim Fathers Fall upon Their Knees when They Arrived in the New World? Art and History in the Ninth Chapter, Book One, of Bradford's History 'Of Plymouth Plantation,'" *Early American Literature* 12 (1977).

¹⁴⁵ On Bradford's dubious claims of monarchical persecution, see Sandra Goodall, *Beyond Bradford's Journal: The Scrooby Puritans in Context* (PhD Diss., Arizona State University, 2015), 116–117: "Prior to 1980, the scholarly view of religious attitudes about late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England was based on the accepted notion of the period as a persecuting society. What does it take to be a persecuting society? R.I. Moore,

So many therfore of these proffessors as saw ye evill of these things, in thes parts, and whose harts ye Lord had touched with heavenly zeale for his trueth, they shooke of this yoake of antichristian bondage, and as ye Lords free people, joined them selves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in ye fellowship of ye gospel, to walke in all his ways, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them. And that it cost them something this ensewing historie will declare.¹⁴⁶

Regardless of whether Bradford's claims of persecution in England are valid, the description of the existential state he gives concerning the members of his group is of great significance. In Bradford's account, his community is a collective body that exists in a particular dynamic state, as they are intended to be a fellowship of the gospel who walk in the ways of the Lord as the Lord directs them to. As the following narrative shows, they are walking in a quite literal sense. The dynamic process that underpins the community is also a process that intensifies as it continues, as it is physically, emotionally, and spiritually challenging, bringing hardships to the community.¹⁴⁷ Hence, Bradford describes the history of the community as building to a climax, as the challenges and hardships culminating in the community's experiences in the New World.¹⁴⁸

In the fourth chapter of his book, Bradford elaborates on the inducements toward taking the journey "Showing ye reasons & causes of their remoovall."

Peter Grell, and Robert Scribner argue that persecuting societies develop in three stages: classification, stigmatization, and persecution. While we have seen evidence of classification in early modern England, with the labeling of some Protestants as Puritans, Brownists, and Anabaptists, we have not seen evidence of widespread stigmatization of Puritans in this period. Quite the opposite is true. Puritans were integrated into society at every level, including James' court. Puritan and Puritan supporters occupied key positions in the bishoprics. And there is no evidence of widespread Puritan persecution in lay society. There is very little evidence that any of these groups, with the exception of the Anabaptists, experienced the final stage of persecution, which is marked by the 'pursuit, denunciation, and interrogation, exclusion from the community, deprivation of civil rights, and the loss of property, liberty, and on occasion, life itself.'

¹⁴⁶ Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 7.

¹⁴⁷ On the physical or bodily effects of the Pilgrim's journey, see Kathleen Donegan, "As Dying, Yet Behold We Live': Catastrophe and Interiority in Bradford's 'Of Plymouth Plantation,'" *Early American Literature* 37 (2002).

¹⁴⁸ For example, see Bradford's foreshadowing lines in the first chapter of his book: "But after these things they could not long continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted & persecuted on every side, so as their former afflictions were but as flea-bitings in comparison of these which now came upon them." (Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 8 (1)).

As instructed by the 'grave mistress experience', following long consideration and not due to any 'new-fangledness', the idea of removing to some other place became dominant within the community.¹⁴⁹ The primary reason behind the decision to move, as Bradford argues in the introductory first chapter of his book, was a current danger: Satan's primordial, ongoing, everlasting wars against the Saints.

It is well knowne unto ye godly and judicious, how ever since ye first breaking out of ye lighte of ye gospell in our Honorable Nation of England, (which was ye first of nations whom ye Lord adorned ther with, after yt grosse darknes of popery which had covered & overspred ye Christian world,) what warrs & opposissions ever since, Satan has raised, maintained, and continued against the Saincts, from time to time, in one sorte or other.¹⁵⁰

These wars were manifested in the suppression of religious liberty in their home countries, in the dangers of physical persecution and, not least, in the danger of being spiritually seduced by the evil temptations present in their current environment.¹⁵¹ Of course, this self-image is modeled after a Biblical

149 "[...] the grave mistris Experience haveing taught them many things, those prudent governours with sundrie of ye sagest members begane both deeply to apprehend their present dangers, & wisely to forsee ye future, & thinke of timly remedy. In ye agitation of their thoughts, and much discours of things hear aboute, at length they began to incline to this conclusion, of remoovall to some other place. Not out of any newfanglednes, or other such like giddie humor, by which men are oftentimes transported to their great hurt & danger, but for sundrie weightie & solid reasons [...]" William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 21 (iv).

150 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 1 (1). Howard, however, rediscovers the more basic motivation of employing a religious interpretation of events (in Luhmannian terms): "Complexity, not Satan, is the real antagonist in the drama of Plymouth Plantation." Howard, "Art and History in Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*," 249.

151 In her dissertation *Beyond Bradford's Journal: The Scrooby Puritans in Context*, Sandra Goodall concludes that "[...] the Scrooby Puritans may not have been fleeing from authorities trying to confine them for their religious beliefs, but from the corruption of their very souls, had they remained in England and under the theological influences of the Church of England." Goodall argues that to Bradford, physical persecution, is an inevitable element in a certain narrative, elaborated from "rare, individual experiences informed by a separatist theology into a tale of deep and wide spread persecution." Summarizing her findings, Goodall claims: "Had historians examined the history of persecution in England and the ecclesiastical and court records for evidence of actual instances of persecution suffered by the Scrooby Puritans, they would have found the record to be lacking any evidence of persecution or prosecution in the traditional sense. It is only through a close reading of the theological record do we find that the persecution suffered by the Scrooby

model form that provides the description with transcendental significance. Bradford, accordingly, makes use of the Anglo-Saxon myth of migration¹⁵² and “describes the exodus of the Pilgrim Fathers through England, Holland, and America as the ultimate test of faith in divine Providence that the English Israel must undergo.”¹⁵³

In Bradford’s account, the faith-testing challenges the pilgrims would face started well before their famous crossing of the Atlantic. The Puritan Separatists, later the Pilgrim Fathers, having publicly refused allegiance to any institutional authority on their journey from Scrooby Manor, where their first congregation was formed, proceeded to the Dutch Republic, first to Amsterdam and then to Leiden:

[B]y a joynte consente they resolved to goe into ye Low-Countries, wher they heard was freedome of Religion for all men.¹⁵⁴

Here, after a nine-month stay in Amsterdam, they established a place for themselves at ‘Stink Alley’ in Leiden.¹⁵⁵ However, the religious tolerance of their new place of residence also presented some severe drawbacks to Bradford’s communities, as they were confronted with other communities that they saw as threatening their spiritual well-being. Though admittedly, they did not suffer institutional persecution in the Dutch Republic, Bradford takes great pains in describing the situation with reference to the situation of the Israelites in Egypt.¹⁵⁶ Ultimately, the aims of Bradford’s community reveal a significant spatial dimension. Explaining the reasons for the idea ‘of remoovall to some other place’, Bradford lists the hardships of their present place as unlikely to

Puritans was not actually persecution, but a narrative form of persecution they felt necessary to elevate them to sainthood.” Goodall, *Beyond Bradford’s Journal*, 1 and 195.

152 See Michael Modarelli, “William Bradford and His Anglo-Saxon Influences,” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 46 (2014): 40–41: “Bradford [...] serves as the first instance of Anglo-Saxon themes in early American literature, placing the Saxon Christendom model squarely on New World shores with a purposeful social crossing. [...] Buttressed by themes translated by John Foxe, Bradford’s mission served as the link to a glorious ancient past, an authoritative voice of Anglo-Saxon vision and a religious connection to Christian Saxon liberties free from the constraint of a dominant power.”

153 José María Rodríguez García, “Exiles and Arrivals in Christopher Columbus and William Bradford,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 28 (2002): 75.

154 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 8 (1).

155 On the sojourn of the group in Leiden, see Jeremy Dupertuis, *Bangs, Strangers and Pilgrims, Travellers and Sojourners: Leiden and the Foundations of Plymouth Plantation* (Plymouth, MA: The General Society of Mayflower Decedents, 2009).

156 Compare Rodríguez García, “Exiles and Arrivals,” 88.

allow the community to prosper, the untimely decrease in its members due to the hard conditions and a general atmosphere that made them feel as though they were surrounded by enemies. Moreover, the few youth of the community fought in vain against the temptations of their environment, thus endangering their spiritual well-being and causing grief to their parents. According to Bradford, there was another, yet still more important reason behind their decision to go:

Lastly, (and which was not least), a great hope & inward zeall they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for ye propagating & advancing ye gospell of ye kingdom of Christ in those remote part of ye world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for ye performing of so great a work. These, & some other like reasons, moved them to undertake this resolution of their removal; the which they afterward prosecuted with so great difficulties, as by the sequell will appeare.¹⁵⁷

In Bradford's account, the 'great hope and the inward zeal' represent an urge toward transcendence that operates in conjunction with the physical journey to the New World. Hence, the future Pilgrim Fathers were (creatively) driven by the hope of contributing to a transcending process that would qualitatively change them via their own physical transfer to some distant shore.

Their special ontological status is stressed by Bradford in his account of the departure from the Netherlands. Here, in the lines that earned Bradford's group the name of the Pilgrim Fathers, the 'pleasant city' of Leiden is rhetorically opposed to the transient state of the departing travelers:

So they lefte ye goodly & pleasante citie, which had been ther resting place near 12. years; but they knew they knew they were pilgrimes, & looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to ye heavens, their dearest cuntrie, and quited their spirits.¹⁵⁸

Titling the community here as pilgrims, Bradford makes use of a Biblical model form derived from Hebrews 11, 8, and 13. He thus relates his community and their future journey to the status of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, who

¹⁵⁷ Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 23 (IV).

¹⁵⁸ Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 57 (VII).

went out without knowing where they did go,¹⁵⁹ yet saw the promised land 'afar off',¹⁶⁰ and accepted their fundamentally transient existential status.¹⁶¹ Bradford here employs a strongly specified TID, and in his work, the city of Leiden is implicitly juxtaposed and contrasted with the city of God as the final destination of all (self-)transcending pilgrims.¹⁶² Tearing their eyes away from the goods and pleasures of the world and instead lifting them up to heaven makes the journey of the pilgrims a transcendental endeavor. They overcome the world for the sake of a heavenly space beyond, which directs their spirit toward the 'dearest country', the ultimate place of the pilgrim's longing.¹⁶³

Thus, the process of crossing the ocean becomes the experiential expression of an ontological concept concerning the status of the religious individuals and the religious group involved, a concept that is developed by employing a specific form of the TID. The three levels of the model, thus, can be identified in Bradford's object language account. By reflecting on the journey, Bradford points out that the transitional process of moving between 'here' (Europe) and 'there' (the New World) might, or rather should, be interpreted in terms of the specified TID—the earthy and the heavenly city and the transient state of the pilgrims between them. This is a model to him that is prefigured in the

159 "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

160 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

161 See Walter Wenska's remark on the transient existential condition of the Puritan: "Assurance and spiritual repose were fugitive, sometime things for the Puritan; his spiritual case, like the roads taken by our fictional heroes, remained open. Movement, restlessness, change, metamorphosis: if these are not touchstones of salvation, at least they are signs that neither Puritan nor hero has damned himself through a commitment to a corrupt or unsatisfactory reality." Walter P. Wenska, "Bradford's Two Histories: Pattern and Paradigm in 'Of Plymouth Plantation,'" *Early American Literature* 13 (1978): 161.

162 See Hebrews 11,10: "For he [Abraham] looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The transient status of pilgrims according to the Letter to the Hebrews, therefore, does not mean that they are on a journey into the vague and unknown. Their directedness towards God, here, makes the transcending journey spiritually reliable and well-led—as it is expressed in Bradford's confidence in the God-guided status of the Pilgrim Fathers (compare Erich Grässer, *An die Hebräer* (Hebr 10,19–13,25), (EKK XVII/3) (Zürich: Benziger/Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), 137). On the pilgrims and God as necessary partners in a providential history see Donegan, "As Dying, Yet Behold We Live," 13.

163 Rodríguez García stresses: "A crucial point to make here is that Bradford was from the outset more concerned with the Separatist's possible escape from the bondage of body and conscience represented by European Catholicism and Lutheranism than he was with their arrival at the Promised Land [...]." Rodríguez García, "Exiles and Arrivals," 80.

biblical text in the exemplary role played by Abraham in the Letter to the Hebrews. The physical act of crossing, therefore, is ascribed with a specifically religious sense.¹⁶⁴

The journey itself, however, was far from being a surefire success. It was neither pleasant nor easy, and was fraught with dangers both physical and emotional. The travelers faced an abundance of challenges and inconveniences that Bradford characterizes as tests of their spiritual integrity. The parting from Holland was itself emotionally depressing and sorrowful.

The next day, the wind being faire, they wente aborde, and their friends with them, where truly dolfull was ye sight of that sade and mournfull parting; to see what sighs and sobs and praires did sound amongst them, what tears did gush from every eye, & pithy speeches peirst each harte.¹⁶⁵

The ships they had engaged were leaky, obliging the travelers to return to England having proceeded a mere hundred leagues beyond Land's End. They were finally forced to leave one vessel behind—and with the ship, they abandoned those who were more skeptical about the possible success of the journey. Prominent among these deserters was the captain of the ship, who was accused by Bradford of playing up the bad condition of the ship in order to free himself from his contract owing to his “self-love and fears, as he forget all duty and former kindness.”¹⁶⁶ Thus purified from reluctant or otherwise diabolical elements, the pilgrims continued their journey “now all being compacte together in the one ship.” Here, the final nonconformist element, a “proud & very profane” sailor who harassed and cursed the sea-sick passengers, died from an illness and was thrown overboard by “a spetiall worke of Gods providence.”¹⁶⁷ The temptation of returning to England after a series of storms and bad weather was resolved by ‘committing themselves to the will of God’ to continue their perilous and storm-ridden journey. Having delivered themselves into the hands of the Lord—as Bradford suggests—the remainder of the

¹⁶⁴ On the ambiguity of the English term ‘crossing’ that plays a significant role here as indication (marking), crossing and recrossing see Johann Hafner, “Die Codierung des Christentums. Versuch einer formlogischen Entfaltung,” in *Interdisziplinäre Traditionstheorie. Motive und Dimensionen*, eds. Blahoslav Fajmon and Jaroslav Vokoun (Wien: Lit, 2016), 151.

¹⁶⁵ Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 57/58 (vii).

¹⁶⁶ Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 68 (viii).

¹⁶⁷ Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 73 (ix).

journey witnessed the death of only one traveler,¹⁶⁸ and also saw the miraculous rescue of a passenger (“a lustie yonge man”) who fell overboard. The man later on became “a profitable member both in church & comone wealthe.”¹⁶⁹ Nearly drowning in the water, here, serves as an indicator of rebirth by means of a vehement and insistent baptism.¹⁷⁰ The journey thus gains further transcendent significance: as a trial for the pilgrims and as a purification and rebirthing process. It is a manifestation of commitment to divine providence and, thus, to the divine sphere, as opposed to the perilous conditions of the earth.

The transcending process embodied in the journey, and with it, the transcending ontological status of the passengers, is maintained even after the final landing on the American continent, about which “they were not a litle joyfull.” Bradford’s description of the arrival of the travelers on the shore of the new world is quite famous:

Being thus arrived in a good harbor and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees & blessed ye God of heaven, who had brought them over ye vast & furious ocean, and delivered them from all ye periles & miseries therof, againe to set their feete on ye firme and stable earth, their proper element.¹⁷¹

Thus, the very possibility of crossing the ocean is attributed to God’s will as the travelers here are not in touch with their ‘proper element’, the earth. The earthy beings thus had to overcome or were made to overcome, their physical and spiritual restrictions that relate to the biblical fact of their creation from earth. They transcended their status through being forced to travel amid an alien and hostile element that is far from being ‘firm and stable’. The Pilgrim Fathers’ shaking knees and their troubled sense of balance after a long and demanding journey on the ocean are used by Bradford to illustrate the very physical impacts of their journey with regard to the transcending process of crossing the ocean directed by the prospect of the heavenly city. Falling on

168 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 74 (IX).

169 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 74 (IX).

170 See Brumme, “Did the Pilgrim Fathers Fall upon Their Knees when They Arrived in the New World?,” 29: “The young man’s near death by water and his rescue and rebirth adds the implicit interpretation to the group’s experience: surviving the mortal dangers of the ocean crossing means to have died to the Old World and to be reborn for the New, and the almost fatal immersion into the sea suggests an extreme and violent baptism which initiates them to their new status in their new commonwealth.”

171 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 75 (IX).

their knees to bless the Lord, however, transcends the physical lack of capacity the pilgrims had at that moment. To Bradford, the gesture expressed a transcendent reality, man's directedness towards God manifested in a gesture of deepest gratitude.¹⁷²

Despite their safe arrival, not all was well. Though they had, in fact, reached a (already well-known) comparatively good harbor that provided favorable conditions for future settlement, they had not reached the safe harbor they longed for.¹⁷³ Bradford makes it very clear that the transcendental crossing of the ocean did not relieve the pilgrims of their physical and worldly needs. To underline the significance of this insight, even his narrative comes to a standstill that is both astounded and astounding. Their physical condition and situation were desperate, as "perhaps the most widely quoted and anthologized passage of colonial American literature"¹⁷⁴ impressively suggests:

But hear I cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amased at these poore peoples presente condition; and so I thinke will the reader too, when he well considers ye same. Being thus passed ye vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation [...], they had now no freinds to wellcome them, nor inns to entertaine or refresh their weath-erbeaten bodys, no houses or much less townes to repaire too, to seeke for succoure.¹⁷⁵

In employing this narrative pause, Bradford explicitly stands back and looks beyond and forces the reader of his account to do likewise. The act of formal transcending has significant effects. The vast ocean and the sea of troubles faced beyond it are put into a close metaphoric relation, Bradford underlines the perturbed state of being the travelers had to pass in order to reach another shore where they could perform their spiritual goal. Bradford stresses this state by emphasizing the separation between the pilgrim's present existence and their former life, a separation that forms another distinction between a present 'here' and a past 'there' which has been transcended:

¹⁷² See Brumme, "Did the Pilgrim Fathers Fall upon Their Knees when They Arrived in the New World?," 32.

¹⁷³ On the geographical advantages of the later settlement of the Pilgrims see Darrett B. Rutman, "The Pilgrims and Their Harbor," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 17 (1960), 166, 181.

¹⁷⁴ Donegan, "As Dying, Yet Behold We Live," 22.

¹⁷⁵ Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 75 (1X).

If they looked behind them, ther was ye mightly ocean which they had passed, and was now as a maine barr & goulfe to separate them from all ye cvill parts of ye world.¹⁷⁶

Separation, here, has become a threatening physical reality to the Separatist Puritans. On the new shore, however, there are no resources to refresh their emotional and bodily state. Rather, nature itself seems opposed to them, and the inhabitants of the New World would rather “fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise.”¹⁷⁷ The testing of the passengers continues. To accentuate this impression, Bradford “shows a marked tendency to uglify the New World by making it resemble the deserts, the wildernesses, and other hellish places found in the Bible.”¹⁷⁸ Their condition even outdoes the hardships of the religious heroes in Biblical narrative, Paul’s shipwreck on Malta from Acts 27 and 28, that serves as the ever-present reference, or rather, model form, for Bradford’s account.¹⁷⁹ Even the apostle and his shipwrecked company encountered a kinder welcome than the miserable travelers, thus religiously intensifying the transcending process they have performed and continue to perform. The hostile environment offered no solace for them, so they continued their process of transcending, thus overcoming their physical misery:

And for ye season it was winter, and they that know ye winters of ye cuntrie know them to be sharp & violent, & subjecte to cruell & feirce storms, deangerous to travill to known places, much more to serch an unknown coast. Besids, what could they see but a hideous & desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts & wildd men? and what mutituds ther might be of them they knew not. Nether could they, as it were, goe up to ye top of Pisgah, to vew from this wilderness a more goodly cuntrie to feed their hops; for which way soever they turnd their eyes (save upward to ye heavens) they could have little solace or content in respecte of any outward objects.¹⁸⁰

Bradford’s story of transcending conspicuously features no mountains. However, the travelers’ situation here is characterized by the model of Moses, who,

176 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 76 (1X). Compare on the term ‘to separate’ in these lines Laurence, William “Bradford’s American Sublime,” 62.

177 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 75–76 (1X).

178 Rodríguez García, “Exiles and Arrivals,” 89.

179 See chapter on Model Forms.

180 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 76 (1X).

from the mountaintop of Pisgah, could see the Promised Land but could not reach it. The Pilgrims do not have the benefit of that vision. They are, so to speak, flatly in-between, indicating promise and rigid prohibition. The transcendental process goes on. Thus, the passengers of the Mayflower remain passengers, in a permanently transcending state. To Bradford, there is no arrival for the pilgrims. Instead, they are always on the move. In his description, the land they arrived in resembles more a worldly hell than a terrestrial paradise. However, all these means he employs are, in fact intended to stress the TID and the process of transcending that a proper religious person of that community must perform.¹⁸¹ In doing so, they are enabled to counteract “the slippings of their profane sense of self.”¹⁸² Transcending the individual self to become a part of a transcending community is yet another of the transcending processes associated with the Pilgrim’s transatlantic journey.¹⁸³ As José María Rodríguez García notes: “To be sure, Bradford was more interested in having his community repeat the errand of the Old Testament prophets than he was in paving the way for the doctrinal arrival at the Terrestrial Paradise, the New England Canaan [...] For the Plymouth Governor, the American sojourn signified primarily an intermedial stage in the long journey of preparation for his community’s spiritual (rather than physical) arrival at the Promised Land.”¹⁸⁴

With the last lines of the ninth chapter of *On Plymouth Plantation*, Bradford even transcends the time of his narrative, turning to a vision of the future that encompasses not only the possible reactions to his report but also anticipates

181 Modarelli considers *Of Plymouth Plantation* to be “the textual expression of the community in the Anglo-Saxon tradition.” Compare 49: “Where in Smith we see the individual working on a level that will move the community through individual heroes, in Bradford we witness more the reshaping of a social ethnics to fit in and carry forward the message of Christendom.” (Modarelli, “William Bradford and His Anglo-Saxon Influences”) Compare also Hovey’s observation that the only emotions Bradford presents in his account are, in fact, group sorrow and joy. Kenneth Alan Hovey, “The Theology of History in ‘Of Plymouth Plantation’ and Its Predecessors,” *Early American Literature* 19 (1975): 50.

182 Rodríguez García, “Exiles and Arrivals,” 89.

183 “[...] Bradford emphasizes community over individual. As much as Smith’s *True Relation* highlighted the heroic actions of the individual, *Of Plymouth* resounds with collective action. Bradford punctuates the text with the communal ‘we’ as a literary trope.” Modarelli, “William Bradford and His Anglo-Saxon Influences,” 50.

184 Rodríguez García, “Exiles and Arrivals,” 78–79, 92.

a legacy by which the afterworld might model its future attitude and action.¹⁸⁵ This attitude is in itself fashioned after biblical model forms:¹⁸⁶

May not & ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this willderness; but they cried unto ye Lord, and he heard their voice, and looked on their adversitie, &c. Let them therfore praise ye Lord, because he is good, & his mercies endure for ever. Yea, let them which have been redeemed of ye Lord, shew how he hath delivered them from ye hand of ye oppressour. When they wandered in ye deserte willderness out of ye way, and found no citie to dwell in, both hungrie, & thirstie, their sowle was overwhelmed in them. Let them confess before ye Lord his loving kindness, and his wonderfull works before ye sons of men.¹⁸⁷

Although later commentators have hinted at the supposed decline of Bradford's narrative capacity after the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers had been described (again with some reference to Hamlet: "Bradford's history begins magnificently, diminishes into a tedious account of unsorted administrative details, and ends, uncompleted, in silence."¹⁸⁸) the process of transcending through contrasts that is employed by Bradford to structure his account can be expected to continue, potentially forever.

185 "The composition that began with ragged bodies facing a world of absolute lack ends with the paradoxical claim that the process of the journey, arrival, and settlement both sundered them irrevocably from the civilized world and allowed them to remain exactly who they had always been. Bradford moves anxiously from the stopped time of the shocked colonial, through a disjointed survey of bodies and land, finally to a projected fantasy of the grateful descendant in order to substantiate the hope that, despite all appearances, such extreme geographical and temporal dislocation did not permanently fracture the ability to connect the present to a past and to a future." Donegan, "As Dying, Yet Behold We Live," 27.

186 See chapter on Model Forms. On other biblical model forms involved in the Puritan colonization of the New World see Heike Brandt, *Invented Traditions. Die Puritaner und das amerikanische Sendungsbewußtsein* (Passau: Stutz, 2011), 36–64.

187 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 76–77 (IX). Brumme comments accordingly: "The children here envisioned do not even exists at the time. In order to define this moment in its world-historic proportions, Bradford opened the door to the future. Only from this vantage point could the participants of this great undertaking be evaluated and celebrated." Brumme, "Did the Pilgrim Fathers Fall upon Their Knees when They Arrived in the New World?," 29–30.

188 Robert Daly, "William Bradford's Vision of History," *American Literature* 44 (1973): 557.

Bradford's book provides an object language narrative on the basis of a specified TID. Basic transcendence is expressed in spatial shifts that are pointed out in the narrative (formal transcendence) or interpreted as being essentially related to the doctrinally specified TID. This is achieved in the sense that the specified transcendent sphere can only be reached via a permanent process of transcending, represented as travel. The preeminence of spatial metaphors is once again obvious in his presentation of the perilous crossing of the ocean. The different analytic levels of the TID are here intermingled within a story that claims, in the first place, to be a historical account.

6.3 *Transcending the Walls of Paradise—the Role of Human Language in Nicholas of Cusa's Concepts of God*

The third example stems from medieval Europe as it was perched on the verge of the early modern or rather, the Renaissance.¹⁸⁹ In this example, the very processuality of transcending that is triggered by the employment of the TID is addressed. Perhaps the most important characteristic of the process of transcending is that according to reflective object language religious thinkers, the process of transcending cannot be concluded. There is no stage at which transcendence as such is reached—reaching it would be self-contradictory and, thus, would not be transcendence. Rather, transcending is characterized by its very indeterminability. This insight has twin results, for it is both a humiliation and a motivating challenge to the reflective human mind.

On a very sophisticated object language level, one instance of this indeterminability is found in Nicholas of Cusa's search for an adequate name of God, or rather, a notion of the divine. According to him, the name of God is only to be approached asymptotically by an intensifying process of trial and error due to the insurmountable 'walls of paradise' (*muris paradisi*). Through this metaphor, Cusanus (1401–1464) illustrates the insurmountable limits of the human mind, characterized by this tendency to process via distinctions. An adequate notion of God can only be reached asymptotically by continuously transcending (*transcender*) rational limitations.

Hence, the persistent philosophical thorn in the intellectual flesh of Nicholas of Cusa was the search—or, in his words, pilgrimage—for an adequate concept and name of God.¹⁹⁰ Cusanus, during his investigation (formal transcending)

189 Parts of the following subchapter were presented at the КНК workshop on 'Analogy in the Abrahamic Religions', organized by Damien Janos, on 4 and 5 February 2010.

190 On the diverse suggestions Nicolas makes for the name of God in the course of his thinking, see Luis Martínez Gómez, "From the Names of God to the Name of God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1965). At some points, Nicolas even congratulates himself as having found the best name, but these moments of triumph are only momentary. In later work, he nevertheless starts his efforts over and again. *Ibid.*, 84 and 92.

of a concept of specified transcendence, employs a spatial metaphor of movement (pilgrimage). Philosophically interesting as it may be, his philosophical project founded on a religious basis has political significance in addition to its theological implications, for it explicitly discusses the possibility of religious concordance. If one could find the true name of God, Nicholas claims, religious diversity would become much less dangerous. Cusanus' ideas are, therefore, triggered and strongly motivated by situations of religious contact.

Unfortunately, Nicholas's sublime aims prove a mission impossible for limited human intellectual capacity. In his 1453 religious multilogue *De pace fidei*, Nicholas describes both the human longing for God's true name and the problems associated with his hunt:

You, then, who are the giver of life and of existence, are the one who is seen to be sought in different ways in different rites, and You are named in different names; for as You are [in Yourself] You remain unknown and ineffable to all.¹⁹¹

God's true name, being identical with truth, is a shared desire of all, as the perception of truth is happiness itself. He who gives life is often called upon and is named in many different ways, but all of them are unsuccessful—at least if you share the magical conviction that naming an object gives as well power over it.

In his research, Nicholas follows a traditional intellectual pattern. Concerning the limits of human thinking, Thomas Aquinas seems to have anticipated Cusanus' results. To Aquinas, the ultimate insight into God is to recognize that one does not know God. "Illud est ultimum cognitionis humanae de Deo quod sciat se Deum nescire" (de potentia, q. 7, a. 5, ad 14). The unrecognizability itself is God.¹⁹² But there is another important point here. To use Schwartz's term, there is always the persistent search for transcendence in reflective human beings. God's unrecognizability is not the end of human efforts and

191 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Pace Fidei cum Epistola ad Ioannem de Segobia*, eds. Raymund Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour. *Opera Omnia VII* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1970), h VII, p. 6, 5, 14–17. (Translation: Hopkins, Nicholas of Cusa's *De Pace Fidei*, 635.) "Tu ergo, qui es dator vitae et esse, es ille qui in diversis ritibus differenter quaeri videris et in diversis nominibus nominaris, quoniam uti es manes omnibus incognitus et ineffabilis." Compare Nicolai de Cusa, *Sermones I (1430–1441)*, ed. Rudolf Haubst. *Opera Omnia XVI* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1991), h XVI, p. 4, 3, 3–6. "Nominatur humanis diversis vocibus, diversis linguis diversarum nationum, licet nomen suum sit unicum, summum, infinitum, ineffabile et ignotum."

192 See William J. Hoye, "Die Unerkennbarkeit Gottes als die letzte Erkenntnis nach Thomas von Aquin," in *Thomas von Aquin*, ed. Albert Zimmermann. *Miscellanea Mediaevalia XIX* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), 123.

action. Despite this, there remains the dire longing for understanding in all humans. For Nicholas, mankind is united in longing for him,¹⁹³ united in the 'pursuit of happiness'¹⁹⁴—and this could be the basis for a concordance of religion and politics.¹⁹⁵

To Nicholas, philosophical reflection, as a conscious or formally transcending process of standing back and looking beyond, can be of much practical help here. As man's finest ability, philosophy is mainly concerned with the conceptualization of his environment. In all his work, the leading question of all human research is, ultimately, the question of God, who resists all meek attempts of human beings toward conceptual explication. Though Nicholas, in his best moments seems to grasp a glimpse of conceptualization and, thus, arrives at the mere possibility of theo-logy, such momentary insight is overcome at the next instant by God's overwhelming inexplicability. "Adverte igitur [...] quam clara atque brevis est theologia, sermone inexplicabilis [...]."¹⁹⁶ Though theology is clear and short, it is not explicable in words. Nicholas explains this with a very skeptical-sounding statement:

That it is neither the case that He is named or is not named nor the case that He both is named and is not named. Rather, whatever can be said disjunctively or conjunctively, whether consistently or contradictorily, does not benefit Him (because of the excellence of his infinity), so that He is the one Beginning, which is prior to ever thought formable of it.¹⁹⁷

193 William J. Hoye, "The Idea of Truth as the Basis for Religious Tolerance According to Nicholas of Cusa with Comparisons to Thomas Aquinas," in *Conflicts and Reconciliation. Perspectives on Nicholas of Cusa*, ed. Inigo Bocken (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 168.

194 See Hoye, "The Idea of Truth," 165.

195 On the relation of the human propensity towards God and the possibility of dialogue in Cusanus' thinking see Markus Riedenaier, *Pluralität und Rationalität, Die Herausforderung der Vernunft durch religiöse und kulturelle Vielfalt nach Nikolaus Cusanus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), 286: "Religiöse Rede ist dadurch nicht nur in ihrem Vollzug, in der Analogie von göttlich-schöpferischem Sprechen und menschlich-schöpferischem Sprechen, gewürdigt, sondern enthält die Möglichkeit, diese analoge Struktur selbst zu formulieren und eine Antwort auf den Anspruch, der im ursprünglichen göttlichen Anspruch ergeht, zu sein. Diese Antwort kann aber an anderen Versuchen menschlicher explicatio nicht vorübergehen, deren Vielfalt wird selbst zur Herausforderung einer Integration, weshalb der Dialog zur Religion gehört."

196 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Coniecturis*, eds. Josef Koch and Karl Bormann. Opera Omnia III (Hamburg: Meiner, 1972), h III, p. 25, 1/5, 20–21.

197 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Deo Abscondito*, in: *Opuscula I*. Opera Omnia IV, ed. Paul Wilpert, Hamburg: Meiner 1959 (h IV, p. 8, 10, 13–17). "Quod neque nominatur neque non nominatur, neque nominatur et non nominator, sed omnia, quae dici possunt disiunctive et copulative per consensum vel contradictionem, sibi non conveniunt propter excellentiam

God is beyond even the conjunction of being named and not being named, as he is the primary principle. This reflection on the name of God leads Nicholas, himself as cardinal of the Church, directly to the audacious statement that being itself cannot be attached to Him, as He is beyond this contradiction.

Rational thinking truly reached rock bottom in Nicholas's description. However, it is precisely at this point that philosophical fortune turns and rational thinking transcends itself. Nicholas celebrates the turning point enthusiastically: his *De visione dei* reads:

And You, O Lord, who are the Nourishment of the full-grown, have encouraged me to do violence to myself, because impossibility coincides with necessity. And I have found an abode wherein You dwell unveiledly—an abode surrounded by the coincidence of contradictories. And [this coincidence] is the wall of Paradise, wherein You dwell. The gate of this wall is guarded by a most lofty rational spirit; unless this spirit is vanquished the entrance will not be accessible. Therefore, on the other side of the coincidence of contradictories You can be seen—but not at all on this side.¹⁹⁸

Here, contemplating on the coincidence of impossibility and necessity, we find a key term that will prove to be of decisive importance for Nicholas: *vis*.¹⁹⁹ It is the force, a process, that turns against the user in a very special way, thereby overcoming his most esteemed ability of rational thought (*altissimus rationis*).

infininitatis eius, ut sit unum principium ante omnem cogitationem de eo formabilem." Translation: Hopkins, A Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa, 303.

198 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Visione Dei* (h vi, p. 34/35, 37, 5–12). "Et animasti me, domine, qui es cibus grandium, ut vim mihi ipsi faciam, quia impossibilitas coincidet cum necessitate. Et repperi locum, in quo revelate reperieris, cinctum contradictoriorum coincidentia. Et iste est murus paradisi, in quo habitas, cuius portam custodit spiritus altissimus rationis, qui nisi vincatur non patebit ingressus. Ultra igitur coincidentiam contradictoriorum videri poteris et nequaquam citra." Translation: Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism*, 697. On the intellectual debate in which *De Visione Dei* emerged (with special regard on the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius) see Meredith Ziebart, "Laying Siege to the Walls of Paradise: The Fifteenth-Century Tegernsee Dispute over Mystical Theology and Nicholas of Cusa's Strong Defense of Reason," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41 (2015).

199 On the importance of the concept of *vis* in Cusanus' reformation of metaphysics, see Thomas Leinkauf, "Renovatio und unitas. Nicolaus Cusanus zwischen Tradition und Innovation—Die 'Reformation' des Möglichkeitsbegriffs," in *Renovatio et unitas—Nikolaus von Kues als Reformator. Theorie und Praxis der Reformatio im 15. Jahrhundert*, eds. Thomas Frank and Norbert Winkler (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012), 97.

However, it is also the way to gain intellectual nourishment, or rather, to transcend the walls of paradise (*murus paradisi*).²⁰⁰

As expected, Nicholas employs a strong form of a specific transcendence/immanence distinction expressed via a liminal spatial metaphor. An insurmountable wall is erected between God and human understanding, and it is guarded by pure reason itself. However, is silence the only possible reaction to this situation? No, for Nicholas shares Proclus' opinion that God is beyond every theology as he is beyond silence.²⁰¹ To modify Wittgenstein: *Worüber man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man immer wieder reden*. Therefore, the way of language is still open; it is in fact the only path. However, without denying reason, the wall cannot be transcended.

The wall thus signifies the essential interrelatedness of the transcendence/immanence distinction. This interplay triggers the process of thinking. In his book on Cusanus, Karl Jaspers explains the decisive function of the forbidding wall of paradise for human thinking:

A wall encompasses the divine sphere, insurmountable for us. But the Beyond takes effect; it is present by giving ground for everything. We flounder if we try to break through it but we experience the wall as a sign of divinity which holds us.²⁰²

Hence, as the unnamable Name of God is the most significant object of investigation, it is also an indication of how to transcend the wall of paradise. Thus, what could be more promising and attractive than the possibility of regaining paradise through philosophical thinking?

Reaching the wall is not the end of human effort but rather the beginning of philosophical insight, which is directed toward the process of transcending itself rather than content. Surprisingly enough, it is the interplay between attempt and failure that Nicholas considered to be significant and to provide worthwhile intellectual work. Cusanus does not embrace skepticism

200 On the image of the wall of paradise in Cusanus see Tilman Borsche, "Nikolaus von Kues (1401–1464)," in *Klassiker der Religionsphilosophie. Von Platon bis Kierkegaard*, ed. Friedrich Niewöhner (München: Beck, 1995), 248. Compare also Rudolf Haubst, "Die erkenntnistheoretische und mystische Bedeutung der 'Mauer der Koinzidenz,'" *Mitteilungen und Forschungen der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 18 (1989).

201 On the question of silence in religious language see the chapter on Secrets.

202 "Eine Mauer schließt den Bereich der Gottheit ein, unüberschreitbar für uns. Aber das Jenseits der Mauer ist wirksam, alles begründend gegenwärtig. Wir scheitern an der Mauer, wenn wir sie durchbrechen möchten, aber wir erfahren die Mauer als das Zeichen der Gottheit, die uns hält." Karl Jaspers, *Nikolaus Cusanus* (München: dtv, 1968), 24.

or nihilism as a result of his philosophy but rather points insistently at the dynamic relationship of assertion and negation, or rather, of both *theologia negativa* and *theologia affirmativa* as the true basis of human thinking in general. *Theologia negativa* and *Theologia affirmativa* coincide in the permanently transcending philosophical theology, for which Cusanus coined the term *docta ignorantia*. In concordance with the ideas of one of his most estimated predecessors, Ramon Llull, Nicholas intends to sketch a methodology for research in general, an *ars generalis*, drafted as a dynamic process.²⁰³ Thinking means trial and error, as well as challenge and response. It follows that the tragic failure of human existence lies in the tendency to stand still (without looking beyond), thus halting the process of transcendence.²⁰⁴ Knowledge is not managing one's intellectual property but the very process of research; and hence, it is restlessness and agitation.²⁰⁵ It is the unending process of transcending.

Cusanus, as an actor on the object language level, deals with the problem posed above by introducing a fictitious situation of religious contact. In his dialogue, *De deo abscondito* between a pagan (*Gentilis*) and a Christian (*Christianus*) participant, the 'conceptive' power of God's non-conceptability is strongly stressed:

Pagan: But is He ineffable? Christian: He is not ineffable, though He is beyond all things effable; for He is the Cause of all namable things. How is it, then, That He Himself, who gives others a name, is without name?²⁰⁶

The interplay of assertion and denial in thought work formally asserts a special kind of concept or notion to be used here in order to continue transcending.

203 Most of Cusanus' excerpts refer to Llull's teachings about God, see Ulli Roth, "Einleitung," in *Die Exzerptensammlung aus Schriften des Raimundus Lullus im Codex Cusanus 83*, ed. Ulli Roth (Heidelberg: Winter, 1999), 18.

204 See William J. Hoye, "Wahrnehmung als Glückseligkeit nach Nikolaus von Kues," in *Aisthesis. Die Wahrnehmung des Menschen: Gottessinn, Menschensinn, Kunstsinn*, eds. H. Schwaetzer and H. Stahl-Schwaetzer (Regensburg: Roderer, 1999), 35.

205 See Kurt Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues in seiner Zeit* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004), 37. Also compare Karl Jaspers: "Aber sein Denken führt ihn dorthin, wo das Denken selber nicht weitergeht, sondern sich in dialektischen Kreisen, sich in unendlichen Abwandlungen wiederholend, bewegt, den Abflug ins Udenkbare und Unsagbare ständig versuchend, immer wieder stürzend, immer wieder sich aufschwingend zu neuem Versuch." Jaspers, Cusanus, 49.

206 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Deo Abscondito*, h IV, p. 7, 10, 4–7. "Gentilis: Est autem ineffabilis? Christianus: Non est ineffabilis sed supra omnia effabilis, cum sit omnium nominabilium causa. Qui igitur aliis nomen dat, quomodo ipse sine nomine?" Translation: Hopkins, *A Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa*, 303.

All statements and concepts concerning God must maintain the contradictory balance of negation and affirmation. They cannot be used for definitions but merely as indications of a process that both transcends and allows further human philosophical or theological speculation. Thus, the unity of God as the 'notion of notions' is the precondition for the search.²⁰⁷ In fact, a new language is needed to transcend human inadequacy.²⁰⁸ Language is the ladder that leads human thinking to divine spheres. As a consequence, conceptual experiments to Nicholas are not mere idle linguistic games. Rather, these experiments gain ontological significance by leading human thinking to transcend itself by a process of perpetual approximation. Nicholas, in reflecting on the name of God, therefore, does not promote a self-sufficient system of true assertions as the final goal of human knowledge but rather a methodologically derived opening for various ways of transcending one's own limits.²⁰⁹

Accordingly, the status of language and concepts in Nicholas' thinking cannot be overestimated. As Kurt Flasch states, to Nicolas, being is language.²¹⁰ The special status of man as a *Deus secundus* was founded on the fact that man was created to be the image of God, mirroring God's creativity.²¹¹ This state manifests itself in man's linguistic ability and his potential to create concepts, which leads to a whole 'universe of vocabulary' (*Vokabeluniversum*).²¹² However, *Sine mente non fit conceptus*.²¹³ An important conclusion can be drawn from this first god-related anthropological definition. Formally, notions and

207 See Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de sapientia/Idiota de mente*, ed. R. Steiger. Opera omnia v (Hamburg: Meiner, 1983), h v, p. 67, 34, 12–14: "Nam absolutus conceptus aliud esse nequit quam idealis forma omnium, quae concipi possunt, quae est omnium formabilium aequalitas."

208 On Cusanus' linguistic quest see Hans Gerhard Senger's summarizing assertion: "Es kann also nur darum gehen, verbesserte Aussageweisen zu suchen, d.h. nach einer neuen Sprache mit anderen Begriffen, Wörtern, Denk- und Grammatikstrukturen zu suchen, durch die das Unnennbare nennbarer werden könnte." Hans Gerhard Senger, "Die Sprache der Metaphysik," in *Nikolaus von Kues. Einführung in sein philosophisches Denken*, ed. Klaus Jacobi (Freiburg/München: Alber, 1979), 86.

209 The claim for (peaceful) competition is even the final word in the religious multilogue *De pace fidei*, see Nicolai de Cusa, *De Pace Fidei*, h vii, p. 62, 67, 3–8: "Ubi non potest conformitas in modo reperiri, permittantur nationes—salva fide et pace—in suis devotionibus et ceremonialibus. Augebitur etiam fortassis devotio ex quadam diversitate, quando quaelibet natio conabitur ritum suum studio et diligentia splendidiorem efficere, ut aliam in hoc vincat et sic meritum maius assequatur apud Deum et laudem in mundo."

210 Flasch, Nikolaus Cusanus, 122.

211 Compare Nicolai de Cusa, *De Beryllo*, eds. Hans Gerhard Senger and Karl Bormann. Opera Omnia xi/1 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1987), h xi/1, p. 9, 7, 2.

212 See Flasch, *Nikolaus Cusanus*, 87.

213 Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, h v, p. 66, 34, 5.

concepts are figural indications of God's creative powers; they are not identifications of objects. Man's creative power in devising notions represents the one notion that enables and grounds this power while not being any subject to this power, for God is absolutus and removed from the sphere of human intellect. Semiotically speaking, man's utmost intellectual power consists of creating, reading, and working with signs, which, nevertheless, allows gathering knowledge of the one thus indicated.²¹⁴ To Cusanus, knowledge is semiosis. We only know the signs, but we also know that they are Signs of the Light (*signa lucis*).²¹⁵ Human reason is only, but also not less than, a reflection of divine action in creating things: *conceptio divinae mentis est rerum productio; conceptio nostrae mentis est rerum notio*.²¹⁶ The notion of God does not signify God directly, but by permanently transcending itself, signifies his creative power and thus indicates him indirectly. However, as only an indication, it also points at its own inadequacy.²¹⁷ Being a *deus secundus*, man analogously creates notions, which nevertheless approximate the truth by transcending themselves, this being the higher form of *theologia affirmativa*, that is, *transcensus*. Creating notions, therefore, operatively enables transcendence. Notions are regulative principles for both human understanding and human action. Reasonable action is working with and on notions in order to create a new basic system of notions.

The requirements of such a language are explicated by Nicholas in his dialogue *Idiota de sapientia*:

For if I am to disclose to you the concept that I have of God, then if my locution is to be of help to you, it must be such that its words are significative—so that in this way I can lead you (through the meaning-of-the-word which is known to us both) unto what is sought.²¹⁸

There is a certain power to words (*vis vocabuli*) that can lead the searching mind on its way. The indicative power of certain words is thus much more important

²¹⁴ See Flasch, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, 42.

²¹⁵ Flasch, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, 93.

²¹⁶ Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de Mente*, h v, p. 109, 72, 6–7. Compare Flasch, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, 77.

²¹⁷ See Senger, "Die Sprache der Metaphysik," 99–100. "So faßt man beide Sprachebenen in ihrer Realisierung durch die Normalsprache vielleicht besser als Verweissprachen auf wegen ihres Verweisungscharakters auf das nicht rational Erkennbare und Benennbare."

²¹⁸ Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, h v, p. 66, 33, 5–8. "Nam si tibi de deo conceptum, quem habeo, pandere debeo, necesse est, quod locutio mea, si tibi servire debet, talis sit, cuius vocabula sint significativa, ut sic te ducere queam in vi vocabuli, quae est nobis communiter nota, ad quaesitum." Translation: Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 514.

than their meaning. In metaphysical terms, for Nicholas, it is completely misleading to look for the meaning of the key terms and notions as they have quite another function in the process of philosophizing. Though it is surely better to examine the context of the word and provide a contextual meaning rather than looking for definitions of its content, the key idea of Cusanus' philosophy will still be concealed. The point is that the basic notions have no meaning, but it is still a fallacy to conclude that they are senseless and, therefore, ought to be abolished from any responsible philosophy. Basic notions are essentially functional. The *vis vocabuli* Nicolas points at is the formal power of indicating and, thus, transcending the common use of language. Jan Bernd Elpert has identified the overall motto of Cusanus' intellectual efforts as *ad deum per vim vocabuli*.²¹⁹ Metaphysical notions, as with all basic notions and especially the notion of God as the notion of notions, are formal indications. If God is the final goal of research, then corresponding science must be linguistically based, which is both the easiest and most adequate way forward. "Unde haec est sermocinalis theologia, qua nitor te ad Deum per vim vocabuli ducere modo quo possum faciliori et veriori."²²⁰ The 'power of words' guides the human mind by transcending it.²²¹ The shortness and clarity of the affirmative theology (*theologia sermocinalis*) result from the simplicity of the complicated Word (of God).

Closely related to the creative power of human beings concerning notions is the *impositio nominis* of man, based on Genesis 2,19. It is thus important to God to see Adam in his naming competence. Naming God himself becomes a matter of *Visione Dei*.

In his work, Nicholas repeatedly experiments with the *vis vocabuli* with reference to God's name. In a 1441 sermon, he expounds his rather demanding idea of what a name should accomplish. A name should be the perfect basis

219 Compare Jan Bernd Elpert, *Loqui est relevare—verbum ostensio mentis. Die sprachphilosophischen Jagdzüge des Nikolaus Cusanus* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2002), 140–141: "Vom Wort, vom ewigen Wort, dem Logos, geht alles aus. Aus ihm entströmt alles. Hier liegt, wie schon öfters bemerkt, der Grund, die Basis für jegliches Wort, sei es gesprochen oder nur im Geiste gedacht. Im Wort selber liegt also eine Kraft verborgen. Cusanus nennt sie die 'vis vocabuli'. Die 'vis vocabuli' aber ist allen bekannt ('communiter nota'), d.h. die 'vis vocabuli' ist eine universelle Größe. Zu ihr haben alle in gleicher Weise Zugang. Über die 'vis vocabuli' ist es möglich, einen Weg zurück zum Logos zu gehen. Dieser Weg jedoch führt ins Schweigen, in die Dunkelheit, ohne daß aber Cusanus das mystische Schweigen einseitig glorifizieren würde. Denn dieser Weg ins Schweigen findet seine Grundlage darin, daß die menschliche Rede, die auf diesen Weg führt, eine signifikative Rede ist. [...] Das Motto, so können wir sagen, lautet also 'ad deum per vim vocabuli'."

220 Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, h v, p. 66, 33, 9–11.

221 On the *vis vocabuli* see also Christian Ströbele, *Performanz und Diskurs, Religiöse Sprache und negative Theologie bei Cusanus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2015), 235.

for understanding the object named, leading to full insight.²²² To fulfill such a demand, an authority is needed to guarantee the insight, which is not itself subject to the process of naming—and that is nothing else than God's unnamable name. Therefore, every finite name is only a name in the proper sense of the word if it is an image of the divine name.²²³ As a consequence, every possible name functionally indicates God's name: every name is an explication (*explicatio*) of the complicated (*complicatio*), infinite name. Every name is God's, and every name is of God. For Nicholas, this insight brings with it a philosophical duty to experiment with indicating names, which must be transcended.

The experimental nature of his writings has a strong impact on their particular form. Nicholas developed a special literary technique to express the formal intention of his work. One could describe the literary form of his texts as written spiritual exercises of transcending, which begin in everyday observation—for example, with a spoon (*idiota de mente*), a portrait (*de visione dei*), children at play (*de ludo globi*), or even syllables or letters (*de possesset*). Accordingly, there is little secrecy in Cusanus' thinking, but rather, he shows the unnamable within the obvious²²⁴—a practical reference to the Letter to the Romans 1,20.²²⁵ In his writings, Cusanus performs a process of transcending, taking everyday experiences and objects of daily routine as his starting point. He claims that these experiences, practices, and objects essentially transcend themselves, thus indicating a way to the higher and, ultimately, the highest forms of transcendence.

To Cusanus, through transcending, simple everyday material becomes religious material and, ultimately, religious material through an unlimited process. Usually, Cusanus takes his starting point of research in daily life, that is, here, in ordinary philosophical language. The common name *Deus* as used in philosophical treatises is not adequate, but it might be used as a starting point for further reflection due to its intellectual popularity:

222 *nominati perfecta innotescendi ratio esse, quae ad eius notitiam deducat* Sermon XXIII Domine in lumine vultus tui, in: Nicolai de Cusa, *Sermones* I (1430–1441), h XVI, p. 374, 28, 3–5.

223 See Nicolai de Cusa, *Sermones* I (1430–1441), h XVI, p. 375, 31, 1–11.

224 In his last writing, titled *De apice theoriae*, Cusanus meditates on this point: "Veritas quanto clarior tanto facior. Putebam ego aliquando ipsam in obscuro melius reperiri. Magnae potentiae veritas est, in qua posse ipsum valde lucet. Clamitat enim in plateis, sicut in libello De idiota legisti. Valde certe se undique facilem repertu ostendit." Nicolai de Cusa, *De Venatione Sapientiae/De Apice Theoriae*, ed. Raymund Klibansky and Hans Gerhard Senger. Opera Omnia XII (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982), h XII, p. 120, 5, 9–13.

225 "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead [...]."

For we do not call true the statement that 'God' is His name; nor do we call that statement false, for it is not false that 'God' is His name. Nor do we say that the statement is both true and false since His simplicity precedes both all namable things and all unnamable things.²²⁶

On the other hand, due to the anteceding primacy of God's Name, the word *Deus* might be used as a sign of God's actions thanks to its etymology: Nicholas states that *Deus* originally stems from the Greek word *θεωρέω*, which shows that human relationships to God must be understood in the same way as the relationships of color and sight.²²⁷ Here, the latter is the basis for color because it enables one to name it, although it itself cannot be described in terms of color, and hence, it is, in fact nothing other than an item related to color.

In almost all of his writings, Cusanus transcends the usual theological language and courageously experiments with neologisms. Such linguistic creativity aroused the anger and suspicion of his contemporaries, who accused him of Anti-Aristotelism or attempting to destroy all possibility of scientific knowledge—rather than of heresy, as might have been expected. The word *possest*, which appears in a 1459 dialogue *De possest*, combines the indefinite *posse* with the finite *est* and is the linguistic sign for the notorious *coincidentia oppositorum*. Interestingly, the *coincidentia* is not indicated by mathematical figures as in *De docta ignorantia*, but rather in language and grammar itself. This complication in God's name indicates the 'super'-rational coincidence of absolute possibility and highest reality—thus linguistically challenging the custodian of reason at the walls of paradise. Other weapons in this struggle to transcend are *posse fieri* (in *De venatione sapientiae*) and *posse ipsum*. In one of his last texts, the *Compendium* (1463), Cusanus considers *posse* to be the most promising candidate for his transcending efforts.

One of the more famous proposed names of God, developed by Nicholas later in his life, is the non-aliud. In his text *Directio speculantis seu de li non aliud* he gives a definition of the non-aliud that would make any hard-boiled logician of modern times burst into tears: "Not-other is no other than Not-other" (*'non aliud' est non aliud quam non aliud*). As a metaphysical assertion, this is tautological and notoriously senseless, thanks to a modern understanding that

226 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Deo Abscondito*, h iv, p. 9, 13, 4–8. "Non enim dicimus verum quod hoc sit nomen eius nec dicimus falsum, quia hoc non est falsum quod sit nomen eius. Neque dicimus verum et falsum, cum eius simplicitas omnia tam nominabilia quam non-nominabilia antecedit." Translation: Hopkins, *A Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa*, 304.

227 See Nicolai de Cusa, *De Deo Abscondito*, h iv, p. 9, 14, 1–5.

closely connects words to a concept of meaning.²²⁸ For Nicholas, nevertheless, this sentence was a big step in understanding the transcending function of God's name for conceptualizing the human mind. Explicating its complicity, he firstly indicates that a correct reading of the sentence does not have the form 'A equals A equals A ($A = A = A$)', but rather it should be read 'A is A pointing at A (indicating itself) ($A \leftrightarrow A \leftrightarrow A$)'. Secondly, it is also a description of a trinitarian process as an expression of the self-defining nature of this indication of God as the non aliud.

If the same thing repeated three times is the definition of the First, as you recognize [it to be], then assuredly the First is *triune*—and for no other reason than that it defines itself. If it did not define itself, it would not be the First; yet, since it defines itself, it shows itself to be *triune*. Therefore, you see that out of that perfection there results a trinity.²²⁹

Tautologies are only senseless if they are taken to be equations; in metaphysical contexts, they indicate self-reference, which allows the transcendence of both language and thinking.²³⁰ In his philosophical work, Nicholas Cusanus tries over and over again to establish a conceptual language of formal transcendence.²³¹ The philosopher, in search of God's name is continuously standing back and looking beyond his own conceptual abilities, thus permanently transcending the notions used and modifying them through the reflective process.

All of Nicholas' efforts are intended to develop a dense and short formula as a linguistic sign that would open itself for the self-explication of the Complicated, God himself. The names of God are conceptual blank spaces

228 Nicolai de Cusa, *Directio speculantis seu de li non aliud*, eds. L. Bauer and P. Wilpert (Hamburg: Meiner, 1944), h XIII, p. 12, 18.

229 Nicolai de Cusa, *De li non aliud*, h XIII, p. 12, 18, 19–23. "[...] idem trinititer repetitum si est primi definitio, ut vides, ipsum profecto est unitrinum et non alia ratione, quam quia se ipsum definit; non enim foret primum, si se ipsum minime definiret; se autem quando definit, trinum ostendit. Ex perfectione igitur vides resultare trinitatem [...]." Translation: Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other*, 1117.

230 See chapter on Tradition.

231 Jaspers explains the process of formal transcending as follows: "Die Begrifflichkeit formalen Transzendierens gilt manchem als ein sich in den Windungen des Gedankens ständig wiederholender mühsamer und pompöser Unsinn. Für den spekulativ Philosophierenden liegt die Anziehungskraft darin, daß dieses Denken das Tor öffnet zur Unendlichkeit. Aber diese Anziehungskraft wird erst dadurch mächtig gesteigert, daß die Unendlichkeit selber den Denkenden ergreift. Dann hört er gleichsam ihre Sprache." Jaspers, *Cusanus*, 54.

where the epiphany may take place, thus transcending human thinking to a *Visione dei*—a vision of God in the double sense of grammar. The names are expressions of a phenomenology that conceptually allows the only phenomena worthwhile to show itself. The truth cannot be reached through the medium of language, but language becomes the medium of truth if rationality is transcended through experimentation with notions.

7 Transcending and Semiosis

How can the unending process indicated by the transcendence/immanence distinction be scientifically captured? How can it be modeled and conceptualized? On a systematic level, it might be suggested that this processing of religious material can be analyzed as a form of semiosis. Not only is semiosis also considered to be indeterminable, but the process of transcending also reflects the process of signs (*Zeichenprozeß, Zeichengeschehen*) in general.²³²

The three-level model elaborated above does not suppose an evolution of transcendence from a more primitive to a more elaborate form over the course of a historical process but rather characterizes the attempt to observe religious material in its internal (systematic) processing. This does, however, not exclude an examination of the history of the notions of transcendence and immanence as a historical development. We could systematically examine the process of transcending as semiotics, with its basic process one of semiosis. By applying semiotics, one might hope to find the answer to the question of when, within the transcending process, the point is reached where one's material interprets itself—that is, when object language itself introduces second-order observation or a metalanguage. This is also important for the dynamics of religion, for here, the material becomes a 'dynamic object': something that generates a chain of immediate objects or signs in the form of interpretations or commentaries.²³³

In semiotic terms, the main questions concerning the three-level model of transcendence are as follows. When is a point reached in the process of semiosis at which the material provides interpretations of itself? An answer to this question would provide the starting point for analysis within the religious tradition under consideration. In simple terms, when is metalanguage introduced on the object linguistic level? When and under what circumstances

232 On the notion of semiosis see Volkhard Krech, *Die Evolution der Religion. Ein soziologischer Grundriß* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021), 45–58.

233 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

does second-order observation occur? When and under what circumstances are existing relationships between transcendence and immanence approached as religious relations? It must be stressed again that this approach is systematic and not historical in nature. The systematic self-reference and self-identification of religion per se has to be distinguished from the process of formation of individual religions and the demarcation processes by which religions distinguish themselves from one another.

Semiosis, meaning the action of any kind of sign, involves the action of three elements ('subjects'), namely sign, object, and interpretant. This three-way influence is manifested in the transcendence/immanence distinction, even on the level of basic transcendence (here, there, world). Semiosis, as a process of signs, normally produces new qualities and capacities, such as ideas of formal or even specific transcendence, thus performing an evolutionary function in cosmology or, rather, in cultural history that may include the history of religions.

My assumption is that the evolutionary process regarding transcendence is basically semiotic in nature. One can show this with reference to the basic notion of transcendence. As Raymond Tallis has elaborated, the gesture of pointing (at) can be used for the exploration of everyday transcendence.²³⁴ To point at (something) overcomes the boundaries of one's own body and establishes a commonly shared world. First of all, transcendence is an indication of direction. The simple indexical, or rather, deictic expression '(over) there' does not only introduce 'the other', the things separated from oneself but at the same time introduces the relational 'here', one's own things. This is not to forget the common frame, the world or context of indication, which comprises 'there' and 'here', the one pointing, the thing pointed at, and the one to whom something is shown by pointing. So, pointing contains the potential to transcend oneself and, by introducing a common horizon (of understanding), to return to 'oneself' as the origin of the assigning process. Therefore, basic transcendence establishes a primordial triad in an interrelated process. It introduces basic concepts of transcendence, immanence and their associated interplay. The gesture of 'pointing at' introduces a complex transcending process that makes it possible to step back and look beyond. Generally speaking, it introduces the concept of space, which is, by definition, transcendent or transcending space.²³⁵

The space established here is furthermore qualified as a product and expression of sign-processes. As Tallis put it: "We are unique in having a public

²³⁴ See the subtitle of his book: Tallis, *Michelangelo's Finger*.

²³⁵ See chapter on Space.

domain, a place in which truth and falsehood emerge. This domain is first of all stitched together by joint attention made explicit through signs, foremost among which is the gesture of the index finger.”²³⁶ The inner coherence of the transcendent space is mediated by signs based upon deixis.

Imagine, as an example, a conceptually innocent baby performing the gesture of pointing. By doing so, through the threefold processual structure of there, here, and the combination of there and here, the ‘world’ is established. By examining this gesture of pointing, an observer may point out that something like a semiotic structure comprising transcending elements is established. As a possible further step, the pointing child may be furthermore qualified through the ascription of religious sense. The pointing child might, therefore, be pointed out to have religious meaning, such as in the case of Baby Jesus pointing at his mother or the shepherds.

8 TID and Contrast

It is no secret that the assumption that the TID is a necessary feature of all religions has a Luhmannian background, hailing from Niklas Luhmann’s assumption that the transcendence/immanence distinction is the primary code of religious communication. With the following considerations, I intend to open up a new and hopefully fruitful perspective on that idea.

Several dichotomies found in object language material might be examined as cases of basic transcendence, such as the dialogical I-thou relation, the temporal Present-Future (or Present-Past), or even logical p and non-p. To me, the most interesting point stems from an observation Kianoosh Rezania made in a 2016 KHK meeting. It concerns a relationship between relations, i.e., the relationship of the TID to the relationship between unity and manifoldness or the one and the many. It is the observation that the process of transcending heads towards indifference in the sense of non-differentiation.²³⁷

Therefore, as the notion of ‘transcending’ indicates, one is well advised to interpret the relationship not only as a distinction, but also as a process. And if the notion of process arises, in philosophical discussions one inevitably turns to Alfred North Whitehead.

Whiteheadian ideas played a salient role in the considerations of dynamics and stability outlined earlier in this volume.²³⁸ Concerning the relation-

²³⁶ Tallis, *Michaelangelo’s Finger*, 36.

²³⁷ See also Stolz, “Transzendenz,” 525.

²³⁸ See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

ship between dynamics and stability, Whitehead suggested that it might be described as an elliptic stability of dynamic bipolarity that combines the physical and the mental pole of every actual occasion (entity). That the parts of a bipolar relation only 'make sense by mutual reference' does not merely say that they are not explainable without the other, but rather that the process between them, the mutual reference, generates meaning (as interpretation or expression), and therefore is the birthplace of sense. The introduction of emphasis, valuation, and purpose (meaning) means the introduction of intensification. The integration of the mental and the physical pole provides a concrescence that may be characterized as an axial rotation; it is not only the mind informing the body but also the ongoing repercussions of the information. This may lead to 'ideal forms' that may be used as schemes or model forms (potentials) in realizing self-formation, for example, in self-reflection. On the TID itself, Whitehead accordingly notes:

Immanence and transcendence are the characteristics of an object: as a realized determinant it is immanent; as a capacity for determination it is transcendent, in both rôles it is relevant to something not itself.²³⁹

As a matter of fact, I would like to introduce the notion of contrast, as found in Whitehead's philosophy of organism, to the TID model in order to describe the threshold zones between the three forms of the TID more adequately. Transcendence and, above all, the notion of transcending work via contrast. To adopt the notion of contrast from Whitehead's thinking is intended to further explicate the idea of guiding dichotomic codes and their role in the description of the phenomena, above all, the role of the transcendence/immanence distinction, considered to be the primary code of religious communication.

According to Whitehead, religion's main problem "is to link finitude to infinitude," as he puts it in one of his dialogues recorded by the journalist Lucien Price.²⁴⁰ Religion's main task, therefore, may be described as mediating something that is expressed in terms of difference. Thus, it is a relationship of contrasts. This task makes religion a worthwhile subject for philosophical reflection. Shortly after this statement, Whitehead talks about the central problem of modern philosophy, which is, in turn, the old Platonian question of "how to relate the one and the many."²⁴¹ To me, this seems to be the same

²³⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 239–240.

²⁴⁰ See the *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead as recorded by Lucien Price* (Boston: Godine, 2001), 131.

²⁴¹ *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, 132.

structural problem religion both faces and seeks to answer: how to deal with contrast. On the object language level, contrast can be introduced to separate and relate the human and the divine sphere. William Bradford, in *On Plymouth Plantation*, makes repeated use of the contrast between God and men regarding power, thus exalting God's majesty and, at the same time, man's dependence and directedness towards that supreme majesty as an ontological fundamental.²⁴²

In *Process and Reality* Whitehead introduces the notion of contrast as a fundamental, and hence, relationships are abstractions.²⁴³ To Whitehead, relational religion, therefore, would be contrasting religion. The relations of affirmation and negation are no more than the most important contrast. Contrast is not to be confused with incompatibility, as contrast means the particular relation between contrasting elements. Therefore, the notion of contrast as a category expresses "Modes of Synthesis of Entities in one Prehension, or Patterned entities,"²⁴⁴ including the possibility of "an indefinite progression of categories, as we proceed from 'contrasts' to 'contrasts of contrasts', an on indefinitely higher grades of contrasts."²⁴⁵ Cusanus, for instance, describes the process of transcending as a process of contrasting contrasts, such as logical contradiction. Processes of contrasts, therefore, do not unfold merely in a linear way but in many directions, allowing for diversity of perspective. But this also means that as a transcending contrast, a contrast can only be perceived if it is contrasted against another contrast, i.e., by a contrast of contrasts that, in turn, can be contrasted themselves and so on. The concept of transcending, thus, does not necessarily relate to a distinction between two fixed spheres²⁴⁶ but rather is linked to contingent contrasts that are dependent on other contrasts.²⁴⁷

²⁴² See Hovey, "The Theology of History in 'Of Plymouth Plantation' and Its Predecessors," 64.

²⁴³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 228.

²⁴⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 22. A 'prehension' is, according to Cobb possibly "the single most important and original concept in Whitehead's philosophy. A 'prehension' consists in an objective datum as well as a subjective form. The objective datum is what it prehends. The subjective form is how it prehends it." John B. Cobb, Jr., Whitehead Word Book. A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality (Claremont: P&F Press, 2008,) 31. A prehension, thus, is essentially bipolar.

²⁴⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 22.

²⁴⁶ See Hubert Knoblauch's critique on the 'binary transcendence' he finds in Luhmann's theory, compare Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 55.

²⁴⁷ This idea is the Whiteheadian equivalent of what Licia Di Giacinto in one of her presentations to the КХК termed the 'Matryoshka Principle' of the ТИД. Forms (Levels) of transcendence are connected in the manner of nesting of Russian dolls. The concept is further elaborated in Di Giacinto's forthcoming monograph 'Laozi in Context'. Compare

The processual emergence of a meta-contrast allows the emergence of a reflective sphere (expressing, examining) directed toward the first contrast—hence, the emergence of what we call formal transcendence via contrasting the first contrast. Basic and formal transcendence, thus, are more closely connected than expected. To give an example, the contrast of black and grey is needed to contrast the contrast of black and white in order to denote it as a contrast.

Now, what are the advantages of introducing this notion? As such, the notion of contrast, on the one hand, allows the acknowledgment of the mutual interdependency of the contrasted. It expresses their close interrelation in the distinction, as opposed to an idea of pure opposition. On the other hand, it permits the possibility of gradual distinction as there are quantitatively and qualitatively higher and lower levels of contrast.²⁴⁸ For example, the color black may contrast with white, but it also contrasts with grey. Darker and brighter greys themselves present another form of contrast. Third, each contrast is a whole, an 'entity' of its own, that as such is part of the process and not only as a combination of the things contrasted. This is due to Whitehead's basic systematic assumption that the combination of actual entities (nexus) is itself an

also the particular interrelation of contrasts as elaborated by Reinhard Schulze: "Wie schon angesprochen erfolgt die Interpretation einer vorgängigen Unterscheidung meist erst nach einem oder mehreren späteren Differenzierungsprozessen. So wurde die Sakral-Profan-Unterscheidung erst in dem Moment begrifflich, als sich das Feld des Sakralen in eine neue, zwischen Transzendenz und Immanenz unterscheidende Ordnung ausdifferenziert hatte. Das Gleiche gilt auch für die Transzendenz-Immanenz-Unterscheidung. Auch sie wurde erst begrifflich, als sich die Transzendenzordnung in eine Religion-Säkularität-Ordnung differenzierte. Das Paar Transzendenz und Immanenz interpretiert also aus einer späteren Zeit die Verfassung der Ordnung, die sich aus einer Differenzierung des Sakralen ergeben hat. Daher sind die Abstrakta Transzendenz (transcendentia) und Immanenz (immanentia) erst seit dem 17. Jahrhundert belegt." Reinhard Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam* (Basel: Schwabe, 2015), 135.

248 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 95. Whitehead's idea finds some resemblance in Georg Simmel's anthropological idea about the human being that is that man is a differentiating creature, see Georg Simmel, "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben," in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908*, eds. Rüdiger Kramme, Angela Rammstedt, Otthein Rammstedt. Gesamtausgabe 7 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995), 116. See also Georg Simmel, "Über sociale Differenzierung," in *Aufsätze 1887–1890. Über sociale Differenzierung. Das Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie*, ed. Heinz-Jürgen Dahme. Gesamtausgabe 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 137: "Der Mensch ist ein Unterschiedswesen; wie wir nie die absolute Größe eines Reizes, sondern nur seinen Unterschied gegen den bisherigen Empfindungszustand wahrnehmen, so haftet auch unser Interesse nicht an denjenigen Lebensinhalten, die von jeher und überall die verbreiteten und allgemeinen sind, sondern an denen, durch die sich jeder von jedem unterscheidet."

actual entity.²⁴⁹ Edward Shils, in his book on Tradition, elucidated this process with reference to T.S. Eliot: “T.S. Eliot once said that the literary tradition is changed by what every important work which has incorporated the tradition adds to it. ‘The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; in order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, value of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.’”²⁵⁰ Novelty is the production of new contrasts—or to relate it to the overarching task of the КХК: the dynamics of the history of religion rely on transcending contrasts. To Whitehead, the contrast increases intensity,²⁵¹ thus contributing to the third aspect of dynamics.²⁵² And what could be more of a contrast than an other met in a contact situation? The intensity of contact situations is dependent on the contrasts employed in the situation in question.

Thus, the social reality of phenomena that may be interpreted as religious and their basic contrasting dependence on their environment is a vital element of the phenomenon in question itself. This holds not at last true for processes of transcending. For the Chinese transcendent, xian, Campany stresses “[...] that practitioners of transcendence arts performed their ascetic selves before, and in self-conscious contrast to, many others who surrounded them, sought them out, and took a keen interest in their doings (performance implies audience); that, despite their stereotype as solitary and isolated, they were, in fact, public figures who functioned in society as holy persons and who did so largely by virtue of their insistence on their difference from others [...].”²⁵³ The new self of the practitioner as a transcendent is contrasted against the old self-set amid the social environment that is simultaneously the acknowledging body of the new status and the process of transcending leading to it.

Another advantage of the notion might be the following. As I demonstrated in ‘Dynamics and Stability’, Whitehead provides us with a theory of the bipolarity of process, of how the physical (‘enjoyment’) and the conceptual (‘appetition’) sphere are related. As such, this idea introduces the concept of the elliptic stability of bipolarity.²⁵⁴ This idea is further relevant for understanding formal transcendence, and particularly the basic structure of self-reference, introducing the possibility of a second-order observation.

249 See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 22.

250 Shils, *Tradition*, 196.

251 See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 278, also compare Cobb, *Whitehead Word Book*, 74.

252 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

253 Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 31.

254 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

The notion of contrast is closely related to the idea of process. Whitehead states that “along the route of the life-history there is a chain of contrasts.”²⁵⁵ This holds true for individual entities as well as for collective ones. By transcending oneself via contrast, one progresses. By doing so, it dynamically establishes a stability of the chain of interpretation, which is itself one of the forms of the relationship between dynamics and stability.²⁵⁶

In his philosophy of culture and knowledge, published in 1933 under the programmatic title of *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead states that harboring contrast provides progress. Without it, a tradition is ‘in full decay’. The “real contrast of what has been and what may be” is the trigger for process, stimulating the “vigor to adventure beyond the safeties of the past.”²⁵⁷ What happens here is the self-examination (self-reference) of a tradition triggered by contrast, thus transcending oneself in reflection and, as a consequence, also in action as an adventurous enterprise—perhaps to the Promised Land or the Kingdom of God in specific transcendence.²⁵⁸ The adventure of ideas consists of the search for new contrasts or occasions of transcendence.

The real contrast of what has been and what will be introduces another perspective the KHK has dealt with—the question of time or temporal transcendence in relation to the model of the TID that mainly uses spatial metaphors. The concept of contrast connects tradition and the transcendence-immanence distinction.

In order to reformulate the process of transcending with regard to the idea of the one and the many: in processes of transcending, manifoldness is integrated as compatible contrasts into positively conceived information, and that is information as both a datum to recognize and a formation of a horizon of understanding. This self-ordering process is performed in order to prevent incompatibilities.²⁵⁹ In Whitehead's terms:

255 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 279.

256 Compare Peter Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion. Continuity and Change in Patterns of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 43: “The contrasts between patterns reflect differences of emphasis rather than irreconcilable oppositions.” See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

257 Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 279.

258 Stephen Berkwitz stressed this point with regard to the South Asian contact situations between Buddhists and Christians as follows: “Contact situations marked by interreligious encounters gave new energy to self-referential moves to systematize Buddhism and delineate acceptable sources from which one could get knowledge of it.” Berkwitz, “Dynamics and Stability,” 37.

259 See Jürgen Frese, “Sozialprozessstheorie im Anschluß an Whitehead. Whiteheads Metaphysik als methodenkritisches und kategoriales Orientierungsmodell für soziologische Theorien,” in *Whitehead und der Prozeßbegriff/Whitehead and the Idea of Process*, edited by Ernest Wolf-Gazo (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1981), 92.

God and the World are the contrasted opposites in terms of which Creativity achieves its supreme task of transforming disjoined multiplicity, with its diversities in opposition, into concrescent unity, with its diversities in contrast.²⁶⁰

The notions of God and the World, though indispensable for Whitehead's theory, which inaugurated a whole branch of process theology, should not be our main concern. Rather, it is the process described here that interests us: contrast transforms or transcends diversities into process by means of guiding conceptual assumption: in this case, 'God'/transcendence and the 'World'/immanence. The TID is, therefore, a contrast to overcome, to end all contrasts, and, thus, headed toward non-differentiation. It concerns a relationship between relations, the relation of the TID, and the relation of unity and manifoldness, or the one and the many. Therefore, one may observe that the process of transcending heads towards indifference is a form of non-differentiation, as Kianoosh Rezania suggested.²⁶¹ This idea is also found in Luhmann's description of the transcending process—transcendence indicates the unity of differences on a higher level.²⁶²

In conclusion, I would like to link the previous considerations on the TID to a concrete event in the KHK's work. As a matter of fact, I think that the interpretation of the TID in the Whiteheadian sense is in accordance with some of the criticism of the programmatic TID some speakers of the 2017 September conference of the KHK have articulated, above all, Magnus Schlette.²⁶³ In his commentary, Schlette rightly argued for a differentiated interpretation of the transcendence/immanence dichotomy.²⁶⁴ The TID is more than a mere

260 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

261 Regarding object language terminology, Johann Hafner notes a corresponding phenomenon: salvation means the blurring of distinctions ("Erlösung ist das Verwischen von Unterschieden"). Hafner, "Die Codierung des Christentums," 174.

262 See Kleine, "Niklas Luhmann und die Religionswissenschaft," 66: "Im ostasiatischen Buddhismus würde man den Sachverhalt folgendermaßen formulieren: die beiden Pole sind vom (transzendenten!) Standpunkt eines Buddha aus betrachtet 'nicht zwei und doch zwei; zwei und doch nicht zwei'. In der Luhmann'schen Diktion: Transzendenz verweist auf die Einheit der Differenz—aber eben auf einer höheren Ebene!"

263 The KHK yearly September Conference in 2017 (6–8 September) was devoted to the subject 'The Transcendence/Immanence Distinction in the Study of Religious Contacts between Asia and Europe', summarizing the results of the research carried out in the KHK during the academic year 2016/2017 on the topic of the transcendence/immanence distinction.

264 See Magnus Schlette, "Commentary. The Transcendence/Immanence Distinction (TID) as a *tertium comparationis* in the Study of Religious Contacts" (unpublished manuscript, 2017), 1.

contradictory opposition, as in the logical *p* and non-*p*, but also covers contrary and subcontrary opposition. To interpret the TID as a Whiteheadian contrast takes this graduation of difference into account, thus elaborating on the idea of the “Matryoshka principle” of the TID that Licia Di Giacinto has stressed.

As a matter of fact, Schlette answered this claim by raising an important idea concerning the role of (symbolic) language even within deictic (or indexical) processes found on the level of basic transcendence. These are considered to be proto-symbolic processes, as “Full-fledged indexicality requires symbolic language.”²⁶⁵ This is even more the case for the level of formal transcendence, where symbolic language allows sense to be made of that which is not restricted by the indexical boundaries of the here and now and, thus, allows self-reference by means of contrasting possible and real worlds. Schlette suggests calling this transcendent immanence “meaning an immanence that is qualified by the capability of transcending it towards the hypothetical.”²⁶⁶ From here, reflection on something that is, perhaps by definition, not the subject of direct reference may take place, establishing the possibility of ‘religious transcendence’ that may be called immanent transcendence: the awareness of transcendent immanence. Hence, in our terms, this is also a reflection of immanent transcendence, a contrast of contrasts. A possible medium for such processes would be the great mythical narratives. Having thus described the emergence and the interaction of the immanent and the transcendent by means of the possibility of symbolic communication, one is able to define Transcendence (with a capital T)²⁶⁷ as a higher level (grade or contrast) of formal transcendence. Here, another self-reflective turn takes place, producing the insight that the symbolic means of conceptualizing the transcendent may be insufficient. This, in turn, deals with the development of what in the Christian tradition is called negative theology, which serves as a medium for the incommensurable Transcendence. Other participants of the conference, namely Walter Young, posed the question of agency in this process. Agency cannot be restricted to human beings but is rather focused on symbolic communication of language or notions as such.²⁶⁸

265 Schlette, “Commentary,” 4.

266 Schlette, “Commentary,” 5.

267 Schlette, “Commentary,” 6 (with reference to Dalferth, “The Idea of Transcendence,” 155). On a critique on Dalferth’s idea that is, it basically using the logics of Dialectical Theology see Hafner, “Die Codierung des Christentums,” 184. After all, Dalferth’s approach from the very beginning starts with a specified form of the transcendence-immanence distinction, as the idea of absolute transcendence is presupposed as the unconditioned/absolute (das Unbedingte).

268 See chapter on Attraction.

The entangledness of the diverse levels of the TID must be stressed, and above all the entangledness of formal and specific transcendence. To add, it must be remembered that the levels of the TID are analytical distinctions only, and in the phenomena, they constantly interact. Hence, there is not only the entangledness of formal and specific but also the entangledness of formal and basic, specific and basic transcendence. A picture of Baby Jesus pointing may serve as an example of this co-presence of the analytically distinguished levels. Nevertheless, I would agree with Schlette that formal transcendence, the capability and performance of self-reflection, plays a paramount role in the process of the TID, which has yet to be further elaborated.

9 Conclusion: Transcending, Contrast, and the Dynamics of Contact

The level at which the process of transcending becomes a specified transcendence is far from being decided. In fact, most transcending processes are located on the levels of basic and formal transcendence. However, it can be safely assumed that when religions actually encountered one another in history, the question of how to deal with the transcendence-immanence distinction gained semantic urgency. That is to say; those interreligious encounters produced a semantic space of “controversial commonality,” in which the relationships of transcendence and immanence may become ever more marked. It might additionally be asked whether the very process of demarcation, based upon the basic ‘here’—‘there’ distinction, might be interpreted semiotically as an expression of the (formal) transcendence-immanence distinction (‘we’—‘they’), as well as the elaboration of general notions (such as ‘religion’), in order to capture and thus transcend the other on a common linguistic level.²⁶⁹

Interreligious contact can be an inducement for a specific religion at a specific time to embrace a concept of specific, religious transcendence. It is here that, according to object language descriptions, the ‘real’ transcendent God might be set against others, perhaps the worldly ‘pagan’ ‘demons’ that were formerly known as ‘gods’.²⁷⁰ What is more, even the processes involved in a religious contact situation, recognizing, identifying, interpreting, translating, rejecting, or adapting, might be described with regard to the presence of the transcendence-immanence distinction. The problem of comparison is not

²⁶⁹ See chapter on More Than Semantics.

²⁷⁰ On the relationship between God and demons Daniel Barbu, “Idolatry and the History of Religions,” *Studi e Materiali de Storia delle Religioni* 82 (2016): 548–550.

only a sole product of the scholar's search for an appropriate meta-language. Religious traditions themselves also relate to others and compare, struggling for the correct interpretation of the phenomenon with regard to their ideas and notions about themselves. Accordingly, the very act of comparison, performed on the object language level, is in itself an employment of the TID and a distinctive form of the process of transcending. It is also the point at which metalanguage may develop suitable notions derived from metalinguistic considerations of the available object language to handle a situation of contact.²⁷¹

Perhaps one might even argue that the final absolute transcendence of the divine, as found in medieval theological speculation, has to be examined as a result of a transcending process—a result of constant self-reflection and multifoldings of observations to a higher and higher order. This process is triggered by critique, whether voluntary or involuntary. Thus, the process leads to a seemingly paradoxical result: the more critique, the more absolute (and distinct) the transcendent, but also the stronger the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent, the 'here' and 'there'. In his theory of religion, Whitehead describes the interrelationship of the twain as follows: "But just as the kingdom of Heaven transcends the natural world, so does this world transcend the kingdom of heaven. For the world is evil, and the kingdom is good."²⁷²

Accordingly, one has to look for semantic concretions of the three concepts of transcendence (basic, formal, specific) within object language. Promising candidates may be any type of binary (complementary) oppositions or contrasts that are pointed at and reflected upon. As the Kantian definition and the Chinese examples related to certain places (borders, mountains) and movements (crossing, ascending) show, the metaphorology of the distinction has to be taken into consideration as well. It might even be argued that the very employment of metaphors as such indicates the presence of formal transcendence and, accordingly, of religioid material.

The introduction of the TID is not reduced to situations of contact of two or more distinct religions. Intrareligious contact and contact with other social spheres have to be transcended as well. However, the contact of religious traditions might still have a certain preeminence, for it is, above all, interreligious contact that triggers an experience of contingency within one religious tradition. All of a sudden, the traditional and unquestioned conduct of life is put into question by the presence of the other. The experience of contingency demands an answer that re-establishes certainties by (spatially) moving them

271 See chapter on Object Language and Metalanguage.

272 Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 87–88.

to another, transcendent sphere. The experience of the other also prompts the integration of the other into a semantic field that can be controlled conceptually. Here, the other, as a manifestation of an external second-order observation, becomes transcendent. For example, there might be an introduction of an orthodox-heterodox distinction in order to integrate the other into an overarching worldview by removing it from one's own sphere. Religious contact, thus, might induce a double movement (more immanence/more transcendence) that causes the intensification of both.²⁷³

As regards the three-level model of the TID, the 'borders' between the various forms of transcendence could be regarded as indicative markers of the influence of situations of contact on the process of transcending. Contact situations may trigger both a transgression of borders and, subsequently, densification of religious meaning. These contact situations are, here, not reduced to situations of two religious traditions meeting but also comprise occasions of internal critique, of critique performed by another societal field. In his study of the Chinese transcendents (*xian*), Campany refers to such situations of contact, even claiming that antagonistic contact lies in the very structure of the kind of transcendence expressed by the ancient transcendents: "The shapers of the tradition of *xian*-seeking postulated transcendence as a goal beyond the here-and-now, and, [...] they also located access to it in secret methods over which they claimed exclusive control. Antagonism with other sorts of power-wielders and other roles in society—indeed, with all who had not been vouchsafed access to the methods—was therefore built into the very nature of the quest for *xian*-hood."²⁷⁴

The dynamics of contact, therefore, cannot be described with reference to the theory of impetus. Rather, it refers to a process of conceptual transcending. Religious traditions in contact do not correspond to the laws that govern the changing movement of solid objects. Employing the TID in comparison, religious actors are instead involved in the process of realizing a new contrast. That is, they transcend the basic reckoning of the other tradition and, thus, formally transcend by a process of self-reflection. The process of contrast here is a bipolar movement of realization that is both objectification in the sense of making something real and the conceptual grasping of the object as an object to realize.²⁷⁵ The contrast itself introduces a new relational (actual) entity that may be employed in corresponding contact situations (i.e., the

273 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

274 Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 3.

275 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

contrast of two religious traditions will play a role in other situations of contact in which both traditions are involved). Religious traditions in contact do not mutually repulse. They are not billiard balls that bounce off each other and change direction.²⁷⁶ Rather, they are contexts of indication that generate new unities via transcending self-reflection, including the contact situation itself, which re-enters into the recursive process. Comparison is the introduction of a new contrast into the self-referential process. The involvement of the realized contrast in a further process of contrasting stabilizes a dynamic tradition that now may relate to 'itself' in the past.²⁷⁷

276 See chapter on Concepts and Contact.

277 See chapter on Tradition.

Making Sense of the Senses

Communicativeness, Reciprocity, Immediacy, and Scriptuality in Sensory Religious Experience

1 On the Possible Role of the Study of the Senses in Religious Studies

The senses display a certain attraction for scholars of religious traditions.¹ This is not least due to the possible reference not only to sensory but also to sensual religious experiences that make the study of religious phenomena considerably less dry and dusty than the study of doctrinal texts or theological tracts. “For far too long,” the editors of the journal *Numen* in their introduction to *Religion through the Senses* claim, “religion has been equated with doctrine, especially with those systematized doctrines known as ‘theologies’. [...] [S]cholars have tended to study the normative, textual, versions of the traditions with which they have been concerned, in many cases disregarding the lived, physical components of those traditions.”² Admittedly, the wording itself is highly suggestive, as the reference to life, such as in ‘lived’ tradition or religion, seems more attractive than the focus on ‘systematized doctrines’. The unspoken metaphorical opposition is, of course, the opposition between life or lived and death or dead (religion). Nobody, not even scholars, wants to be on the dead side of the matter. The question emerges, however, of whether the emphatic turn to the senses as a paramount field of study of lived religion is also a sensible one, given the strong demarcating restrictions the new sensory approach suggests—especially regarding former approaches to the common subject of religion.

Above all, the emphatic turn to the physical and the senses introduces a strong sense of opposition between the two ways of approaching the subject matter. On the one hand, an old, outdated, dry, and infertile approach; on the other hand, a new, promising, fresh, and fertile one. What is more, the new direction of research is introduced with the suggestion that previous

1 See the extensive review on current research on religion and the senses by Alexandra Cuffel, Licia Di Giacinto, and Volkhard Krech, “Senses, Religion, and Religious Encounter. Literature Review and Research Perspectives,” *Entangled Religions* 10 (2019).

2 “Religion through the senses,” *Numen* 54 (2007): 371.

scholarship has failed through its neglect of an obviously vital element of the subject in question—as one author put it, “By and large, we have failed to encounter, much less think about, other aspects of religion, particularly those that involve the senses.”³ As a consequence, the attitude of the new direction, which sets itself up as intending to atone for the injustices inflicted on the unfortunate helpless object, has a zeal that borders on the messianic. Hence, as a counter-project to such neglectful text-based approaches to the phenomenon of religion, the examination of the senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, but also other senses) has acquired considerable scholarly popularity. Every-day and vernacular religion, as the focus of lived reality, are placed at the cutting edge of the revitalized study of religion in general and lived material, lived experience, and bodily religion are at the very center of the field. Bodily sensation has been foregrounded as an object of study in the wake of yet another ‘turn’ in scholarship. As such, in correspondence with some object language ideas, the interest in the senses in scholarly work on religious phenomena is often guided by an attitude that considers the ‘mind as the adversary of the soul.’⁴ Under this approach, theoretical consideration somehow pollutes or even prevents the genuine sensory experience of the divine, a realm that is supposed to be the bodily reality of practitioners of everyday religion.⁵ In

3 Meredith B. McGuire, “Individual sensory experiences, socialized senses, and everyday lived religion in practice,” *Social Compass* 63 (2016): 162 (Abstract).

4 The soteriological impetus connected to the sensory turn in the study of religion is in many regards prefigured in corresponding approaches in philosophy about forty years earlier. In a volume on a ‘postmodern aesthetics’ the editors claim: “Dabei sind die Sinne vor der Moderne immerzu für paranormal gehalten worden. Was sie vermögen, ist auch heute keineswegs klar. Schon deshalb müssen sie freigelassen werden aus der Übermacht einer zynisch gewordenen Vernunft. Wenn es nicht enden soll bei der entstrukturierten Schwere, jener grassierenden, fallsüchtigen Depression [...], dann muß es zu einer ‘Blickwende’ kommen. Eine Umwendung des Blicks, eine Relativierung des Auges allein könnte das beschleunigte Geschehen verlangsamen und kurz vor Schluß der Geschichte mithelfen, wieder Zeit zu gewinnen.” Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, “Blickwende. Die Sinne des Körpers im Konkurs der Geschichte,” in *Das Schwinden der Sinne*, eds. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 17. One could even go so far as to claim that the emphatic turn to the senses in scholarship follows a distinctly Christian theological pattern: “The ancient Christian valuation of sense perception as a mode of religious knowing yielded a vivid commitment to the human person as an embodied and sensing being created by God for just that purpose. Here lay the basic core of Christian identity: what the Christian sensed was God, known through every aspect of the believer’s existence, body, mind, and soul, here and hereafter.” Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation. Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 239.

5 See the example of the Bishop of Cloyne discussed later in this chapter.

his stimulating introduction to a recent new series on the study of the senses in the study of religion, Graham Harvey categorically declares with the very first lines of his text the following truths to be self-evident when regarding his object of study:

Religion is sensual because it is corporeal and earthy. Religion is something that people (always bodies) do in the world (always physical). It is seen, heard, tasted, smelled and touched, and often involves senses of place, decency, awe, humour, value and honour. These and other senses work together (although not always successfully), and they are integral to corporeality and to engagement with the world.⁶

The most obvious objection here is that object language accounts of achieving certain mystical experiences are excluded from religion proper by this description. Harvey's apodictic insistency notwithstanding, the important question remains: what is it that is seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and touched?⁷ Is the sensual perception process really quite as one-directional as his statement suggests? Are the senses merely sensing religion—or is perhaps also religion sensing—not least making sense of—the senses? Moreover, by employing a general concept, here, the concept of religion, the assertion may be in danger of falling prey to the ever-present fallacy of misplaced concreteness.⁸ “Why does incense smell religious?” Margaret Kenna asked about the role of smell in Greek Orthodoxy in her study.⁹ Is ‘religion’ smelled, or is there a sensation that is described as a religious experience? In other words, is the attribute ‘religious’ ascribed to the sensory experience with regard to certain criteria derived from religious (theoretical) doctrine?

6 Graham Harvey, “Series Foreword,” in *Sensual Religion. Religion and the Five Senses*, eds. Graham Harvey and Jessica Hughes. Religion and the Senses (Sheffield/Bristol: Equinox, 2018), vii.

7 See for instance Harold D. Roth, *Original Tao. Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 154–155, also see the quotation from the *Chuang Tzu* with the disturbing advice to forget practice, body, senses, and material objects in order to have a mystical (religious?) experience, *ibid.*, 156: “Just settle yourself in nonaction. And things will naturally transform. Drop away your body and members. Spit out your eyesight and hearing. Forget your relationship with things. And you will merge in the totality of the boundless.”

8 See chapter on Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.

9 Margaret E. Kenna, “Why does Incense Smell Religious? Greek Orthodoxy and the Anthropology of Smell,” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 15 (2005): 51–70.

It is very much the case that, as Harvey suggests, there are more senses to be found in religious discourse than the five traditional ones.¹⁰ One could also add a sense of balance, a sense of coordination, a sense of language, and so on.¹¹ This fact in itself serves as a confirmation of the idea that religious ideas generate senses that, in turn, sense the religious as a normative prescript, for example, with regard to proper place or decency or value. Another indication is provided by the often-described phenomenon that the senses may be objects of voluntary impact and restructuring. In religious contexts, the senses are possible subjects of training or cultivation, perhaps in order to serve more elevated purposes. In turn, then, the senses must be defined by ideas about what an elevation could possibly mean. The corporeality and earthiness of the sensory engagement with the world in the context of religion presupposes a great deal of theoretical and transcendent assumptions.

Indeed, there is nothing wrong with the assertion that “Religion is the smelling, tasting, touching, hearing and seeing of the world in particular ways,” provided it is not made exclusive.¹² Nevertheless, it is the ‘particular ways’ that qualify the perception of the world as religious that should be the subject of scholarly scrutiny. Something ‘particular’ is opposed to ‘usual’ or at least ‘other’ ways, and hence, we must ask, what makes the ‘particular’ particular?

1.1 *Senses, Experience, and Meaning*

In his analysis of the role of experience in religious studies, Matthew Kapstein has fittingly related the turn toward religious experience to the Cartesian quest for apodictic certainty, unspoiled by critical discussion of the route to achieving one’s religious ideas and convictions:

What was strange about invoking ‘experience’ as a protective strategy in this way was not the turn to experience per se; it was rather the emerging conceit that in the context of religious life experience belongs solely to the subject and so is immune to the criticism or even, in the final analysis, the understanding of others. My experience alone, in other words, comes to be regarded as an incorrigible epistemic authority. What is so odd about this is the ready acceptance such a paradigm requires of what

10 To Jütte, it was a combination of the usefulness of theological allegoresis plus the authority of Aristotle that made the number five for the senses canonical in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic contexts (Robert Jütte, *Geschichte der Sinne. Von der Antike bis zum Cyberspace* (München: Beck, 2000), 65–67).

11 The sense of balance was discussed in the КHK following a presentation by Reinhold Gleis. Compare Cuffel, Di Giacinto, Krech, “Senses, Religion, and Religious Encounter,” 10.

12 Harvey, “Series Foreword,” VIII.

is at root a skeptical, and not an empiricist, view of experience. Though Schleiermacher in part adopted the rhetoric of empiricism, his legacy to the later discussion of religious experience was thus an uneasy mix of that rhetoric with the post-Cartesian quest for apodictically certain grounds.¹³

A similar 'protective turn', towards "a sort of magic lantern show in a Cartesian theater with seating for one," may be witnessed in the critical opposition that is now proposed between ideas of 'theoretical' religion and 'lived' religion. The interest in the senses in the study of religion is closely connected to the analysis of religious experience and, above all, religious experience as opposed to textual-based religious doctrine. In this regard, the senses are held to be closely related to the body. Scholars claim that the study of religion cannot be reduced to the hermeneutic examination of religious ideas as manifested in teaching, narratives, or doctrines; it also has to take sensory experiences into account. The senses in general, or some sense in particular, have triggered a huge amount of scholarship examining religious experience. "Certain visual images, sounds, and smells heighten our spiritual forces and evoke meaningful religious experiences."¹⁴ That is true enough, but this is only the case if the experience in question is described as religiously relevant or meaningful, which happens on the basis of certain criteria. It is these criteria that make the sensory experiences truly particular or 'certain'.¹⁵ Our bodily experience can be embedded in a religious sense, but not the other way around. Accordingly,

13 Matthew T. Kapstein, "Reconsidering Religious Experience. Seeing the Light in the History of Religions," in *The Presence of Light. Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 270.

14 McGuire, "Individual sensory experiences," 154.

15 Here, one cannot expect clear-cut ascription processes like scholarly definitions, but rather we are confronted with fuzzy, subcutaneous, and mostly unreflected everyday ascriptions, especially when it comes to concrete religious practice. One does not, however, find religious experiences without those ascriptions conveying religious meaning. As David Morgan has pointed out: "Meaning is not only abstract and discursive, but embodied, felt, interactive, and cumulative. This means that the Cultural construction of reality is not a wispy evocation of words about objects, but a concrete process that invites us to take a careful look at objects." David Morgan, "The Materiality of Cultural Construction," *Material Religion* 4 (2008): 128. Or as Thomas Tweed reminds us regarding the experiences of other (and, in particular, religious) people: "We do not have access to those 'states' or 'experiences'. We have only narratives, artifacts, and practices of religious women and men." Thomas A. Tweed, "On Moving Across: Translocative Religion and the Interpreter's Position," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70 (2002): 256. Sadly enough, as Tweed quite justifiably laments in the following, this near-to truism has to be reaffirmed because most academic studies of religion do not make this clear.

Stephen S. Bush summarizes his considerations on experiences as follows: "They involve causal processes that extend beyond and outside consciousness, and whatever knowledge that people come to about their experiences, they only come to because of their social-linguistic capacities to respond to things that affect them by taking a normative status that their peers recognize. [...] The term 'experience' refers to matters that are public and/or social: dispositions, normative statuses, and causal processes."¹⁶ With reference to these matters, sensory experiences matter in religious communities or traditions, and they make a difference as they are so thoroughly situated in the local religious and social context.

However, the question of the possible role of the senses in a religious context must also be considered. What makes the senses an independent area of possible research on religious phenomena? There are a number of questions that inevitably arise with the assumption that the senses play a major role in religious experience. How do senses affect individual religious experience and the discourses between different religious groups? Are they a means of mediation of experience that has to be analyzed as such? If the divine, according to Birgit Meyer, "does not appear as a self-revealing entity, but, on the contrary, is always 'effected' or 'formed' by mediation processes, while resisting being reduced to mere human-made products," the type of mediator making such an experience possible has to be carefully scrutinized.¹⁷ In philosophical terms, we must reflect on the conditions of the possibility (*Bedingung der Möglichkeit*) of reference to the senses in a religious context. Are sensory religious experiences a priori possible? Is there an independent status of sense experience in experiences described as 'religious'?

The starting point of research on the subject of 'religion and the senses' has been discerned by Cuffel, Di Giacinto, and Krech in the following way: "Research on religion and the senses has to consider the facts that a) there is no direct access to sensual perception and b) sensual perception can have various meanings, among them religious ones. None of the senses or activities that evoke sensory experience are, in and of themselves, 'religious'. It is the religious context which makes them so [...]." Given the additional fact that senses allow interaction with the physical world and may "become symbolic building blocks for human imagining about the divine and demonic world,"¹⁸ it seems

16 Stephen S. Bush, *Visions of Religion: Experience, Meaning, and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 154.

17 Birgit Meyer, "Introduction: Media and the Senses in the Making of Religious Experience," *Material Religion* 4 (2008): 127.

18 Cuffel, Di Giacinto and Krech, "Senses, Religion and Religious Encounter," 31.

vital to refrain from following a one-sided approach, and thereby overestimating the role of either the conceptual or the physical side of sensate experience in religion.¹⁹

To qualify as religious, a sensory experience has to make religious sense.²⁰ Sense, however, is a phenomenon of *ascription*;²¹ no experience makes sense as such; it is only certain *judgments* on the sensory experience expressed in linguistic assertions that can be meaningful and, therefore, make sense.²² Note that it is religion itself that ascribes religious sense, not the scholar: "Religion constitutes itself via the attribution of something as being religious [...]. Action has to be observed and identified as religion in order to be religious; the same holds true for sense-perception communicated as religious experience, and an object is not relevant for religion unless a religious meaning is ascribed to it."²³ Suppose there are rituals or common practices designed to

19 With reference to Peirce's semiotics, Gesche Linde shows that experience and interpretation are always interrelated, see Gesche Linde, "Experience as Interpretation. A Peircean Approach to Practical Theology," in *Religion: Immediate Experience and the Mediacy of Research. Interdisciplinary Studies, Concepts and Methodology of Empirical Research in Religion*, eds. Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Christopher P. Scholz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 166.

20 See Kapstein, "Rethinking Religious Experience," 281: "[R]eligious experiences are whatever experiences are imbued with religious value for the subjects of the experiences in question, and their objects are the objects, of whatever kind, to which such value is attributed." I am not sure about the notion of 'value' here, as it leads to merely further discussion of the relationship between validity and value. The notion of sense is broad enough to cover both possibilities.

21 In her pathbreaking book on *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, Ann Taves has carefully analyzed the processes of ascription as differentiated into attributions and simple and composite ascriptions to and as things deemed religious, or rather, religions, see Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered. A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 8–9. The element of sense, however, seems to be somewhat neglected, either on the level of the senses as the mediators of experience or on the level of meaning-providing sense. Ascription phenomena as assertions ('This and that is religious') convey and express processes of sense-making. An experience is thus not deemed to be religious, but rather deemed to make religious sense. This can be quite different from both object language and metalanguage common sense, not least as regards causality.

22 In the case of the sense of smell James McHugh points out that South Asian religious experts in their analyses "all have one thing in common—that some, if not all, of the fundamental qualities of odors (for example, 'fragrant') are what we would think of as value-laden aesthetic terms, implying an aesthetic judgement." James McHugh, "The Classification of Smells and the Order of the Senses in Indian Religious Traditions," *Numen* 54 (2007): 379.

23 Volkhard Krech, "How to make sense of the senses?," (unpublished KHK Paper, 2016), 1. On this aspect more generally see Volkhard Krech, *Wo bleibt die Religion? Zur Ambivalenz des Religiösen in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 13: "Religiös bestimmt

evoke certain sensory experiences or 'spontaneous' visions; the visual, acoustical, olfactory, haptic, or gustatory impression has to be accompanied by an ascription of religious sense. This ascription will necessarily follow certain criteria to distinguish it from normal or simply other sensory impressions. Hearing someone calling through loudspeakers does not make religious sense as such while hearing a *mu'adhdhin* calling believers to prayer does. Of course, one cannot expect religious traditions to use scholarly or 'Western' wording when ascribing religious sense to a sensory perception. However, there are other indicators that can be used. The criteria for 'making religious sense' are based upon the *transcendence/immanence distinction*, as they ascribe sense with regard to the tension between embodiment and existence in the physical world and the aspiration to reach a transcendent, disembodied divine sphere.²⁴ The senses can only make religious sense if they are said to do so by the religious practitioners themselves. Thus, any attempt to separate religious narratives from sensory experience to gain insight into the phenomenon of religious experience is illusionary. Accordingly, religious meaning is *assigned* to sensory experiences.²⁵ As Susan Ashbrook put it, introducing her study on the role of

und vereindeutigt werden Sachverhalte, Ereignisse und Objekte erst durch die entsprechende Zuschreibung innerhalb rekursiver religiöser und sich als solche bewährender Kommunikation." In a 2015 article, Krech states laconically: "[...] religion is always a result of ascription." Volkhard Krech, "From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back: Some Methodological Considerations on Comparative Perspectives in the Science of Religion," in *The Dynamics of Transculturality, Transcultural Research—Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, eds. A. Flüchter and J. Schöttli (Cham: Springer, 2015), 63.

- 24 "The effusive smell of roses wafting from a Christian corpse confirms the saint's location between heaven and earth: the corporal form still bound to this world while the spirit is present in paradise. Both Christian and Muslim audiences recognize the bodies of martyrs and saints—tied to both this world and the next—after smelling glorious odors symbolic of their virtue and sanctity." Mary Thurkill, "Odors of Sanctity: Distinctions of the Holy in Early Christianity and Islam," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3 (2007): 134.
- 25 Meredith McGuire asks an impressive set of questions in her attempt to prove that religious practices are as closely linked to people's bodies as to cognition: "For instance, imagine how you would arrange your physical environment if you wanted to reach a profoundly prayerful or meditative state. Where would you choose to be? What postures and gestures would you find conducive to deeper religious experience? Kneeling? Standing? Lying prostate? Sitting on the ground? Eyes closed or open? Head bowed of upright? Hands clapping? Folded on your lap? Uplifted? Holding the hands of others? Arms swaying? Body rocking? Breath slow and drawn out? Breath rhythmic and in time with a drum beat or music? What physical connection to others do you imagine? Does a human touch promote your spiritual depth or does it get in the way? Do you need to be alone or in a group? And so on." McGuire, "Individual sensory experiences," 154. The obvious answer to every single one of these questions is, however, dependent on the prevailing theoretical/doctrinal idea about what is religious—to an ascription of religious sense.

olfactory experience in the emergence of Christianity: "Christianity emerged in a world where smells mattered. They mattered for what they did. They mattered for what they meant."²⁶ In this sense, the matter of smell is meaning.

1.2 *Senses as Hypotheses and Forms*

Sensuous experience has been attributed a privileged position as a source for religious experience, and thinking over the basic questions above, that deserves further examination. Do religious traditions claim a genuine sense-making potential for sensuous experiences in religious matters? If the senses alone permit certain religious experiences, the senses themselves become the *sensus numinis* which is—according to Rudolf Otto—ultimately responsible for the very possibility of the *homo religiosus*.²⁷ This would also hold true for the scholar of religion studying the senses: "The journey towards a richer and fuller sense of religion will entail a much wider notion of senses [...] By sustained focus on the senses [...] we will a greatly improved sense of what religion is and what religious people do."²⁸

What are the relations of mind and senses within the object language reflection, and does it make any sense here to distinguish between the senses and the mind as mediators of religious experience? It should be clear by now that I consider the distinction between senses and mind as merely analytical—even potentially dangerous if hypostasized into a 'new' scientific approach. Sensory religion is a meaningful concept *only* if it expresses the interrelatedness and the reciprocity of both parts. The idea of a possible description of pure religious experience via the senses, without taking into account the theoretical assumptions or intellectual superstructure '*Überbau*', is on many levels, a chimera created by idealistic scholars who wish to place lived, material, and bodily religion at the definite center of the study of religion. What is more, the idealistic impetus cannot work on the object language level, which is comprised of the assertions of the religious. For instance, the basic act of ordering the senses in religious traditions presupposes classificatory principles that reflect broader religious ideas or interests.²⁹ Moreover, sensory experience is vital for the understanding of religion as it connects humans to the physical world as well as to religious ideas. Concluding his study of the *Masā'il Abdallāh ibn Salām*, a religious dialogue between a learned Jew and Muḥammad that

26 Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 1.

27 See Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige*. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen (München: Beck, 1997), 7.

28 Harvey, "Series Foreword," ix.

29 See for the case of Indian religions McHugh, "The Classification of Smells," 376.

was probably composed between the ninth and tenth century CE, Ulisse Cecini takes issue with dualist thinking in religious studies. Cecini states that “The sensorial is intertwined with the intellectual and even when it is seemingly addressed by the discourse as a separate issue, nevertheless contains in itself traces or hints to the intellectual and the potentiality to surpass itself and transform into something which is more than sensorial, something we could call mystical, or just religious.”³⁰

Moreover, any reference to the senses in religious traditions under study does not come out of the blue but is dependent on a tradition. The reference to that tradition can be performed in terms of demarcation or adaption. The nature of a tradition-based reference to the senses serves as the background or framework of a religious tradition’s attitude towards sensory experience.³¹ Accordingly, there is no ground zero for experience; *in religions, nothing is ever experienced for the first time*. With regard to the sense of smell, Mary Thurkill has pointed out that “Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures associated fragrance and sweet smells with Divine presence and sacrificial offerings. Evolving within those cultures, early Christians and Muslims assimilated these sensory cues within their own cultic practices while also adapting them to their unique theological and hagiographical purpose.”³²

Instead of playing the senses off against theory (religious knowledge that is manifested in text), an approach is needed that takes the bipolarity of the dynamics of religions into consideration. In contrast to approaches that over-emphasize either the mental or the material pole, I would like to propose considering the senses as *hypotheses* derived from traditional ideas for communication of religious experience.³³ As a hypothesis, a sense generates certain

30 Ulisse Cecini, “Body, senses, and gender-related questions as gates to the transcendent. A new reading of the *Masā’il ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām*,” in *Religious Boundaries for Sex, Gender, and Corporeality*, eds. Alexandra Cuffel, Ana Echevarria, and Georgios T. Halkias (London/New York: Routledge, 2019), 126.

31 See chapter on Attraction.

32 Thurkill, “Odors of Sanctity,” 136.

33 See Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge. An evolutionary approach* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 145: “The tentative solutions which animals and plants incorporate into their anatomy and their behavior are biological analogues of theories; and vice versa: theories correspond [...] to endosomatic organs and their ways of functioning. Just like theories, organs and their functions are tentative adaptations to the world we live in. [...] All this holds also for sense organs. They incorporate, more especially, theory-like expectations. Sense organs, such as the eye, are prepared to react to certain selected environmental events—to those events which they ‘expect’, and *only* to those events. Like theories (and prejudices) they will in general be blind to other events: to those which they do not understand, which they cannot interpret [...]” So, it is *only* as hypothesis that sensory

data due to a given frame of reference; that is, it embodies a propensity.³⁴ As such, the senses serve as interfaces between the collective or individual mind and the world. These are not naturally occurring interfaces but rather are culturally constructed, dependent on basic religious ('dogmatic') propositions.³⁵ The oft-used metaphor of the senses as 'gateways' to the outside world, memory, and knowledge tacitly hints at the fact that such gateways are, in fact, the result of a building process guided by intentions and propositions.³⁶ These propositions are expressed in religious concepts: "Thus, *concepts* [...] are at the core of [...] every experience [...]; consequently, experience exceeds subjectivity and gets within socio-cultural patterns an objective meaning."³⁷ It is this objective, concept-based meaning that forms the possible subject of the scholarly study of religious experience derived from sensory perception.

In her seminal article *Religious Sensations*, Birgit Meyer introduced a most useful notion to describe the senses as religious hypotheses: sensational forms. To her, sensational forms make the transcendental 'sense-able'. They are "relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between religious practitioners in the context of particular religious organizations. Sensational forms are transmitted and shared; they involve religious practitioners in particular practices of worship and play a central role in forming religious subjects."³⁸

organs can generate meaningful data—if taken as such, sense organs only provide and undifferentiated chaotic impressions i.e. their 'blindness' is less about seeing too little, but rather, about seeing (or rather, experiencing) too much.

34 See chapter on Attraction.

35 This holds true for non-Eurasian religious traditions and supposedly underrated senses in the context of religious practice. In her discussion of the African Luba people, Mary Nooter Roberts claims with regard to the sense of touch that the Luba "[...] create objects that are touched for mimetic purposes as well as spiritual mediation, validation, and empowerment. [...] Touch and tactility participate in culturally specific sensory epistemologies, and people and spirits engage with, wield, and are affected by objects through ontological constructions of 'thing-ness'. Beliefs are materialized through objects meant to be touched, held, caressed, worn, or otherwise perceived haptically." Mary Nooter Roberts, "Tactility and transcendence. Epistemologies of touch in African arts and spiritualities," in *Religion and Material Culture. The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 80.

36 See Gábor Barna, "Senses and Religion. Introductory Thoughts," *Traditiones* 36 (2007): 9.

37 Krech, "How to make sense of the senses," 6. As an example, the sensory impression of odors is, as Mary Thurkill has shown, in early and medieval Christianity associated with the concept of transformation, whereas in Islam it is closely connected to the concept of purity (Thurkill, "Odors of Sanctity," 135).

38 Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations. Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2006), 9. Also compare Birgit Meyer, "Picturing the Invisible. Visual Culture and the Study of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 27 (2015): 338.

Sensational forms organize access to the religious, as determined by the close relationship of religion and the transcendence/immanence distinction. By doing so, they make common experiences related to organizations and institutions possible—thus forming both the objects and subjects of perception considered to bear religious sense. Accordingly, diverse religious organizations “may be characterized as having distinct ‘sensory regimes’³⁹ that are, ultimately, responsible for “generating a sacred surplus.”⁴⁰ Hence, comparative analysis is necessary for any further study.

Meyer defines ‘sensational’ as referring to feelings, while ‘sensory’ refers to the senses, although she acknowledges the close relationship between the two. However, in employing the concept of sensational forms, it is possible to take a further analytical step. In ascription processes underpinning religious meaning, the senses *are* sensational forms as well. Every ascription of sense allows for access to the transcendent. This permits a non-essentialist means of description: in a religious context, there is no sense (as such) behind the sensational forms, which are, accordingly, the sole carriers of religious meaning. Therefore, Meyer’s assertion regarding feelings is all the truer for the senses: they are defined by a (common) sense: “Sensational forms, though produced and in a sense ‘made up’ appear as situated beyond mediation exactly because they are—literally—incorporated and embodied by their beholders. These forms invoke and perpetuate shared experiences, emotions, and affects that are anchored in a taken-for-granted sense of self and community, indeed a *common sense* that is rarely subject to questioning exactly because it is grounded in shared perceptions and sensations.”⁴¹ Moreover, it is by working on the body and on the senses in the process of religious training that the culturally induced sensational forms are finally naturalized and embodied in and by the religious (believers).⁴² To adapt David Morgan, via sensational forms, the individual body is disciplined to participate in the social body. The body perceived and perceiving, guided by sensory hypothesis, becomes the very way in which

39 Meyer, *Religious Sensations*, 22.

40 Meyer, “Picturing the Invisible,” 338.

41 Meyer, *Religious Sensations*, 20. In general, it seems worthwhile to scrutinize phenomena of emotion that appear as a mode of particular situations of contact. Emotional strategies, as Tarantino and Zika argue, contribute to the formation and maintenance of stereotypical claims of difference, but also of similarities, that permeate daily life and culture and are, thus, indispensable elements to be taken into consideration in the description and analysis of situations of religious contact. These claims follow particular patterns that serve as model forms of dealing with the challenges connected to other religious traditions (Giovanni Tarantino and Charles Zika, “Introduction. Feeling exclusion, generating exclusion, Feeling Exclusion. Religious Conflict, Exile and Emotions in Early Modern Europe,” eds. Giovanni Tarantino and Charles Zika (New York: Routledge, 2019), 2).

42 See Meyer, “Media and the Senses in the Making of Religious Experience,” 129.

individuals and groups practice belief: “The body in such cases does more than signify. More than passively enabling it, the body shapes, colors, tunes, tastes, and performs belief.”⁴³

Sensational forms are subject to confirmation and rejection, as all things are subject to historical circumstances. They change, in short. This, in turn, leads to the introduction of a new hypothesis to adapt to the meaning constituted by theoretical consideration. It can be presumed, however, that situations of religious contact are the foremost historical events that induce the need to confirm or reject any hypothesis (or sense) in question.

1.3 *Senses and Language*

The senses, therefore, must be analyzed as equivalents of the basic theories that generate data that constitutes religious sense. Consequently, they must be expressed in language. *There are no senses without language.* In this context, I consider the oft-heard statement that some (sensory) religious experiences cannot be expressed in language as a rudimentary metalanguage consideration of language active on the object language level. Therefore, the statement that some religious experience cannot be expressed in language is a linguistic expression of a theoretical assumption—in this case, it displays an assumption based on a strongly specified transcendence/immanence distinction, i.e., the existence of a realm beyond the possibilities of language.⁴⁴ This does not mean that sensuous experiences simply confirm religious assumptions, but rather that the mediation process between the senses hypothetically constructed by these assumptions and the assumptions nourished by experiences—the dynamic in-between—is the location where religious meaning emerges. *In religion, there is no sense organ that is not shaped by basic theories or cosmological ideas, which anticipate the sense and the corresponding sensory experience.*⁴⁵

43 Morgan, “Materiality, social analysis, and the study of religions,” 59.

44 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction; compare for example the theologoumenon of the *theologia negativa*. See also Cecini, “Body, senses, and gender-related questions as gates to the transcendent,” 121: “That is to say that perception and senses can be a way to speak the unspeakable and to convey something that transcends the words. Moreover, perceptions and senses have the power to transcend themselves, being but just the door which opens to more profound experience, which are hinted at by the sensorial, but can result in intellectual speculation or even an ecstatic state.”

45 David Morgan’s considerations of sight can be easily adapted to the other senses as well: “[...] [S]eeing is an operation that relies on an apparatus of assumptions and inclinations, habits and routines, historical associations and cultural practices. *Sacred gaze* is a term that designates the particular configuration of ideas, attitudes, and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting. A sacred

Sense-based religious experience is, therefore, a self-reinforcing process of generating meaningful data. It is here, in the hermeneutical circle internal to religion, that scholarly work on the senses has to start.

These self-reinforcing processes are at stake in situations of religious contact.⁴⁶ In such instances, the senses as hypotheses for the generation of meaning are defined more clearly. For example, the saying repeatedly used in the Gospels *Let them who have ears hear* indicates a reestablishment of sense (sensory experience and meaning) in order to demarcate in a situation of contact. It serves to demarcate listeners from those who, for various reasons, are not able to have a certain sensory perception. On one hand, the internal dynamic of the tradition is altered through the challenge posed by a contact situation.⁴⁷ On the other hand, it is the self-references of the religious traditions that meet in contact that allow for comparison.⁴⁸ It is either a comparison between the traditions in question and/or a comparison on the metalanguage level as performed by the scholar examining situations of contact.

Therefore, the question of the senses in the study of religion is not physiological, psychological, or materialistic. Rather, the question concerns the tradition-dependent linguistic mediation of—supposedly religious—sensory experiences. It is precisely at this point where reductionist naturalistic approaches to the phenomenon of sensory religious experiences fail in their endeavor to contribute to the understanding of religions or religion in general. Though it may well be the case that, say, a visual experience of the divine may be precisely located in a certain part of the brain, the functioning of religion is in no way explained as the ascription processes behind religious sense-making are not taken into account.⁴⁹

gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance." David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze. Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3.

46 As a survey of the role of the senses in current research see Cuffel, Di Giacinto and Krech, Senses, "Religion and Religious Encounter," 20–30.

47 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

48 See chapter on Tradition.

49 On this point, see Webb Keane, "The evidence of the senses and the materiality of religion," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (2008): 114. An encounter with the Virgin Mary may well involve identifiable cognitive processes, but the question remains "[W]hat makes these respectively a vision, a prophetic experience, and a case of spirit possession rather, than, say, fantasies, dreams, psychotic episodes, the effects of drugs or a sudden head injury? They are instances of categories that are recognizable to other people. This is not an automatic business; even in places where shamanism or spirit possession are well accepted, in any given instance local communities have to decide whether

2 Object Language Examples of Ascribing Sense to the Senses

In the following, I analyze some object language examples of religious discourses with the intent of establishing a metalanguage to describe the phenomenon of the senses making religious sense. It is true, however, that all of these cases refer to persons who are commonly known and appreciated as philosophers. This is, above all, due to my personal training as a philosopher. However, all of them considered themselves to be religious agents—a missionary, a cardinal, and a bishop. Their dual roles provide a certain advantage in approaching their writings, for all these cases most clearly display religious object language, which was intended to develop a philosophical meta-language capable of describing its own sense-making of the senses.⁵⁰

2.1 *The Sense of Language and the Senses*

Religious sense or meaning is a phenomenon of ascription. Accordingly, language is the most important means of mediation between the bodily senses and (religious) knowledge. In a nutshell, *the linguistic process of mediation is known as religious experience*.

The medieval polymath intellectual Ramon Llull (1232–1316), who combined language and the senses in a strict and significant manner, makes an intriguing case study, not least as his ideas are products of a contact situation of religious traditions and thus can be considered object language expressions of this contact. Llull, who hailed from the Mediterranean Kingdom of Majorca, was not a philosopher *per se*.⁵¹ Rather, he was a Christian missionary who employed philosophy, which he termed his ‘Great Art’, to irrefutably convince infidels of the truth of Christianity. Accordingly, Llull’s innovative proposals emerge in what may be termed a complex, multifarious contact situation. “In terms of language, then, Llull was a liminal figure in the culture of his time.”⁵²

they now have a case of possession, or, say, madness, fraud, or error. [...] Cognition may provide some raw materials, but the socially relevant outcome results from the irreducible conjunction of a potentially open-ended set of things such as micro-politics, recent precedents, kinship ties, currently available concepts, and so forth.”

⁵⁰ See chapter on Object Language and Metalanguage.

⁵¹ On Majorca as a preeminent place of religious contact, see David Abulafia, *A Mediterranean Emporium. The Catalan kingdom of Majorca* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also Roger Friedlein, “Ramon Llull. Der Islam von Mallorca aus gesehen,” in *Romanische Inseln im Mittelmeer. Traumbilder und Wirklichkeiten*, eds. Thomas Bremer et al. (Halle an der Saale: Stekovics, 2000), 9.

⁵² Fernando Domínguez, “Works,” in *Raimundus Lullus. An Introduction to his Life, Works and Thought*, eds. Alexander Fidora und Josep E. Rubio (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 125.

His thinking took place within the context of his overarching missionary efforts, which were directed at his non-Christian surroundings and, above all, at the Muslims. Contact with others, as the subjects of mission and potential converts, is therefore always a core part of Llullian theory design. Hence, Llull's writings are a significant object language self-reflection on the communication of religious sense. Llull confirmed his thoughts through concrete actions. In his communicative crusade, Llull encouraged the establishment of missionary schools, most famously his 'own' monastery of Miramar, which focused on the teaching of languages and, above all, Arabic—a language Llull claimed to have mastered. Imagined or concrete contact situations are used to frame his thoughts on language. These are mostly situations in which communication between a Christian missionary and some public under the guidance of (and intended towards) the divine has to be prepared, started, and executed.⁵³

Additionally, and most interestingly, Llull's thought is yet another example of religion, in the form of an engaged religious agent, providing the scholar with a sense beyond the five traditional ones—although his choice might come as a surprise for those who categorically separate the physiological senses from the socio-cultural sphere. More specifically, Llull considered language to be a sixth sense, and he coined a proper name for it: *Affatus/Afflatus*. The notion itself may be traced back to Tertullian and Irenaeus, in whose thought man is denoted as the image of God and wherein *afflatus* is opposed to the divine *spiritus*.⁵⁴ By introducing the notion, Llull also establishes a hierarchy of the senses, for it is the sense of language that coordinates the other senses in order to be able to generate meaning—to gain sense from experience.

53 "All his plans for missions among unbelievers and for moral regeneration of Christian society depend inherently on the effective exercise of verbal communication. The arts of language are surely central to the Llullian Great Art. It is hardly surprising that virtually every page of his oeuvre mentions some problem of signification, communication, interpretation, translation, or persuasion. Indeed, the importance of language for Llull's enterprise perhaps explains why his accounts of communication offer some of his most innovative proposals, like the reduction of all logical fallacies to one, recognition of speech as a sixth sense, or arrangement of discourse by degrees of dignity." Mark D. Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric of Ramon Llull. Lay Learning and Piety in the Christian West Around 1300* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 24. On Llull's thoughts on notions and language see my monograph: Knut Martin Stünkel, *Una sit religio*, 125–226.

54 See Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, first theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 100. In this context, *afflatus* is a pneumatological notion, designating 'breath' (ibid. 164).

To his later exegetes, Llull's postulate of a sixth linguistic sense⁵⁵ "arguably, the most unusual doctrine from his entire extraordinary career."⁵⁶ He even wrote a book on this additional sense, titled *Lo sisè seny, lo qual apellam afflatus* (The sixth sense called afflatus).⁵⁷ The additional sense is presented as an exclusive discovery of his, for *affatus est sensus incognitus*, as Llull in his discussion of the senses in his *Liber Proverbiorum* states.⁵⁸ Though not recognized as such, the *affatus* has vital capacities and tasks to perform. One of the most important is the development and establishment of notions and concepts.⁵⁹ *Affatus est potentia, quae manifestat conceptionem mentis. Objectum Affatus est manifestatio mentis et suum instrumentum est lingua.*⁶⁰ The creation of meaningful notions makes sense.

The creation of notions and concepts is closely related to sensory experience. According to Llull, this remarkable sense coordinates the other five senses and functions in many regards as a translator or mediator. On the one hand, it mediates the outer world and the inner senses; on the other hand, it transforms the outer world through being a sense that controls the human production of language.⁶¹ *Affatus* is language as a receptive, transforming, and productive sense, created from the imaginative parts of the human soul, transferring passions and thoughts to their linguistic expression.⁶² This capacity is of superior importance for a human being to cultivate the *habitus* of directedness towards God as one's 'first intention'.⁶³ To Llull, man's real intention is directed towards God; all other intentions serve only as a means to this

55 See Roger Friedlein, "Modellierung von Kommunikation in der Theorie und textuellen Praxis der Religionsdisputation (Ramon Llull: Libre de contemplació, cap. 187)," in *Zwischen Babel und Pfingsten. Sprachdifferenzen und Gesprächsverständigung in der Vormoderne*, ed. Peter von Moos (Berlin: Lit, 2008), 256. Also, compare Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric of Ramon Llull*, 66f.

56 Mark D. Johnston, "Affatus: Natural Science as Moral Theology," *Estudios Lulianos* 30 (1990): 3.

57 The Catalan version of the text is edited by Josep Peranau i Espelt, "Lo sisè seny, lo qual apellam afflatus, de Ramon Llull," *Arxiu de Textos Catalans Antics* 2 (1983).

58 Raymundus Lullus, *Opera*, ed. Ivo Salzinger (Mainz: 1721–1742, reprinted Frankfurt 1965), MOG VI, 397.

59 See Johnston: *Affatus*, 15.

60 MOG VI, 397.

61 Friedlein, "Modellierung von Kommunikation," 257.

62 "Die im imaginativen Seelenteil wahrgenommenen Leidenschaften und Gedanken (*conceptiones*) setzt der Affat in Sprache um." Friedlein, "Modellierung von Kommunikation," 257.

63 "Unde benedictus sis, Domine, qui voluisti, quod prima intentione hominis sit ad amandum et honorandum Te et ad servientum Tibi et ad cognoscendum tuam Nobilitatem et tuam Bonitatem; et secunda sit ad possidendum bona, quae descendunt per merita primae intentionis." Lullus, *Liber contemplationis*, MOG IX, 96.

primary intention. Accordingly, the importance of language is paramount, and above all with regard to religion. It is the *affatus* that allows humans to serve God in the first place; it is the *affatus* that turns a human being into a religious person, someone who is directed exclusively toward God.⁶⁴ By controlling language, *affatus* is the sense that allows any human to get closer to the purpose they were created for, the praising of God.⁶⁵ Thus, Llull's thinking confirms the idea that "a structured process in which the senses are called upon and then tuned yields a *habitus*" that creates religious subjects.⁶⁶

The *affatus* is the one medium of communication that connects the individual human being in a threefold manner. Firstly, it connects and orders internally, linking the individual's sensory capacities. Secondly, the *affatus* connects the individual to God. Thirdly, it connects the individual to his fellow men. "*Affatus* comprises, then, a dual system of *caritas verbalis* and *veritos verbalis*, a medium for communicating the highest objects of desire and knowledge alike. Through *affatus*, human beings separated materially from each other and from God establish a spiritual link between themselves and their creator."⁶⁷ The *affatus*, as a religious sense, is, therefore, the interface that connects the human to the divine sphere, thus transcending human activity to a higher level of understanding that, in turn, might be communicated to others. With regard to the process of the *communicatio idiomatum* which takes place between the divine and the human sphere, the idea of the *affatus*, thus, allows the inclusion of Llull into a tradition of language philosophy.⁶⁸ Llull strongly underlines the importance of the *affatus* for religious life, not least for its theological self-reflection: *In hoc mundo non potes participare cum DEO sine affari*.⁶⁹ *Affatus*, therefore, provides the very basis for human beings to fulfill their primary intention. It is a means to serve God through its coordination of the senses.⁷⁰ As such, *affatus* is the necessary condition for the very possibility of human communication, both vertically with a higher level as well as horizontally, with other human beings. In his *Ars Brevis*, Llull states that it is the *affatus* that provides the voice with meaning. Thus, that hearing might become understanding.

64 In Llull's thought, there is, accordingly, also an object language example of the basic directedness that makes religious attraction (see chapter on Attraction).

65 Friedlein, "Modellierung von Kommunikation," 257.

66 Meyer, *Religious Sensations*, 23.

67 Johnston, *Affatus*, 157.

68 See Friedemann Fritsch, *Communicatio idiomatum. Zur Bedeutung einer christologischen Bestimmung für das Denken Johann Georg Hamanns* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1999).

69 Lullus, *Liber proverbiorum*, MOG VI, 397.

70 Johnston, *Affatus*, 140.

The sensitive faculty uses all the senses to sense objects, as when it uses sight to sense something colored, and hearing to sense a voice, using the *afflatus* to give it a name. For without *afflatus* the hearing cannot properly sense the voice, and therefore the intellect knows that the *afflatus* is a sense.⁷¹

Sense or meaning arises from the coordination of the senses via language. Mark D. Johnston describes the *affatus* as an indispensable mediator: “Thanks to its interoceptive nature, *affatus* functions chiefly as a means of communication among the powers of the soul. [...] In this regard, *affatus* extends (and perhaps replaces) the mental language method mentioned so often in Llull’s earlier writings. In its communication with the higher faculties, *affatus* plays an instrumental role. That is, *affatus* serves as a mediator, conceiving imaginable or intelligible concepts and manifesting them in speech.”⁷² By doing so, the *affatus* is primarily instrumental for man’s first intention to know, honor, and serve God. It is further instrumental for the ‘second intention’, namely to know, honor, and serve God through his creatures—that is, through the experience of the communication process.⁷³

To Llull, there is no sense in the senses apart from the sense provided by the sense of language. His example, thus, serves as a case of religious object language on the possible role of senses in religious experience. Only if mediated by the *affatus* are the senses instrumental to religion, helping the individual achieve praise or directness towards God, which is their first intention. Ultimately, to Llull, this is being a *religiosus*.

2.2 *Reciprocity: How to Taste and to See God?*

I continue my considerations with another example of sensory religious experience as expressed in object language. The example specifies the criteria religious language uses to ascribe religious sense to sensory perceptions. The case also shows that religious traditions themselves are aware of the two-directional relation of the senses and the religiously meaningful object of perception. In this case, the meaningful object of perception is the divine.

71 *Selected Works of Ramon Llull (1232–1316)*, ed. and trans. Anthony Bonner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 610.

72 Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric of Ramon Llull*, 67.

73 See Johnston, *Affatus*, 150.

The object language material examined here originates from fifteenth-century Western Europe, i.e. from Catholic Christianity and is a part of a philosophical and theological treatise that is often described as being 'mystical'. It is taken from Capitulum v of Nicolas of Cusa's *De Visione Dei*:⁷⁴

Quod videre sit gustare, quaeri, miserari et operari

O quam magna multitudo dulcedinis tuae, quam abscondisti timentibus te; nam est thesaurus inexplicabilis, gaudiosissimae laetitiae.

Gustare enim ipsam dulcedinem tuam est apprehendere experimentalis contactu suavitatem omnium delectabilium in suo principio, est rationem omnium desiderabilium attingere in tua sapientia.

Videre igitur rationem absolutam, quae est omnium ratio, non est aliud quam mente te deum gustare, quoniam es ipsa suavitas esse, vitae et intellectus.

Quid aliud, domine, est videre tuum, quando me pietatis oculo respicis, quam a me videri? Videndo me das te a me videri, qui es deus absconditus. Nemo te videre potest, nisi in quantum tu das, ut videaris. Nec est aliud te videre, quam quod tu videas videntem te.

[God's] seeing is His tasting, seeking, showing mercy, and working

O how greatly manifold is that sweetness of Yours which You have reserved for those who fear You! For it is an uncountable treasure of most joyous joy. For to taste of Your sweetness is to apprehend the sweetness of all delights—to apprehend it in its own Beginning and by experiential contact. It is to attain, in Your wisdom, to the Form of all desirable things. Therefore, to see Absolute Form, which is the Form of all [forms], is no other than mentally to taste of You, who are God; for You are the sweetness of being and of life and of understanding. O Lord, when You look upon me with an eye of graciousness, what is Your seeing, other than Your being seen by me? In seeing me, You who are *deus absconditus* give Yourself to be seen by me. No one can see You except insofar as You grant that You be seen. To see You is not other than that You see the one who sees You.⁷⁵

74 Nicolai de Cusa, *De visione dei*, ed. A.D. Riemann. Opera omnia VI (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), h VI, 13, 2–14.

75 Translation by Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism. Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study Of De Visione Dei (Third Edition)* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1988).

An important clarification first: I wholeheartedly admit that Nicolas of Cusa (Cusanus) is one of my favorite philosophers, someone whose thinking I consider relevant even today. I even think that he and some of his medieval contemporaries saw things more clearly than some of the postmodern and postcolonial scholars of our own time. This, however, does not mean that I wish to apply his thought to the material of religious studies, but rather that I intend to read the text quoted above as an object language expression of a religious phenomenon to be described and analyzed by metalanguage. There is, however, a great advantage in the writings of this bishop, legate, and Cardinal of the Roman Church and failed organizer of a crusade that makes them suitable as a starting point on the considerations on the relation of notions (language) and senses.

Cusanus (1401–1464) wrote the book from which this short passage is taken in the year 1453, three years after he was appointed Cardinal and Bishop of Brixen (South Tyrolia). Thus, he had become a territorial ruler as well. This year saw the fall of Constantinople, forever changing the history of Christianity and its relationship to other religious traditions. It was also, and not by chance, the most productive year of Cusanus' philosophical career. Two works must be highlighted in particular. On the one hand, the fall of Constantinople in May 1453 inspired Cusanus to write his famous 'religious' multilogue *De Pace Fidei*, which makes an argument for balancing religious differences by peaceful, rational means.⁷⁶ All his writings from this year can be considered to have been written amid a situation of (violent) religious contact. However, following a request by the monks of the Benedictine abbey of Tegernsee in Bavaria, he composed a book many scholars consider his most beautiful and poetic; *De visione dei*.⁷⁷ Among others, Kurt Flasch has interpreted these two works, *De pace fidei* and *De visione dei*, as intentional complements to each other.⁷⁸ Thus, the seemingly poetic meditation of *De visione dei* is also a product of a violent situation of religious contact and of a profound challenge to Christianity brought by the Muslim conquerors, although this might be more subtle than in the case of *De pace fidei*. At the same time, the text was written during an inter-religious debate concerning the status and possibility of mystical theology.⁷⁹

76 On *De Pace Fidei* see Markus Riedenauer, *Pluralität und Rationalität. Die Herausforderung der Vernunft durch religiöse und kulturelle Vielfalt nach Nikolaus Cusanus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007).

77 Kurt Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2001), 385–386.

78 Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues*, 389.

79 See Meredith Ziebart, "Laying Siege to the Walls of Paradise: The Fifteenth-Century Tegernsee Dispute over Mystical Theology and Nicholas of Cusa's Strong Defense of Reason," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41 (2015).

The very title of *De visione dei* suggests its content will be sense-related. However, the turn to the senses, in this case to the sensory perception of vision, is surprising given the context from which Cusanus' considerations emerged.⁸⁰ Cusanus and the Tegernsee monks had been discussing the interpretation of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysus Areopagita (*theologia mystica*), particularly the question of whether the ascent to the divine is promoted by insight or by affection and whether insight is needed for the mystic union (*unio mystica*).⁸¹ Interestingly enough, Areopagita himself appears to have proposed the abolition of sensory evidence with regard to the question of mystical ascension. For Areopagita, in order to gain 'mystical' insight, we have to exclude sensory perceptions and sensory impressions in the first place. Cusanus, however, takes his point of departure from precisely this. Therefore, *De visione dei* primarily deals with the concrete religious experience of the monks as related to Viennese academic theology and mystical speculation, hence its relevance to the discussion of the senses.⁸² As a significant move, in his considerations, Cusanus mobilizes the sense which allows the most distance (seeing) and also the one that most requires closeness (taste). Cusanus, thus, conspicuously combines the most distinctive and the most threatening sense in a conceptual *coincidentia oppositorum*. That is, he implicitly uses his theological and philosophical concepts to qualify the sensory impressions as religious.⁸³

To Cusanus, religious experience is related to the senses. In the text, he describes religious experience as 'the taste of your sweetness', further explicated as 'the sweetness of being and of life and of understanding'. Although the text reports a concrete experience, perhaps as described by the Benedictine Monks, the language used to describe this experience cannot be considered incidental in any way, neither for the monks who had the experience nor for Cusanus. Cusanus' writings combine quotation and tradition.⁸⁴ As an object language writer, he reflects on the traditional object language he is familiar

80 On the concepts of vision within Cusanic philosophy, see Christian Kiening, "'Gradus Visionis'. Reflexionen des Sehens in der Cusanischen Philosophie," *Mitteilungen und Forschungen der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 19 (1991).

81 Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues*, 384.

82 Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues*, 384.

83 Rachel Fulton, "'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet' (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West," *The Journal of Religion* 86 (2006): 170.

84 David Morgan rightfully points out that: "[t]o see is to enter in a long history of seeing, to submit to the discipline of visual structures that mediate the authority of a teacher, ruler, institution, or saint. The sacred, in this way of thinking, is constructed within particular configurations of image, viewers, archive, and setting. Each of these elements form varying networks of relations. The archive plays a special role in the recognition of the sacred by linking the viewer to tradition, which the image updates or brings to life." Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 59.

with in this short passage, intending to establish descriptive and explanatory metalanguage. The first sentence quotes Psalm 31:19, thus establishing a further reference to other Psalms passages such as 34:8–9: “O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.” The explication of the sensory experience as religious is not that original, though the experience itself might be an immediate impression. The taste to be expected is furthermore qualified and considered carefully with regard to its flavor.⁸⁵ From Augustine onwards, the sweetness of God, as described in Psalm 134:3, had been a matter of intense theological consideration.⁸⁶

By quoting these lines from the Psalms, Cusanus also evokes an exegetical tradition of the five spiritual senses that began in the work of Origin (*sensus spiritualis/sensus interiores*). This tradition uses the senses as metaphors to describe a special access to God through the loving desire for closeness. Origin uses his theory to solve the contradiction of God’s transcendence and the concrete sensory experience of God that can be performed by the spiritual senses.⁸⁷ Cusanus’ text reads, “no other than mentally taste of You” (*non est aliud quam mente te deum gustare*). The five kinds of God’s perception correspond to the five senses. This idea is most prominently elaborated in Augustine’s *Confessions* (10:27), “I tasted and now I hunger and thirst for you” (*gustavi et esurio et sitio*).⁸⁸ The reference to the senses and the explication of their perceptions thus provides an answer to a theological and philosophical problem, namely how to mediate between transcendence and experience, or between conceptual assumption and bodily experience. Without this reference

85 On the communicative nature of this (communion) event, see Cuffel, Di Giacinto and Krech, “Senses, Religion, and Religious Encounter,” 4: “Thus, while eating may be an act of incorporation and transformation, the flavor itself is what communicates the nature of this transformation and contact between the spiritual and human realm.”

86 See Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet,” 177–180.

87 E. Scheerer, “Sinne, die” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 9: *Se–Sp*, eds. Joachim Ritter und Karlfried Gründer (Darmstadt: WBG, 1995), 837.

88 On Augustine’s expression, see Georgiana Huian, “Gustavi et esurio et sitio ...: Augustine and the Spiritual Taste,” in *Homo Viator. Perspective ecumenice în antropologie*, ed. Alin Tat (Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star, 2018), 75: “The passage depicts an overabundance assaulting and overwhelming human receptivity. At first glance, this overabundant experience seems to allow for the pouring of the divine endlessness (‘excess’) in the treasury of interiority, without ever consuming the infinity of the divine, and also without satiating or tiring the human desire for the divine. The spiritual senses are here most eclipsed and most brilliant, most hidden and most visible, most secret and most overt. Not even named as perceptive pathways of the divine (eyes, ears, nostrils etc. of the heart), they become the pure medium of transparency, translucency, effulgence, being completely filled with and united to what they perceive (call or cry, radiance, fragrance, taste, touch).”

to conceptual assumption, talking about the sensory experience of God would be religiously meaningless. Using the metaphor of taste illustrates the possible union with God in this world, which is only a preliminary stage to the vision of God in the other world beyond.⁸⁹ This leads to an interesting etymology: they who tasted (*sapor*) God are therefore wise (*sapiens*).⁹⁰

Cusanus evokes these intertextual devices in a seemingly paradoxical way, as they are intended to convey a message of immediacy. Through his choice of words and his semantics, Cusanus suggests that an immediate experience of God is possible, as the notion of the 'sweetness' of God indicates, where Cusanus invokes the sense that works on the smallest distance imaginable. The sense of taste is located at the turning point where proximity becomes unity, and thus, it introduces a direct communicative relation. Accordingly, it allows one to attain 'non-abstract' contact (*experimentalı contactu*) with the principle (*in suo principio*, the moving force, processual dynamics), which is the very source of all joys. Through the experience of tasting, the perceiving and the perceived are so closely connected that on a very physical level, some degree of union is achieved.

Therefore, immediacy emerges as the one great theme expressed in religious language related to the senses, in this case, taste. To follow Birgit Meyer, this sense is a powerful sensational form that seeks to involve believers in such a way that they sense the presence of the divine in an apparently immediate manner.⁹¹ Religious sensory experiences of an immediate encounter with God do not happen spontaneously; rather, they are pre-figured by existing mediation practices that make it possible for believers to be touched by God in the first place.⁹² The *ascription of immediacy* renders the sensory experience into a religiously sensible one.

However, *De visione dei* is of additional interest in the field of media. This may be surprising given that it is really the case that the religious language of the senses contains this vital element of immediacy. The further discussion in Cusanus' text is well known as the famous example of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the most well-known idea of his work as a whole. When Cusanus sent his work to Tegernsee Abbey, he included a painting that is far more than

89 See Astrid von der Lühe, "Schmecken," in *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Metaphern*, ed. Ralf Konersmann (Darmstadt: WBG, 2007), 344.

90 See Fulton, "'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet,'" 192 on Bernard's musings on the Song of Songs: "*sapientia* (wisdom) is derived from *sapor* (taste) because when it is added to virtue, like some seasoning (*condimentum*), it adds taste (*sapidam*) to something which by itself is tasteless (*insulsa*) and bitter (*aspera*)."

91 Meyer, "Sensational Forms," 11.

92 Meyer, "Sensational Forms," 16.

a mere visualization of his ideas in *De visione dei*. If the slogan ‘Media is the Message’ is ever true, herein is a case in point.

Cusanus gave detailed advice on how to fix the picture to the wall, preferably a north wall, and how the monks should arrange themselves to behold it.⁹³ The picture is a depiction of an ‘all-seer’, perhaps Christ himself, painted in such a manner that God’s eyes ‘follow’ the beholder who faces him directly. This could simply serve as a nice illustration of God’s capacity for absolute observation, but Cusanus is predominantly interested in something else. It is a more profound irritation but not an irritation of the senses. The beholder clearly sees God’s eyes seeing him. Hence, it is the beholder’s rational capacity that is troubled. This relates to the following paradox: the gaze follows a moving beholder while also at the same time fixing upon an unmoving one—so, a basic rule of logic, the law of non-contradiction, evidently does not apply. I am cutting a complicated story very short here, for it is not the argument itself we are interested in but rather the conclusions that might be drawn from the description of concepts of the senses in object language.⁹⁴ Cusanus suggests that we directly see or experience something that human rationality *a priori* must deny; that is, the individually restricted senses may convey a religious truth that goes beyond rational, logical, or conceptual understanding—or at least indicates the way how to ascend in understanding. What one sees in the painting is the gaze of God, which is beyond contradiction. By seeing, the beholder is seen by God in his limited rational capacity. The beholder sees the contradiction complicated in God, thus sensing/experiencing the inadequateness of his own rationality in grasping these contradictions. These contradictions, however,—and that distinguishes Cusanus from pure mystics—may be, nevertheless, stated and explicated via an additional cognitive capacity, the intellect (*intellectus*). Thus, they, via a *theologia affirmativa*, lead to a higher yet still inadequate understanding. Accordingly, Kurt Flasch stresses the fact that in Cusanus, the human senses participate in the illumination of the intellect: “The objects of the senses are the books of the senses. Within them, the intention (*intentio*) of the divine intellect is inscribed in sensory figures, and the intention is the self-presentation of the creator.”⁹⁵ Sensory perception with regard to the divine is basically scriptural, allowing perception of the intentions of the author of nature as a rationally readable language. This is Cusanus’

93 On the arrangement see Kiening, “Gradus Visionis,” 262–263.

94 On an explication of the diverse stages of the sensory perception of vision involved in the process see Holger Simon, “Bildtheoretische Grundlagen des neuzeitlichen Bildes bei Nikolaus von Kues,” *Concilium medii aevi* 7 (2004): 59–64.

95 Kurt Flasch, *Nicolaus Cusanus* (München: Beck, 2001), 70.

version of the sense-making of the senses: the sense of creation, thus, is that the creator is seen in His glory.⁹⁶

However, there is another element that renders the sensory experience of *De vision Dei* a religious one. Let me again quote the last sentences of the text:

O Lord, when You look upon me with an eye of graciousness, what is Your seeing, other than Your being seen by me? In seeing me, You who are *deus absconditus* give Yourself to be seen by me. No one can see You except insofar as You grant that You be seen. To see You is not other than that You see the one who sees You.

Here, Cusanus explicitly alludes to the theologoumenon of the *deus absconditus*, thus referring to a conceptual tradition regarding the divine. A sensory experience for Cusanus only makes sense in terms of this tradition, which introduces a strongly specified transcendence/immanence distinction—namely, of the unrecognizable God who evades perception despite the fact of revelation.

“*Nec est aliud te videre, quam quod tu videas videntem te.*” What is important here is the *reciprocity* that the concepts of the relation of the senses and the divine indicate. Hence, in religious object language concerning the senses, the subject-object relationship is not a one-way street. In abstract terms, to be described as religious, sensory experiences must identify the relationship between a particular dichotomous pair (be it the relationship between seeing and the divine, or perhaps the immanent to the transcendent, subject to object) as a mutual and even processual one.⁹⁷ This is not only true for vision but also for taste, as it establishes a relationship of immediate mutual acquisition. This dynamic *reciprocity* may lead to interesting conclusions concerning religious aesthetics (*Wahrnehmen ist Wahrgenommenwerden*, or perception is being perceived).⁹⁸ Human and divine vision coincide in a blessed vision (*visio facialis*).⁹⁹ It is this conceptual framework of immediacy and reciprocity that makes religious sense of the senses in question. The framework behind religious sensing is this mutual participation that thus establishes a dynamic, immediate relationship and fosters an impression or a semantic structure of

96 Flasch, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, 73.

97 See Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 73: “The reciprocal gaze is the opposite of the unilateral gaze inasmuch as it structures a two-way iconic colloquy between viewers—human and divine.”

98 In other traditions, some ‘objects of religiosity’ might ‘look back’ and transform the beholder as well, see Julie Gifford, *Buddhist Practice and Visual Culture: The Visual Rhetoric of Borobudur* (London: Routledge, 2011).

99 See Kiening, “Gradus visionis,” 245.

unity. In the case of Cusanus, unity is elucidated by the senses' most distinct and closest, vision and taste, indicating a reciprocal immediacy that can only be qualified as religious.

In short conclusion: 'to taste and to see God' (Psalm 34), as explicated by Cusanus, refers to the *immediacy* and *reciprocity* of religious sensuous experience. As a general thesis, one could say that if a sensory experience is ascribed as being religiously meaningful, the concepts used to describe it on the object language level evoke a logical-semantic form of reciprocal immediacy. At the same time, the sensory experience may also be described in object language as making religious sense as scriptural experience. In terms of metalanguage implications, the form of reciprocal immediacy might be interpreted as methodological advice but does not have to be. The examination of the senses may also reflect the scholar's wish for an immediate approach to the material and to proceed in a dynamic relation with it; thus that research is not spoiled by conceptual presuppositions. It is its particular form that might turn this approach into a religious one.

2.3 *Sensing the Author of Nature*

The third example examined here are the writings of the Anglican Bishop of Cloyne, Dean of Derry, the Irish patriot George Berkeley (1685–1753), today mostly known for his philosophical works, but also a fellow and lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin and an ordained priest from 1709. As an Anglican clergyman in Catholic Ireland, struggling with upcoming free thinkers in the public arena, Berkeley hails from a diverse religious field characterized by religious contact—not only in terms of interconfessional contact but also in terms of the encounter between institutionalized religion and philosophical critique. As Scott Breuninger stresses, it is important to recognize the Irish context of Berkeley's views, not only important for understanding his arguments on social and moral matters but also for his position as an object language religious writer.¹⁰⁰ He was appointed Dean of Derry in 1724 and, finally, Bishop of Cloyne in 1734 as a representative of a ruling minority church in an overwhelmingly Catholic environment. For an academic teacher of his time, priesthood was obligatory, but Berkeley clearly had a strong vocation for it. In matters of belief, he was a man of tradition, struggling uncompromisingly against Deism and the movement of the 'Free Thinkers' (see his work *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher*, a defense of Christianity against the freethinkers—the 'small

100 See Scott Breuninger, *Recovering Bishop Berkeley. Virtue and Society in the Anglo-Irish Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.

philosophers' as he calls them).¹⁰¹ Berkeley was even willing to travel abroad for the sake of faith. In line with Ramon Llull's lifelong endeavor, he sought to establish a college for missionaries at the end of the world, the Bermuda Project, although he wound up in Rhode Island instead.¹⁰² He outlined this project in his text *A proposal for the Better Supplying of Churches in Our Foreign Plantations, and for Converting the Savage Americans to Christianity, by a College to be Erected in the Summer Islands, otherwise Called the Isles of Bermuda* (1724).¹⁰³ With regard to this Prospero-like attitude, David Berman even argues that "[...] Berkeley's deep religiosity was more extreme and radical than usually is accepted [...] it was sometimes bordering on the messianic."¹⁰⁴ The plan, however, was not only devoted to missionizing Native Americans but also to tackling what Berkeley considered the moral, religious (and financial) decline, degeneration, and decay of Europe and of Britain in particular. He sought to revitalize the Protestant Christian faith in his home country or, failing that, in the New World.¹⁰⁵

Berkeley's extensive writings and texts dealing with the senses are, therefore, not least object language reflections on the role of the senses in experience, based on a sternly religious background. Owing to this, I shall analyze his writings as part of the religious discourse on the senses and not with regard to the validity of his arguments in the philosophical sense.

Stressing his profoundly religious background, Berkeley unambiguously limits the scope of his philosophical doubt and rationalism. To him, skepticism is never an option. On the contrary, "the corrosive influence of Scepticism represented the greatest threat to the traditions and values he cherished".¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Berkeley also took issue with other confessions: "Berkeley's theory is greatly concerned with denying the legitimacy of other kinds of religious activity, and other churches [...] for Berkeley enthusiasm is as unacceptable as freethought." Philip Kohlenberg, "Bishop Berkeley on Religion and the Church," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 219.

¹⁰² Arend Kulenkampff, *George Berkeley* (München: Beck, 1987), 12.

¹⁰³ On the religious and ideological background and the eventual execution of this plan see Scott Breuninger, "Planting an Asylum for Religion: Berkeley's Bermuda Scheme and the Transmission of Virtue in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World," *Journal of Religious History* 34 (2010).

¹⁰⁴ David Berman, "Berkeley's Life and Works," in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25. See also Harry Bracken, "Bishop Berkeley's Messianism," in *Millenarism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought*, ed. R.H. Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

¹⁰⁵ Breuninger argues that Berkeley even hoped to fulfill the goal of facilitating the transfer of learning and religious values to the New World, following the *translatio* tradition of empire and learning (Breuninger, "Planting an Asylum for Religion," 424).

¹⁰⁶ Gerald Hanratty, "A Voice in the Wilderness: Berkeley's Response to Enlightenment," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 32 (1990): 323. In his

When I say I will reject all Propositions wherein I know not fully & adequately & clearly so far as knowable the Thing meant thereby This is not to be extended to propositions in the Scripture. I Speak of Matters of Reason & Philosophy not Revelation, In this I think an Humble Implicit faith becomes us just.¹⁰⁷

For Berkeley, matters of revelation (and indeed religion) are not subject to philosophical demands concerning the language employed. He is also frank about the apologetic aims of his philosophical considerations. In his notebooks, the *Philosophical Commentaries*, written as a young man across the years 1708–9, he states:

My doctrines rightly understood all that Philosophy of Epicurus, Hobbs, Spinozá etc which has been a Declared Enemy of Religion Comes to the Ground.¹⁰⁸

In his works, he deliberately places himself in opposition to the declared enemies of religion, ‘in opposition to Sceptics and Atheists’ as the subtitle of his *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* indicates. He even names the most notorious ones, culminating in the ‘prince of the atheists’, Spinoza. Accordingly, Berkeley’s writings can be situated within a situation of contact, as he took issue with the critical stance against religion that was personified by skeptic and even atheist philosophers.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, his basic approach is

thinking, Hanratty argues, Berkeley sustainedly shows “his resolve to vindicate human knowledge and to expose the fallacies and absurdities in the arguments of the Sceptics” (ibid., 323).

107 George Berkeley, “Notebook A (720),” in *Philosophical Works including the Works on Vision*, ed. Michael R. Ayers (London: Everyman, 1996), 393. If not otherwise noted, references to Berkeley’s works refer to this edition.

108 Berkeley, “Notebook A (824),” 405.

109 In his *Dialogues*, Berkeley characterizes his predominant field of (victorious) encounter and struggle as a decidedly religious: “You may now, without any laborious search into the sciences, without any subtlety of reason, or tedious length of discourse, oppose and baffle the most strenuous advocate for atheism. Those miserable refuges, whether in an eternal succession of unthinking causes and effects, or in a fortuitous concourse of atoms; those wild imaginations of Vanini, Hobbes, and Spinoza; in a word the whole system of atheism, is it not entirely overthrown by this single reflection on the repugnancy included in supposing the whole, or any part, even the most rude and shapeless of the whole world, to exist without a mind? Let any one of those abettors of impiety but look into his own thoughts, and there try if he can conceive how so much as a rock, a desert, a chaos, or confused jumble of atoms; how anything at all, either sensible or imaginable, can exist independent of a mind, and he need not go farther to be conceived of his folly.” Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, 202–203 (213).

framed by his religious and apologetic intentions. In his opposition, Berkeley turns to sensory perception to make his case—a universal method for countering false opinions.

At first sight, Berkeley's sensory turn might seem a disappointment. Berkeley considers the question of the content of sensory experience alone. As such, the diverse sensory experiences are characterized by indifference and, accordingly, are basically senseless:

What I see is onely variety of colours & light. what I feel is hard or soft, hot or cold, rough or smooth &c what resemblance have these thoughts with those?¹¹⁰

[...] in a strict sense, I see nothing but light and colours, with their several shades and variations.¹¹¹

Thus, the connection to the world provided by the senses is confusing rather than clarifying, as the perceiver is overwhelmed by the sheer variety of impressions. Even the most prominent sense, sight, does not *per se* produce a distinct, sensible picture. It, too, only causes confusion and is more likely to induce despair than anything else.

The senses, however, play a paramount role in Berkeley's religious struggle. To abolish them to him would be inexcusable folly, unworthy of a truly enlightened mind. The "abject surrender to the Sceptics' denigration of senses,"¹¹² is a manifestation of the wrong turn modern philosophy has taken—with atheistic and nihilistic consequences.¹¹³ It is interesting to notice how Berkeley describes the figure of Prejudice, found within the mind of a 'certain eminent free-thinker', as

110 Berkeley, "Notebook B (226)," 329.

111 Berkeley, *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (130), 55.

112 Hanratty, "A Voice in the Wilderness," 324.

113 Berkeley shares his trust in the senses with authors such as Tertullian, who blames the questioning of sensory perception for the rise of heresy: "To question the senses, Tertullian explains, is to question our ability to know ourselves, to know our world, and to know the truth of Christ who heard the Father's voice and saw Satan falling as lightning. Tertullian continues, 'We cannot, I insist, impugn the validity of the senses, for thus we will be denying that Christ really saw Satan cast down from heaven; that He ever heard His Father's voice testifying to Him.' Further, Tertullian explains that questioning sensory perceptions is precisely what led to the heresy of Marcion and his denial of Christ's real body." Emily R. Cain, "Tertullian's Precarious Panopticon. A Performance of Visual Piety," *Journal for Early Christian Studies* 27 (2019): 619.

the figure of a woman standing in a corner, with her eyes close shut, and her fore-fingers stuck in her ears; many words in a confused order, but spoken with great emphasis, issued from her mouth. These being condensed by the coldness of the place, formed a sort of mist.¹¹⁴

Of course, despite all emphasis, the words of the figure cannot make any sense without the senses. This is an uneasy aspect of modern philosophy: Descartes shuts his eyes and ears and abolishes all other senses in order to concentrate on doubt,¹¹⁵ or rather, pure thought.¹¹⁶ What Berkeley argues for is the proper use of sensory perception and proper use of language, as opposed to prejudice that applies neither of these but abolishes the senses and replaces them only with meaningless emphatic babble. In his allegorical description of prejudice, Berkeley also combines the two elements he considers to be of importance for a proper method, namely sensory perception and orderly (systematic) language. These two, accordingly, are inseparable. As a religious man, Berkeley knew of the necessary connection required between the senses and language to make sense.

Therefore, the phenomena of nature that strike on the senses and are understood by the mind form not only a magnificent spectacle, but also a most coherent, entertaining and instructive Discourse; and to effect this, they are conducted, adjusted, and ranged by the greatest wisdom.¹¹⁷

114 George Berkeley, "The Pineal Gland (continued)," in *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, Vol. VII, eds. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (London: Nelson 1967), 188.

115 See the famous introductory sentence to Descartes' third meditation "Claudam nunc oculos, aures obturabo, avocabo omnes sensus, imagines etiam rerum corporalium omnes vel ex cogitatione mea delebo, vel certe, quia hoc fieri vis potest, illas ut inanes et falsas nihili pendam, meque solum alloquendo et penitus inspiciendo meipsum paulatim mihi magis notum et familiarem reddere conabor." René Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia/Meditationen über die Grundlagen der Philosophie*, ed. Lüder Gäbe (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992), 60.

116 See Berkeley's preface to his *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*: "Upon the common principles of the philosophers, we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived. And we are taught to distinguish their real nature from that which falls under our senses. Hence arise scepticism and paradoxes. It is not enough that we see and feel, that we taste and smell a thing. Its true nature, its absolute external entity, is still concealed. For, though it be the fiction of our own brain, we have made it inaccessible to all our faculties. Sense is fallacious, reason defective. We spend our lives doubting of those things which other men evidently know, and believing those things which they laugh at, and despise." Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, 157.

117 *The Works of George Berkeley*, Vol. V (Siris), 121 (254). Pearce comments: "The greatness of God is communicated in the creation by rational demonstration, but this demonstration

It is not only merely a matter of being overwhelmed by the magnificent spectacle of nature that renders the individual religious. It is rather perceiving such phenomena as the sensory expressions of a speech, a discourse in language, that makes the sensory experience religious and thereby meaningful. Berkeley closely relates proper language to meaning, as to employ words and to mean nothing by them is an unworthy enterprise: “*vocem autem proferre, & nihil concipere, id demum indignum esset philosopho.*”¹¹⁸ However, the senses alone are not enough for a religious experience; the sensory phenomena rather have to say something as well, and they will have to say it rationally, coherently, and instructively. It is this manner of discourse that might bring the individual into religion.

The necessary connection between the senses and language on a religious basis finds full expression in Berkeley’s major writings. He carefully scrutinizes the nature of this connection in many of his works, seeking to define what makes a religiously meaningful sensory experience. His linguistic account of sense perception is one of the most central tenets of his philosophy, “so central, in fact, that his metaphysics stands and falls upon it,” and is also a sustained object language reflection on the possible religious sense of the senses.¹¹⁹ For us, the latter is of more interest, for it is another demonstration that the religious sense of the senses is closely connected to language.

In his first major work, Berkeley examines the sense most intimately related to contemporary natural science with its characteristic focus on optics sight. His *Essay towards a new theory of vision* (published in 1709, the final edition in 1733) relates sensory experience to script, defining the objects of vision as a language and introducing an author responsible for this language. Though they are repeatedly alluded to in earlier chapters, Berkeley introduces these ideas properly in section 147:

(147) Proper Objects of Vision the language of the Author of Nature

Upon the whole, I think we may fairly conclude, that the proper Objects of Vision constitute an universal Language of the Author of Nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our Actions, in order to attain those things, that are necessary to the Preservation and Well-being of our Bodies, as also to avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of

is not presented dryly, but, rather, in such a way as to truly inspire confidence in the greatness of its creator.” Kenneth L. Pearce, “The semantics of sense perception in Berkeley,” *Religious Studies* 44 (2008): 267.

118 *The Works of George Berkeley*, Vol. IV, (De motu), 18 (29).

119 Pearce, “The semantics of sense perception in Berkeley,” 249.

them. It is by their Information that we are principally guided in all the Transactions and Concerns of Life. And the manner wherein they signify, and mark unto us the Objects which are at a Distance, is the same with that of Languages and Signs of Humane Appointment; which do not suggest the things signified, by any Likeness or Identity of Nature, but only by an habitual Connexion, that Experience has made us to observe between them.

Berkeley describes vision as a tool by which God can literally communicate with us, in effect, as a religious experience in itself.¹²⁰ The sense of vision serves as the mediator or interface of a communication process that connects the individual to God. Moreover, the universal language constituted by the objects of vision not only tells a tale of the creator but also displays a prescriptive character, instructing readers of the language in what they should do. ("But I think it plain this optic language hath a necessary connexion with knowledge, wisdom and goodness. It is equivalent to a constant creation, betokening an immediate act of power and providence.")¹²¹ It is, therefore, also a direct claim, an address, and a request for immediate embodiment. Sensory experience makes sense in subsequent regulated action that is necessary for the well-being of bodies. Thus, objects of vision by instruction put the attentive perceiver into a certain form—vision, accordingly, shapes the perceiver and their sensory apparatus. As such, "our life in the physical is a conversation with God"¹²² in so far as "our every interaction with the physical is a statement in an ongoing discourse with God himself."¹²³ It is, thus, a conversation that contains all aspects of human conversation: instruction, discourse, encouragement, and so on. Above all, it is a responsive language or even one specifically addressed to us. It reverses the idea that the senses perceive objects hence interactions with the physical

120 Berman, "Berkeley's Life and Works," 25. Pearce stresses the preeminence of vision in Berkeley's theory: "Berkeley's theory is a theory of *vision* as language; other perceptions are also signs, but lack the requisite level of sophistication to be properly called language." Pearce, "The semantics of sense perception in Berkeley," 251. Compare, however, the often-stressed interrelation of sight and touch in Berkeley, for example in the *Principles of human knowledge*, section 44; i.e. an interrelation provided by God: "[V]isible ideas are the language whereby the governing spirit, on whom we depend, informs us what tangible ideas he is about to imprint on us, in case we excite this or that motion in our own bodies." Berkeley, *Principles of human knowledge*, 105. Here, the reciprocity of the senses again comes into view: in a religious context, to touch means to be touched (or rather, imprinted) by the divine via its special language.

121 *The Works of George Berkeley*, Vol. III (Alciphron), 159.

122 Pearce, "The semantics of sense perception in Berkeley," 254.

123 Pearce, "The semantics of sense perception in Berkeley," 256.

world are mostly answers to the Author of Nature's addresses.¹²⁴ According to Berkeley, there is also a remarkable resemblance between human language and the signification of visual objects that allows further specification. An additional element is introduced, a habitual connection that renders visual perception sensible, something that, by strong analogy, might be described as language. As a consequence, it becomes clear that the chief purpose of the Berkeley's theory is to give (religious) meaning to the world described by his immaterialist metaphysics, not least to save his philosophy from solipsism. He achieves his aim by introducing a meaningful language of sense perception.¹²⁵

His 1733 explanation of his earlier work *The Theory of Vision or visual language shewing the immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity Vindicated and Explained* conveys his main message in the title: vision is a language that displays the immediate presence of the deity.¹²⁶ The sensory experience of vision, to Berkeley, only makes sense as a language of self-revelation of the author of nature, rendering the sensory experience religious. A language is, according to Berkeley:

not the sound of speech merely as such, but the arbitrary use of sensible signs, which have so similitude or necessary connexion with the things signified; so as by the apposite management of them to suggest

124 Cassirer characterizes the reversion of sensory perception performed by Berkeley as follows: "Um uns des göttlichen Seins zu versichern, brauchen wir nicht über die Welt der Phänomene hinauszugehen, es genügt, den Inhalt jeder Einzelwahrnehmung vollständig und bis zum Ende zu analysieren, um auf ihrem Grunde den Begriff Gottes unmittelbar zu entdecken. Die Zeichensprache der Natur, die wir in der Wahrnehmungstheorie als den eigentlichen Grund aller unserer Erfahrungsschlüsse kennen lernten, lernen wir nunmehr als die Zeichensprache Gottes zu begreifen: Gott ist es, der unserem Geiste die mannigfachen sinnlichen Impressionen in bestimmter Ordnung und Folge einprägt und der dadurch das Bild der empirischen Wirklichkeit in ihm entstehen läßt." Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit. Zweiter Band* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), 309.

125 See Pearce, "The semantics of sense perception in Berkeley," 252.

126 This is all the more interesting with regard to the fact that Berkeley excludes all essentialist metaphysical theories that claim that something 'real' is 'behind' the immediately perceived. Karl Popper has coined the term 'Berkeley's razor' for the act of eliminating such ideas from physical sciences. It may be added that the razor also works for religion: for Berkeley, due to the immediacy of God, there is no *hinterwelt* behind the perceived, and, as a consequence, the Christian believer willing to accept this fact, is the opposite of a *hinterweltler* in the Nietzschean sense. Meanwhile the natural philosopher who proposes a reality beyond the immediately perceived is precisely that, compare Karl. R. Popper, "A Note on Berkeley as Precursor of Mach and Einstein," in *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2002), 231.

and exhibit to my mind an endless variety of things, differing in nature, time, and place: thereby informing me, entertaining me, and directing me how to act, not only with regard to things near and present, but also with regard to things distant and future.¹²⁷

Visual phenomena are a system of signs representing touchable things. These signs, however, constitute a language “because they are arbitrarily connected with that which they signify; they inform us of an infinitely large variety of things; they enable us to regulate our lives in an orderly fashion; and they are perceived by the eye as is the written word.”¹²⁸ As a kind of written language, an explanation is provided as to why human beings can understand the world and regulate their actions accordingly. Thus, the paramount importance of the scriptuality of the visual sense for Berkeley becomes clear: sensory perception confirms the authorship of the divine. “Berkeley often referred to the natural course of ideas as the language or handwriting of God. He wanted this to be taken very literally [...]”¹²⁹ To the religious, the visually perceived scriptural language is as well descriptive as prescriptive:

But this Visual Language proves, not a Creator merely, but a provident Governor, actually and intimately present, and attentive to all our interest and motions, who watches over our conduct, and takes care of our minutest actions and designs throughout the whole course of our lives, informing, admonishing, and directing incessantly, in a most evident and sensible manner. This is truly wonderful.¹³⁰

Visual perception has an immediate self-assuring quality that is hard to deny.¹³¹ Language makes visual perception sensible; (written) language makes

127 *The Works of George Berkeley* Vol. III (Alciphron), 149 (IV, 7).

128 E.G. King, “Language, Berkeley, and God,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 1 (1970): 116.

129 J.O. Urmson, *Berkeley* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 63.

130 *The Works of George Berkeley*, Vol. III (Alciphron), 160 (IV 14). (III, 160). Alciphron also discovers that it is not impossible to imagine that “[...] we saw God with our fleshly eyes as plain as we see any human person whatsoever, and that He daily speaks to our senses in a manifest and clear dialect.” *The Works of George Berkeley*, Vol. III (Alciphron), 159 (IV 14).

131 The conspicuously high degree of rationality Berkeley claims in his philosophical apology of religious truth (see Kulenkampff, *George Berkeley*, 122) is, thus, justified by the close connection of sensory perception and language.

sense of the senses.¹³² As a consequence, Berkeley uses it as proof of God's existence: God exists because he immediately speaks to us.¹³³ Religion cannot be seen, but religion is sensorially evident.¹³⁴ The validity of his argument is of no concern for religious studies.¹³⁵ One can, however, draw conclusions with regard to the ascription of religious sense to sensory perceptions as described by religious authors themselves. The immediacy and reciprocity of religious sense appear in Berkeley as it did in Cusanus, and similarly, Lull's close connection between the senses and language would not have been alien to him.¹³⁶

Berkeley clarifies his concept of language as follows. Meaning arises from the interplay of senses as ordered by language:

(40) A great number of arbitrary signs, various and apposite, do constitute a language. If such arbitrary connexion be instituted by men, it is an artificial language; if by the Author of Nature, it is a natural language. Infinitely various are the modifications of light and sound, whence they are each capable of supplying an endless variety of signs, and, accordingly, have been each employed to form languages; the one by the arbitrary appointment of mankind, the other by that of God Himself. A connexion established by the Author of Nature, in the ordinary course of things, may surely be called natural; as that made by men will be named artificial. And yet this doth not hinder but the one may be as arbitrary as the other. And, in fact, there is no more likeness to exhibit, or necessity to infer, things tangible from the modifications of light, than there is in language to collect the meaning from the sound. But, such as

132 On the close connection of language and truth in Berkeley, see also Kohlenberger, "Bishop Berkeley on Religion and the Church," 235.

133 See King, "Language, Berkeley, and God," 114.

134 "Religion, I say, is no such speculative knowledge which rests merely in the understanding. She makes her residence in the heart, warms the affections and engages the will." *The Works of George Berkeley*, Vol. VII (Sermon on Religious Zeal), 16.

135 On this point, see Michael Ayers, "Divine Ideas and Berkeley's Proofs of God's Existence," in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, ed. E. Sosa (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1987), or Ekaterina Y. Ksenjek and Daniel E. Flage, "Berkeley, the Author of Nature, and the Judeo-Christian God," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29 (2012).

136 Therefore, Cassirer's characteristics of Berkeley's thinking is accurate, though there may be some doubt about his evaluation: "In der Geschichte der Religionsphilosophie bildet die Lehre Berkeleys eine der originalsten Erscheinungen. In eigentümlicher Art wird hier das sinnliche und das geistige Sein ineinander verwoben, wird die Erfahrung, ohne durch einen fremden Zusatz verfälscht und ihrer selbständigen Eigenart beraubt zu werden, unmittelbar an ein 'intelligibles' Sein geknüpft." Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, 315.

the connexion is of the various tones and articulations of voice with their several meanings, the same is in between the various modes of light and their respective correlates; or, in other words, between the ideas of sight and touch.¹³⁷

The endless variety of the modifications of light and sound in sensory perception are thus arbitrarily joined in a meaningful language, be it either artificial as in human speech or natural as established by the author of nature. A visual experience, therefore, serves as a sign to start a semiotic process by introducing connections, or rather, by linking sensational forms to semiotic forms.

Making religious sense is about making arbitrary connections in the physically perceived world via language. To Berkeley, the main fault of natural philosophers is that they tend to utter mere grammatical remarks on the language of the Author of Nature. But then, this is not what a wise man—and that to Berkeley, of course, is a Christian—does. His intention is to divine the sense of what he reads; his aim is to make religious sense of sensory perception:

As in reading other books, a wise man will choose to fix his thoughts on the sense and apply it to use rather than lay them out in grammatical remarks on the language; so in perusing the volume of Nature, it seems beneath the dignity of the mind to affect an exactness in reducing each particular phenomenon to general rules, or shewing how it follows from them. We should propose to ourselves nobler views, such as to recreate and exalt the mind, with a prospect of the beauty, order, extent, and variety of natural things; hence, by proper inferences, to enlarge our notions of the grandeur, wisdom, and beneficence of the Creator: and lastly, to make the several parts of the Creation, so far as in us lies, subservient to the ends they were designed for, God's glory, and the sustentation and comfort of ourselves and fellow-creatures.¹³⁸

3 Conclusion: the Dynamics of Sense-Making

The senses have the potential to allow religion, or religious meaning, to manifest itself in the immediate moment. However, this fact does not mean that concepts, specifically religious ideas and assumptions, play no role in religious sensory perception or the bodily religious experience. Rather, the senses

¹³⁷ Berkeley, *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, 293 (40).

¹³⁸ Berkeley, *Principles of human knowledge*, 132 (109).

embody religious sense. They *are* religious meaning, and they represent religious sense in the body.

No sensory experience is in and of itself religious. As the three case studies illustrate, it is quite clear that the senses alone, sensory perception as such, cannot make religious sense—at least on an object language level. Nevertheless, sensory perception does make religious sense when it is combined with certain *concepts* in a process of attribution or ascription, for example, in our case, the concepts of immediacy, reciprocity,¹³⁹ and scriptuality.¹⁴⁰ Sensory religious experiences are traditionally conventionalized experiences that start a semiotic process.¹⁴¹ *Sensate* experience is deemed to make religious *sense* if *concepts* that originate from a broader background context (tradition) can be employed.

Accordingly, there can be no immediate sensate experience of the religious, but rather, it is that the ascription of immediacy renders a sensate experience religious.¹⁴² As immediacy is a matter of ascription, the possibility cannot be excluded (in fact, it is rather likely) that religious experiences in scholarly analysis are mediated.¹⁴³ Sensate experience does not privilege subjects, and it

139 On the relation of immediacy and reciprocity see Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 153: “A reciprocal gaze denies the viewer the comfort of looking from afar—one is seen seeing those one looks upon, and thus made present to them. The reciprocal gaze levels viewer and those one views to a common moral plane.”

140 Perhaps these concepts may be interpreted as examples of simple ascriptions in the sense of Ann Taves that may cluster to composite ascriptions that allow the overarching concept of a ‘religion’, compare Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 17.

141 As Gesche Linde put it, ‘immediacy’ is “a later abstraction born by theory,” Gesche Linde, “Experience as Interpretation,” 167.

142 On the systemic connection of media and religion see Linda Simonis, “Einleitung. Medien und Religion—Ansätze zu einem interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm,” in *Medien und Religion. Ansätze zu einem interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm*, ed. Linda Simonis (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2019), 7: “Religiöse Vorstellungen und religiöse Erfahrungen sind auf Medien angewiesen; sie bedürfen der Vermittlung durch Medien, um sich überhaupt konstituieren und zur Geltung bringen zu können. [...] Dort, wo sich religiöses Denken und erleben artikuliert, werden vielmehr immer schon mediale Verfahren als implizite Bedingung der betreffenden Vorgänge oder Erfahrungen mitgeführt. [...] Wo Menschen mit Göttern oder Geistern kommunizieren oder überhaupt mit einer Sphäre des Unsichtbaren oder Übernatürlichen in Relation treten, sind immer schon Medien im Spiel.”

143 The paradox of ‘mediated immediacy’ in religious experience only occurs if the conceptual pole of sensate experience is not taken into account. Birgit Meyer has described the intertwinement of mediation and ascription of immediacy as follows: “While media, by virtue of their technological properties, play a central role in bringing about such links, to the participants they are not present ‘as such.’ These media rather seem to vest the mediation in which they take part with some sense of immediacy, as if the use of microphones or film would yield some extraordinary experience that brings people closer to

does not privilege itself as a path to turn to in the study of religion. Ascription is dependent on doctrinal ideas, and the ascription of immediacy is used to counter the perils of mediation.¹⁴⁴ This can be seen in Buddhist visualization practices: “One appeal of iconization and visualization practices to those versed in emptiness philosophy, with its implicit critiques of language, was that the somaticization and concretization of doctrine could be seen as a way of circumventing some of the problems involved with trying to express the Dharma in words. Seeing had a magic that was more immediate than words. It was already indicated in sūtras that the vision of the Buddha, both in the sense of seeing him and seeing what he sees, could grant an immediate, intuitive understanding of the Dharma equal or even superior to merely hearing then it put forth in words.”¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, a process of ascription of religious sense

the divine. [...] Practices of religious mediation appear particularly able to invoke a sense of the immediate presence of the divine, as in the case of the first two vignettes in which the Holy Spirit is invoked, or to incorporate the medium of film in such a way that it can be harnessed so as to produce an actual religious revelation. Thus, though it may be counterintuitive in the first place, the vignettes suggest that mediation and immediacy do not belong to two opposing realms, but are intertwined.” Birgit Meyer, “Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideologies, and the Question of the Medium,” in *Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*, eds. Janice Boddy and Michael Lambek (Chichester: Wiley, 2014), 312.

- 144 See Kenna's interpretation of the sense of smell, triggered by incense, as mediating the immediacy of the divine in a certain place (the church) in Greek Orthodoxy: “On these occasions incense is used to sharpen the believers’ attention and indicate that they are going to get in touch now, this particular moment, with something which is always there, such as at the moment of consecration (when the bell and censer are used). Outside the church, however, believers are back in a fallen world, where there is a distinction between sacred and profane, and [...] it is in this everyday, profane, world that incense does indeed mark transition. Generalising from the example of Greek Orthodoxy, my argument is that incense, or any other fragrant smoke, is both a medium of inter-connectedness with the transcendent world and a symbol of it, a symbol of the underlying unity of what westerners would separate as the natural and the supernatural worlds.” Kenna, “Why does Incense Smell Religious?,” 64. Moreover, the meaning ascribed to the sensate experience is likely to synchronize all the senses to a common experience described as the immediate experience of the divine, in this case, heaven on earth: “Within the church-as-transformed-world, all the senses are offered input. The eyes see icons and candlelight [...], the ears hear the chanting of the priest and the singing of hymns and chants (without the accompaniment of any musical instruments), the chanting of prayers, the ringing of bells adorning the chains of the censer; the nose smells incense; and while only a few experience taste through taking communion, most members of the congregation will eat *prosforo* (the blessed but unconsecrated bread) after the service. Lips press kisses onto the surface of icons, fingers grasp the wax of candles and trace the sign of the cross from forehead to chest, shoulder to shoulder. As Ware writes, ‘Worship, for the Orthodox Church, is nothing less than “heaven on earth”’” (ibid., 61).

- 145 David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision. Metaphor and Visionary Imaginary in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 176. Hearing, thus, is not a suitable means for

to sensory perception takes place if a religious tradition is challenged in one way or another.

Hence, we can supplement the explication of the senses as hypothetical sensational forms with the idea of semiotic forms.¹⁴⁶ In order to be recognized as religious and to be attributed with religious sense, a sensory experience has to take a semiotic form (language) that makes it communicable as religious and ultimately communicated as religious.¹⁴⁷ As such, a sensory religious experience triggers a semiotic process.¹⁴⁸ By doing so, within our bipolar structure,¹⁴⁹

reasons of epistemology: "Hearing is often associated with the word and language in Buddhism, which was intrinsically linked to conceptual thought, whereas the paradigmatic sense capacity in Buddhist thought, vision, represented unmediated knowing. Even though hearing was, of course, perception as well, the primary thing to be heard was language, which requires inference, conceptual thinking, and processing and is, therefore, inevitably prone to delusion. Perception, represented by vision, is used to express the simple and direct access to what is there. Thus the act of seeing becomes prototypical of the act of knowing—not just knowing facts, but apprehending truth in the sense of awakening" (ibid., 51).

146 See Keane, "The evidence of the senses," 114.

147 To Cecini, contemplating the early medieval religious dialogue *Masā'il 'Abdallāh ibn Salām*, sensorial issues "[...] appeal to the understanding of a language not made of words, through which the human heart can understand transcendent realities and religious messages. The senses work in this text, almost paradoxically, as gate to the transcendent, as a language whose words are feelings and perceptions, which speaks to the intellect through the heart and the soul. The senses enhance the capacity of analogy and imagination and are thusly a universal language that every human being can relate to, not only the theologian and the expert." Cecini, "Body, senses, and gender-related questions as gates to the transcendent," 126.

148 On the semiotic processes involved in sensate experiences in the context of Christian-Muslim encounters in medieval times, see Nikolas Jaspert, "Zeichen und Symbole in den christlich-islamischen Beziehungen des Mittelalters," in *Religiosità e civiltà. Le comunicazioni simboliche (secoli IX–XIII)*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2009), 342: "Unbestreitbar dürfte sein, dass neben sichtbaren Bedeutungsträgern wie etwa Kreuz und Koran, Kirchturm und Minarett die Rolle des Auditiven und Performativen für die Geschichte interreligiöser Kommunikation und Symbolizität im Mittelalter herausgestellt gehört. Der Klang der Glocke und der Ruf des Muezzin, aber auch die vermeintliche Macht der Prozessionen, der Liturgien und anderer Leib- und Zeitsymbole wirkten stark auf Fremdwahrnehmung und Selbstverständnis von Christen wie Muslimen des Mittelalters. Diese den Symbolen zugeschriebene Wirkmächtigkeit wiederum erklärt das Bemühen um deren Kontrolle, das sich nicht nur während der Kreuzzüge und anderer militärischer Auseinandersetzungen, sondern auch im diplomatischen Verkehr und weiteren Formen friedlicher Interaktion niederschlug. Der Transfer solcher Bedeutungsträger aus dem Mittelmeerraum in die Binnenländer Lateineuropas trug wesentlich dazu bei, nicht nur die heiligen Stätten Palästinas, sondern auch den Islam und die Muslime im Bewusstsein der Christen präsent zu halten, mithin den Symbolen ihre Fähigkeit zur Transzendierung zu sichern."

149 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

the sensory experience dynamizes the religious material (context) via a conceptual process that, at the same time, meta-stabilizes the religious process in question.¹⁵⁰

Cusanus serves as a radical example of a guiding concept of religious sensory experience. In his explication of a certain visual impression, Cusanus stresses immediate reciprocity¹⁵¹ to catalyze identification: for sensory data, the eye of the beholder (individual) is the eye of the Beholder (the divine).¹⁵² David Morgan generalizes the sense of vision to universal dignity with regard to religion: “The sacred is the experience of seeing and being seen as configured in a particular gaze, which may be understood as a current of feeling that flows among the components of a visual field.”¹⁵³ Such concepts of reciprocity can also be observed in other religious traditions and, moreover, with regard to other senses. According to Shawn Arthur, the most crucial aspects of the relationship between humans and deities in Chinese religion are reciprocal: mutual trust and acting appropriately, both referring to believing that the prevailing “other party will uphold their ends of the bargain.”¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, the truly “most fundamental religious act in Chinese culture,”¹⁵⁵ the burning of incense, establishes a respectful and reciprocal relationship through sensory perception, in this case, scent, by emphasizing “reciprocal communication,

150 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

151 It seems that this kind of immediate reciprocity also works with other senses. Susan A. Harvey describes the olfactory experience described in Origin's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* as follows: “When Origin more often concerns himself with biblical intertextuality (cross-referencing texts), or with ethical activity, here he pauses to reflect on the nature of physiological experience as it can illuminate the human-divine encounter. Olfaction sets in motion a sequence of reactions in the believer that turns the human-divine relationship away from alienation and toward intimate union: the scent of the Bridegroom's fragrance initiates first recognition, then longing, and then embracing of the divine. All this, as Origin marvels, from the sense of smell alone.” Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 173.

152 This idea is also to be found in later theological writings, such as in the Swabian pietist Friedrich Christian Oetinger's notion of the *sensus communis*. This sense is an organ of immediacy, which deletes anything mediating between the perceiver and the perceived, and, thus, allows to perception of God via the senses, compare my article Knut Martin Stünkel, “*Hoc est Corpus meum*—Body talk in ‘orthodox’ Lutheran Protestantism in the eighteenth century,” in *Religious Boundaries for Sex, Gender, and Corporeality*, eds. Alexandra Cuffel, Ana Echevarria, and Georgios T. Halkias (London/New York: Routledge, 2019), 91–92.

153 Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, xvii.

154 Shawn Arthur, “Wafting Incense and Heavenly Foods: The Importance of Smell in Chinese Religion,” in *Sensual Religion. Religion and the Five Senses*, eds. Graham Harvey and Jessica Hughes (Sheffield/Bristol: Equinox, 2018), 49.

155 B.J. ter Haar, “Teaching with Incense,” *Studies of Central and East Asian Religions* 11 (1999): 5.

cooperation and mutual respect.”¹⁵⁶ In elaborating on the concept of *darshan* in his study on the printed image in India, Christopher Pinney fruitfully applied Merleau-Ponty’s concept of vision as being necessarily reciprocal or at least a ‘double-sensation’, for “he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it.”¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, *darshan* as an information-generating reciprocal process can be described as “[...] ‘seeing and being seen’ by a deity, but which also connotes a whole range of ideas relating to ‘insight’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘philosophy’ [...] *Darshan*’s mode of interaction [...] mobilizes vision as a part of a unified human sensorium, and visual interaction can be physically transformative.”¹⁵⁸ Likewise, Diana Eck summarizes, “The central act of Hindu worship, from the point of view of the lay person, is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one’s own eyes, to see and be seen by the deity.”¹⁵⁹

As such, the concepts of language, immediacy, reciprocity, and scriptuality serve as indicators of the fact that, within object language, some kind of the attribution or ascription of sense to sensory perception has taken place. That means that religious sense has been made of the senses, providing their evidence with religious meaning. Other concepts may perform the same function as determined by a particular religious context, but in all cases, meaningful concepts are present in the religious communication of the senses.

3.1 *Sense-Making and Contact*

Although sensory experience appears overwhelmingly personal, in religious contexts sensate experiences are predominately a matter of contact. The contact dimension is an indispensable factor in the discussion of the role of the senses in the study of religion. As Kapstein put it, “That religious experience, like other types of experience, is subject to contestation supports the contention that it is not in fact taken to be private and that within specific historical traditions, no particular authority stems from claims based upon the supposed incorrigibility of private experience alone.”¹⁶⁰ Religious experience, thus, is

156 Arthur, “Wafting Incense and Heavenly Foods,” 49.

157 Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 194.

158 Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*, 9.

159 Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 4. Eck continues as follows: “Since in the Hindu understanding, the deity is present in the image, the visual apprehension of the image is charged with religious meaning. Beholding the image is an act of worship, and through the eyes one gains the blessings of the divine.”

160 Kapstein, “Reconsidering Religious Experience,” 272. Private, here, means, above all, uninfluenced by culturally determined sensual forms of experience; See *ibid.*, 276: “Hence,

always in the public area; its status as religious can be open for contestation. When challenged, religious traditions tend to claim both a special sensitivity for and a special affinity to sensory perception. Sensory perception, thus, becomes both a matter of contestation and a matter of distinction, distinguishing one religious tradition from its inadequate other. To give a notorious example from the history of Jewish-Christian relations: in Christian iconography, the 'synagogue', represented as a blind maiden, does not perceive what the triumphant church, the maiden 'ecclesia', perceives, recognizes, and ultimately embodies, the 'true' religion. This tendency manifests in many ways. On the one hand, sensory perception relates a religious tradition in question more closely to the divine sphere. This sensory perception, then, is qualified by immediacy, reciprocity, and scriptuality based on the close relationship between perception and language.

A discourse concerning religious sound between Christians and Muslims in medieval Spain, as analyzed by Olivia Remie Constable, exemplifies this idea.¹⁶¹ Here, a certain sense is ascribed to a certain sound, in this case, the call to prayer (*adhān*). The *adhān* was not only seen as a noisy disturbance but, due to the wording of the call, which names Muhammad the 'Prophet of God', was also seen as making a religious assertion: "It, thus, appears that it was not merely noise but also the public announcement of faith, expressed in words, that bothered Christian listeners. Beyond simple auditory intrusion, there would have been concerns about proselytization, conversion, and—in case of converts to Christianity—the lure of a return to Islam."¹⁶² Heard in a still contested territory, the sound, though, was no mere political signal of territorial control and a sign of conquest but was also given sense as a statement of the relation to the divine.¹⁶³ By producing a certain kind of sound, Muslim

any meaningful discussion of experience, religious or otherwise, must concern itself with contentful and hence essentially effable experiences, experiences that may be engaged intersubjectively and so are not, in any relevant sense, private."

161 See Olivia Remie Constable, "Regulating Religious Noise: The Council of Vienne, the Mosque Call and Muslim Pilgrimage in the Late Medieval Mediterranean World," *Medieval Encounters* 16 (2010).

162 Constable, "Regulating Religious Noise," 68–69.

163 Compare Jaspert, "Zeichen und Symbole," 311–312: "Auf der christlichen Seite wurde der Ruf des Muezzins (*Adhān*) immer wieder in pejorativen Farben geschildert und etwa mit dem Jaulen von Hunden verglichen. Der Hintergrund all dieser Versuche, im 'Konflikt des Klanges' die Oberhand zu gewinnen, war jenseits des religiösen Symbolgehalts nicht zuletzt auch die Tatsache, dass die Reichweite des Läutens bzw. Rufens zugleich die räumliche Geltung von Herrschaftsrechten zum Ausdruck brachte und die Glocken unter anderem dazu dienen konnten, im Gefahrenfall Waffenträger zusammenzuziehen."

communities claimed *immediacy* to the Divine over the heads of other communities, and mutual recognition between the two spheres took place. So, the public proclamation of the name of Muḥammad in the *adhān* “posed an overtly religious threat to Christian listeners.”¹⁶⁴ It challenged and questioned their own immediate relation to the divine—an attitude that was mirrored in the attitude of Muslim rulers who usually forbade the public ringing of church bells in their lands.¹⁶⁵ As a consequence, the very sound of the *adhān* was made subject to strict legislation and punishment mandated for those who dared perform it in public. Following the demands of the bishop of Tarragona, the king of Aragon, James II, 1318, imposed the death penalty on Muslims in the Kingdom of Valencia, who “publicly invoked or otherwise extolled the name of Muhammad in a loud voice in a mosque or other location.”¹⁶⁶ Hearing the sound of the name was considered religiously offensive. Apart from the concrete wording, it was also the sound itself that was considered as religious or religiously threatening due to its volume and reach: “It appears that it was the volume of Muslim prayers, and the consequent disruption of the acoustic environment, that especially irked Christian hearers.”¹⁶⁷ In 1498, the very connection between sounds and words was polemically denied by King Ferdinand of Aragon, but not the religious sense ascribed to the sound. Ferdinand expressed his astonishment that in the city of Tortosa, Muslims were permitted “to ululate [Lat. *ululare*] and to venerate the festivals and things required of them by the Mahometan sect and diabolical custom.”¹⁶⁸ Though the sounds heard were unrecognizable as human language, to the King, perfect (offensive) religious sense was associated with the ‘diabolical customs’ of the ‘Mahometan sect’.

On the other hand, sensory perception allows for any challenger to be more clearly perceived *as* something—in many cases, as something different, conspicuous or annoying. Reference to the senses and the sensory data gained by it due to doctrinal assumptions, thus, becomes a matter of discourse and, hence, of polemics that may cover the full scope from strict demarcation to embracing absorption of the other tradition.¹⁶⁹ For example, the otherness of

164 Constable, “Regulating Religious Noise,” 89.

165 The twelfth-century *hisha* text of Ibn ‘Abdūn of Seville is quoted in Constable, “Regulating Religious Noise,” 91.

166 Decree of James II quoted in “Constable, Regulating Religious Noise,” 77.

167 Constable, “Regulating Religious Noise,” 76.

168 Quoted in Constable, “Regulating Religious Noise,” 82.

169 Of course, this is also relevant in intrareligious contexts for example the acoustic distinction between the silent inner circle of the priestly cult in times of Second Temple Judaism as opposed to the singing and loudly praying outer circles, thus separating the sacrificial

the religious other is clearly marked if religious minorities are forced to wear particular clothing, distinguishing them from the majority. Likewise, certain characteristics of the minority can be perceived as depraved, ugly, and appalling or as offensively smelly—thus inflicting pain on the perceiver, who is, of course, inclined by their own preconceptions to sense in that particular way.

There are also sensory markers that are perceived as religiously desirable, such as certain colors (Islamic green), sounds (ringing of church bells, the *adhān*, singing of songs, recitation of the Qur'an), smells (roses), tastes (sweetness), and so on. All of these sensory data provide an immediate relation to the divine that, in turn, addresses the individual who perceives via certain sensory data. Accordingly, the main struggle between religious traditions is less about controlling sensory data defined as religious but rather about defining sensory perception (generating certain data) as such. It is less reflection on the sensory data that renders a sensory experience religiously appealing or appalling but the hypothetical construction of the sense in question which transmits that data that does so.

As the example of Berkeley shows, if a religious tradition is challenged by (philosophical) atheism, immediate sensory perception can be called on to immediately confirm the existence of God. Accordingly, the religious position is impossible to reject on its own terms—at least not with reference to any meaningful usage of words.¹⁷⁰ To dispute what is clearly seen cannot be anything but the ill-willed voluntary introduction of meaningless words in the form of philosophical banter. Daring to dispute the immediately evident, one might well be accused of having a bad intention—that is, to function as the *diabolus*.

Finally, the order and even the *hierarchization* of senses in religious contexts also seem to be prominently a result of a situation of religious contact.¹⁷¹ Taxonomies of the senses differ greatly across the history of religions.¹⁷² Such hierarchization is naturally a matter of self-reflexive theological consideration,

cult (see Peter Wick, *Die urchristlichen Gottesdienste. Entstehung und Entwicklung im Rahmen der frühjüdischen Tempel-, Synagogen- und Hausfrömmigkeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 78).

170 "Berkeley thus invoked the spontaneous and direct realism of the ordinary person as the most efficacious antidote to the contrived principles and arguments of those who doubted the existence of sensible objects." Hanratty, "A Voice in the Wilderness," 324.

171 On the hierarchy of senses see Jütte, *Geschichte der Sinne*, 74–83. Compare on the supposed epistemic preeminence of vision as *immediate* perception Jean-Pierre Wils, *Die Moral der Sinne* (Tübingen: Klöpfer & Meyer, 1999), 43–47.

172 Cuffel, Di Giacinto, and Krech, "Senses, Religion and Religious Encounter," 3.

depending on ideas of what suits the religious best.¹⁷³ The senses are “ordered in hierarchies of social importance and reordered according to changing circumstances.”¹⁷⁴ The circumstances most likely to trigger a reordering of the senses are the situations in which the values attached to them, as (dogmatic) conceptual assumptions, face challenges. Moreover, the prevailing impressions of each sense are themselves classified and ordered due to religious priorities.¹⁷⁵ Which sense is preferred and which sense is neglected is typically a result of a comparison between religious traditions. For example, the *fides ex auditu* idea can be described as a result of opposition to the more visual-based religious experience of other traditions, such as those of late antiquity or in the times of the Reformation. A contact-based comparison may even induce the religious to highlight one sense at the expense of the others, or perhaps can even lead to the introduction of another ‘religious sense’ to counter the treachery of our other sense.

The emphatic turn to the senses that has been seen within the scholarly field is not completely hollow. In order to make the sensory turn in scholarship more fertile, the study of the senses in the study of religions has to take into consideration the dynamic interplay of the mental and the physical pole of sense-perception. This is an interplay of sense and meaning. In the religious field, the senses, sense perception, and sensate experience are not at all mere

173 The primacy of vision in Buddhism seems to be closely connected to the ascription of immediacy: “This paradigmatic place of vision among the other senses has to do in part with the Indian understanding of visual perception as immediate. Visual perception is often considered by different intellectual traditions to have an immediacy that is absent in audition, particularly the hearing of words. Greek, European, and Indian thought have often claimed, on the basis of widely divergent theories of perception, that vision has a direct access to its objects, while hearing is mediated. An object of vision is directly disclosed to the eye, but hearing discerns activities of things. The hearing of words involves further mediation, conceptualization, and processing. While contemporary cognitive science has revealed the high degree to which visual perception is also mediated, what is important here is how vision is understood phenomenologically in this case, by Mahayana Buddhists, but perhaps cross-culturally as a more immediate disclosure of the world than that given in auditory experience. This apparent immediacy of visual perception—the implicit facticity of the seen—contributes to the structuring of Buddhist discourse, and it is from this structuring that we can begin to discern the place of vision in this discourse.” McMahan, *Empty Vision*, 51.

174 Barna, “Senses and Religion,” 13.

175 See McHugh, “The Classification of Smells,” 378 on the ‘constant dialogue’ on the difficulties surrounding the sense of smell among the Indian religious traditions. See also 374 and 377: “Depending on the sectarian context, and also on the emphasis in classification, the place of smell in the order of the senses could change quite radically.”

subjective events. A religious individual perceives via the hypothesis of the senses that render the sensate experience religiously meaningful. The religious meaning of the senses and sensate experience is shaped via situations of religious contact, which trigger reflection on the theoretical assumptions that motivate ascriptions. Various notions, such as immediacy or reciprocity, indicate that the ascription of religious sense to sensate experiences has taken place.

Secrets: Formally Indicating Blank Spaces in Situations of Religious Contact

Cherchez la banane.

WALTER BURKERT¹



1 Secrets in the Study of Religion

Scholarly research on the phenomenon of the secret lives with a certain tension caught between the examination of the secret and its elimination.² The secret, hence, is a scholarly desire likely to prove fatal. As Shils and Urban have it, the Humanities suffer from the ‘torment of secrecy’. Put more positively; scholars are strongly motivated in their scholarly zeal by the search for fascinating and forbidding secrets. This is not less true for religious studies, wherein the relationship between scholarly interest and the objects in question is ever-precarious.³ The *notion* of the secret is, therefore, a fundamental notion in both metalanguage and object language *and* concerns the relationship between the two. However, there is an obvious fundamental difficulty. Hugh B. Urban, a highly prolific scholar on the phenomenon of the secret, describes the situation as the ‘double-bind’ of secrecy correspondingly as follows: “In this sense, secrecy would appear to represent a particularly extreme example of the

1 Walter Burkert, “Der geheime Reiz des Verborgenen: Antike Mysterienkulte,” in *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions*, eds. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 80.

2 The present chapter builds largely on the findings presented in my articles in the collected volume *Secrecy as Contact Zone*, edited by Anna Akasoy, Georgios Halkias and Knut-Martin Stünkel (forthcoming), i.e., my introduction “Secrets in Contact: Secrecy as a Promoter of Contacts between Religious Traditions” (written together with Philipp Reichling) and my article “The Secret of Religious Language. Some tentative considerations with reference to the Gospel of Thomas and Herodotus’ *Euterpe*.” As a whole, the volume is intended to review the main thesis of the following chapter critically with regard to cases from the Eurasian area.

3 See chapter on Object and Metalanguage.

epistemological and ethical problems inherent in every attempt to understand another culture: it embodies the dilemma of all ethnography [...]."⁴ Secrets are exemplarily problematic and dangerous; they are also challenging passageways to other cultures. Among other issues, they pose questions of academic ethics, most notably when speaking of living religious traditions that would be endangered by scholarly study that might reveal them to a hostile environment.⁵ Secrecy and secrets might, therefore, claim an exemplary or paradigmatic status.⁶ Even if there were a tradition devoid of secrets and secrecy, the claim would still remain that this tradition should be treated in scholarly discourse in accordance with the paradigm of secrets and secrecy—that is, taking the epistemological and ethical problems into strict consideration.

With regard to language, there appears to be a special relationship between secret and religion, which remains even if you consider the notion of secrecy as merely an ever-popular means to disguise the vanity of all religions by removing its essence beyond rational control. The language of secrets may indeed hint at a deliberate cover-up of the truth in that it has a tendency to become a language of concealment. The secrets of the Greek Mystery Cults are characterized as *arrheton* or *aporrheton*, thus indicating the close relation between secret and language (rhetoric).⁷ However, the language of the secret might also be a language that is guided by the secret as a structural element. Its description requires something that might be called a tentative phenomenology.

4 Hugh B. Urban, "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions," *History of Religions* 37 (1998): 210. According to Graham M. Jones, the same holds true for anthropology: "Secrecy remains such a vital and generative object of investigation precisely because it mirrors and amplifies core concerns of anthropology itself." Graham M. Jones, "Secrecy," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 60.

5 See Cengiz Sisman's thoughts on the study of living secret religious communities, where not only the paucity of sources presents a considerable problem, but also the moral dilemma implied through the disclosure of the communities' secrets. His study on the Sabbatean sect of the *Dönme* Sisman, therefore, stresses the need to add a dimension of secrecy and invisibility to the scholarly examination of crypto-religions, for this dimension shapes all others to a considerable degree. Cengiz Sisman, *The Burden of Silence. Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4–5.

6 Kees Bolle characterizes the analogy as follows: "We have no definition of religion on which we agree. We have no definition of secrecy on which we agree. This may sound like a confession of secrecy on which we agree." Kees Bolle, "Introduction," in *Secrecy in Religions*, ed. Kees Bolle (Leiden: Brill, 1987), xiv. In his article 'Secrecy in Religions' in the same volume, Bolle explains: "Crucial terms in religions are always undefinable in strict sense [...] The philosophical inability to come up with satisfactory, unambiguous definitions is not due to a weakness in religion. It is merely a reflection of a central mystery in each case." Kees Bolle, "Secrecy in Religions," in *Secrecy in Religions*, ed. Kees Bolle (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 13–14.

7 Burkert, "Der geheime Reiz des Verborgenen," 83.

More than that, the notion of secret in religious language, or rather, the language of the secret, teaches us something about the secrets of (religious) language in general. Key terms of religious language can only be dealt with tentatively.⁸ The question is how to deal with a concept that, on the object language level, resists and defies any attempt at conceptual definition. Additionally, secrets [Lat. *secernere*] *per se* evade perception and cannot be indicated by pointing them out—for they categorically separate or divide themselves off from such efforts. By stating ‘this is a secret’, the indexical or deictic function of language is denied. With reference to Bruno Latour’s book on religious language, one might call this function the ‘arrow of reference’ or the ‘aiming movement’.⁹ Concerning the secret, Latour reminds us of the frailty of the assertions about it, gravely endangered by the arrow aimed toward it.¹⁰ However, the very fact that the secret cannot be pointed at is, at the same time, a fact that has to be pointed out, and thus secrets *per se* can be said to be formally transcending.

Any tangential reflection on the role of secrets within religious traditions must confront two major difficulties. Firstly, both the ‘thing’ and the notion are problematic, as secrets are a problem on the ontic level as well as on the level of language. Derivatives of secrets, however, play a crucial role in religious traditions.¹¹ ‘Secrecy’, thus, can be claimed as a key concept in the study of religions. Jan Assmann has no doubt that there is no religion without secrets and

8 See chapter on the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness; on this concept A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York/London: The Free Press, 1979), 7–8.

9 Bruno Latour, *Rejoicing or the Torments of Religious Speech* (Cambridge/Malden: Polity, 2013), 38.

10 See Latour, *Rejoicing*, 52–53.

11 For a non-Eurasian example, see John Middleton, “Secrecy in Lugbara Religion,” *History of Religions* 12 (1973): 299–300. On the close association between secrets and secrecy in Shi’ite Islam see Maria Dakake, “Hiding in Plain Sight. The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi’ite Islam,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (2006): 329; “This emphasis on secrecy was related to issues of both prudent practice and fundamental religious doctrine and represented an aspect of Shi’ite thought in which the two overlapped, each profoundly influencing the other. In fact, the principle of secrecy in Shi’ism underlies and gives a certain unity to many of the distinct, and sometimes peculiar, aspects of Shi’ite thought and practice and is deeply embedded in the spiritual perspective and symbolic matrix of Shi’ite thought.” To Walter Burkert, the emergence and function of secret societies is an anthropological constant, as he argues such behavior is based on the intelligence and linguistic ability of human beings, see Burkert, “Der geheime Reiz des Verborgenen,” 81.

that secrets are a central element in any religion.¹² In their introduction to their seminal edited volume on secrets and secrecy in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions, Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa state that “[s]ecrecy has never seemed a pointless concept to those reflecting and conceptualizing the gods.”¹³ Esoteric religions are only the most obvious case for the appropriate study of the basic function.¹⁴ Regardless, there are certain structures in every religious tradition that fulfill analogous functions to those the secret performs in religious traditions where a concept of secrecy is explicitly present. These analogous functions are related to the transcendence/immanence distinction at work in any given religious tradition—the distinction between a ‘here’ and a ‘there’ (that might be developed into another sphere/realm) that is beyond immediate reach.¹⁵

Secondly, as is usual for basic notions and fundamental features, the concept of the secret cannot be neatly defined. There have been many attempts to do so, and the concept of the secret has drawn considerable critical attention. One promising possibility is to define secrets via conceptual differentiation. For instance, there is an important differentiation between secret and mystery, as they operate on different levels of perception. A mystery is something that is entirely hidden or impossible to understand, whereas a secret is something that is not known to most people.¹⁶ In his *Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant scrutinizes three forms of the secret: first, as seclusions of

12 “Darüber, daß das Geheimnis ein zentrales Element jeder Religion ist, kann es keinen Zweifel geben. Es gibt gewiß keine Religion, die ganz ohne Geheimnis auskommt, und je weiter wir in der Religionsgeschichte zurückgehen, eine desto größere Rolle kommt dem Geheimnis zu.” (Jan Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1998), 270).

13 H.G. Kippenberg and G.G. Stroumsa, “Introduction: Secrecy and its benefits,” in *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions*, eds. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1995), xiii.

14 On the close connection between secrecy and religion in esoteric religion, see Shaul Shaked, “Two Types of Esotericism,” in *Schleier und Schwelle Vol. 1: Geheimnis und Öffentlichkeit*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (München: Fink, 1997), 221: “Secrecy is an essential part of their significance, on the other hand, in order to preserve them they require secrecy.”

15 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

16 See the example of the Egyptian Religion as characterized by Jan Assmann, “Ägyptische Geheimnisse. Arcanum und Mysterium in der ägyptischen Religion,” in *Schleier und Schwelle. Vol. 11: Geheimnis und Offenbarung*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann. *Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation* v,2 (München: Fink, 1998), 22: “Das ist kein Geheimnis, das durch Geheimhaltung geschaffen und aufrechterhalten wird, sondern das unaufhebbar im Wesen des Gottes begründet liegt. Das Geheimnis des Ursprungs ist also kein Arcanum, sondern ein Mysterium.”

nature (*arcana*, arcane), second, secrecy in politics (*secreta*, secret). These first two forms can be revealed, but the third form is the secret beyond our capacity to understand and beyond our duty, namely, the 'holy' secret of religion (*mysterium*, mystery).¹⁷ This threefold differentiation can also be found in contemporary attempts to define secrets. Aleida and Jan Assmann also distinguish three major forms of secrets: firstly, 'substantial' secrets which are unfathomable, such as the secrets of love and death, time and origin; secondly, 'strategic' secrets, or secrets that are a result of secrecy; and, finally, 'constructive' secrets that are both constituted and provoked from the viewpoint of curiosity.¹⁸ Secrets may be dealt with passively, as in the substantial mysteries, actively when secrets are constructed via secrecy, or medially, where the secret is constructed by the human perspective on natural phenomena, which, in turn, is triggered by the secret. Depending on the perspective of the researcher, the three forms might be reduced to only one of them, thus missing the full scale of the phenomenon by a one-sided description.

Such conceptual differentiation, however, is of minor importance when it comes to structural or, rather, functional considerations. As secrets cannot be defined with regard to their content without dissolving them, the field of possible research on the phenomenon of secrets is largely limited to the functional and linguistic field.¹⁹ The examination of the content of a secret or the content of secrecy, however, cannot be completely removed from consideration. Rather, research must concentrate on clarifying the content of the secret as something that by definition evades perception, recognition, and deictic indication.

17 Immanuel Kant, "Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft," in *Werke. Band VII: Schriften zur Ethik und Religionsphilosophie. Zweiter Teil*, ed. Wilhelm Weisschedel (Darmstadt: WBG, 1983), 805–806.

18 Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, "Die Erfindung des Geheimnisses durch die Neugier," in *Schleier und Schwelle. Vol. III: Geheimnis und Neugierde*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann. Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation v.3 (München: Fink, 1999), 7.

19 On freemasonry and historical work Reinhart Koselleck reminds the historian that all the secret is about is its (social) function, not its unreachable content. This holds on both object language and metalanguage level: "Das Geheimnis hatte in den verschiedenen Systemen einen verschiedenen Inhalt, aber immer dieselbe soziale Funktion. Die Funktionen des Maurergeheimnisses sind im Rahmen des absolutistischen Staates weit wichtiger als ihr wirklicher oder vermeintlicher Inhalt, dem nachzuforschen meist vergeblich bleiben wird. Diesen Funktionen soll im Folgenden nachgefragt werden, und es wird sich dabei herausstellen, daß es gerade die Funktionen sind, die—im Rahmen des Staates—für die führenden Köpfe der Gesellschaft den wahren Sinn und den eigentlichen Gehalt des arcanum bildeten." Reinhart Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), 57.

As a subject of religious studies, the secret is not only a consciously intended concealment but rather a 'given' fact, at least on an object language level, and so the scholar has to describe its function within a certain context. As a consequence, to dissolve the secret 'kept' by the tradition in question on the level of scholarly metalanguage is *not* the task of religious studies,²⁰ nor should it be the result of the work of the scholar interested in the phenomenon of the secret.²¹ Research on the arcane, mystery, and the secret, or to put it another way, substantial, strategic, and constructive secrets, takes place on another level. Accordingly, the question of what 'really' is to be found in the inmost sanctuary of the Solomonic Temple does not matter at all, but the way this secret is dealt with does. As Jan Bremmer, with regard to the Eleusinian Mysteries, has pointed out, the quest to dissolve the secret may result in disappointment since "there was no esoteric wisdom to be found in the ancient Mysteries, no Da Vinci Code to be deciphered."²² Describing and dissolving secrets as a means of the ever-present social power play (thus inverting Taussig's "wherever there is power, there is secrecy") manifested in the religious discourse is only one side of the coin.²³ Whether the social act of secrecy or 'secretism' is the origin of the secret rather than the numinous is not for the scholar to decide, although both are performed as an identifiable practice of certain religious traditions. In this case, the difference between an absolute or a relative secret or that between a substantial and a strategic secret does not matter.

This move away from the joy of a secret revealed is likely to cause some disappointment.²⁴ This is unless, of course, the process of undoing the secret

20 Intriguing as it may be, given the "tantalizing aura of secrecy" around certain esoteric movements. See Hugh B. Urban, "Magia Sexualis: Sex, Secrecy, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (2004): 719.

21 On the point that the content is not the decisive element of a secret, see Teeuwen's account of the secret of the Dharma lineages in medieval Japanese religion: "A secret was not lost to its original keepers when others had discovered its contents; it was lost only when others could prove that they were the ones who had acquired it on the correct way: through an initiation (preferably an exclusive one) by the previous rightful owner of the transmission." Mark Teeuwen, "Knowing vs. owning a secret. Secrecy in Japan, as seen through the *sokui kanjo* enthronement unction," in *The culture of secrecy in Japanese Religion*, eds. Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen (London/New York: Routledge, 2006), 195.

22 Jan Bremmer, *Initiation to the Mysteries of the Ancient World* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 18.

23 Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labour of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 57.

24 Walter Burkert describes the explanation of the secret of initiation in the Mysteries of Eleusis by some Gnostics who had defied the commandment of secrecy as "authentic, but yet rather bound to cause disappointment." (Walter Burkert, *Antike Mysterien. Funktionen und Gehalt* (München: Beck, 2003), 76).

itself is part of metalanguage research and can be used for comparative analysis or if the revelation of the secret is to be found on the object level as an element of a distinct religious practice, such in the Christian explanation of the mystery cults and their secrets by Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, and others.²⁵ Here, the systematic undoing of a secret through explanation takes place, either by means of one's own rationale, perhaps relying on religious dogma—one example of this latter process would be the Christian explanations of the secrets in contemporary Mystery Cults in Justin Martyr, who claims that the Mysteries of Mithras were introduced by the devil as imitations of the Christian sacraments.²⁶ In the same way, Tertullian attacks Marcion: "The wisdom which he says was kept secret is that which has been in things foolish and little and dishonourable, which has also been hidden under figures, both allegories and enigmas, but as afterwards to be revealed in Christ who was set for a light of the gentiles by that creator who by the voice of Isaiah promises that he will open up invisible and secret treasures."²⁷ Via Christian explanation in simple language, Origen and others brought about the so-called 'Death of Myths'.²⁸ One might, in this regard, also add Plutarch's explanation of the Ancient Mysteries by using Plato's metaphysical ontology in his book *On Isis and Osiris*.²⁹

In all these cases, however, the object language revelation of the secret via an explanation of its content is triggered by a challenging situation of religious *contact*: in the case of early Christianity, the agonal contact between established religious praxis concerned secrets and the contemporary evolution of new religious tradition.³⁰

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- 25 See Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "Milk and Meat. Augustine and the End of Ancient Esotericism," in *Schleier und Schwelle Vol. 1: Geheimnis und Öffentlichkeit*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (München: Fink, 1997), 254.
 - 26 Compare Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras. Ein persisch-römischer Mysterienkult* (Wiesbaden: VMA, 1998), 189.
 - 27 Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 5,6., quoted in Guy G. Stroumsa, "From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity," in *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religion*, eds. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 299.
 - 28 Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "Moses' Riddles: Esoteric Trends in Patristic Hermeneutics," in *Interpretation in Religion*, eds. Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1992), 239.
 - 29 Compare Burkert, *Antike Mysterien*, 71–72.
 - 30 On the relation of the *mysterion* and newness in early Christianity, see Stroumsa, "From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity," 304.

2 Secrets and Contact

The overall approach of the КНК 'Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe' necessitated a re-evaluation of the approaches to the phenomenon of the secret in religious studies. Of course, the findings of former attempts to theorize are relevant to this enterprise but must be modified with regard to the crucial contact dimension of religious history. Instead of trying to reveal or undo the secret, research should be conducted on the '*strategies of secret*' in order to evaluate its attraction and also focus on its special character *as a promoter of contact*. The latter is the main thesis of the following chapter, which may seem counterintuitive. The thesis runs as follows: in situations of contact between religious traditions, secrets *promote* mutual understanding rather than preventing it. Secrets can even aid the *concrecence* of religious traditions, perhaps resulting in the emergence of a new religion entirely. Secrets are able to perform this function precisely because of the non-determinability of their content and the resulting possibilities of translation. Secrets thus function as a (privileged) zone of contact.

2.1 *Georg Simmel's Sociological Analysis of the Secret*

The first aim above, of examining strategies behind the secret, is not exactly new—not since the path-breaking sociological studies of Georg Simmel. Simmel, moreover, is a figure whose work is well-known and often referred to in religious studies. However, his findings produce an apparent contradiction with the second aim, namely that secrets might function as promoters of contact.³¹ Secrets and contact seem contradictory, at least on the level of sociological analysis. The phenomenon of crypto-religions and secret societies springs to mind in this regard. Here, secrecy is used to make sure that a

31 In sociology, Michel Maffesoli indicates at a corresponding perspective of possible research, following the 'hypothesis of secret centrality': "Zuweilen kann das Geheime Mittel zur Kontaktherstellung mit der Andersheit im Rahmen einer begrenzten Gruppe sein; gleichzeitig bedingt es die Einstellung dieser letzteren gegenüber jedem Äusserem." Demarcation, thus, does not mean isolation from others, but rather a change in the form of communication with them, leading to a 'polytheism' of communicative possibilities: "Tatsächlich impliziert die Tatsache des *Sich-Absonderns*, wie man es in sozialen Netzwerken beobachten kann, nicht das Ende des Zusammenseins, sondern eben nur, daß dieses jetzt in anderer Weise verläuft als in den bekannten Formen institutioneller Legalität." Michel Maffesoli, "Die Gesetze des Geheimen," in *Schweigen. Unterbrechung und Grenz der menschlichen Wirklichkeit*, eds. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf. Reihe Historische Anthropologie 18 (Berlin: Reimer, 1992), 302, 306.

real religious 'identity' remains hidden against the onslaughts of the religious majority, preventing outsiders from penetrating the religious in-group by a variety of means. Note that in the case of such crypto-religions, the pragmatic need to hide one's real religion via secrecy may itself become an element of the religious doctrine. Thus, we can say that secrecy is likely to give birth to a secret in religious doctrine.

On second glance, the notions of secrets and contact do not seem mutually exclusive. Secrets imply a certain contact dimension. The contact dimension is significant on different levels, one of which is indeed the secret as a means for demarcation or the establishment of an in-group/out-group relationship, thus using it to prevent contact. Nevertheless, secrets do not only demarcate, but they also connect. Even within such a social process of demarcation, the secret employed here could be considered as a feature that connects religion to another sphere—to the transcendent, to the material world, in form of demarcation/protection, for example, to the wider social and epistemic environment.³² Secrets, thus, are a result of an attempt to participate in another sphere on a higher (intensified) level. Thus, the invention or introduction of the secret is an inherently interactive enterprise, as it is always dependent on the interrelation of two well-defined areas.³³ Ultimately, it too depends on the transcendence/immanence distinction.³⁴ Moreover, the strategy of secretism as coined by Paul C. Johnson—that is, cultivating one's reputation for possessing secrets as an outward-directed active policy of secrecy—also implies social contact with the wider world. As a last point, in some religious traditions particularly concerned with secrecy, such as Shi'ite Islam, secrets connect the practical and the doctrinal aspects of the tradition in question, forming a lasting unity.³⁵ Thus, even with regard to endogenous aspects, the secret provides an *inherent contact dimension*.

However, the second aim of this chapter goes much further. The thesis that *secrets connect traditions* is intended to provide a whole new perspective for researchers in religious studies. But is this idea really excluded by previous

32 The connective aspect of the secret, connecting to the divine realm and making owners of divine objects intermediaries, makes them especially useful for display of power, see Middleton, "Secrecy in Lugbara Religion," 312.

33 Assmann and Assmann, "Die Erfindung des Geheimnisses durch die Neugier," 8. See Jens Heilmann, "deipnon/symposion—sacramentum/mystērion. Blank Spaces in the History of the Christian Eucharistic Ritual," in *Secrecy as Contact Zone* (forthcoming).

34 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

35 See Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 329.

sociological analysis? A closer look at Simmel's analysis, as the main source of the ideas on secrecy in religious studies, is therefore appropriate.³⁶

Simmel described the socially productive use of secrets, or rather, the strategy of secrecy as a sociological technique. He moreover celebrates it as one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity.³⁷ Simmel further claimed that the benefits of secrecy at the social level of the community are much greater than its drawbacks,³⁸ though it undoubtedly could be harmful to individuals and private interests.³⁹ As historical experience has shown, secrets and secrecy may even contain emancipatory potential due to their socio-cultural transformative potential, as the example of Freemasonry might testify.⁴⁰

Simmel characterizes the general sociological meaning of the secret as follows, distinguishing between the individual and a group as the secret carriers:

As long as being, doing and possessing of an individual exist as a secret, its general sociological meaning is: isolation, contradiction, egoistic individualization. Here, the sociological sense of the secret is external: as a relation of the one possessing the secret to the one who does not possess it. But as soon as a group adopts the secret as its form of existence, its sociological sense becomes an internal one: now, it dominates the interrelation of those who possess the secret commonly. However, as the

36 On Simmel's analysis of the secret and secrecy, see Joachim Westerbarkey, "G.S. und das Geheimnis," in *Georg Simmel und das Leben in der Gegenwart*, eds. Rüdiger Lautmann and Hanns Wienold (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018).

37 See Georg Simmel, "Das Geheimnis. Eine sozialpsychologische Skizze," in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908. Band II*, eds. Allesandro Cavalli and Volkhard Krech (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993), 317.

38 Sissela Bok is more cautious about this twofold nature of the secret, comparing it to the ambiguity of fire: "Secrecy is as indispensable to human beings as fire, and as greatly feared. Both enhance and protect life, yet both can stifle, lay waste, spread out of all control. Both may be used to guard intimacy or to invade it, to nurture or to consume. And each can be turned against itself; barriers of secrecy are set up to guard against secret plots and surreptitious prying, just as fire is used to fight fire." Sissela Bok, *Secrets. On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 18. The guarding and protecting function of secrecy, however, is interpreted as (mutually) exclusive here as well.

39 Compare Albert de Jong, "Secrets and Secrecy in the Study of Religion. Comparative views from the Ancient World," in Teeuwen and Scheid eds., *The culture of secrecy in Japanese Religion*, 45.

40 See Helmut Reinalter, *Die Freimaurer* (München: Beck, 2006), 96: "Aufklärung und Geheimnis waren im freimaurerischen Verständnis kein Widerspruch. Das Geheimnis enthielt 'als eine organisatorische ... wie symbolisch-kulturelle Größe' bestimmte 'soziokulturelle Transformationspotentiale', die im Rahmen des Strukturwandels von der feudalen zur bürgerlichen Gesellschaft für das Bürgertum und für Teile des Adels emanzipatorische Aspekte aufwiesen."

relation of exclusion to those not initiated with its particular nuances still exists, the sociology of the secret society introduces the complicated problem of identifying the immanent forms of a group that are dominated by its secrecy against outward elements.⁴¹

Simmel's elaborate and sustained analysis of the sociological secret and secret societies seems, however, to be guided by a basic metaphorical relationship between *in* and *out*, the secret being a relationship of exclusion in case of both the individual secret and the secret as a phenomenon related to a group. Secrets isolate and juxtapose the 'other', and individualize 'egoistically'. This is the case for both the individual and a group, which is interconnected by a secret and thereby performs as a quasi-individual. As such, the secret in a group requires trust in the other members of the group, but it also offers protection. Consequently, secrecy and the secret society tend to become 'auto-poetic', a form of self-referential and self-intensifying system. The secret offers protection for the interests of the group, and, in turn, the emergence of the (secret) society guarantees that certain contents remain secret.⁴² The most distinctive feature of this self-intensifying system is its 'othering' border: "Its secret encompasses them as a border, beyond which there is only material or at least formal contradiction, and which, therefore, connects them internally to a perfect unity."⁴³ The society of the secret, thus, becomes an isolated entity, existing in contrast to all others. The function of the secret is, accordingly, dominated by what Simmel calls the *Abscheidungszweck*, the aim to separate.⁴⁴ As Joachim Westerbarkey put it, secrets for Simmel are barriers of communication that problematize the public sphere.⁴⁵

Contrary to Simmel's own words concerning the importance of the secret as a sociological form that, as such, is located beyond the (moral) values of its content, this 'egoistical' perspective on the function of the secret sounds rather negative or at least exclusive, and, therefore, dangerously one-sided.⁴⁶ Simmel describes the pressure to exclude as intrinsically related

41 Georg Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, 4th ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1958), 282 (my translation).

42 See Simmel, *Soziologie*, 289.

43 "Ihr Geheimnis umgibt sie wie eine Grenze, jenseits deren es nur material oder wenigstens formal Entgegengesetztes gibt, und die sie deshalb in sich zu einer vollendeten Einheit zusammenschließt." Simmel, *Soziologie*, 294.

44 Simmel, *Soziologie*, 295.

45 "Geheimnisse stehen bei Simmel für Kommunikationsbarrieren, auf deren Kehrseite das Öffentlichkeitsproblem erscheint." Westerbarkey, "G.S. und das Geheimnis," 308.

46 See Simmel, *Soziologie*, 273.

to the pressure to include, leading to a deindividualization of the group members and a corresponding and profound lack of responsibility among them (*Verantwortungslosigkeit*)—all these aspects render the secret a threat to humankind as it forms conspiracies against all others.⁴⁷ Admittedly, secret societies can also bear emancipatory potential within a totalitarian society. However, in other societies, there must remain some uneasiness about this description. Perhaps there are aspects of the function of the secret that go beyond the in-group and out-group perspective or the group egoism driven by the need to exclude. This need is derived from the examination of pre-modern secret societies, particularly with regard to those cases where two of those supposed ‘in-groups’ meet in situations of contact.

Following Simmel’s analysis, the functions of the secret have often been interpreted with regard only to the ‘egoistic’ perspective, perhaps guided by the idea that the preservation of one’s ‘identity’ is the one and only aim of religious traditions when dealing with one another.⁴⁸ But these seemingly endogenous cases nevertheless also indicate the importance of the *contact dimension* for the strategies of the secret. Above all, if one considers the context of the historical situation in which these strategies emerge, for example, the protection of the religious in a situation of external pressure or even oppression or the establishment of a secret-guided hierarchy as a reaction to colonization.⁴⁹ Here, secrecy may be used to provide a “hidden transcript,” “a buffer and counter against the juggernauts of colonization, slavery, modernity, globalization, and the market economy.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, if one considers the practice of secrecy among crypto-religions, such as, for example, the *Dönme*, the urgent need to hide that they were in fact Sabbatian Jews encouraged them to appear as devout Muslims and to cultivate their knowledge about Islam in such a way that their secret religion did not become apparent. Secrecy, thus, promotes adaption.⁵¹

47 See Simmel, *Soziologie*, 303.

48 See chapter on Tradition.

49 Compare Dakake, “Hiding in Plain Sight,” 338: “Perhaps the most important practical, social function in the Shi’ite tradition, other than pure survival, was the creation of ‘discursive’ or ‘hermeneutic’ space in which Shi’ite doctrine could be developed and systematized as a minority religious perspective under the vigilant eye of the political authorities. While the space secrecy provided could have been used to organize active rebellion [...] this space was primarily used to develop their religious opposition as an intellectual perspective.”

50 Paul Christopher Johnson, “Secretism and the Apotheosis of Duvalier,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (2006): 425.

51 See Sisman, *The Burden of Silence*, 145–146. There is another telling example of secrecy employed for reasons of protection actually promoting religious contact in the fusion and

Simmel's work also has important implications for the *comparative* aspect. The strategy of the secret provides a neutral sociological form by means of which spatially and temporally different cultures might be compared. Urban summarized this as follows: "The content of the secrecy involved in all of these various esoteric traditions is obviously radically different and very much determined by its historical and cultural context; however, my suspicion is that the forms of strategies through which secrecy operates—the tactics of metaphoric disguise, hierarchical access to information, deliberate obfuscation, and so forth—may well turn out to be strikingly similar across cultures and throughout historical periods."⁵²

The 'striking' synchronic and diachronic similarity that may be observed triggers important consequences for the analysis of the phenomenon of the secret. These become conspicuous in situations of religious contact. One could also claim that this works not only for the scholar advancing a comparison but also on the object level for members of religious traditions themselves. By means of structural resemblances, religious believers might '*compare*' their secrets and the ways of dealing with a secret with the secrets and strategies of other traditions. By doing so, they are practically establishing the secrets in question as a possible *contact zone* of religious traditions.

2.2 *Strategies of the Secret*

Reference to secrets in a given society does not always lead to division and fraction or to the instalment of an ingroup/outgroup relation but may also be used to *unite* different individuals, groups, and traditions. There are historical examples where the secret and secrecy did in fact serve as a means or a *topos* for bringing together members of different religious traditions. Antoine Faivre, for example, describes the "unexpected marriage" between Jewish Kabbala and Alexandrine Hermetism within Christianity after 1492, when Jews had been exiled from Spain. This resulted in the emergence of the concepts of the *philosophia occulta* or the *philosophia perennis*.⁵³ Hence, the very possibility of this merging process has something to do with the ways these traditions dealt with (their) secrets. Moreover, under the title "formation of concordance,"

conflation of Buddhism and Christianity during the period of persecutions of Christians in Japan after 1614. In effect this led to the formation of a new religious tradition (*Kakure Kirishitan*, after 1873 becoming *Hanare Kirishitan*, 'separated Christians'). See Junhyoung Michael Shin, "Avalokiteśvara's Manifestation as the Virgin Mary: The Jesuit Adaptation and the Visual Conflation in Japanese Catholicism after 1614," *Church History* 80 (2011).

52 Urban, "The Torment of Secrecy," 248.

53 Antoine Faivre, *Esoterik im Überblick. Geheime Geschichte des abendländischen Denkens* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2001), 17.

Faivre described the melting together of different (religious) traditions into a joint fervour by means of personal and social illumination as a tendency of the esoteric in modern times. According to Faivre, it is not by chance that this tendency, which grew in strength through the nineteenth century, is closely related to and perhaps was influential on the emergence of a new academic discipline: comparative religion.⁵⁴

The strategies through which secrecy operates and the function of the secret within those strategies Urban (following Simmel) is talking about, therefore, have to be scrutinized if they are to provide both metalanguage and object language with a possibility of synchronic and diachronic comparison.

Sociological and historical analysis has shifted the focus of attention on the practice of secrets within a given community. Following these approaches, the subject to be examined in the study of religion is not the secret, either as a matter of investigative revelation or as an unquestionable entity, but the *ways of dealing with it* ('secretizing'). Scholarship has distinguished two major forms that such ways take: secrecy and secretism. *Secrecy* is "a form of religious practice in its own right."⁵⁵ It indicates a certain *process* within a special social situation where the secret functions in a certain framework of institutions: "[...] secrecy has an impact on both the form and the content of religions. The need to keep certain matters secret forms institutional structures."⁵⁶ *Secretism* means that dealing with secrets in religions can be independent of the *content* and can focus on the *form* of secret or secrecy. The secret itself is replaced by ritualized secretism, which often takes the form of disseminating the fact that the secret exists promoting its reputation.⁵⁷ We should, therefore, be able to describe the *claim* for such an entity on the object level, although the entity itself remains concealed. Secrets function not as neutral or indifferent notions in religious processes but are distinguished from other notions and function by a certain *claim*.⁵⁸ This claim is important in two ways, referring both to language and function. First, the secret can be described as a claim (*Ruf, Anspruch*) that provides a certain appeal, namely that there is a secret to be solved or secrets to be preserved. Second, the claim of the secret opens

54 See Faivre, *Esoterik im Überblick*, 31–32.

55 Mark Teeuwen, "Comparative perspectives on Secrecy," (unpublished manuscript, Opening Speech on the KHK Workshop 'Secrecy in Asian Religions', 19 June 2009), 4.

56 Mark Teeuwen, "Introduction: Japan's culture of secrecy from a comparative perspective," in *The culture of secrecy in Japanese Religion*, eds. Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen (London/New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

57 See Paul Christopher Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods. The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3, 17.

58 This claim was made by Christoph Auffarth in one of his presentations to a KHK workshop on the phenomenon of the secret.

a certain space, which is loaded with emphasis as it is known to be decisively relevant for somebody (see the 'claim' as a gold-digger territory). Secrecy and secretism, thus, denote dealing with an (ac)claimed space or zone.

From the perspective of *contact*, secrets and secretizing as establishing a certain space is a special form of *communication process*. "The semantics of the secret is really a semantics of communication, but under the minus sign (*unter negativem Vorzeichen*)."⁵⁹ At first sight, the form of the secret restricts communication, establishing a social control on the religious. However, if the sacral is described as secret, thus separating it from being determined by communication, although it is both removed from everyday perception, it is still *presented as such*. Thus, a secret as an evasive presence might be communicated as a secret without being in danger of being revealed. As a consequence, the secret becomes something one can relate to in a conditioned and practiced way.⁶⁰ Two forms of semantic strategies can be distinguished with regard to *intentionality*: the voluntary introduction and subsequent establishment and the social exploitation of the secret.

Processes of exchange bear some significance for the explication of the secret as a social factor. Contemporary research has a tendency to describe the secret in terms of economic theory. Accordingly, Urban considers secrecy as "the tactics by which social agents conceal or reveal, hoard or exchange, certain valued information. In this sense, secrecy is a discursive strategy that transforms a given piece of information into a scarce and precious resource, a valuable commodity, the possession of which in turn bestows status, prestige or symbolic capital on its owner."⁶¹ Secrecy, as Simmel previously pointed out, may function as an adornment of the secret carriers, who are considered to be adorned by the most precious treasure imaginable: secret knowledge.⁶² As a consequence, Urban characterizes secrets as a form of symbolic capital in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu, as subjects of trade on a 'black market' where peripheral groups create their own capital in competition.⁶³ "As the careful concealment of information, secrecy serves to transform ordinary knowledge into a kind of scarce resource, a good that is rare and worthy of being sought after."⁶⁴

59 See Niklas Luhmann and Peter Fuchs, *Reden und Schweigen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 104.

60 See Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002), 61–62.

61 Urban, "The Torment of Secrecy," 210.

62 On the case of Freemasonry, see Hugh B. Urban, "Secrecy and New Religious Movements: Concealment, Surveillance, and Privacy in a New Age of Information," *Religion Compass* 2 (2008): 72.

63 Urban, "The Torment of Secrecy," 221–223.

64 Urban, "Secrecy and New Religious Movements," 73.

The capitalist model for description of the secret and secrecy, however, allows another explication of these phenomena. Even symbolic capital has to be put in circulation. It cannot simply be kept, as it has to be related to an outside process—a market. Secrets are symbolic capital and thus become a connective element. The focus on the economic aspect of the secret enhancing the (symbolic) capital of its owner, therefore, might prove reductive if another aspect of this strategy is not taken into consideration.⁶⁵ Via secrecy, the secret not only enlarges the possibilities of the secret carriers on the market but also expands the horizon of perception independent of any individual intention. In his study on the “economy of the secret” as a manifestation of the exchanges of Jewish and Christian societies in the ‘Age of the Secret’ (*Das Zeitalter des Geheimnisses*), Daniel Jütte has consistently shown that secrets can serve an *establishment of a new zone of contact* (‘Kontaktzone’).⁶⁶ Accordingly, the secret cannot be considered to be a static object or content concealed with a negative intent. Rather, it has to be conceived as a specific mode of communicative exchange of knowledge and social action. “Secrecy, thus, does not appear as a deficient variant or even as a decline of open forms of knowledge, but it opens for those involved genuine scopes of action and zones of contact. The secret, as it were, generates a social field of its own and—in case of early modernity—a dynamic market.”⁶⁷

The secret here is a dynamic mode of communication and social action. Dealing with the secret, or rather, communicating it, opens new horizons of possibilities and contact zones. In early modern times, it established a field of its own as a dynamic market. In the examination of the dynamics of the history of religions, this dynamic field of contact triggered by the secret is a worthy subject for closer attention.

2.3 *Secrets as an Attractor*

One possible field of research for a closer examination of the dynamics of secrecy is the process of secretizing as an action-directing *attractor* within the religious field.⁶⁸ Secrets might, of course, be attractive as currency in a newly

65 See Kocku von Stuckrad, “Secrecy as Social Capital,” in *Constructing Tradition. Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, eds. Andreas B. Kilcher (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010).

66 See Daniel Jütte, *Das Zeitalter des Geheimnisses. Juden, Christen und die Ökonomie des Geheimen (1400–1800)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 9–10.

67 Jütte, *Das Zeitalter des Geheimnisses*, 24.

68 See the chapter on Attraction.

established dynamic market.⁶⁹ The attraction here, however, is based on its proposed value within a market economy. However, what are the essential features of any situation where a secret becomes an attractor, to be established, defended, revealed or bequeathed?

One telling example of the attraction of the secret can be found in the relationship of publicity and secrecy. In Guy Stroumsa's analysis of the presentation of apocalypses as apocryphoi, the attractive potential of secrets becomes obvious. Here, the attraction of the secret is based upon the interplay of the hidden and the public: "*Aprocryphon* actually, can be translated as 'a book of secrets'; to be sure, there was in early Christian literature, and not only within Gnostic or Gnosticising milieus, a plethora of such apocalypses. The genre itself seems to have been rather popular: there is no better way to publicize a text than to prohibit its publication, strongly limit its readership, or insist that it reveals deep and heavily guarded secrets."⁷⁰ The same holds true for the Mystery Cults and their associated reputation. Eleusinian secrecy is, in many regards, extremely paradoxical. It lacked doctrinal content and an in-group defined by their secrets. They were public in a way that negated the boundaries of society, although the protection of the secret was strictly preserved by the state.⁷¹ In late antiquity, both Mithraic and Christian communities were defined by secrecy, but it was "an attractive, communal secrecy which, by its very nature, in many ways also must have served as a means to attract and to recruit new members."⁷² Violating the sanctity of secrecy by explicitly revealing their secrets did no harm to the ancient mysteries but instead substantially contributed to their religious prestige.⁷³ The same holds true for esoteric arts

69 See the case of early medieval China: "The very secrecy of adept's methods was itself one of the things that got noticed, stoked curiosity, and enhanced the cultural capital of adepts who possessed such arcana." Robert Ford Campany, *Making Transcendents. Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 153.

70 Stroumsa, "From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity," 297.

71 Burkert, "Der geheime Reiz des Verborgenen," 85.

72 Jonas Bjørnebye, "Secrecy and Initiation in the Mithraic Communities of Fourth Century Rome," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practice. Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty*, eds. Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 351.

73 Walter Burkert describes the peculiarly ambiguous status of the secret here as follows: "Dieses zu verraten, ist streng verboten und ist doch zugleich auch eigentlich unmöglich; wenn es je an die Öffentlichkeit gerät, verliert es von selbst seine Wirkung. So haben die Verletzungen des Mysteriengeheimnisses, die durchaus vorkamen, den Institutionen im Grunde nicht geschadet; wohl aber schien die bemühte Geheimhaltung dem Prestige des Sakralen zugute zu kommen." Burkert, *Antike Mysterien*, 16.

in early medieval China.⁷⁴ Secrets and secrecy generate a public sphere. “The very gestures of esotericism suggest a particular kind of display for an audience and *create* the conditions under which the revelation of secrets becomes a powerful event.”⁷⁵ In a similar manner, modern new religious movements that began with the nineteenth-century Theosophical Society often are characterized by their elaborate and sophisticated “advertisement of the secret,” one of the “fundamental paradoxes in many esoteric traditions.”⁷⁶ In fact, this relationship has been the subject of much commentary within religious traditions as well. In the case of Judaism, Peter Schäfer describes the “resplendent ambivalence between esotericism and exotericism” of Jewish *Hekhalot* literature as belonging to the matter in question itself: secret and revelation are two

74 See Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 108: “The secrecy surrounding esoteric arts was bound to have a paradoxical result. [...] The restriction of access to esoteric knowledge, accomplished via multiple and mutually reinforcing textual representations and social practices, inevitably enhanced the status of such knowledge and the status of its possessors in the eyes of outsiders (at least those favorably disposed) not privy to its secrets. Secrecy itself drew attention and generated prestige, the opposites of secrecy.” Also compare Campany, *Secrecy and Display*, 294: “In China, at least, there was a basic tension between hidden arts and observed wonders, between reclusion and recognition, and these opposing tendencies implied and reinforced each other; to describe the tendency to secrecy without describing the other member of the dyad is to paint an incomplete picture. At least if we understand power and prestige in social terms, for initiated practitioners to have accrued any power or prestige from their possession of secretly transmitted arts, it was necessary that the impressive effects of those arts be shown to the uninitiated.”

75 Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 110.

76 See Urban, “Secrecy and New Religious Movements,” 68–69, who adds that here, “secret knowledge is never purely ‘secret’. In fact, it is very often advertised, at least in partial and incomplete form, to a public audience and offered with the tantalizing promise of much deeper mysteries to come. For a secret is only worth anything if someone knows one has a secret; but it retains its power only so long as not everyone knows the content of the secret.” Advertisement of secrets and techniques for it were, of course not restricted to modern times, see Alan Lenzi, “Advertising Secrecy, Creating Power in Ancient Mesopotamia: How Scholars Used Secrecy in scribal Education to Bolster and Perpetuate their Social Prestige and Power,” *Antiquo Oriente* 11 (2013). Introducing his considerations Lenzi reminds us that these techniques, though displaying a certain attraction in many cases might not have been self-conscious strategies, as “[a]ncient intentions are largely inaccessible. We cannot and need not assume that wielders of secret knowledge self-consciously realized the necessity of advertising secret knowledge for their own social advancement to have engaged in such activity or for us to recognize their activity as such. Although we may be able to demonstrate that some ancient scholars were deliberate or even politically shrewd in their tactics of both guarding and advertising their possession of secret knowledge for their advantage, it is likely that many individuals would have never reflected self-consciously about such matters. They would have simply acted the way they were expected to act and reaped the benefits of their intellectual possession and social position—just as many contemporary scholars do” (ibid., 20).

sides of the same coin. The importance of the secret is only revealed insofar as it becomes public.⁷⁷ Secrecy in general, being in this sense essentially paradoxical “must itself be performed in a public fashion in order to be understood to exist.”⁷⁸ Simply put, one may speak of a secret only if others are aware of it, even though they themselves are ignorant of its content and meanings.⁷⁹

The paradox of the secret is not confined to a certain type of text. In his lectures on *The Genesis of Secrecy*, the literary critic Frank Kermode analyzed the interplay of proclamation and concealment involved in any narrative as the basis for hermeneutics and interpretation.⁸⁰ The “radiant obscurity” of narrative texts that both reveal and conceal mutually allows for and is responsible for the human practice of interpretation. Perhaps this paradox, proving that the secret and the public do not function as mutually exclusive zones of human conduct, might again indicate the tendency of the secret to trigger situations of (unexpected) contact—not least by means of its particular attraction.

2.4 *Secrets as Interfaces of Transfer*

The *connection* of the terms secret and contact provides certain difficulties but also promising prospects for better understanding the concrete ways the transfer of religious ideas takes place on the object language level. Despite the observations above on its insignificance for research, the hidden content of the secret does not have to be entirely removed from responsible scholarly

77 Peter Schäfer, “Der göttliche Name. Geheimnis und Offenbarung in der Merkava-Mystik,” in *Schleier und Schwelle Vol. 11: Geheimnis und Offenbarung*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (München: Fink, 1998), 158.

78 Michael Herzfeld, “The performance of secrecy: domesticity and privacy in public spaces,” *Semiotica* 175 (2009): 135. “Secrecy,” Herzfeld adds, “is always somewhat like gambling [...]; inasmuch as its performance is both its enabling condition and the source of its destruction, it is clearly a form of social agency. Moreover, it is an active form of self-protection, one that depends upon and utilizes the structural characteristics that make it possible to render secrecy palpable” (ibid., 136).

79 Accordingly, Campamy claims that the sociology of secrecy requires revision. In the case of early and medieval China, masters of esoterica “[...] did not constitute a ‘secret society’: they neither organized themselves into widespread horizontal groups nor, for the most part, did they attempt to conceal their possession of esoteric arts or the results of these arts. Quite the contrary. Even narratives that depict adepts as retreating behind a disguise of ordinariness also depict their eventual recognition as adepts by discerning others, and many stories make clear that some adepts flaunted the abilities they derived from their access to secret arts.” Campamy, *Making Transcendents*, 128. The revision of the sociology of secrecy resonates with the proposed revision of the function of the secret in situations of contact, stressing its promotional over its preventative role.

80 Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy. On the Interpretation of the Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 47.

interest, but it has to be clarified in terms of its phenomenal structure that allows the secret to perform its function within the strategies of secrecy. This means it has to be analyzed as an 'empty' form. Therefore, analyzing secrets as promoters of contact is closely related to the particular character of the 'content' of the secret. Secrets are especially significant for research guided by the contact dimension due to their basic *structural openness*—they are, by definition, undetermined. They open new zones of contact by offering ample possibilities for translations.

Admittedly, old secret carriers have waged a bitter war against translations of secrets and the inevitable associated misunderstandings. Secrets, nevertheless and in fact, due to the translation process wherein they are not restricted by dogmatic ideas about the original secret, function as *interfaces of transfer*. A secret is a functional structure that can be phenomenologically identified and described. This means that it is not necessary to postulate a one-to-one translatability of the notion of secret between different traditions. On the contrary, it is perhaps more interesting when the secret is related to a structure formerly not denoted as 'secret' in the other tradition due to certain family resemblances. This works in both scholarly metalanguage comparison and object language dealings with another religious tradition. From a philological perspective, the translation may well be 'wrong', but on the object level between religious *acteurs* it, nevertheless, provides a connection between one's own horizon of experience and the other.⁸¹ For example, the reference to mystery cults in the Acts provides readers with possibilities of association with the Gospel, as a case of the so-called *interpretatio graeca*. On the references to the mysteries of Dionysus in the Acts, Jan Schäfer states: "By referring to the mysteries of Dionysus antique readers were provided with possibilities to associate and identify themselves as well as the new belief in Christ was provided with possible connections. [...] Allusions on the language and the contents of the mysteries in the context of a new offer of salvatorial certainty, i.e. the belief in Jesus Christ, could be well understood as such by the people of Hellenistic-Roman antiquity."⁸² This does not, of course, mean that

81 As an example for this productive misreading see the story examined by Hendrik Sørensen, "The 'Transferred Secret': On Religious Exchanges between Daoism and Esoteric Buddhism in China," in *Secrecy as Contact Zone* (forthcoming). On the secret as a promoter of communication see the article of Peter Wick, "Jewish and Christian Interreligious Exchange with Hellenistic Mystery Cults in the First Century AD" in the same volume.

82 Jan Schäfer, "Zur Funktion der Dionysosmysterien in der Apostelgeschichte. Eine intertextuelle Betrachtung der Berufungserzählungen in der Apostelgeschichte und der Bakchen des Euripides," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 66 (2010): 220–221.

the Christian-guided understanding is an appropriate interpretation of the Dionysiac Mysteries, nor was it intended to give one.

The opening, connecting, and fertilizing functions of the secret-as-interface are indicated by Burkhard Gladigow, who argues that the characterization of something as a secret means it is resituated in an interpretative framework that generates new and different explanations of it.⁸³ A secret might serve as an interface between religions, as in the case of Egyptian religion, where Jan Assmann has shown that the secret mediates between open polytheism and concealed monotheism or between multiformity and unity.⁸⁴ Accordingly, it is also possible that one secret may surpass another, as in the interiorization of Jewish secret traditions “into the soul” via the transformation of religious language and attitude as performed in early Christianity by thinkers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen. This was done in order to overcome the distinction between believers and non-believers and, as a consequence, to make the highest levels of the secret open to all, at least in principle, thus freeing secrets from esotericism and establishing a new all-compassing (‘catholic’) mysticism.⁸⁵

In the sociological analysis of Georg Simmel, the secret was analyzed as a means to prevent the flow of information within a given society and also between different traditions, presumably in order to protect the ‘essentials’ of the traditions, that is, their ‘identity’. Secrecy, thus, is interpreted as an obstacle to the contact of different traditions. Relatedly, there are the “overwhelmingly negative, antisocial, and primitive associations in learned Western discourses since the Enlightenment”⁸⁶ concerning the concept of secrets and the praxis of secrecy. The Enlightenment’s obsession with the secret, though it implies both a demarcating rejection *and* a connective fascination, seems to have only developed toward rejection.

83 “Etwas als Geheimnis zu bezeichnen bedeutet dann vor allem, es in einen interpretatorischen Rahmen zu stellen, von dem aus ‘neue’ und tiefgreifend ‘andere’ Deutungen erzeugt werden können. Mit dem Index ‘Geheimnis’ gar ‘ein Geheimnis den meisten’, ist ein übergreifender Deutungsanspruch verbunden, der beispielsweise auf Form, Geschichte oder ‘Gott als Geheimnis der Welt’ fokussiert sein kann.” Burkhard Gladigow, “Vom Naturgeheimnis zum Welträtsel,” in *Schleier und Schwelle Vol. III: Geheimnis und Neugierde*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (München: Fink, 1999), 78.

84 Assmann, *Ägyptische Geheimnisse*, 31.

85 Guy G. Stroumsa, “Clement, Origin and Jewish Esoteric Traditions,” in *Schleier und Schwelle Vol. II: Geheimnis und Offenbarung*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (München: Fink, 1998), 124.

86 Jones, “Secrecy,” 54.

Scholarly approaches that describe secrets as obstacles, either for contact of traditions or for contact of object language and metalanguage, seem to me sadly one-sided. They are clearly dependent on the ever-popular sociological obsession with unmasking occasions of political power play in social processes. The scholarly intermingling of secrets and secrecy with what ultimately are political aims highlights just one form that secrecy assumes. As it has been shown, even within Simmel's analysis, there are elements (above all, allowing comparison) that point in another direction and may fruitfully be used for a more adequate description of the phenomenon of the secret in a situation of religious contact.

Historical *diachronic* analysis has already found cases in which secrets and secrecy have joined religious traditions together. Guy Stroumsa, for instance, stresses the Hellenistic and, above all, Jewish sources of Christian esotericism, thus identifying secrecy and the secret as strategies that connected and linked the emerging Christianity to those traditions.⁸⁷ Stroumsa particularly highlights the importance of language in this process of transfer.⁸⁸ This analysis presupposes the *dynamic* perspective on the history of religions. The over-emphasis on protecting and guarding, thus the contact-prohibiting and anti-communicative function of the secret, seems all the more plausible with regard to certain metaphysical presuppositions, such as taking traditions as solid entities which are obsessed with preserving their 'identity'.⁸⁹ The presupposition, however, remains highly questionable. The thesis that secrecy might rather promote the flow of information and endorse the contact of tradition sounds counter-intuitive. This is truer still for synchronic situations of contact at a given time and space. Here, the demarcating element of secrets and secrecy appears preeminent. There are, however, some good reasons to look at things differently, given a re-description of the phenomenon of a secret and the process of secrecy within a given tradition. Even in synchronic situations of contact, secrets can promote the transfer of meaning and thus join traditions together.

87 See for example, Stroumsa, "From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity," 297.

88 See Stroumsa, "Milk and Meat," 251: "While the inner logic of Christian soteriology was fundamentally anti-esoteric, it was also the heir to the *koine* of religious esotericism [...], both in the Greek and the Jewish tradition." With regard to the 'cornerstone of the western medieval intellectual world', Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, Stroumsa describes the special form of this transfer: "The unending interpretation of the *mysterium* had definitely taken the place of the preservation of the *secretum*. Only the language of the mysteries of old had not completely disappeared. Its trances are left in the vocabulary of Christian mysticism" (ibid., 261).

89 See chapter on Tradition.

3 Secrets as Blank Spaces

Given the contact-guided approach to the study of the history of religions, it might be fruitful to consider the function of secrets within a situation of religious contacts or because of the situation of contact. Is there any kind of change that can be anticipated in such a situation concerning the 'content' or the form of the secret and the religious traditions in contact? A further possibility is the exploration of the *formal* structure of the secret and processes involving secrecy, which variously allow, trigger, and perform situations of contact. To this end, the secret in its empty form can be considered a *blank space* (*Leerstelle*) in order to describe phenomena and transfer processes associated with the contact of religious traditions. It is the blank space of the secret that opens new zones of contact and transfer.

Accordingly, to address the question of the promotional role played by the secret in situations of contact, the scholar cannot merely address the forbidding exterior of the secret but rather should examine the function of its, by definition, empty ('forbidden, veiled') content. Inherently guided by a certain form of contact and through providing possibilities for reaction or translation of an outward impact, the secret 'acts' as a certain kind of systematic interface. As such, it can be regarded as a blank space that functions in an analytically identifiable way.⁹⁰ Hence, the secret promotes contact and transfer between religious traditions.

3.1 *Blank Spaces in the Humanities*

The concept of blank space has some prominence in certain disciplines of the humanities. Literary theorist Wolfgang Iser has analyzed blank spaces as spaces of indeterminability (*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*) within a given poetical text. To him, these spaces are an elementary condition for communication. The undetermined spaces do not indicate that they must be completed, but instead, they must be combined with the reader's imagination. They do not prohibit but rather invite interpretation. Textual blank spaces are thus predominantly characterized by their connectability (*Anschließbarkeit*). Blank spaces, accordingly, open a plurality of possibilities that are realized by the chosen selections of the individual reader.⁹¹ So, when confronted with such blank space, the habitual

90 See Möller's description of the blank space (*Leerstelle*) of the hub in the Daoist image of the wheel. As an image of the *dao* the Wheel is centered by an empty space. Hans-Georg Möller, *In der Mitte des Kreises. Daoistisches Denken* (Frankfurt/Leipzig: Insel, 2001), 34.

91 See the recent study by Alexandra Irimia. *Figures of Radical Absence. Blanks and Voids in Theory, Literature and Arts* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023).

expectations of a reader are disturbed and the reader is forced to reformulate the text.⁹² Concerning these effects, the blank spaces may be considered an “elementary matrix for the interaction of text and the reader,” likewise helping and hindering the communication process.⁹³ However, the capacity of the blank space is not restricted to the text and reader. With regard to the author, a poetics of blank spaces is developed by Monika Schmitz-Emans with reference to the work of Peter Handke.⁹⁴

As the secret is predominantly analyzed in sociological terms, one can also employ the concept of the blank space to describe social processes. In his considerations of social action, termed the ‘*Soziotext*’, the social philosopher Jürgen Frese analyzed blank spaces in social model forms (*Formulare*), and argued they are culturally determined narratives for the expression of personal experiences. Here, blank spaces function as a request to pause and to decide on the continuation of a given text in order to construct a new narrative. The social advantage of this process consists in the possibility of connecting commonly known parts of a given text to one’s own experience via the filling of the blank spaces.⁹⁵

Last but not least, the historian Lucian Hölscher places great stress on the paramount importance of blank spaces, which to him include chance, forgetting, abstract spatial and temporal distances, and the idea of an open future for the theory and praxis of modern historiography. For Hölscher, systematic blank spaces are responsible for the very possibility of ‘history’ beyond mere causality or memory. In his book *Semantik der Leere* (‘Semantics of Emptiness’), Hölscher describes the explorative potential of historical blank spaces and their formation as follows: “Chance, forgetting and also the distance made possible by the number zero are systematic blank spaces of history. We need them in order to discover new interrelations of sense in the material handed down to us. Without them, there would be no difference between poetry and

92 See Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (München: Fink (UTB), 1984), 280–287.

93 Compare Wolfgang Kemp, “Verständlichkeit und Spannung. Über Leerstellen in der Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Der Betrachter ist im Bild. Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik*, ed. Wolfgang Kemp (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1992), 315.

94 See Monika Schmitz-Emans, *Schrift und Abwesenheit. Historische Paradigmen zu einer Poetik der Entzifferung und des Schreibens* (München: Fink, 1995), 281–293. The knowledge-promoting function of the blank space might also be exemplified by the blank space of the ‘absolutely, indefinitely, and existentially’ hidden Twelfth Imam in Shi’ite thought, whose presence (as a blank space) facilitated the emergence of Shi’ite books of theology and law as described by Maria Dakake, “Hiding in Plain Sight,” 331–332.

95 Compare Jürgen Frese, *Prozesse im Handlungsfeld* (München: Boer, 1985), 158–162. See chapter on Model Forms.

history. [...] The very possibility of modern historical research depends on the assumption of such blank spaces, which allow the discovery of the sense of every limited context of sense anew and thus keep open the context of history in general. In sum, they define the limits of history. Without their systematic exploit, historical research would not be possible."⁹⁶ Blank spaces for Hölscher are of vital importance for the freedom of scholarly research in a narrow sense but also for the freedom of action of human beings as a whole. He argues that we need the blank space of an undetermined future in order to be able to start all over again in the present or to have been able to start again in the past.⁹⁷

As these examples from literary studies, social phenomenology, and theoretical historiography show, blank spaces are an important subject of scholarly work in the humanities. They provide connectability, possible forms of understanding and make the adventure of ideas possible. What is more, they allow the permanent revision of a historical narrative that they themselves generate. These findings can be applied to the material of religious studies as well. Veit Rosenberger in his study of the Greek oracles interprets the medium of the Oracle at Delphi, Pythia, explicitly as a blank space (*Leerstelle*) that allows contact, for it serves as a projective foil (*Projektionsfläche*) connecting the divine utterances and the expectations of the Greeks.⁹⁸ In Hebrew tradition, as examined by Korpel and de Moor, blank spaces mark rhetorical silence. Silence was not only marked in words but indicated by blank spaces in the text.⁹⁹

96 Lucian Hölscher, *Semantik der Leere. Grenzfragen der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 7–8 (my translation).

97 Hölscher, *Semantik der Leere*, 8.

98 Veit Rosenberger, *Griechische Orakel. Eine Kulturgeschichte* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2001), 125.

99 See Marjo A.C. Korpel and Johannes C. de Moor, *The Silent God* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 74. As an example see 87: "Silence because of fear could also be expressed not in words, but by blank spaces. In order to denounce David's adultery with Bathsheba the prophet Nathan tells David his well-known parable about a rich man who wrongfully took the only lamb of a poor man (2 Sam. 12:1–4). After vv. 5–6, with David's angry threat to execute this rich man, the venerable Aleppo Codex lets fall a first silence by means of a blank space to indicate that the audience realizes that David has just condemned himself. Then after Nathan's reply 'You are that man!' a second space underlines this dramatic turn in the story. These blanks are not merely the result of scribal caprice, because several other Hebrew and Greek witnesses support them. Sometimes silence is expressed both in words and by a blank space. Initially Esther fears to address the Persian king because if she went to the king uninvited she risked to be killed (Est. 4:11–4). In Est. 7:4 she explains to the king that she would have kept silent if she and her people had been sold as slaves, thus indicating that it had taken her a lot to overcome her fear. There is a space (Setumah) after this verse, graphically expressing the tense silence that falls after her speech before the king answers."

3.2 *Blank Spaces: Semantics, Communication, Materiality*

Blank spaces work on the semantic, communicative, and material levels.¹⁰⁰ Leaving blanks is apparently an ancient scribal technique used to determine how a texture is to be interpreted and used. “In written texts the blanks between words, blanks between lines, extra empty space at the end of verselines, indentation to mark off new paragraphs are substitutes for silence [...]. Few people realize that many of these clever tricks were already used in some of the oldest alphabetic texts we have, for example the clay tablets of Ugarit dating from around 1200 BCE.”¹⁰¹ Of course, these three levels can be combined, for example, by leaving a blank space in a text that is to be recited.¹⁰²

On the *semantic level*, a secret can be understood as a non-identifiable blank space. Its content, by definition, cannot be defined, so there is no need to ‘complete’ the notion on the semantic level. On the contrary, the blank space, in order to fulfill its function, cannot be filled.¹⁰³ However, this blank space functions as such in a given context and, accordingly, can be described formally. Secrets as blank spaces, thus, become signs of both absence and presence. In Lucian’s *De Deae Syriae* one finds the description of a deliberately blank space as a cultic reality within a cultic context.¹⁰⁴ Posed between other statues, there was a golden image that was very different from all the others. It had no form of its own but seemed to be a combination of all forms. The Assyrians had no name for it, simply calling it the ‘sign’. They were not able to say anything reliable about its origin or its real form; some related it to Bacchus, some to Deukalion, and some to Semiramis.¹⁰⁵

100 Korpel and de Moor, *The Silent God*, 127.

101 Korpel and de Moor, *The Silent God*, 72.

102 Korpel and de Moor, *The Silent God*, 204: “In the literary texts of Ugarit horizontal lines mostly serve to demarcate portions of text not intended for recitation. It is our contention that in addition to that device, a blank space at the end of lines often fulfills the function to mark a rhetorical silence when the text was recited. Longer pauses are indicated by blank lines and an even longer moment of silence is required when a large number of blank lines or even an entirely blank page precedes a fresh chapter.”

103 Compare Peter Wick, *Das Geheimnis des Evangeliums. Mysterien bei Paulus, Markus, Johannes und in der Apostelgeschichte als Testfall interkultureller Inklusions- und Demarkationsprozesse* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2023), 32–33.

104 This work is widely considered to be an imitation of Herodotus’ *Histories*. See Wolfgang Spickermann, “Lukian von Samosata und die fremden Götter,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 11 (2009): 238. As described in the following, the above made use of the blank spaces in his translational effort.

105 See chapter 33 of *The Syrian Goddess*. Lucian, *Works. Volume IV*, with a translation by A.M. Harmon, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

Here, for illustrative purposes, one may consider the relation between frame and picture: in its particular semantics, a secret may be described structurally as a frame without a picture. As a frame, however, it essentially indicates and presents the absent. We can recognize a blank space as a means to identify a structure framing absence. In his study on the Japanese 'culture of secrecy', Mark Teeuwen gives an analogous description of the secret in his discussion of the secret Buddhas of Japanese temples, which he considers to be representative of the realm of secrecy as a whole: "[...] the secret is a vacuum displayed in a conspicuous place."¹⁰⁶

The absence indicated by a blank space can be shown with regard to the term "secret" itself, which does not communicate anything about the content of this secret, though it communicates that non-communication. On the *communicative level*, the secret might, thus, be indicated by silence. But silence also has to be displayed in a conspicuous place.¹⁰⁷ Secrecy and secretism are human actions. That is, they are ways of talking about the secret, or rather, using the concept in language. Secrets are only relevant as forms of communication. Secrets without language are not imaginable.

One indication of the importance of language for the secret, secrecy, and secretism can be derived from the characteristics of the Greek oracles, particularly the oracle of Delphi, notorious for its riddles, which were, of course, a form of secretism. The secrets of Delphi, as the "central place of the Greek world," served as a crystallization point for Hellenic identity and, therefore, it was of vital importance that its riddles were not solved but rather contemplated, debated, and discussed in treatises.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, the function of the secret in the oracle context consists in its being communicated and serving as a means of communication, firstly between the divine world and the human

¹⁰⁶ Teeuwen, "Introduction," 6.

¹⁰⁷ To Luther Martin, in Hellenistic religious communities, secrecy by silence is basically communication, i.e. an explicitly rhetorical strategy for structuring social relations "especially in religious and pedagogical contexts. As such it belongs [to] [...] the right of free speech claimed by all Athenians [...] and [...] to the discursive strategy of social formation in the Hellenistic world generally, and to its religious communities specifically." (Luther A. Martin, "Secrecy in Hellenistic Religious Communities," in *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions*, eds. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 112) In case of the early modern and modern *Dönme*, the practice of the impenetrable and forced 'burden of silence' concerning their beliefs does not exclude their existence always being an 'open secret', resulting in an open secret subculture. Sisman, *The Burden of Silence*, 3, 157. See also *ibid.*, 148: "However paradoxical it may sound, the Dönmes were visible enough to be noticed by outsiders, at least on the surface, since the group's inception."

¹⁰⁸ See Rosenberger, *Griechische Orakel*, 119, 121.

world and secondly, as in uniting together those who consider themselves Hellenes. Consequently, when it comes to secrets, there is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. All possibilities are tied together by the way people talk about them. Regarding the function of the concepts in question, be it *arcanum*, mystery, or secret, I am of the opinion that all these ‘types’ of secret operate in the same way in language. Therefore, the religious language of the secret is not silence. Secrecy and a lack of communication are “indeed a loud and clear statement of religious attitudes.”¹⁰⁹ Even the religious practices associated with the Greek Mystery Cults were a comparatively loud matter, making up a multifaceted soundscape, where even the secret segment of the initiation was “an opulent audial setting.”¹¹⁰ Yet we indeed do find claims for silence in religious object language—but this fact is surely something to be talked about.¹¹¹ In certain cases, there is also an ambiguity of function in the language of the secret, which may be revealed to the wise while at the same time be concealed from the ignorant.¹¹² As Johnson, in his study on Brazilian *Candomblé*, shows, it can even be the case that gossip might become the language of the secret on the object language level.¹¹³ Another strategy, applied for example in Shi‘itism, might be to make use of ‘phanic’ speech, transmitting and concealing esoteric content through a combination of rhetorical devices such as “speaking cryptically, using gestures, pauses or momentarily silences” to conceal the real meaning of the words uttered, or through use of accepted words that have been tacitly recharged with heterodox meaning.¹¹⁴ Shaul Shaked has analyzed the use of paradoxical language and cryptic remarks by mystics as serving both as a pointer towards the truth and as a veil protecting it.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, Lanzi describes the use of a language

109 Shaked, “Two Types of Esotericism,” 221.

110 Georgia Petridou, “Resounding Mysteries. Sound and Silence in the Eleusinian Soundscape,” in *Sensual Religion. Religion and the Five Senses*, eds. Graham Harvey and Jessica Hughes (Sheffield/Bristol: Equinox, 2018), 162.

111 See Johnson, *Secret, Gossip and Gods*, 23. The subject of these considerations is “not that which cannot be spoken, but rather how the rule to not speak it gets around [...]”

112 See Florian Ebeling, “‘Geheimnis’ und ‘Geheimhaltung’ in den *Hermetica* der Frühen Neuzeit,” in *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis. Hermetismus in der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Ann-Charlott Trepp and Helmut Lehmann. Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 171 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 76.

113 See Johnson, *Secret, Gossip and Gods*, 55–56.

114 Dakake, “Hiding in Plain Sight,” 341, 343. See also the rhetoric of secrecy in the *hermetica* and the alchemists in early modern times who used riddles, symbols, and allegory as a suitable means to both publish and conceal knowledge by means of a published secret. See Ebeling, “‘Geheimnis’ und ‘Geheimhaltung’ in den *Hermetica* der Frühen Neuzeit,” 74.

115 Shaked, “Two Types of Esotericism,” 226.

of secrecy in the Epic of Gilgamesh as a means to both reveal the existence of a secret and conceal it.¹¹⁶

In terms of communication theory, secrets are a means to limit communication through communication.¹¹⁷ However, this limitation also generates a meta-communicative surplus in the form of a discourse on the fact of the secret and process of secrecy within the tradition itself. Silence is, thus, not the mode of the language of the secret; it is rather the mode of speech concerning the content of the secret. This has to be expressed in language as a blank space.

The notion of secret as a blank space can be fruitfully developed through the introduction of other important aspects, which help in understanding the function of the blank space. Accordingly, the process of secretism might be understood as the process of *emptying* conceptual content for a different linguistic use.¹¹⁸ That is, it allows an alternative communicative combination.¹¹⁹

116 "In the prologue, the text advertises the existence of antediluvian secret knowledge; and now, in this passage, the text adapts the language of secrecy to describe the life-wisdom Gilgamesh learns and offers it to every reader of the epic. This vulgate of secret knowledge is useful and available to all; it is, we might say, a democratized form of secret knowledge. But this so-called secret knowledge is not to be equated with either the antediluvian secrets, which hint at scholarly secret lore but are actually no secrets at all, mentioned earlier in the prologue (and disclosed in Tablet x1) or the actual secret knowledge that we know from other sources was protected by the scholars (i.e., their various learned corpora). This equivocation on the supposed content of secret knowledge, this rhetorical sleight of hand, both advertises and masks yet again that which only the initiated, the king and his royal scholars, actually possessed." Lanzi, "Advertising Secrecy, Creating Power," 34. To Nosco, it is in the nexus of the revealed and the concealed that one finds the experience of religion in general. Peter Nosco, "The Experiences of Christians During the Underground Years and Thereafter," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34 (2007): 87.

117 "Geheimnis ist eine Art, Kommunikation durch Kommunikation zu beschränken." Manuel Zelter, "Geheimnis und Öffentlichkeit. Kommunikationstheoretische Beobachtungen zu einem Motiv im Markusevangelium," in *Religion als Kommunikation*, eds. Hartmann Tyrell, Volkhard Krech, and Hubert Knoblauch (Würzburg: Ergon, 1998), 359.

118 This point was developed by Volkhard Krech during the discussion of the focus group 'Secrets' of the KHK. To a certain extent, Thomas Merton's attempt to match Christian and Buddhist spiritual experience via the idea of emptiness serves as another example of the contact-promoting role of blank spaces. See Fred Dallmayr, *Spiritual Guides. Pathfinders in the Desert* (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre-Dame Press, 2017), 125–132.

119 This may also form a strategy in a struggle between religious traditions. See for example the creation of an 'empty image' by Pentecostal Ghanaian filmmakers in order to capture and, ultimately, to destroy secrets of traditional Ghanaian religious tradition as described by Birgit Meyer. It is interesting to notice, however, that even those present on the film set fear that the picture voluntarily emptied may be 'taken over' by the 'secret' power that it was intended to destroy. In any case, via the empty space, a constant contact is established between the two competing religious traditions: "This empty image is a kind of reverse *kenose* in that, in contrast to the Catholic icon, it should not reveal, but rather

The presence of the empty space, thus, allows communication that may differ from traditional forms of communication.¹²⁰ Here, on the communicative level, secrets may be used, for instance, in order to provide space for epiphany.¹²¹ This epiphany may even be indicated by the evasion (*Entzug*) expressed in the notion of secret.¹²² Here, the evasion displays an almost 'physical' dynamic effect, a suction. The evading secret functions dynamically like a whirlpool, which may *attract* persons as well as theories approaching its zone

destroy the invisible by making it visible. The impossibility of achieving this, because of invisible forces' resistance to being imagined implies that traditional religion, which Pentecostals by and large equate with demonic forces and despise for this reason remains powerful—even though it is hunted down in continuous attempts to throw light into the dark. Diabolizing such forces affirms their power and thus binds Pentecostalism in a symbiotic relation with the powers it renounces so articulately." Birgit Meyer, "Religious revelation, secrecy and the limits of visual representation," *Anthropological Theory* 6 (2006): 445.

120 This is also the case with the phenomenon of (religious) sound and silence, as David Morgan explained: "Likewise, silence is used by sound-makers to punctuate sound, to initiate a new sequence of sound, or to highlight another medium such as space or objects or movement." David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye. Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2012), 162.

121 Compare the practice in Mahāyāna literature of indicating Emptiness itself (in which dharmas display a certain type of contact) by emptying space: "Throughout Mahāyāna literature, emptiness itself is often symbolized by empty space. In one episode of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, the great teacher Vimalakīrti, using a feigned illness as a means to draw people to receive teaching from him, empties his house of all attendants and furniture except for his sickbed. When asked why his house is empty, he evokes the classic doctrine of emptiness replying that all Buddha lands are similarly empty, as is emptiness itself. Thus he makes the abstract notion of emptiness concrete, symbolizing it with the empty space of his room. The *Gaṇḍavyūha* frequently refers to unimpeded space of the Dharma-realm (*dharmadhātu*), which is conceived of in this text as the state in which dharmas in their emptiness mutually penetrate each other, their boundaries dissolved in light of their lack of inherent existence." David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision. Metaphor and Visionary Imaginary in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 81. Also compare teachings of Taoist mysticism, quoted in Harold D. Roth, *Original Tao. Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 155: "When the mind is empty, the Way settles within it [...]." The *Nei-yeh* itself uses the metaphor of "cleaning out the lodging place of the numinous" for the corresponding meditative experience (*ibid.*, 189).

122 See for example in modern Judaism the religious thought of the liberal rabbi Max Wiener who contemplates on secret as a place marker of the experience of the divine, an empty space that structures religious existence. See Knut Martin Stünkel, "Das eigentlich Religiöse in der Religion. Die Bedeutung des Geheimnisses für das Judentum bei Max Wiener," in *Juden und Geheimnis. Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen*, ed. Christian Oberlander. Interdisziplinäre Forschungen 25 (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2015), 42–44.

of influence. Mark Teeuwen characterized this very fittingly as the ‘black hole potency’ of the secret.¹²³

In general, the linguistic structures that indicate absence hint at a main problem of religious language, wherein an immanent representation of the transcendent is needed, inaccessible as it may be. The secret, thus, becomes a key topic for examining the function of religious language in a contact situation.

On the *material level*, visual examples of the blank space structure are provided in the iconographic motif of the ‘Empty Throne’, *hetoimasia*, in the Christian context. Empty thrones are a widespread phenomenon in the Near East and are often found as rock-cut thrones in Greece.¹²⁴ As many Greek empty thrones are located on the peaks of mountains,¹²⁵ their mediating function between the human and the divine sphere becomes obvious.¹²⁶ The motif of the Empty Throne can be found in Greek and Roman imperial iconography and ritual, as well as in ancient oriental prefigurations. The Empty Throne, which represents the presence of a divine entity that is invisible by marking out a place to envision an invisible god, functions as a blank space that can be occupied in different ways by different gods in different contexts and epochs. It thus provides an interface for mutual translation between religious traditions. The framing of the blank space by the empty throne—the context of the blank space—is significant as it marks out the space containing the god, thus implying a human-like corporeal form.¹²⁷ Furthermore, it might be interpreted as a place of preparation for *parousia*, setting a place to receive the divine and expressing a certain claim that makes the structure attractive both for translation and devotion. In a similar way, the *opaeum* in the vault of the Pantheon can be interpreted as a blank space that represents the absent deity.¹²⁸ Likewise, iconoclasm could be interpreted as an attempt to re-establish empty spaces indicating the divine on the material level.

123 Teeuwen, “Comperative perspectives,” 1.

124 Compare Henry S. Blume, “The Furniture of the Gods: The Problem with the Importation of ‘Empty Space and Material Aniconism’ into Greek Religion,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 17 (2016): 57, 62.

125 Blume, “The Furniture of the Gods,” 63.

126 On the role of mountains within a process of transcending in the Chinese context, see the Chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

127 Blume, “The Furniture of the Gods,” 66.

128 The subject of the empty throne was introduced into the discussions of the ΚΗΚ in a presentation delivered by Philipp Reichling. See also Cornelius Vollmer, *Im Anfang war der Thron: Studien zum leeren Thron in der griechischen, römischen und frühchristlichen Ikonographie*. Tübinger Archäologische Forschungen 15 (Rahden: VML, 2014).

3.3 *Blank Spaces in Contact*

How can the concept of the blank space be used to describe and analyze situations of religious contact? As a model on the abstract level, a situation of contact catalyzed by a secret could be described as follows: two religious traditions, each with a secret as an integral part of their self-understanding, 'meet' or 'overlap' in a situation of contact, which is guided by transfer or translation. Both religious traditions can be interpreted as *semiospheres* in the sense of Juri Lotmann.¹²⁹ The internal structure of each sphere may be described as a series of contexts providing a *reference* for both elements and given structures of knowledge. Every religion provides a context of indications (*Verweisungszusammenhang*), an interplay of signs that relates its elements to each other.

One example of this context of indication might be *myth*, which is used in ancient religions. Myths provide possibilities for speaking about the (formerly) unknown and, in doing so, inaugurate a first contact in an undogmatic, experimental, and tentative way. "[...] [M]yth has provided a net of relations, with the help of which decisive and less decisive aspects of the Mysteries could be verbalized by parallelism and in contrast, but without obligation to a contradiction-free systematic. It was a way to 'speak about the Gods'; some kind of theologia, which, admittedly, was characterized by experimental, playful, almost contingent features and which evades scholarly theology."¹³⁰ In the Greek world, myths were "exoteric by nature." They were stories told in simple terms, allowing for both general understanding and general applicability.¹³¹ According to Walter Burkert, popular myth has provided a tentative net of reference that served to verbalize matters via parallelism and contrast but without the obligation to systematize without contradiction. A myth was used experimentally in order to deal semantically with the Mystery Cults. Jonathan Z. Smith characterizes myth accordingly: "[...] there is no pristine myth; there is only application. That this requires that we not excise myth from

129 See Jurij M. Lotman, *Die Innenwelt des Denkens. Eine semiotische Theorie der Kultur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), 163–290.

130 Burkert, *Antike Mysterien*, 66.

131 Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "Gnostic Secret Myths," in *Tradition und Translation. Zum Problem der interkulturellen Übersetzbarkeit religiöser Phänomene. Festschrift für Carsten Colpe zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Christoph Elsas et al. (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1994), 31. Thus, Stroumsa argues, it is not the (simple) myth, but rather the interpretations of it that might be called esoteric.

its interpretative context or existential situation. [...] Myth as an application represents the complex interaction between diviner, client and situation."¹³²

In order to characterize the process of contact between two religious traditions with a secret and its effects upon each tradition, we can create a model of the event. It may be described by a processual scheme that combines two model forms (I + II) containing blank spaces (secret I and secret II).¹³³ If the secret in question is considered to function as a blank space, it can serve as a structural interface for both semiospheres *because* of its essentially 'evasive' character. Secret I and secret II are thus spaces of congruence. The intersection of both secrets assigns a possible space of inclusion, where the ineffable of model form I corresponds to the ineffable of model form II or the secret I is congruent to the other secret II. The non-intersecting areas assign the space of exclusion. However, because of the (empty) space of inclusion and its structural position within a context of indication, it is possible for both semiospheres to obtain attributions, determination of relations, insight, and knowledge from the spaces of non-intersection. For example, secret I can gain insight from the space of non-intersection into model form II and vice versa. The blank space, thus, indicates the possibility of a combination between model forms I and II. Using the blank space of the secret as a space of correspondence, the two model forms can be mapped upon one another, making the semiospheres of one tradition available to the other.

It is at this point that a *concrecence of traditions* might occur. Because of the dynamic process of mapping and translation, concrecence leads to a fundamentally contingent result that serves as a starting point for further translations.¹³⁴ In order to avoid the well-known calamities of the notion of hybridization, the concept of *concrecence*, as introduced by Alfred North Whitehead, is better suited for expressing the dynamic process of the contact

132 Jonathan Z. Smith, "No News is Good News: Secrecy in Late Antiquity," in Bolle, *Secrecy in Religions*, 78. On myth as a continuously adapting, open-ended, and ever-changing system, see Jan N. Bremmer, "What is a Greek Myth?," in Jan N. Bremmer, *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London: Routledge, 1988), 3–4: "Mythology, then was an open ended system. [...] it is precisely this improvisatory character of myth that guarantees its centrality in Greek religion. 'It is not bound to forms hardened and stiffened by canonical authority, but mobile, fluent, and free to respond to a changing experience of the world.'"

133 See the chapter on Model Forms.

134 In Iser's words: "Hier wie dort eröffnet die Leerstelle zwischen den Segmenten bzw. der Schnitt zwischen den Bildern ein Netz von Beziehbarkeiten, durch das sich die Segmente bzw. die Bilder wechselseitig bestimmen. Was eine solche Bestimmung regelt, darf selbst nicht bestimmt sein, denn die Segmente gewinnen ihre Bestimmung durch ihre Beziehung aufeinander, und nicht durch ihre Teilhabe an einem bestimmten *tertium comparationis*." Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, 303.

and merging of semiospheres. Whitehead defines concrescence as the “production of novel togetherness,” via the “advance from disjunction into conjunction, creating a new entity other than the entities given in disjunction.”¹³⁵ Furthermore, Whitehead’s concept provides the advantage that it does not presuppose two solid entities merging into a hybrid of the two but rather takes its point of departure from processual entities. In the ideal situation of contact, *two* new areas of contextual indication arise from the original contact point, each one related to the semiosphere in question but now containing reference to the other semiosphere as well. The blank spaces of the secrets at the interface are not neutral but are framed differently by each religious tradition. It is, therefore possible that the secret might become a subject of competition. The frames of the blank space of the secret and the contexts of indication do not remain static, but as framing stories, they are forever being retold or written, and thereby, they continue to create new and dynamic religious fields.¹³⁶ Seen as such, secrets in fact become ‘interactive events’.¹³⁷

The pattern can also be used if one religion with a secret comes into contact with another religion that does not have an explicit secret. The blank space of the secret is compatible with any given contents. Here, some blending of concepts may take place.¹³⁸ The development of relations can be realized by the area of intersection. Secrets are, therefore, the privileged linguistic *pathfinder* of contact. In his lecture on ‘Facets of Secrecy in Hindu-Muslim interaction’ at the KHK, Svevo D’Onofrio gave an example of the functioning of the secret. In the translation of the Upanishad into Persian by Dārā Šikōh (1615–1659), the

135 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

136 This idea enhances and clarifies Bolle’s observation: “The ability to fertilize minds and hearts with a central mystery is probably the clearest mark of a religious tradition.” Bolle, “Secrecy in Religions,” 10. As such, the mystery or secret allows fertilization processes between two traditions.

137 Urban describes the contemporary ‘feedback-loop at play’ between Scientology and the FBI accordingly, for “in its obsession with secrecy and information-control, Scientology was almost a kind of strange mirror image of the FBI itself.” This mirroring, employing the framing of secrecy, ultimately led to the result that “the Church of Scientology and the US government became entangled in an extremely complex, quite often bizarre game of secrecy, surveillance, paranoia, and counter-espionage.” Urban, “Secrecy and New Religious Movements,” 78.

138 On the idea of conceptual blending, see Gilles Fouconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think. Conceptual Blendings and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). For a concrete case study see Jens Kreinath, “The Politics of the Visible and the Invisible: Secrecy and Concealment among the Alawis in Hatay, Turkey,” in *Secrecy as Contact Zone* (forthcoming).

secret provided the structural possibility of translation by equating the secret spiritual meaning of words in religious scripture with each other.¹³⁹

The blank space provided by a secret is a useful tool or starting point in the process of transfer. It allows the concrescence of formerly unrelated contexts of indications (religious narratives). As a consequence, concrescence by secret allows a *gain of knowledge*, an increase of possible semantics, or an ‘explosion of meaning’ in Lotmanian terms.¹⁴⁰ In this sense, secrets become a more general condition for knowledge production. Of course, the risk of misunderstanding is overwhelming, confirming the close relationship between secrecy and risk, but the possible benefits on the social level of interreligious transfer are much greater than its drawbacks—just as Simmel argued for the intersocial level.¹⁴¹ Thus, through a combination of semiospheres, secrets generate more knowledge than mere ‘facts’. ‘Secretizing’, in this sense, can be understood as a process-promoting type of contact between religions, which at the same time become *attractors*. Secrets with their open content thus become something like passwords, allowing the mutual entrance of different religions.

4 The Blank Spaces of Secrets in Contact: Translation Processes

The role of the blank space of the secret within a process of religious contact is exemplified in cases in which object language authors are forced to relate their traditional narrations to other narrations. The process of such relating is generally defined as interpretation, itself a manifestation of object language attempting to come to terms with other traditions of thought.

4.1 *Herodotus and the Interpretatio Graeca*

A comparatively early set of philosophical reflections on the contact of religious traditions in object language is to be found in the Second Book of Herodotus’ *Histories*, titled *Euterpe*. As Herodotus can claim a seat of honor among the

139 Svevo D’Onofrio, “Facets of Secrecy in Hindu-Muslim Interaction,” (unpublished lecture manuscript, KHK-Workshop ‘Religious Secrets in Contact’, 2 December 2010, Bochum). Compare the introduction to the Italian edition Muḥammad Dārā Šikōh, *La congiunzione dei due oceani (Majma‘ Al-Baḥrayn)*, eds. Svevo D’Onofrio and Fabrizio Speziale (Milano: Adolphi, 2011), 9–70.

140 See Jurij M. Lotman, *Kultur und Explosion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010).

141 Thus, Jones claims that this also holds true on the level of communication between traditions: “Any objectification, instantiation, or entextualization of a secret—an ineluctable feature of its existence as a social phenomenon—creates risks of unintended communicability.” Jones, “Secrecy,” 56.

founders of comparative religious studies (Walter Burkert), his eminence in this context should not be surprising.¹⁴² In *Euterpe*, Herodotus deals at length with Egypt and the Egyptian traditions, and his reflections were highly influential on later scholars and travelers to that place.¹⁴³ *Euterpe*, in particular, has also provoked the interest of scholars interested in religious contact situations, as it is the classical source for the *interpretatio graeca*, or the tendency of Greek writers to equate divinities of other traditions with figures from the familiar Greek pantheon. The *interpretatio graeca* thus provides an example of religious transfer through the translation of names on the basis of their functional and structural resemblances.¹⁴⁴ However, it is not only names that serve as interfaces of contact between the Greek and the Egyptian semiospheres. In his account, Herodotus also makes hermeneutical use of the blank space of secrets for the sake of mutual understanding between different traditions.

To Herodotus, the Greek world always served as a point of reference.¹⁴⁵ Under this guiding perspective, he is able to denote similarities that make his principle of narration, his *logos*, understandable.¹⁴⁶ It may seem naïve that such a translation could produce only a deceptive closeness between different

142 Walter Burkert, "Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen," in *Hérodote et les peuples non grecs*, eds. by G. Nenci and O. Reverdin (Vandoeuvres-Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1990), 4.

143 See Erik Hornung, *Das esoterische Ägypten. Das geheime Wissen der Ägypter und sein Einfluß auf das Abendland* (München: Beck, 1999), 26–27.

144 Jan Assmann considers the function-based translatability of the prevailing polytheistic divinities as a major cultural achievement: "Übersetzung ist also nicht als illegitime Vereinnahmung wirklicher Andersheit zu verstehen. Sie ist vielmehr der Versuch, die Grenzen durchlässiger zu machen, die durch kulturelle Unterscheidungen errichtet werden. [...] Die Namen sind natürlich von Kultur zu Kultur verschieden, weil die Sprachen verschieden sind. Auch die Gestalten der Gottheit und die Riten ihrer Verehrung können sehr verschieden sein. Hinsichtlich ihrer Funktion dagegen bestehen große Ähnlichkeiten [...] aufgrund dieser funktionalen Äquivalenz ließen sich die Götternamen verschiedener Religionen übersetzen. Diese gegenseitige Übersetzbarkeit der polytheistischen Gottheiten muß man als große kulturelle Leistung verbuchen." Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter*, 19. Assmann furthermore notes that the tradition of translating the names of Gods can be traced back to the Mesopotamian 'lists' of the third millennium BCE (*ibid.*, 74). Ultimately, it is the authority of the Gods, or rather, their mandatory character that allows for translation and mutual understanding (*ibid.*, 75).

145 See Kai Brodersen, "Einleitung: Die Thematik von Herodots Werk," in *Herodot, Historien 2. Buch*, trans. and ed. by Kai Brodersen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), 7.

146 In his account, as Susanne Gödde puts it, the relativity of the prevailing νόμοι allows Herodotus to reflect configurations of the alien other in the mirror of his own. See Susanne Gödde, "οὗ μοι ὁσίον ἐστὶ λέγειν. Zur Poetik der Leerstelle in Herodots Ägypten-Logos," in *Literatur und Religion 2. Wege zu einer mythisch-rituellen Poetik bei den Griechen*, eds. Anton Bierl, Rebecca Lämmle, and Katharina Wesselmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 46–47.

entities. However, turning the point about, the attempt to examine without a point of reference is illusionary. From this perspective, Herodotus is not naïve in the slightest.

Herodotus's work did not emerge *ex nihilo* but rather was written in an intense communicative context. His monumental and rich text, later divided into the nine books of *Histories*, was composed amidst the intense intellectual debates on the essence of the Gods and anthropomorphic approaches to the Gods of his time.¹⁴⁷ In writing his account, he transferred the debate from a fundamental and theological level to a comparative one, allowing him some critical distance from the theological debate.¹⁴⁸ Whilst generally skeptical of the possibility of truly recognizing the divine, Herodotus, nevertheless, recognized the influence of traditions upon each other. He had a particularly keen eye for the influences on the Greek tradition, which itself served him as a basic reference for other traditions.¹⁴⁹ Cultural import and indirect lines of transfer are the rule rather than the exception. In Chapter 49 of *Euterpe*, Herodotus points this out with reference to the cult of Dionysus and its introduction into Greece:

It is my opinion that Melampus was a clever man who had formed for himself an art of divination, and, having learned from Egypt, he introduced much that was new to the Greeks, including the ritual of Dionysus—and he made very little changes in it. I will never believe that the rites in Egypt and those in Greece can resemble each other by coincidence; for in that case the Greek rites would have been in the Greek fashion, and they would not have been so recently instituted. Nor will I admit that the Egyptians could have taken these from the Greeks—either these or any other thing of customary usage. In my opinion, Melampus learned these Dionysiac rites for the most part from Cadmus, the man of Tyre, and from those Phoenicians who came with him to the country now called Boeotia.¹⁵⁰

147 See Reinhold Bichler and Robert Rollinger, *Herodot* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 57.

148 See Walter Burkert, "Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen," 1–32.

149 Herodotus, thus, appears to associate himself with skeptical intellectual positions held by the sophist Protagoras. See Rosalind Thomas, "The intellectual milieu of Herodotus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, eds. Carolyn Dewald and John Marincola (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67–69.

150 Here and in most of the following I use the translation by David Grene (Herodotus, *The History*, trans. David Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 152–153).

Herodotus' evolutionary history of religion is, therefore, not so much a success story for the Greek pantheon but rather a descriptive attempt to deal with a situation of religious diversity. This does not exclude, however, either convictions of the reality of the Gods or the supremacy of certain traditions over others. As such, Herodotus' diffusion theory of religion is based upon the assumption that the basic structure of polytheism, as well as its material expression, first came into being in Egypt, which is as such set apart from other, more uncivilized and primitive countries.¹⁵¹

Herodotus himself reflected intensely on his method of interpretation. For him, names are not idle but an important, if not the most important, means of translation, especially in religious matters. Names indicate substance and action. In a much-debated statement in Book II, Chapter 3, he contemplates the presentation of his discussions with Egyptian priests in his *Histories*:

Those parts of their narrations regarding the gods, which I heard, I am not willing to relate in full, except for the names alone, because I think that all men know the same about them; and whatever of them I may record, I shall record only because I am forced by the logos to do so.¹⁵²

When it comes to the gods, a particular form of language is needed—that is, a language capable of leaving things unspoken—and, not less important, at the same time explicitly talking about that particular language, perhaps in order to prove one's piety. Herodotus here famously employs the rhetorical gesture of aposiopesis, the device of suddenly breaking off in speech, in his narrative account.¹⁵³ The names of the Gods play a special role in piously conveying the utterances of the religious specialists of the country, for these names, as a focus of common knowledge, might serve as connecting devices or interfaces in the process of understanding.

The names of nearly all the gods came from Egypt to Greece. That these gods came from the barbarians I found on inquiry to be true; personally, I believe they came from Egypt. For except for Poseidon and the Discouri, as I mentioned before, and also Hera, Hestia, Themis, and the Graces and

¹⁵¹ See Bichler and Rollinger, *Herodot*, 56.

¹⁵² My translation, with reference to the German translation by Kai Brodersen (*Herodot, Historien. Zweites Buch*, trans. and ed. Kai Brodersen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), 13).

¹⁵³ See Gödde, "οὐ μοι ὁσίον ἔστι λέγειν," 50.

Nereids, of all other gods the names have always existed in Egypt. I say what the Egyptians themselves say.¹⁵⁴

The communicative function of the names of the Gods is corroborated in Erik Hornung's description of the 'particular formality' (*eigentümliche Formelhaftigkeit*) of the Egyptian Gods. According to him, they favor syncretism and the willingness to adopt other Gods or to recognize one's own Gods in the Gods of other people—in short, they favour translation processes.¹⁵⁵ For Herodotus, the claim that the Egyptians discovered the suitable 'names' of the Gods indicates their basic field of action or the context they are located within.¹⁵⁶ As an example, Herodotus, in Book 2, Chapter 43, tries to show that the name of Heracles is of Egyptian origin: "Now, certainly the Egyptians did not get the name of Heracles from the Greeks, but rather the Greeks got it from the Egyptians. And indeed, it was the Greeks who got it or who put the name of Heracles upon the son of Amphitryon. I have many proofs of this [...]."¹⁵⁷ Interestingly enough, for Herodotus the *logos* that may be the logic of narration (a particular context of indication) serves as the measure of piety of language.

Herodotus's assessment of secrets is to be found in Chapters 170 and 171 of *Euterpe*. Here, Herodotus describes an Egyptian burial site and ritual complex located in the city of Saïs. Additionally, he reflects on the issue of what language is appropriate for his description. Closely connected to the description of this particular space, the role of a notion of secret as an *interface* in the process of religious contact becomes evident.

154 Herodotus, *The History* (11, 50), 153. For a detailed discussion on Herodotus' claims on the Egyptian origins of the Greek names of the Gods, see Thomas Harrison, "Herodotus' Conception of Foreign Languages," *Histos* 2 (1998): 26–29.

155 Summarizing his argument, Hornung draws instructive parallels with modern philosophical theory of language: "Für Griechen wie für Ägypter ist jeder Gott eine eigene Welt, die sich gestalthaft offenbart. Aber die einen legen den Nachdruck mehr auf die offenbarende Gestalt, die anderen auf die Formel, die sie mitteilt, die den jeweiligen Weltinhalt beschreibt. Für diese Beschreibung reicht die natürliche Sprache nicht aus, es bedarf einer höheren, formalisierten Sprache, die wir gern als Meta-Sprache bezeichnen möchten—wenn auch nicht ganz im Sinne von Tarski, der diesen Begriff für eine Sprache geprägt hat, in der über eine andere (die Objektsprache) gesprochen wird. Wir zielen hier noch einmal auf die Formelhaftigkeit der Göttergestalten und auf die zunächst erstaunliche Tatsache, daß ihre Ikonographie in Ägypten so wenig festgelegt erscheint, vielmehr in einer breiten Streuung wechselt. Offenbar kommt die Meta-Sprache nicht mit *einem* Bildzeichen aus, sondern ist auf die ständig neu formulierte Kombination von vielen Zeichen angewiesen." Erik Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen. Ägyptische Gottesvorstellungen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 253.

156 See Bichler and Rolinger, *Herodot.*, 57.

157 Herodotus, *The History* (11, 43), 149.

Also at Saïs is the burial place of the One whom I regard it as not holy to name in such a connection; it is in the shrine of Athena, behind the temple, close to the entire wall. Also in the precinct there are great stone obelisks, and, near by, a lake with an ornamental stone coping, very well wrought in a circle; its size, in my opinion, is about that of what is in Delos called the Round Pond.

On this lake they hold, at night, an exhibition of the god's sufferings, a performance that the Egyptians call the Mysteries. I know more about each element of these, but let me hold my peace. And again, about the rites of Demeter that the Greeks call the Thesmophoria, let me hold my peace—save insofar as it is right for me to speak. It was the daughters of Danaus who brought this rite from Egypt and taught it to the Pelasgian women. Afterwards, when the Peloponnesus had its population driven out by the Dorians, the rite perished, and it was the only people in the Peloponnesus who were not driven out but remained—namely, the Arcadians—who preserved it.¹⁵⁸

This is a striking example of the relationship between secret and language in contact situations, or rather, in the course of translation or transfer. The blank spaces employed by Herodotus in a formulaic manner (οὗ μοι ὄσιόν ἐστι λέγειν) do much more than simply create a poetic fairy-tale atmosphere.¹⁵⁹ It is not only the line of transmission, as indicated by Herodotus in the second part of chapter 171, that provides a connection between the Egyptian and Greek mysteries.¹⁶⁰ Rather, this line of transmission serves as a supplement to this connection Herodotus establishes within the mode of speaking about the mysteries. He calls this mode of speaking, which leaves things unspoken, 'piety'. The pious mode, therefore, serves as a phenomenological method.¹⁶¹ It is tentative and indicative. The language of the secret, though seemingly very unsatisfactory to the curious mind, works very well as a means of contact. The silence on

158 Herodotus, *The History* (II, 170–171), 205 f.

159 Gödde, "οὗ μοι ὄσιόν ἐστι λέγειν," 56.

160 Modern scholars consider it rather 'historically worthless'; see Alan B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II. Commentary* 99–182 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 210.

161 Thus, as Susanne Gödde argues, there is no way to reconstruct Herodotus' own religiosity via his implementation of the pious mode in his narrative. Rather, ritual formulas are used for a poetic or narratological aim: "Herodot setzt die ihm aus seiner Kultur vertraute Figur der Geheimhaltung ein, um das Angedeutete im Sinne des Geheimnisses zu exponieren. [...] Der literarische Text eignet sich hier sprachliche Muster ritueller Praxis an und spielt mit dem religiösen Wissen seines Publikums." Gödde, "οὗ μοι ὄσιόν ἐστι λέγειν," 66–67.

the mysteries is in fact 'good speaking'.¹⁶² It is the proper way of speaking about mystery, and this language has an impact on religious contact. By articulating his intention to keep the secret secret, as piety demands—leaving it a blank space—Herodotus does not alienate his audience from the Egyptian religion but rather brings them closer. His audience had a particular background, and thus, they were familiar with these matters. To the Greeks, secrecy with regard to the mystery cults was 'radical'.¹⁶³ So, in talking about the secret while piously preserving its content, Herodotus is able to produce an acquaintance between someone who is used to the secrecy of the mystery cults in Greece and the Egyptian cult practice.¹⁶⁴ Accordingly, the paradox of the secret becomes an important instrument in the contact-promoting function of the secret. By using the rhetorical form of aposiopesis, Herodotus invites his audience to connect this new secret to their own frames of reference. As the Greek audience is able to connect the Greek context of indication to the blank space of the secret in the Egyptian cult, they reach what can be termed a framing understanding applicable to the whole of Egyptian religion.¹⁶⁵ The blank spaces overlap, providing an opportunity to access the other semiosphere. Through speaking about something in a non-indicative fashion, Herodotus is communicating more than merely saying what the secrets are 'really' all about.

References to the size of the 'Round Pond' at Delos, the miraculous birthplace of the twin gods Artemis and Apollo, form another example. According to Alan Lloyd, it is "well nigh certain that similarities between this myth and elements of the Osirian cycle would have facilitated comparison with Eg[yp]tian sacred lakes."¹⁶⁶ True enough, but the comparison of these bodies of water may also have served as an impressive metaphor for Herodotus's own practice of comparison. Since we know that the Egyptian pool in fact must

162 See Walter Burkert, "Mysterien der Ägypter in griechischer Sicht. Projektionen im Kulturkontakt," in *Ägyptische Mysterien?*, eds. Jan Assmann and Martin Bommas (München: Fink, 2002), 11.

163 Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion. Archaic and Classical* (Malden: Blackwell, 2013), 276.

164 "Wenn die Griechen, voran Herodot, 'Mysterien' in Ägypten fanden, haben sie etwas gesehen, was ihnen nicht nur imponierte, sondern in gewissen Maße bekannt vorkam, eine Jenseits-Religion, bestimmt durch Isis-Demeter und Osiris-Dionysos mit auffälligen nächtlichen Zeige-Ritualen; sie haben die aber aus ihrer eigenen Optik gesehen, und was sie übernahmen, haben sie ganz den eigenen Formen angepaßt, eben als *mysteria*." Burkert, "Mysterien der Ägypter," 16.

165 A corresponding process is examined by Jan Schäfer in his analysis of the intertextual references in the *Acta Apostolorum*, see Schäfer, "Zur Funktion der Dionysosmysterien in der Apostelgeschichte," 220 f.

166 Lloyd, *Herodotus Book 11. Commentary* 99–182, 209.

have been rectangular,¹⁶⁷ the reference to the round pond at Delos as comparable to the Egyptian one can be read as solving the squaring of the circle by means of the secret, which here again serves as an interface for religious transfer.¹⁶⁸ Of course, the squaring of the circle does not work in a way that would satisfy a philologically zealous modern scholar, but, nevertheless, it is the attempt that counts.¹⁶⁹ In this attempt, Herodotus's primary aim is once again achieved: the promotion of communication through the form of secret, not a reduction or restriction.¹⁷⁰ As such, I argue that this way of promoting communication contributed to the "astounding level of intercultural translatability" of the cultures and polytheisms of antiquity¹⁷¹ by providing functional equivalences for the Gods.¹⁷² Moreover, there are hints that Herodotus in fact

167 See Burkert, "Mysterien der Ägypter," 11. Compare also Lloyd, *Herodotus Book 11. Commentary* 99–182, 208–209.

168 See also the position at the interface of the Mysteries of Samothrake, as analyzed by Jan Bremmer in his chapter *Mysteries at the Interface of Greece and Anatolia: Samothracian Gods, Kabeiroi and Korybantes*, in Bremmer, *Initiation to the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 54. The result of secret or mystery guided comparison performed by the Greeks, despite all differences, was an increase in knowledge: "These similarities seem to have influenced the Greeks much more than the differences, and, from the fifth century onwards, this led to an increasing identification of these gods, first in literature but eventually also in inscriptions [...]."

169 "The Thesmophoria was not identical with the *mystēria* which H. has just mentioned but features at this point by an association of ideas for several reasons: 1. H. identified Demeter with Isis (11, 59, 122–3) and Isis was one of the most important figures in the Osirian 'mysteries'. 2. H. considered the rites performed on the lake to be *mystēria*; in Greece the rites of the Thesmophoria, though not *mystēria* in the strict sense, were shrouded in the atmosphere of secrecy and taboo particularly associated with such cults [...]." Lloyd, *Herodotus Book 11. Commentary* 99–182, 210.

170 See Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 60. Of course, Herodotus' idea contains certain restrictions, for he does not claim cultural integration is possible but rather meditates on its impossibility (see Harrison, "Herodotus' Conception of Foreign Languages," 6).

171 See Jan Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 73.

172 On the role of interchangeability and transferability of divine names and functions in the horizontally and vertically dynamic process of monotheising association and, ultimately, assimilation in a former polytheistic context see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 76: "Assimilation indicated that this mutuality, usually described as syncretism, was no longer operative, and that the social force of one divinity, especially when sustained and promoted by a central political instance, had become so overwhelming as to result in subordination, or even in obliteration of the socially or politically subordinate deity. It indicates that, once having run its potential course, a horizontal transference takes place between gods, formally abjuring and cultically eradicating all but one, leading to a vertical transference in which an indivisible divine remit is lodged in a particular name such

further exploited the communicative function of the 'talking' secret. It might be argued that he deliberately introduced secrets into his account of Egypt in order to render certain mythical elements comparable to Greek ones: "That Herodotus mentions the sufferings of Osiris but assiduously keeps silent about them, although in Egypt itself there was no secret about the details of this myth, is to be explained by the assumption that the corresponding myth of the dismemberment of Dionysos was an unspeakable doctrine of the mysteries."¹⁷³

Herodotus arrives at the seemingly paradoxical conclusion that the increase in knowledge, not least about other religious traditions, is much greater if one resists the urge to discover the concrete content of the secret. Here, then, is another paradox of the secret: knowing less is knowing more. That Herodotus, as he states, knows more of the content of some rites might serve as an indication that knowledge on these matters is at least potentially possible for any visitor who is familiar with the rites in Greece. In his study on *Mysterien der Ägypter in griechischer Sicht* (*Egyptian Mysteries from a Greek Viewpoint*), Walter Burkert describes Herodotus's account as follows: "In Herodotus, we find a partial understanding for the cult of Isis and Osiris, which is guided by the authentic experience of the Mysteries of Dionysios and Demeter."¹⁷⁴ As a consequence, the case of Herodotus shows that partial understanding can be achieved through a combination of one's own prejudices within a certain historical background and a particular linguistic piety over the content of the secret.

Of course, the problem of quite how to evaluate Herodotus's 'partial understanding' is another matter, but this need to evaluate is itself an ideological formation within a certain branch of science anyway. It is not my intention to evaluate here whether Herodotus' account of Egypt is adequate ('realistic') or a mere construction. Regardless of whether Egyptian religion was indeed a religion of secrets,¹⁷⁵ Herodotus found that the best way to make himself understandable to his Greek readers was to allude to rites of the Greek mystery cults, which were known to be unknown. Thus, he not only provides a projection of his own background as a report on the Egyptian religion but exemplifies religious contact as guided by semantic blank spaces. Given this blank space, the Greek audience may connect their own *logos*, their context

as Yahweh or Allāh, obliterating the distinction of divine persons endowed with special functions (such as fortune or protection), locations or personal names, and allocating all supra-mundane functions to one person only."

173 Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 298.

174 Walter Burkert, "Mysterien der Ägypter," 15.

175 On this question compare Wick, *Das Geheimnis des Evangeliums*, 115.

of indication.¹⁷⁶ Thus, they arrive at a ‘partial understanding’ of the Egyptian Gods and the Egyptian religion, which may be (and often is) wrong in the details but, nevertheless, opens a horizon of possible understanding. Secrets are thus used as *tertia comparationis* between traditions on an object language level to promote rather than prevent contact.

4.2 *Paul and the Interpretatio Christiana*

In the antique world, secrets and secrecy were major devices for reference and the transfer of religious ideas. Philo of Alexandria and the rabbis borrowed the very language of Hellenistic Mystery cults in their own biblical exegesis.¹⁷⁷ Gnostic authors could expect to be understood in their promise to possess, continue, and, perhaps, to reveal hidden knowledge with reference to ‘secrets’. Esoteric methods of secrecy, for example, keeping secrets oral and limiting access, were known, understood and applied by Jews and Christians. Even Manichaeism, with its claim of a prophet who ultimately revealed in its entirety to all people, also relied on the attraction of a statement claiming that “All the secrets which my Father has given to me, while I have hidden and covered (them) from the sects and the heathen, and still more from the world, to you I have revealed according to the pleasure of my most blessed Father” (CMC 69, 615).¹⁷⁸

The opening of horizons of possible understanding, of course, also provides a starting point for missions as well as for description. Religious traditions made good use of this potential contained within the secret as a connecting blank space. The famous but rather contested speech of Paul at the council of the Areopagus on the Unknown God, to whom an altar in Athens was devoted (Acts 17,22–31), might serve as another example of the function of secrets as interface.¹⁷⁹ As a contact situation, this series of events that took place at the center of the cultural capital of the Greek-speaking world could not have

176 On the existence of a Panhellenic context of indication, here termed a ‘mental map of sacred landscape’ (including the mystery cults) inscribed in Greeks’ minds in Herodotus’ account, see Peter Funke, “Herodotus and the Major Sanctuaries of the Greek World,” in *The World of Herodotus. Proceedings of an International Conference held at the Foundation Anastasios G. Leventis, Nicosia, September 18–21, 2003*, eds. V. Karagheorgis and J. Taifacos (Nicosia, 2004), 162, 165.

177 See Bremmer, *Initiation to the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 149.

178 The examples and the quotation here are drawn from Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, “Esotericism in Mani’s Thought and Background,” in *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis. Atti del Simposio Internazionale*, ed. Luigi Cirillo (Costenza: Marra, 1986), 157–159.

179 On the particularities of the location of the scene see Arco Den Heijer, *Portraits of Paul’s Performance in the Book of Acts. Luke’s Apologetic Strategy in the Depiction of Paul as a Messenger of God* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2021), 133.

been more significant.¹⁸⁰ For good reasons, the Areopagus speech can be seen as one of the most striking scenes across the entire narrative of the *Acta Apostolorum*.¹⁸¹ Moreover, it is precisely here that the path-finding role of a secret becomes prominent as a strategy in a contact situation.¹⁸²

In Paul and the Athenians, the insignificance of the content of the secret is, once again, evident. For examination of the strategy employed by Paul,¹⁸³ or rather, by Luke as the narrator of the scene,¹⁸⁴ the question of whether such an altar in fact existed and if it really contained the inscription that Paul refers to is of equally little importance as the question of the authenticity of the speech which, to many commentators, seems to be incompatible to Pauline theology.¹⁸⁵

Throughout the narration, Luke uses commonplaces, or *topoi*, to indicate the specific context of the situation.¹⁸⁶ This is done to stress the dramatic tone of the scene, which not only puts Paul on trial but also relates him to Socrates's

180 See Albert Henrichs, "Anonymity and Polarity: Unknown Gods and Nameless Altars at the Areopagos," *Illinois Classical Studies* 19 (1994): 29.

181 C. Kevin Rowe, "The Grammar of Life: The Areopagus Speech and Pagan Tradition," *New Testament Studies* 57 (2010): 31.

182 On the success of Paul's efforts see Wick, *Das Geheimnis des Evangeliums*, 373.

183 On the possible influence of 'Mystery terminology' on Paul, see Bremmer, *Initiation to the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 150.

184 See Rowe, "The Grammar of Life," 36 f. On Paul's own use of the concepts of mystery and secret compare Birger A. Pearson, "Mystery and Secrecy in Paul," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practice. Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty*, eds. Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012). Examining Paul's treatment of secrecy and secrecy Pearson concludes: "It is to be noted that in all of these instances except one the 'secrets' that Paul refers to are secrets kept by other people. The one exception is the wisdom of the cross that God had kept secret until the appointed time. As for Paul himself, he has no secrets at all. The 'mysteries' that he conveys to his congregation are conveyed openly to all. In Paul's congregations, including the Corinthian one, there is no special group of 'mature' people capable of receiving higher wisdom" (*ibid.*, 300).

185 See Jürgen Becker, *Paulus. Der Apostel der Völker* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck (UTB), 1998), 135: "Auch inhaltlich widerspricht die Rede so stark der paulinischen Theologie, daß man sie dem Völkerapostel auch nicht in Grundzügen zutrauen kann." Martin Dibelius characterized it as a 'Hellenistic speech with a Christian ending', that was, nevertheless, a starting point of the Hellenization of theology, itself more influential on the later ecclesiastic theology than the 'authentic' Paul. Martin Dibelius, "Paulus auf dem Areopag," in *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte*, eds. Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1951), 54, 59.

186 "Der erzählende Rahmen besteht aus einer Reihe von Motiven, die damals jeder halbwegs Gebildete als spezifisch athenisch kannte: die vielen Tempel und Götterbilder, die besondere Frömmigkeit der Athener, ihre philosophischen Schulen, der Areopag (Hügel und Gericht!), die sokratischen Gespräche auf dem Markt, die Einführung neuer Götter, die athenische Neugier. Lukas hat diese Motive in solcher Dichte aufeinanderfolgen lassen,

well-known fate. The scene, therefore, takes place in a conspicuous space¹⁸⁷ that is diachronically intensified by an air of considerable risk.¹⁸⁸

However, this is not only done in order to conjure the specific atmosphere of Athens but rather to provide Paul and the reader of the Acts with a series of possible connectabilities (*Anschlußmöglichkeiten*). Paul faces a typical Athenian audience that includes philosophers.¹⁸⁹ Confronted with the Athenians' reproach that he seeks to introduce 'strange' Gods, Luke's Paul makes use of the various constellations that made up the religious atmosphere in Athens. In Acts 17:23, he is introduced during his examination of the religious situation in which he beholds the Athenians' devotion and the notorious curiosity of the Athenians (*For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean*, Acts 17,20), and also by means of the complementary secret he himself can provide. Paul goes one decisive step further and confronts them, equating the blank space of the Unknown God, embedded in a certain kind of context of indication within the Athenian semiosphere, with the secret of his God placed in the semiosphere of the Gospel. Thus, *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you* (Acts 17,23).

Notwithstanding the double meaning of the Greek ἀγνοῦντες, which indicates either lack of knowledge or being deliberately ignorant,¹⁹⁰ to Paul, the inscription on the altar is a blank space, designating the very place where the Athenian's religious context of indication might be open for the Gospel.¹⁹¹ The inscription, thus, may be described as an invitational kind of model form. In his apostolic efforts, Paul makes use of this possibility to intervene by inscribing into the model form and reading into the inscription. Via reinterpretation, Paul enables the Athenians to access the secret of his God by using the common space of intersection, namely the blank space indicated by the altar's inscription 'To the unknown God': *For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD*. As his secret is not identical to the unknown God of the Athenians, paths of possible relations

daß der Eindruck athenischen Lebens und Geistes den Leser gefangennimmt." Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 465.

187 On the concrete spatial setting of the scene as a place surrounded and dispersed by temples and other official buildings, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Contextualizing Paul in Athens: The Proclamation of the Gospel before Pagan Audiences in the Graeco-Roman World," *Religion & Theology* 12 (2005): 172–173.

188 See Rowe, "The Grammar of Life," 37–38.

189 Den Heijer, *Portraits of Paul's Performance*, 137.

190 See den Heijer, *Portraits of Paul's Performance*, 144.

191 Compare Mark D. Given, "Not Either/Or but Both/And in Paul's Areopagus Speech," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995): 365–366.

between mutually unknown areas of each side are opened for further translation processes, resulting in a concrescence of both traditions to produce something later called Christianity. With reference to the line quoted above, the way the Athenians *ignorantly worship* the unknown God is somehow suitable for the God *declared* by Paul; hence a certain religious practice, worship of and curiosity for the unknown (the attraction toward secrets), is thus a possible means of communication between two traditions. In this sense, the description of the speech as a 'key scene' of the whole Acts, due to the confrontation of the Gospel and Hellenistic (philosophical) religiosity, carries an important meaning.¹⁹² Although it may not be an intentional *interpretatio christiana*, it refers to the instrumentalization of secret structures (*secretism*) on the object level in order to open up mutual 'understanding' between different traditions in a situation of contact.¹⁹³ Via the blank space, pagan philosophical or religious vocabulary can be incorporated into a different overall interpretative framework, or rather, an alternative hermeneutical context of indication.¹⁹⁴

5 Conclusion: Secrets and Formal Indication of Concepts

Using the interface provided by the secret's blank space, the indicational contexts of two religious traditions can be mapped upon each other, thus providing new possibilities of reading as well as possibilities for re-reading one's own tradition. In conclusion, let me dwell on the frame of the language of the secret via the Graeco-Egyptian example. In this case, the frame of the blank space, or its indicational context, can be described in some more detail with regard to its form. In his study of Egyptian secrets, Jan Assmann describes the special *context of indication* related to the concept of mystery:

192 See Jürgen Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*. NTD 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 254.

193 Related to the Pauline case is the (Christian) interpretation of the secret-as-interface after the 'model of the preliminary stage'. See for example Lactantius's account of Hermes Trismegistos: the secret of God being unrecognizable was prefigured and worshipped by Hermes, although he was unable to gain real insight. This was later explained following the birth of Christ; hence for Lactantius, Hermetism, as well as Platonism, serve as an overture to Christianity and are free from being accused as paganism. See Florian Ebeling, *Das Geheimnis des Hermes Trismegistos. Geschichte des Hermetismus* (München: Beck, 2009), 66–68.

194 See Rowe, "The Grammar of Life," 43.

We understand the world of the Gods as a form that is, as something structured. The Gods are related to each other by means of kinship and rule, and are separated more or less clearly from each other by differences of sex, qualities, field of power etc. But that is not all, they are additionally associated by those relations of action and the role, which I, in order to prevent the notion of myth, have described as constellations. [...] The Gods fulfill their roles within the active (and passive) relations of constellation but not yet within the narrative contexts of action in myth.¹⁹⁵

Thus, the contexts of indication are not yet integrated into an overarching narrative but can be seen as preparation of the formal structures which later on may be used for mythical narration. These narrations, in turn, rely on stories the reader is able to control, that is, they are given by his individual background.

The notion of secret, thus, is an example of *formal indication*.¹⁹⁶ Formal indication is a phenomenological device that does not determine the phenomenon in question with regard to its 'content' in phenomenological description, hence regarding its subjects as blank spaces. Therefore, the formal indication serves as a *sign* that attention should be paid and a reminder not to overwhelm the phenomenon (by 'filling' it with supposed content). But at the same time, it indicates a *direction* to the possible experience of its meaning. This particular movement is typical of the religious language of the secret. In his discussion of Clement of Alexandria's concept of the secret, Guy Stroumsa, for example, points to this function by stating: "For Clement, the language of secrecy is meant not only to hide the experience, but also to prepare it."¹⁹⁷

No matter how far this theoretical prospect may carry us, the language and the notion of the secret prove important promoters of contact, allowing certain narratives or contexts of indication to connect together.

The decisive fact is that representatives of different religious traditions never understand each other better than when they tell each other about of their secrets within the context of indication that makes their tradition.¹⁹⁸ It

195 Jan Assmann, *Ägyptische Geheimnisse* (München: Fink, 2004), 36 (my translation).

196 On this concept which is borrowed from Heidegger's thinking (*formale Anzeige*) see my monograph Knut Martin Stünkel, "Formal anzeigendes Philosophieren. Heideggers Denken 1916–1976," (PhD. Diss., Universität Bielefeld, 2002).

197 Guy G. Stroumsa, "Clement, Origin, and Jewish Esoteric Traditions," 127.

198 On the object language level this might also be used to propagate the superiority of one's own religious tradition, such as in Daniel 2. Here, the king of Babylon has a disturbing dream and tests his entourage of experts by demanding that they reveal both the dream he had and its meaning, thus keeping the dream itself secret from them. All experts unanimously declare that this is impossible "There is not a man upon the earth that can shew

is not only the capacity to depart from the immediate social context but also the establishment of a second world that multiplies the contents of human existence, alluded to by Georg Simmel, which made the secret a first-rate human invention—"one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity."¹⁹⁹ The preeminence of the secret as a human accomplishment is also due to its interreligious capacity. In general, "Secrecy may leave hermeneutic space for multiple interpretations and thereby invite pluralism and resistance [...]."²⁰⁰ Such left space, or the "void of the secret" as Mark Teeuwen puts it, may be perceived as a passageway.²⁰¹ This is indeed the case: they are not only passageways to a world beyond but also to another world, into another tradition. The dangerous passage of the secret, embodying "the dilemma of all ethnography" as described by Urban, is the most promising one.²⁰² The language of the secret turns out to be a most suitable instrument for religious transfer. Of course, this capacity can also be used in situations of competition, wherein the secret is a contested (blank) space between religious traditions. Here, the strategies of the secret may lead to inclusions, such as the conversion of pagans as the mystery that is revealed to *Paul* in Eph 3:5–6: "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" and Col 1:26–27: "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints; To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles;

the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chal-de'an." (Dan 2:10) *including* the matador of the Hebrew God, Daniel, who feels equally unable to fulfill the king's demand. Daniel now faced the same grim perspective of being executed together with the other experts on the king's orders. Thus, the blank space of the secret of the dream connects the contesting traditions of the narrative insofar as it cannot be known to any of them. It is here on this common ground that the God of Israel shows his superiority by revealing the dream and its meaning to Daniel—the contest is won by direct impact of the divine. On this passage, see Alan Lenzi, "Secrecy, Textual Legitimation, and Inter-Cultural Polemics in the Book of Daniel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71 (2009): 340–344.

199 "Das Geheimnis in diesem Sinne, das durch negative oder positive Mittel getragene Verbergen von Wirklichkeiten, ist eine der größten Errungenschaften der Menschheit [...] durch das Geheimnis [wird] eine ungeheure Erweiterung des Lebens erreicht, weil vielerlei Inhalte desselben bei völliger Publizität überhaupt nicht auftauchen können. Das Geheimnis bietet sozusagen die Möglichkeit einer zweiten Welt neben der offenbaren, und diese wird von jener auf das stärkste beeinflusst." Georg Simmel, *Soziologie*, 272.

200 Johnson, *Secret, Gossip and Gods*, 5.

201 Teeuwen, "Introduction," 8.

202 Urban, "The Torment of Secrecy," 210.

which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Thus, the newly converted become participants in the community of salvation.²⁰³ The *mysterion* becomes the password and the entranceway.

However, there is yet another prospect for further inquiries on the phenomenon of religious language. As in Brazilian Condomblé in Paul Johnson’s study, the rhythm of the secret is also the rhythm of the sacred and the rhythm of religion itself. To Johnson, the patterning of hiding and unveiling, of containing and releasing is the ‘Rhythm of Secrets’, which is also the rhythm of the sacred and—as to him, religion without secrets is unimaginable—the dynamic function of religion itself.²⁰⁴ So, the language of the secret must do likewise. Studying the secret also brings to mind the attempt to generate general concepts in the study of religion through its evasive and non-definable character. A close reading of the secret in religious contact situations may serve as the most striking example of the general character of concepts in religious object language.²⁰⁵ All concepts demand a (pious) tentative phenomenology for description and function as *formally indicative blank spaces* in a (coherent) constellation context of indication.²⁰⁶

203 Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2002), 426f.

204 Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods*, 3.

205 Gregory D. Alles has a similar idea though he describes it as ‘contentious’: “That leads me to wonder whether it might be possible to define religious concepts etically as ‘empty concepts [that] are fully coherent’ [...] and toward which people adopt certain attitudes. I recognize, however, that counterintuitiveness probably provides a less contentious basis for defining religious concepts than ‘fully coherent empty concepts.’” Gregory D. Alles, “The So-Called Cognitive Optimum and the Cost of Religious Concepts,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 18 (2006): 348.

206 See Pascal Boyer’s considerations on the important notion of *evur* in Fang language, usually translated as ‘witchcraft substance’, but very hard to define in more concrete terms: “Notions like *evur* are extremely common in traditional interaction. Almost every anthropologist has, in the course of fieldwork, come across such a term, which is extremely ambiguous, yet is placed at the very heart of traditional discourse. In anthropological descriptions, such terms are often translated as ‘vital force’ or ‘mystical energy’. [...] Informants will readily claim that the ‘x’ in question is a good, evil, necessary, powerful, dangerous thing, they will easily describe the social relationships and ritual acts connected with the ‘x’, the persons supposed to know about such things, but they seem unable to define what the ‘x’ is. Such notions constitute a limiting case for anthropological hypotheses. Although they are of constant use in the traditions concerned, their exact meaning seems to remain obscure or inscrutable to the speakers themselves. This combination of extreme salience and apparent vacuity constitutes a challenge to the common anthropological ideas about traditional categories.” Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication. A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26. As any challenge also provides opportunities, the phenomenological characteristics of extreme salience and apparent vacuity should provide ample

Concerning the secret, it is notable that a tentative phenomenology appears both on the level of metalanguage and on the level of object language. It is this *shifting quality* that makes the notion of secret valid, especially when we concern ourselves with the examination of key concepts in research on religion.²⁰⁷ ‘Secrets’ thus do not ‘only’ promote the contact of religions or the translatability of one religious language but also highlight the fact that object language and metalanguage do not lose contact overly early in the course of scholarly description. Once the two languages are established, discourse can shift between the reflective levels of language, from object language to metalanguage and back again. The last sentence of the *Tractatus* gives further direction to the researcher of secrets: one has to throw away the ladder after climbing it. Therefore, the study of the secret ultimately leads to the study and description of religious concepts in general.²⁰⁸

opportunity for contemplation on the (syntactical) status of certain notions in object language and their suitable employment in scholarly metalanguage.

207 Mark Teeuwen hints at this function in discussing the shift from one discourse of secrecy to another in medieval Japanese Religion. See Teeuwen, “Introduction: Japan’s culture of secrecy,” 10.

208 On the emergence of religious concepts within the contact of religious traditions, see Görges K. Hasselhoff and Knut Martin Stünkel eds., *Transcending Words: The Language of Religious Contacts between Buddhists, Christians, Jews and Muslims in Premodern Times* (Bochum: Winkler, 2015).

Space: “Quoniam, si nonnulla religio est, ut sepeliantur, non potest nulla esse, quando ubi sepeliantur attenditur”¹

The Dead Body as Contested Space: The Case of Augustine

Das Grab ist recht eigentlich ein religiöser Begriff—Nur die Religion und ihre Bekenner liegen in Gräbern.

NOVALIS

...

Religion geht über Leichen.

∴

1 The Dead Body and Its Proper Space in Philosophy and the Study of Religion²

The reintroduction of the body into the process of philosophizing is an ever-popular enterprise. At least for the last 250 years, the accusation that scholars have forgotten the significance of the body is an all-time classic of philosophical criticism in both (mere) rational and idealistic thinking.³ The fixation upon death as a key feature of existentialism, with its roots in Montaigne and Pascal, is a fundamental characteristic of much modern philosophy—and has been ever since the Great War.

1 “Since, if a certain amount of devotion (religion) is shown by burying them, there must also be devotion (religion) involved when the proper space of burial is given attention.” (Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*).

2 An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the KHK workshop *Sites and Rites of Death. Spacing the Corpse in and Across Religious Contexts*, organized by Georgios Halkias and Ana Echevarria on 12 and 13 October 2011.

3 For an example one might think of Johann Georg Hamann’s persistent struggle against the bodily shortcomings of enlightenment rationality, and especially of his friend Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy. See Knut Martin Stünkel, *Leibliche Kommunikation. Studien zum Werk Johann Georg Hamanns* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 203–232.

In religious studies, the boom in studies of the body has been equally long-lasting. Cases and analyses of embodiment in religious traditions already fill libraries, and undoubtedly, more are coming. Likewise, the question of death is often placed at the very center of considerations on the emergence of religious ideas and practices, being the most persistent occasion for religious contingency management (*Kontingenzbewältigung*) and for the introduction of the transcendence/immanence distinction.⁴ As Malinowski famously wrote: "Of all the sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life—death—is of the greatest importance."⁵ Here, Thomas Tweed claims for the dynamic spatiality of death: "[...] all religions propose that death is not a barrier but a transition. Not only do religions both enable and constrain terrestrial and corporeal crossings, but they also permit and restrict other sorts of crossings."⁶

By combining these most interesting elements, one might expect philosophy and religious studies to be haunted by corpses as well as ghosts.⁷ Yet the dead body and the problems of how to handle it analytically have received far less attention than spectral beings. Nevertheless, interesting questions emerge: what is embodied in the dead body?

Moreover, if someone deals with it in a philosophically or theologically reflected way, the author is likely to be accused of occultism. Even upright authors like Augustine are open to such claims. His relevant text, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 'On the care of the dead', is mentioned in classic literary works of the supernatural like J. Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla*.⁸ LeFanu's editor M. R. James, a scholar in the history of religions himself, referred to Augustine's work in his story *Martin's Close*, here as "a favourite book of reference with the old writers of the supernatural."⁹ What is significant in these contexts is that both stories, as tales of female vampires, deal with the relevance of deceased

4 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction

5 Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), 29.

6 Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling. A theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA/ London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 150.

7 Nietzsche and Gilbert Ryle took up the subject of ghosts in philosophy, whilst Jonathan Z Smith and Russell T McCutcheon have done so for religion. Ghosts, and even undead, play a leading role in Tomoko Masuzawa's analysis of the scholarly preoccupation with the search for origins. See Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime. The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1993), 30.

8 Here, the text appears in illustrious company. "*Magia Posthuma, Phlegon de Mirabilibus, Augustinus de Cura pro Mortuis, Philosophicae et Christianae Cogitationes de Vampiris* by John Christopher Herenberg and a thousand others, among which I remember a few of those which he lent to my father." J. Sheridan LeFanu, "Carmilla," in *In A Glass Darkly* (London: Wordsworth, 1995), 269.

9 M.R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), 315.

persons for the living, appearing as dead bodies in contexts from which they are, by definition, excluded.¹⁰ Could it the same be true for the examination of 'lived' religion?

How dead bodies may trouble or even haunt the living and how to prevent them from doing so is a key question in the religious field—something that Augustine, as a careful object language author, did not omit. On the contrary, his writings represent a particular new concern for the body as the body becomes the focus of discussion.¹¹ In religion, the problem of the dead body cannot be simply buried. The process of disposing of the dead has resulted in an abundant variety of conceptions, regulations, and ritual practices among the religious communities, including entombing, mummifying, dismembering, embalming, cremating, burying, and even consuming the bodies or feeding them to vultures. The reverence for relics is simply the most significant example of a religious way of dealing with dead bodies, or at least with parts of them.¹² However, there are more normal individuals that must be buried than

10 Visions of dead persons are explained to be works of angels and not of the deceased themselves ("angelicis igitur operationibus fieri crediderim", Augustinus, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, in Paula Johanna Rose, "Augustine on the Relations between the Living and the Deceased. A Discourse-Linguistic Commentary on *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*," (PhD Diss., University of Amsterdam, 2011), 242). In the following, I shall quote *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* from the text provided by Rose's commentary. Augustine himself admits that occasions when martyrs or saints actually help and how they bring aid are beyond his understanding. Interestingly enough, he relates his incapacity to understand to temporal, and, above all, spatial questions, thus indicating that time and space have to be treated differently than in common understanding: "quamquam ista quaestio vires intellegentiae meae uincit, quemadmodum opitulentur martyres his, quos per eos certum est adiuuari: utrum ipsi per se ipsos adsint uno tempore tam diuersis locis et tanta inter se longinquitate discretis, siue ubi sunt eorum memoriae siue praeter suas memorias, ubicumque adesse sentiuntur, an ipsis in loco suis meritis congruo ab omni mortalium conuersatione remotis et tamen generaliter orantibus pro indigentia supplicantium—sicut nos oramus pro mortuis, quibus utique non praesentamur nec ubi sint uel quid agant scimus—deus omnipotens, qui est ubique praesens nec concretus nobis nec remotus a nobis, exaudiens martyrum preces, per angelica ministeria usquequaque diffusa praebeat hominibus ista solacia, quibus in huius uitae miseria iudicat esse praebebenda, et suorum martyrum merita ubi uult, quando uult, quomodo uult, maximeque per eorum memorias, quoniam hoc nouit expedire nobis ad aedificandam fidem Christi, pro cuius illi confessione sunt passi, mirabili atque ineffabili potestate ac bonitate commendet." *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 391–393.

11 See Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press, 2009), xi.

12 In Augustin's attitude towards relics and emerging cult of relics in Christianity, see Justin Zangré, *Les rites funéraires dans l'Afrique du Nord chrétienne du 3e aux 5e s. à la lumière des oeuvres de Tertullien, Cyprien, Lactance et Augustin*, (PhD Diss., Université de Strasbourg, 2016), 380–398.

there are religious heroes, and it is the 'normal' people's space after their death that should attract further conceptual consideration and practical elaboration for both religious object language authors and scholars alike. Therefore, if two sets of such death-related conceptions, regulations, and ritual practices meet in a situation of contact, profound disagreement on the proper methods for handling the dead is likely to emerge. With such disagreements, the possibility to compare emerges.¹³

The answers formulated to the question of how to deal with the dead bodies are strongly related to the way the body is described and interpreted. The corpse is a disturbing figure, but one that can be dealt with in different and often contestable and contested ways. Especially intriguing is the question of *space*, for the dead body might be described as a space characterized by loss or non-presence, something that is difficult to handle as objective presence.

Spacing the corpse, therefore, can be considered an important religious practice that gains its meaningful significance through contestation over the question of how to do it properly. "Religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate ones 'situation' so as to have 'space' in which to meaningfully dwell."¹⁴ The definition of 'proper', therefore, relies on religious ideas as well as the specific description of the object in question. It is not merely the disposition of the body but the re-location of it in the semiosphere of a religious context.

The question for the dead body, thus, hints toward the topic of space in general.¹⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, in his collection of essays, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, famously argued that place is a product of human thought and placing a matter of human practice, not least with regard to the human

13 On the dead body and the grave as spaces of possible intersection between religious traditions, see Alexandra Cuffel, *Shared Saints and Festivals Among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press 2024), 20: Furthermore, the development of attitudes among the different communities toward the dead, holy or otherwise, and their ability to intercede for or communicate with the living, and the need on the part of the dead for the prayers of the living, had substantial points of mutual influence and/or intersection. Beliefs about the dead were not identical, but they were close enough to facilitate one group's borrowing from another, or participating in another's rites relating to the holy dead. These commonalities, [...] not only made shared rituals easier on the one hand, they also fed the anxieties of some religious leaders that the boundaries between groups were too porous, and that too many 'foreign' practices were being adopted, which corrupted the purity or truth of a given author's religion."

14 Jonathan Z. Smith, "Map is not Territory," in *Map is not Territory. Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1993), 291.

15 As an introduction to the question of space in the humanities, see Susanne Rau, *Räume. Konzepte, Wahrnehmungen, Nutzungen* (Frankfurt/ New York: Campus, 2013).

body: "It is the relationship to the human body, and our experience of it, that orients us in space, that confers meaning to place. Human beings are not placed, they bring place into being."¹⁶ Accordingly, with regard to practices of the religious field, human beings, or rather, bodies, bring a certain place into being when their body (corpse) is religiously 'spaced'. The final space of the dead body is, thus, where religious tradition meets the bodies of the religious, where narrative touches them, where memory becomes religious, where individuality gives its energy and interests to religious stories in order that the model form stories into which the individual inscribes may enter into daily life to be remembered, or re-cast.¹⁷

Moreover, following the core idea of the KHK that religion is all about contact, the particular space of the dead body is a *node of interaction*. As such, it is a dynamic point of confluence where religious traditions meet, interact, and mutually influence each other, especially when it comes to questions of how to space the body, the grave, and the body within the grave properly.¹⁸ Early Christianity, among other faiths, displayed a considerable affinity to the tomb as a suitable space of residence.¹⁹ Mark Johnson, writing on the supposed pagan-Christian conflict of fourth-century Rome, has remarked that there was one aspect of the religiously polarized society that remains unclear—"whether or not this conflict extended to the grave."²⁰ As there are many shared graves, it seems that the 'conflict' between pagans and Christians in the times of Augustine perhaps ended at the grave.²¹ There was, however, a conflict with regard to the religious interpretation of the dead body within the (possibly shared) grave. The religious significance of the space qualified by containing a dead body was in accordance with Roman law, which considered the tomb as a *res religiosa*—but only if a corpse has indeed been placed in residence there.²² Here, the dead body makes a religious statement. The process of

16 Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place. Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 28.

17 See chapter on Model Forms.

18 See Reinhold Gleis and Nikolas Jaspert, "Terms, Turns and Traps: Some Introductory Remarks," in *Locating Religions*, eds. Reinhold Gleis and Nikolas Jaspert (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2017), 3.

19 See Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, "Living in Tombs: The Secret of an Early Christian Mystical Experience," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices*, eds. Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012).

20 Mark J. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century: Shared Tombs?," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1997): 37.

21 Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century," 59.

22 Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century," 39.

finding a suitable location for the corpse is a complex social construction that combines notions of material space with notions of transcendental or mental spaces.²³ The space of the corpse, thus, becomes a manifest mediation of the transcendence/immanence distinction and an indicator of the way religious traditions deal with that distinction by dealing with the most significant manifestation of contingency in human existence. The third spatial dimension of places described as religious, the *vertical* order, is a vital element of the way the space of the body is constructed in religious traditions.

In the case of Augustine, which will be discussed in the following, the thesis that 'death rites are vital to the definition and redefinition of religious ideas', proves especially valid. However, it is not only the experience of death that shapes both Augustine's thinking in particular and religious ideas in general.²⁴ Defining religious ideas by means of a reflection on the proper way of 'spacing the corpse' bears definite relevance to the contact dimension of the history of religions. In Augustine, the problem of spacing the corpse is solved by answering the question of how to describe the dead body and how to deal with the space that is manifested in it. This combination of semantics and pragmatics leads to a semiotic result.

Yet Augustine's ideas are not merely a product of a theologian's ivory tower but emerged in diverse situations of religious contact that decisively shaped their form. Scholarship in general has stressed the relational character of Augustine's work, which emerged in concrete discussions with his environment and in his reactions to contemporary events. After all, Augustine, despite some short periods of retreat, was an official figure throughout his life, both as a teacher, a *rhetor*, a professor, and later on as a priest, a preacher, and a bishop. Likewise, throughout his life, he is entangled in discursive struggles and arguments. Over half of his writings are either outright polemics or bear at least a polemic character.²⁵

The polemic nature of his writing is the most visible characteristic of the highly contested religious field of Augustine's time. Northern Africa in late antiquity is, in many regards, an outstanding field in which to study the formative phase of a religion and, perhaps, for religion in general. To Maureen A. Tilley, the area provided Christianity as it institutionalized "with a bounteous

23 Gleij/Jaspart, "Terms, Turns, and Traps," 6.

24 Compare Wilhelm Geerlings, *Augustinus* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1999), 15.

25 See Uwe Neumann, *Augustinus* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1998), 54. Here, Neumann also asks if all of these struggles were really merely imposed upon Augustine or if they are rather due to a certain 'aggressive potential' within his character. No matter how one answers this question, the importance of situations of contact for his thought is clear.

crop of theological reflection”, laying the roots for contemporary ecclesiology, sacramental theology, and biblical interpretation.²⁶ These results, however, were not easily achieved. Robin Lane Fox stresses the “devastating schism” in Northern Africa (the “Bible belt of Latin antiquity”²⁷), which split the Church into two opposing doctrinal communities, ‘Catholics’ and ‘Donatists’, as a constant presence in Augustine’s life.²⁸ Brent D. Shaw, in his study on North African Christianity and its internal and external struggles, painted a gruesome picture of the intellectual discourse dominated by the formation of Catholic Christianity: “The extent to which this new Christian story both displaced and substituted for all other is breathtaking. The power of this Christian talk was produced by many things, among them a remorseless hortatory pedagogy, a hectoring moralizing of the individual, and a ceaseless management of the minutiae of everyday life. Above all, it was a form of speech marked by an absence of humor. It was a morose and deadly serious world. [...] What passes for a laugh is a ghastly gloss on your enemy’s spiritual death, on your own coming demise, or on the misfortunes of the sinful and the stupid.”²⁹ Thus, serious attempts at gaining a deeper understanding and acknowledgment of the other cannot be expected in the surviving sources from the many contact situations taking place in Augustine’s lifetime.

There is no doubt that Augustine met some of his interreligious and intra-religious opponents on unequal terms. In the historical situation of the beginning fifth century CE, the struggle between pagan religion and Christianity in the Roman empire was at least politically decided in favor of the latter, thus rendering the situation of contact represented in Augustine’s writings asymmetric. However, this triumphalist picture, which depicted pagans as a tiny minority soon to be extinguished, can also be seen as the very product and wishful thinking of writers such as Augustine, who longed for such a result. Even the conflict between clearly defined pagans and Christians, as described by Augustine, often turns out to be an idealized situation that was opposed to the realities of everyday practice in his lifetime. As Éric Rebillard points out,

26 Maureen A. Tilley, “North Africa,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Vol. 1: Origins to Constantine*, eds. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 381.

27 Paula Fredriksen, “Vile Bodies: Paul and Augustine on the Resurrection of the Flesh,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective. Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 84.

28 Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine. Conversions to Confessions* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 25.

29 Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence. African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

“Augustine did use these categories to cast situations in terms of religious conflict and successfully mobilized Christians in support of his agendas. However, he also unambiguously betrays his knowledge that such mobilization was only intermittent and that most Christians deactivated their Christianness once outside the church.”³⁰

Paula Fredriksen has suggested that the contact with Jews reflected in Augustine’s work shows a less aggressive, although still condescending, stance. He—“being [well] as capable of bitter anti-Jewish invective as were any of his fourth-century peers”—even counters anti-Judaism in the wake of his struggle with Manicheism.³¹ Moreover, “Augustine’s ‘Jew’ expressed the continuing positive theological significance of Judaism as an incarnate, historical community; and that community *in principle* stretched continuously from the pages of the Bible (with all its metaphysical heights and depths) to the synagogues of the Late Roman Empire.”³² The actual Jews Augustine might have encountered, thus, became a sign as “history’s Pole star, a continuing quotidian revelation of God’s will shining in the darkness of secular time.”³³ Augustine’s position is related to the political and social situation of the time: Jews were not in danger of becoming the next imperial target, as imperially sanctioned Christian violence was predominantly aimed at other Christians. Augustine, Fredriksen argues, theologically restates how things generally were for Jews.³⁴ Thus, following his interpretation of the biblical ‘mark of Cain’, he is even willing to integrate the Jews in an inferential manner: “Jews and Catholics, he insists, stand together in one religious community, over against all others.”³⁵

However, at least to Augustine himself, the lack of ‘external’ opponents did not mean that ‘internal’ opponents were also lacking in number. On the contrary, Augustine perceived that the residues of ideas and practices of the former external opponents were still around and, hence, to him, constituted a threat to the *vera religio*. Augustine, in this context and as a consequence of his

30 Éric Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 CE* (Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press, 2017), 8.

31 See Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews. A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press, 2010), 261. See *ibid.*, 259: “Confronting Faustus, Augustine brilliantly integrated his defense of catholic dogma and scripture with a startlingly original and positive apologetic for ancient Jewish practice. Both the generation between Abraham and Jesus and the foundational of Jesus and his apostles, he argued, witnessed to catholic truth precisely by living according to the Jewish interpretation of Jewish law.”

32 Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 365.

33 Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 365.

34 See Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 274–275.

35 Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 275.

theological ideas, became a “classic of religious intolerance” (Kurt Flasch)—though, on other occasions, he was able to display a “remarkably eirenic set of suggestions” (Jason BeDuhn). For example, in his passage on the Manichean renegade, Augustine has obviously and ostentatiously no interest in doing justice to Manicheans³⁶ as possible fellow seekers for the truth but rather portrays them most derogatorily as carnal, arrogant, and hypocrite lunatics directed by the devil:

I fell in with a set of sensualists, men with glib tongues who ranted and raved and had the snares of the devil in their mouths. They baited the traps by confusing the syllables of the names of God the Father, God the Son Our Lord Jesus Christ, and God the Holy ghost, the Paraclete, who comforts us. These names were always on the tip of their tongues, but only as sounds which they mouthed aloud, for in their hearts they had no inking of the truth.³⁷

The same asymmetry, basically, holds true for the conflicts with ‘Donatism’ and ‘Pelagianism’³⁸ in which Augustine was involved, either due to his active participation in such or as the background to his writings.³⁹

36 “From his early years onwards, and to the very end of his life, the Manichaeans were a real and powerful force for Augustine. Evidently, they were also considered to be a most dangerous force. One will not find in Augustine’s oeuvre expressions similar to the very derogatory words, and even invectives, which he time and again uttered in denouncing his former fellow believers.” Johannes van Oort, “Manichean Christians in Augustine’s Life and Work,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 90 (2010): 545.

37 Augustine, *Confessions*, vol. 1, eds. James J. O’Donnell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 26 (111, 6). “Itaque incidi in homines superbe delirantes, carnales, nimis et loquaces, in quorum ore laquei diaboli et viscum confectum commixtione syllabarum nominis tui et domini Iesu Christi et paracleti consolatoris nostri spiritus sancti. haec nomina non recedebant de ore eorum, sed tenuis sono et strepitu linguae; ceterum cor inane verum” (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 60). On the Manichaean audience of the *Confessiones* that is “never far from Augustine’s thoughts”, see Annemaré Kotzé, *Augustine’s Confessions. Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 88. Kotzé, however, claims that Augustine’s hostility is aimed against Manichaean theology, but less against Manicheans who are (as himself) possible subjects of conversion: “[T]here are many instances in this work where the attitude displayed towards a potential Manichaean reader is much less harsh than the attitude displayed towards Manichaean dogma.” (ibid., 199)

38 On the pejorative labels Donatism and Pelagianism, see Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 5 and 562.

39 On the emergence of the conflict with Pelagianism, see Shaw’s malicious but probably realistic description: “What a bishop like Augustine needed was a western Mediterranean heresy, one that had roots in his own world—a burning controversy that would be played out on his own ground, in his own language, and to which his knowledge and

Few authors can compete with Augustine in significance when it comes to an evaluation of the importance of situations of religious contact in the emergence and formation of a distinctive philosophy and theology—of ideas that are important for the self-understanding of a religious tradition. Here, many occasions of an object language author trying to establish a descriptive meta-language can be discerned. Due to the reverence the works of Augustine enjoyed in later times, his contact-driven theological ideas and findings were highly influential on the later Christian tradition and its self-understanding. Wilhelm Geerlings even considered him to be the greatest revolutionary figure in the process of Christian tradition-building up to present times, having both adapted and transformed traditions before him and having added new elements with his ideas.⁴⁰ His ideas are both the result and the manifestation of a context-related dynamic process that defies any idea of monolithic intransigent monumentality.⁴¹ According to Jason BeDuhn, Augustine “was, in fact, constantly at work *inventing* a Christianity for himself that—given who he was, or rather what he turned out to be in terms of historical importance—has been widely adopted subsequently as the standard of what Christianity ought to be.”⁴² Examining Augustine, thus, means not only examining Augustine in the making, but also witnessing religion in the making (A.N. Whitehead).

What is more, the significance of these situations of contact is a major theme of Augustine’s self-descriptions and self-analysis, not least in his “Confessions”. Apart from their philosophical and theological content, his writings are also object language documents that aim to deal with situations of

his role would be central. If he wished ever to be known outside of his small world, as any American businessman would say, Augustine would have to reposition himself in the marketplace. A battle against a Mediterranean-wide heresy would provide the grounds on which his important ideas would finally receive a worthy audience. There was every compulsion for such men, if not actually invent a heresy, at least to be complicit in creating it. Most unfortunately for Pelagius, he was the wrong man at the right time.” (Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 313)

40 See Wilhelm Geerlings, “Augustinus. Lehrer der Gnade,” in *Theologen der christlichen Antike*, eds. Wilhelm Geerlings (Darmstadt: WBG, 2002), 148.

41 See Kurt Flasch, *Augustin. Einführung in sein Denken* (Stuttgart: Reclam 1994), 8: “Augustin ist 76 Jahr alt geworden. Nie war er reiner Theoretiker. Er reagierte denkend auf seine Erfahrungen in einer rasch verfallenden geschichtlichen Welt. Er wußte selbst, daß er sich gewandelt hatte. Er nannte eines seiner letzten Bücher *Revisionen* (*Retractationes*). Er schrieb es, um seine Leser anzuleiten, seine Bücher als Zeugnisse einer Entwicklung zu verstehen.”

42 Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma, 2. Making a ‘Catholic’ Self*, 388–401 C.E., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 403–404.

contact by establishing a suitable meta-language. The diverse phases of his life, characterized by the debates of the time, played a pivotal role in the development of his thinking. The path he took could be described as paradigmatic, leading the young Augustine via conflicts with Manichaeism⁴³ and Greek philosophy to the adaption of neo-platonic ideas, later in conflict with Donatism and Pelagianism, to his later theological standpoint.⁴⁴ Additionally, most of his work is reacting to a challenging situation forced clarification of his own ideas and religious convictions. For example, regarding his lifelong struggle with Manichaeism, BeDuhn states: “Augustine found that he constantly had to reinvent what his conversion would mean for him, as he continued to discover the potential of his adopted system and of himself as its point of articulation in the face of the Manichaean challenge.”⁴⁵ Later in his life, the bitter struggle with Julian of Eclanum, for instance, shaped Christian theology to come, not least with regard to its less appealing aspects, such as the freedom of will and predestination. The significance of his occasional works (*Gelegenheitsarbeiten*) lies in their relationship to contact, rendering them far more important than mere ‘minor’ works. In them, Augustine takes the opportunity to present and clarify his position with regard to actual challenges. He even revised his own works at the end of his life regarding his struggles in former and present situations of contact (*Retractationes*). If one examines the religious tradition of Western Christianity for an exemplification of the assumption of the crucial impact of contact situations on the formation and densification of a religious tradition, Augustine is a prime candidate to turn to.⁴⁶

43 On the long and extensive, perhaps even obsessive struggle with Manichaeism, see van Oort, “Manichean Christians in Augustine’s Life and Work,” 540: “It is difficult to find fundamental aspects of the Manichaean myth, ethic, cult, and Church organization which are not mentioned in some form or another by Augustine.”

44 BeDuhn stresses the Manichaean heritage in Augustine’s thinking, claiming that Manichaean thought not only served as a position to demarcate against: “Never wavering from his commitment to the ‘Catholic’ Church, and never ceasing to offer an anti-Manichaean position, Augustine found it necessary not to cut loose what he considered valid and valuable insights into the human condition to be found in the Christian tradition, just because the Manichaeans grasped and emphasized them in a way ‘Nicene’ Christians up to that point had neglected to do.” (BeDuhn, “Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma 2,” 2)

45 BeDuhn, “Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma 2,” 5.

46 See chapter on Tradition, also compare the chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

2 Some Remarks Concerning Augustine's Phenomenology of the Corpse

The phenomenon of death, its possible description and theological analysis, is a sustained element in Augustine's thinking, and he reached a number of important formal conclusions about it.⁴⁷ In his early text *De vera religione*, Augustine states that death forces all mortal beings into non-being: "mors autem non esse cogit quidquid moritur."⁴⁸ Death, therefore, is the visible expression of a forceful, direct process that is moreover inevitable.

This process and its direction are manifested most clearly in the body, as it is to a greater extent subject to mortality and, therefore, closer to nothingness: "Corpus ergo magis subiacet morti et ideo vicinius est nihilo."⁴⁹ The dead body, thus, most significantly shows the tendency towards non-being, the negation of being or presence.⁵⁰ It does so through visible decay but also through the loss of its former characteristics—above all, the loss of movement (action) in the broadest sense. The loss of this capacity is, in certain contexts, a sign of the separation of the soul from the body. In contrast to the views of his contemporaries, such as Ambrose, Augustine did not see this separation as a liberating benefit to the soul but rather a symptom of degeneration caused by sin.⁵¹

For this reason, the death of the body, the separation of the soul from the body, is not good for anyone, as it is experienced by those who are, as we say, dying. This violent sundering of the two elements, which are conjoined and interwoven in a living being, is bound to be a harsh and unnatural experience as long as it lasts, until the departure of all feeling, which depended on this interconnection of soul and body.⁵²

47 Shaw even claims that Augustine in his reflections on self-killing in fact created a special kind of (quintessentially bad) death (Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 769).

48 Augustinus, *De vera religione/ Über die wahre Religion* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), 38.

49 *De vera religione* 38.

50 See the (still) most sustained phenomenology of death: "Das Nur-noch-Vorhandene ist 'mehr' als ein lebloses materielles Ding. Mit ihm begegnet ein des Lebens verlustig gegangenes Unlebendiges." (Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Neske, 1986, 238)

51 See David G. Hunter, "Augustine on the Body," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Malden: Blackwell, 2012), 360.

52 Aurelius Augustinus, *Der Gottesstaat/ De civitate Dei. Erster Band Buch I–XIV* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1979), 854 (XIII, 6). "Quapropter quod adinet ad corporis mortem, id est separationem animae a corpore, cum eam patiuntur, qui morientes appellantur, nulli bona est. Habet enim asperum sensum et contra naturam vis ipsa, qua utrumque divellitur, quod fuerat in vivente coniunctum atque consertum, quamdiu moratur, donec omnis

According to Augustine, the body is subordinate to life in general, as its consistency depends upon the presence of life, be it the life of the individual body itself or the life of nature in general.⁵³ The dead body, then, could be considered the true obstacle (*Gegen-Stand*) that disturbs the stream of life and, in indicating nothingness, puts life itself into question. As a consequence, it does not simply occupy an empty space but rather manifests a place that resists living dynamics. The corpse, thus, can be examined both temporally and spatially.

Although the dead body lacks a practical manifestation of time (i.e., action), it is not without temporality. It is on this temporality that Augustine's rehabilitation of the body in general is based. In the first place, it is considered as 'having been,' something that is now over. The current dead body most obviously has a past. However, it is difficult to describe the corpse as a present object. Augustine himself explicitly pointed out the difficulty in *De civitate Dei*. Whether the corpse has a future, aside from its capacity to lose further qualities, is dependent on religious ideas. Nevertheless, to identify the dead body, the point of reference is no longer the living or the present but rather the past. To Augustine, the question of the corpse's future is easily answered. As the saints believed in the promise of resurrection of their very bodies, corpses in Christianity have a distinct prospect of a future.⁵⁴ This is a result of his ideas about original sin. For the (decaying) body is not the reason for original sin but its punishment, as it is the sinful soul that made the body transient.

For the corruption of the body, which weighs down the soul, is not the cause of the first sin, but its punishment. And it was not the corruptible flesh that made the soul sinful; it was the sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible.⁵⁵

To Augustine, those who hold the body responsible for the corruption of the soul are, therefore, greatly mistaken: "However, those who imagine that all

adimatur sensus, qui ex ipso inerat animae et carnisque complex." Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003), 515.

53 *De vera religione* 38.

54 See *De civitate Dei* XIII/20, 886: "Non enim, sicut Platoni visum est, corpora oblivione desiderant, sed potius, quia meminerunt quid sibi ab eo sit promissum, qui neminem fallit, qui eis etiam de capillorum suorum integritate securitatem dedit, resurrectionem corporum, in quibus multa dura perpassi sunt, nihil in eis ulterius tale sensuri desiderabiliter et patienter expectant."

55 *De civitate Dei* XIII/3, 916. "Nam corruptio corporis, quae adgravat animam, non peccati primi est causa, sed poena; nec caro corruptibilis animam peccatricem, sed anima peccatrix fecit esse corruptibilem carnem." Transl. Bettenson, 551.

the ills of the soul derive from the body are mistaken.”⁵⁶ The body is not evil *per se* and might be rescued. It is this future-orientated stance that makes the crucial difference between the Christian attitude towards the body and both pagan philosophical reflections which denied the possibility of the resurrection of the body, as well as other religious ideas. Here, Augustine quotes Cicero in saying that it is impossible for the body, even for those of Hercules and Romulus, to be transferred to heaven.⁵⁷

In general, there is a development “toward a more positive appreciation of bodily reality and toward a more physical understanding of the resurrected body” in Augustine’s thinking from his more rigid beginnings.⁵⁸ Of course, the rehabilitation of the worldly (‘fleshy’) body is part of Augustine’s struggle against the body-hostile tendencies in Christianity and Manicheism.⁵⁹ The body, therefore, takes part in the temporal structure of salvation with its particular prospects for the future.⁶⁰

What might then be said about the body’s space? The dead body never simply occupies an indifferent space but is rather integrated into a differentiated context. Having died, the body of the human being does not fall into neutrality and indifference. First of all, it is a center of affection for others, mostly and hopefully in the form of mourning. It becomes an object of care. Thus, it has

56 *De civitate Dei* XIV/3, 916. “Verum tamen qui omnia mala animae ex corpore putant accidisse, in errore sunt.” Transl. Bettenson, 551. See also Aurelius Augustinus, *Der Gottesstaat/De civitate Dei, Zweiter Band Buch XV–XXII* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1979), 594 (XX/20) on the difficulty to understand the process of resurrection. ‘We have to believe in it though we cannot properly understand it’, Augustine argues. “Quo modo autem sit futurum, quod nunc pro nostrae ratiunculae viribus utcumque concicimus, tunc erit potius, ut nosse possimus. Resurrectionem quippe mortuorum futuram et in carne, quando Christus venturus est vivos iudicaturus et mortuos, oportet, si Christiani esse volumus, ut credamus; sed non ideo de hac re inanis est fides nostra, si, quem ad modum future sit, perfecte comprehendere non valemus.” Compare also *De musica* VI concerning the question if the soul suffers from the body: “[...] videtur mihi anima, cum sentit in corpore, non ab illo aliquid pati, sed in eius passionibus attentius agree, et has actiones, sive faciles propter convenientiam, sive difficiles propter inconvenientiam, non eam latere, et hoc totum est, quod sentire dicitur.” Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica. Bücher I und VI. Vom ästhetischen Urteil zur metaphysischen Erkenntnis* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2002), 90

57 *De civitate Dei* XXII/ 4 (752): “Nam cum Herculem et Romulum ex hominibus deos esse factos asseveraret: ‘Quorum non corpora, inquit, sunt in caelum elata; neque enim natura pateretur, ut id quod esset e terra nisi in terra maneret.’ Haec est magna ratio sapientium, quorum Dominus novit cogitationes, quoniam vanae sunt.”

58 Hunter, “Augustine on the Body,” 356.

59 In his struggle against Faustus, Fredriksen argues, Augustine, defending traditional Jewish praxis, emphasized the necessity of seeing flesh as vital to spirit, pointing out that Christ was God in a male human body. Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 317.

60 See Fredriksen, “Vile Bodies,” 86.

an intense quality that a mere neutral object lacks. Additionally, the corpse is always a relational body with a strong reference to the surrounding society.⁶¹ The indicational context of a world points to the empty space manifested by the body that, in turn, indicates the world as temporal as a shared (past) world. This also holds true in the negative: if a religious tradition considers the dead body to be unclean or contaminated, the strong relationship of the corpse to the surrounding world is *ex negativo* stressed.

The phenomenology of the dead body shows that the better one grasps the fact that the deceased is no more, the clearer it becomes that the community of the deceased does not experience them as having ended.⁶² Basic and formal transcendence are embodied in the corpse in a way that does not necessarily have to do with religious ideas concerning a world beyond.⁶³

One might say that the dead body is even only relevant for its living surroundings as it is bereft of any 'subjective' impulse. Burkhard Gladigow analyzed the sociology of the dead body in his work on the social construction of death and the dead body in Roman times. To overcome the systemic crisis that follows the death of a member of a given society, certain rites are introduced to re-member the deceased as well as the living and to reorganize the group. The *pompa funebris* seen in this way is also a self-presentation and a restructuring of the family, the *divi parentum* to protect the internal family structure.⁶⁴ Correspondingly, Arnold van Gennep, in his *Les rites de passage* has described the rituals of burial as rituals of reaffiliation being intended to mend the chain between the members of the group that has been broken as one member has died.⁶⁵

Though the dead body appears as an object, it is not what it seems. Admittedly, this fact makes phenomenological description difficult. Death in

61 Put into philosophical 'jargon': "Im trauernd-gedenkenden Verweilen bei ihm sind die Hinterbliebenen mit ihm, in einem Modus der ehrenden Fürsorge [...] In solchem Mitsein mit dem Toten ist der Verstorbene selbst nicht mehr faktisch 'da'. Mitsein meint jedoch immer Miteinandersein in derselben Welt. Der Verstorbene hat unsere 'Welt' verlassen und zurückgelassen. Aus ihr her können die Bleibenden noch mit ihm sein." Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 238.

62 "Je angemessener das Nichtmehrdasein des Verstorbenen phänomenal gefaßt wird, umso deutlicher zeigt sich, daß solches Mitsein mit dem Toten gerade nicht das eigentliche Zuendgekommenesein des Verstorbenen erfährt." (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 238–239)

63 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

64 Burkhard Gladigow, "Naturae deus humanae mortalis. Zur sozialen Konstruktion des Todes in römischer Zeit," in *Leben und Tod in den Religionen. Symbol und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Gunther Stephenson (Darmstadt: WBG, 1980), 129–130.

65 See Arnold van Gennep, *Übergangsriten (Les rites de passage)* (Frankfurt/ New York: Campus, 2005), 158.

general puts all self-conduct and self-interpretation into question. Augustine himself even takes a step further and reflects on the difficulties concerning the dead body with regard to language. In *De civitate Dei*, he states that the characteristic of a human body as 'dead' is highly disputable, for it is either still living and therefore not dead or it is already beyond death. The word 'dead', therefore, does not describe something temporal because death, as well as presence itself, has no temporal extension.⁶⁶ Therefore, death is not an objective state, and the dead body as such cannot be objectified. As dead, it can only be described in relation to something else, for example, society in the sociological construction of death or as being a visible sign for something in the semiosis of death. In conclusion, regarding Augustine's phenomenology of death and the dead body, one might come to the following definition: by means of the visible dead body, death transfers a 'subject' *not into an object but rather into an 'objective' sign*.

This description is decisive for Augustine's phenomenology of the corpse. For those acquainted with his work, the notion will sound pretty familiar from the very basics of his thinking. Fundamental to Augustine's ontology is the vectorial,⁶⁷ temporal, and dynamic character of human existence.⁶⁸ Human existence, according to Augustine, is structured by its particular propensities.⁶⁹ This idea is expressed in a nutshell at the beginning of the *Confessiones* with the famous and often quoted line: "fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te."⁷⁰ To Augustine, taking this vectorial character seriously means becoming an indication of the divine that will finally comfort the restless heart—and, to him, it is true Christians who can be

66 "Mala mors putanda non est, quam bona vita praecesserit. Neque enim facit malam mortem, nisi quod sequitur mortem." *De civitate Dei* I/11, 26/28. "Death is not to be regarded as a disaster, when it follows on a good life, for the only thing that makes death an evil is what comes after death." Transl. Bettenson, 20.

67 See Christoph Horn, *Augustinus* (München: Beck, 1995), 47. The vectorial character is explained by pointing at the fact that the human being is created by God towards him (*fecisti nos ad te*). This character also comprises a dynamic element as the human heart is restless until it finally reaches its ultimate goal (*inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*).

68 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

69 See chapter on Attraction.

70 Augustine, *Confessions*, 3 (11). Following O'Donnell's commentary one might say that the 'heart' is the space of contact within the individual, not at last in the sense that it most explicitly resonates with the impact of contact with the (sinful) outside world: "Cor in A. is a word whose use is demonstrably influenced by contact with its scriptural employment; it is in A. an expression for the indivisible, authentic centre of human life, where the tensions of a sinful world are most clearly felt." (James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions 11. Commentary on Books 1–7* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 13)

phenomenologically described that way. This fundamental structure plays a decisive role, even in Augustine's struggle to define the proper way of spacing the corpse with regard to different religious contexts.

3 Dealing with the Dead: *De Vera Religione*, *De Civitate Dei*, *De Cura Pro Mortuis Gerenda*

The space of the corpse and its religious significance is not merely a marginal problem in Augustine's all-compassing theological considerations. If anything, his writings are a prime example of religious object language, which intends to develop a metalanguage to describe contested phenomena, and, above all, those that are contested on basis of the normative action caused by them.

Augustine's considerations on the dead body were triggered by a situation of religious contact. This is not just something that is clear in retrospect but is in fact explicit in his writings. He himself made direct reference to the situations of contact. The theologian is challenged by the presence of certain practices and foundational ideas that make up pieces of his everyday environment. The three writings further analyzed in the following, *De vera religione*, *De civitate Dei*, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, exemplify both Augustine's thoughts on the problem of the dead body and its (religious) space and the importance of the fact that they emerged in, react to, and conceptually are dealing with a situation of religious contact.

3.1 *De Vera Religione*

Written around 390 CE, *De vera religione*, is among Augustine's early work. The text aims to sketch out a path to "a good and happy life" (*vitae bonae ac beatae*), and to give an answer to the twofold challenge of pagan philosophy's ambiguous attitude to the nature of the gods and Manichaeism's dualist teachings.⁷¹ The work is dedicated to his patron and former fellow Manichaean, Romanianus. Notably, Augustine sets out his stern opposition toward tolerant attitudes on the diverse opinions, on the nature of gods on grounds of intellectual integrity.⁷² Augustine also predominantly employs one of these philosophies, Neo-Platonism, to counter the philosophical and the Manichean threat that

71 In his 'revision' of *De vera religione* Augustine himself writes: "Maxime tamen contra duas naturas Manicheorum liber hic loquitur." (*De vera religione*, 188)

72 "Non nunc agitur quis eorum senserit verius, sed certe illud satis, quantum mihi videtur, apparet: aliud eos in religione suscepisse cum populo et aliud eodem ipso populo audiente defendisse privatim." (*De vera religione* 4)

also looms in his own intellectual past as a former adherent of Manichean teachings.⁷³ Though the book was written after his conversion and baptism, Augustine was not ordained as a priest until 391, so it does not have the status of having been written by a member of the clergy. Thus, the book is written in the spirit of a philosophically moderated Christianity, presenting itself as the true and definite heir to classical Greek philosophy and aimed toward contemporary educated supporters of Manichaeism and followers of Plato.⁷⁴ It is notable that the later Augustine, now a bishop and stern theologian, would discard much of his own early writing. Although useful in opposing Manichaeism, he thought it too permeated with the language and the spirit of the philosophers.⁷⁵

The main opponent of Augustine's argumentation concerning the deceased and the dead body is explicitly named in *De vera religione* in a significant general context. Here, he makes the case for true religion by opposing it to false religious ideas. The ideas he opposes are listed individually and introduced by the jussive formula *non sit nobis religio*. Among these false ideas 'that our religion shall not be' one finds the cults of human imagination, of human works of art, of beasts, demons or natural elements (earth, water, air), of stars, of biological life or even of reason in the form of the most reasonable soul.

However, Augustine's argument does not merely consist of negating false ideas and teachings but also turns to the directive element and the propensities of the 'true religion'. Augustine urges those who are close to him to move as fast as possible to where God calls them.

Therefore, I urge you, my dearest and closest people, and I urge myself together with you: let us hurry, as fast as possible, to where God in his wisdom calls us.

73 "[...] Augustine defined himself against an otherness of which he had once been a part, developing his adopted faith [...] most intently in those areas where he perceived a crucial contrast to his former commitments. For the first time, he engaged Manichaeism as the explicit 'other' of his intellectual discourse. His treatise on *True Religion* provided the key-stone that held together and capped this project through its dedication to a Manichean and its systematic explanation of how philosophical and religious commitments were coordinated in Augustine's adopted system. Its anti-Manichaean themes serve as an ever-present subtext to a primarily positive statement of Augustine's new creed." BeDuhn, "Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 2," 33.

74 Kurt Flasch, "Nachwort," in Augustinus, *De vera religione/ Über die wahre Religion* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), 217.

75 Flasch, "Nachwort," 224.

Quae cum ita sint, hortor vos, homines carissimi et proximi mei, meque ipsum hortor vobiscum, ut ad id quod nos per sapientiam suam deus hortatur quanta possumus celertitate curramus.⁷⁶

Here, Augustine again describes the vectorial existence of the adherents of the true religion as a motion that comprises turning away from false religious ideas and moving toward the direction that God's wisdom indicates. To him, the dynamics of the event are dominated by the attraction of God's wisdom, which pulls the individual to follow.⁷⁷

Renouncing certain ideas is the first phase of the dynamic process followed by believers. This is all the more important as there were so many ideas in the historical setting, that is, the Roman Empire of late antiquity. In Augustine's summary definition of true religion through disassociation from false ideas, the following lines are most relevant to our general theme:

Non sit nobis religio cultus hominum mortuorum, quia si pie vixerunt, non sic habentur ut tales quaerant honores, sed illum a nobis coli volunt quo inluminare laetantur meriti sui nos esse conservos.⁷⁸

True religion, Augustine argues, will not be a cult of the dead, because if the deceased were pious, they would not have strived for such a dubious honor. Instead, they would want those left behind to worship the One, who illuminated and blessed them, and so we should partake of their achievements.

However, the cult of the dead that Augustine attacks here is not easy to define, as it is not a clear-cut institutional entity but rather a *mélange* of everyday practices. Ramsey MacMullen stresses that "for hundreds of years, the pagan cult of the dead was a common part of Christianity"; thus, 'pagan' ideas were commonly in use in reality, with regard to the ways late antique Christians dealt with the dead.⁷⁹ It may even be argued that the cult of the dead Augustine argues against actually only emerged as an addressable entity through his criticism.⁸⁰ Cults of the dead, however, count among the eldest

⁷⁶ *De vera religione*, 176.

⁷⁷ See chapter on Attraction.

⁷⁸ *De vera religione*, 178.

⁷⁹ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 111.

⁸⁰ "The usual picture is of fourth- and fifth century bishops struggling against the cult of the dead, which they stigmatized as a pagan practice in which newly converted Christians indulged. We owe this picture largely to Augustine." (Éric Rebillard, "The Church, the Living, and the Dead," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), 225)

and most general customs in human societies. It is characterized by a typical ambivalence between caring for the dead and seeking social interaction with them versus fear of their possible return seeking revenge.⁸¹ The explicit cult of the dead required certain practices, among them most prominently a meal or feast taking place at the grave (*silicernium* on the first day of burial and *cena noventialis* on the ninth day) at a certain time (*Parentalia*).⁸² These meals were often described and criticized as tending towards excess. Accordingly, writers such as Tertullian suggest that Christians should not participate in the cults of the dead or “bring offerings to the tomb or consume food from such offerings at banquets given to celebrate the dead.”⁸³ In general, the aims of cults of the dead are directed towards human society, as they stabilize sociality beyond the grave and integrate and disintegrate the dead. Nevertheless, according to Augustine, the tacitly accepted cult of the dead is among the ideas that must be eradicated in order to reach ‘true religion’. The reason for this is spatially significant. Augustine could take the easy way out by simply stating that Christianity, as the true religion, is not about dead people but the living God—but he does not do so as directly as might be expected.⁸⁴ The manner in which he reaches this conclusion via the dead body is of relevance to our general theme.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine even indicates that his mother was inclined toward the cult of the dead, describing how she tried to gain access to the martyr’s tombs with offerings, although they were duly refused, and she immediately renounced this custom. Augustine’s teacher Ambrose had previously forbidden offerings due to the risk of intemperance and the similarity to the pagan rite of *parentalia*.⁸⁵ Listing it among the cults the true religion should not be, Augustine makes it clear that the cult of the deceased is something that contests true religion. Its falseness is clear in its handling of the deceased, by the direction that is manifested in the way such cults deal with dead bodies. According to Augustine, it is not the deceased—if they had been truly pious and faithful—who have to be worshipped, that is, on whom attention is

81 Compare Hans-Peter Hasenfratz, “Totenkult,” in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe. Band V: Säkularisierung-Zwischenwesen*, eds. Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, and Karl-Heinz Kohl (Stuttgart/ Berlin/ Köln: Kohlhammer, 2001).

82 See Robin M. Jensen, “Dining with the Dead. From the *Mensa* to the Altar in Christian Late Antiquity,” in *Commemorating the Dead. Text and Artefact in Context*, eds. Laurie Brink, O.P. and Deborah Green (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2008). Jensen describes the meals at the graves as later being transformed into the practice of an Eucharist at the Grave in Christian times.

83 Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, 143.

84 See Flasch, “Nachwort,” 215: “Sie [the text *De vera religione*] beschwört, das Lebendige höher zu stellen als tote Sachen, den Geist höher zu werten als das dumpfe Leben.”

85 Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, 146. On Augustin’s own attitude towards the *parentalia*, see Zangré, *Les rites funéraires*, 253–279.

directed. Rather, they are to be dealt with as indicating someone different, the One who illuminates them, and to which illumination of the afterworld is irresistibly drawn. The dead body, thus, provides a method, indicating a way that, if followed, leads to ultimate salvation (*meta-hodos*). If the dead bodies of the deceased cannot indicate in this manner, then the body should not be a subject of veneration. One honors the dead if one follows their directive lead and not if one venerates themselves religiously. “[H]onorandi ergo sunt propter imitationem, non adorandi propter religionem.”⁸⁶ The method is the imitation of the particular directedness. This instrumental use of the pious deceased as directional markers thus means taking part in their achievements. Again, it is the spatial role of the dead that must be re-interpreted, this time as concerns the directions or directives the dead body expresses if interpreted in line with the requirements of the ‘true religion’.

Augustine’s spatial ideas about the dead body are an instrument of demarcation against false religious ideas as manifested in certain cults he witnessed in his social environment. As such, they emerge in a situation of religious contact and contest. If Dodds is right in describing paganism in the fourth century as a living corpse, decaying from the moment the state withdrew protection, then Augustine’s struggle for the correct interpretation of the dead body reaches even another, more general level as a broader theoretical claim.⁸⁷

3.2 *De Civitate Dei*

Though one might think of several contemporary cults that fell under the axe of Augustine’s verdict—the local amalgamation of Christian and Greco-Roman elements, the classical Roman cult of the dead, and so on—it is not an actual cult of the dead, which he attacks, but rather the ideas behind one. Something like a cult of the dead is to be found within the ideas of all religious traditions, except, of course, Christianity in Augustine’s interpretation. The tacit cult of the dead, a false interpretation of the dead leading to a dislocation of the dead body, is something that has to be overcome in the process of thinking clearly about death. To Augustine, such a process could be initiated by the description of the dead body.

It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that this theme is located in a most prominent place in Augustine’s oeuvre, in his *De civitate Dei*, Book I, which introduces and frames the whole following discussion. As an “apology for Christianity’s superiority on all fronts”, *De vera religione* can be considered

86 *De vera religione* 178.

87 Eric Robertson Dodds, *Heiden und Christen in einem Zeitalter der Angst* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 113.

a forerunner of *De civitate Dei*.⁸⁸ *De civitate Dei* represents both interreligious and intrareligious contact as reflections on the relationship between *christianitas* and *romanitas*. Written between 413 and 426, *De civitate Dei* is a defense of Christianity against the accusations of pagans who indicted it as responsible for the conquest and sack of the city of Rome by the Visigoths in 410. Moreover, the work takes issue against a Christian version of the ideology of the 'eternal Rome', seeking to show that Christian hope is by no means connected to political institutions.⁸⁹ Augustine sees the reverence of Rome among Christian authors as close to idolatry and thus something that must be opposed. In doing so, Augustine clarifies the topology of the city with regard to his theological conception, or rather; he makes his endeavor a spatial enterprise. He "designates the proper sphere and function of political structures, demythologizes them from all illusionism and idealism, and desacralizes all hierarchical sacralism and triumphalism of political life."⁹⁰ If John Marenbon is right in stating that *De civitate Dei* is "a foundational book for the Problem of Paganism", one could even go so far as to say that the book not only represents but also establishes, a situation of religious contact.⁹¹ Motivated by anger and zeal, Augustine himself considered the work to be his great and difficult work (*magnum opus et arduum*).⁹²

In any case, the work is a tale of two cities, the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena*. It is, therefore, about a particular spatial contact between the inner structure of two social orders, as "there is a thematic contraposition of *due civitates*, which are intermingled in human history, though having different destinies."⁹³ Augustine defines order as follows: "[O]rder is the arrangement of things equal and unequal in a pattern which assigns to each its proper position."⁹⁴

Highlighted in the text, the discussion on the proper space of the corpse in *De civitate Dei* has some significance. The book is about a place, or rather, a particular (relational) space. Augustine describes the city of God in relation to the *civitas terrena* exemplified by Rome, the most prominent city of the late antique world, focusing not least on the atrocities of the conquest of this

88 Fox, *Augustine*, 398.

89 See Horn, *Augustinus*, 114.

90 Mäkelä Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De civitate Dei* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 158.

91 John Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers. The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz* (Princeton/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23.

92 *De civitate Dei* I, Praefatio.

93 Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De civitate Dei*, 26.

94 *De civitate Dei* XIX, 13 (474). "Ordo est parium dispariumque rerum sua cuique loca tribuens dispositio." (transl. Bettenson, 870).

very city, about the dead and their remains within. The place of the dead is stage-managed and discussed by Augustine in a twofold way. In his presentation, corpses are the location of a religious power-play, mainly concerning the question of which Divinity provides the most power to protect its followers and the dead themselves. Corpses, thus, manifest the power and the rightful claims of the religious tradition in question. To Augustine, religion functions via corpses—a motto more fittingly rendered into German: “*Religion geht über Leichen.*”

Augustine's discussion from the very beginning is related to spatial issues. In the introductory opening chapter of *De civitate Dei*, Augustine describes the role of the ‘memorial places of the Martyrs’ and the ‘Churches of the Apostles’ (*martyrum loca et basilicae apostolorum*) as true sanctuaries for Christians and pagans alike during the conquest of Rome. Even the enemies of the city of God fled to these particular places. In Augustine's account, they enclose a particular space that is qualified by its capacity to counter the usual way things happen, above all in a situation of hardship and distress such as the sack of a city. In his report, many who fled there to seek shelter from the looting conquerors were thus saved from their ‘desire to destroy’.

The bloodthirsty enemy raged thus far, but here the frenzy of butchery was checked; to these refuges the merciful among the enemy conveyed those whom they had spared outside, to save them from encountering foes who had no such pity.⁹⁵

Moreover, the conquerors' ‘lust to make prisoners’ was similarly pacified by the holy places (*captivandi cupiditas frangebatur*).⁹⁶ Thus, in Augustine's description, the places of the dead have a significant impact, opposing destructive attitudes and tendencies among human beings in situations of extreme temptation and emotional agitation. From the spatial perspective, the holy places of the dead, thus, saved not only Christians but anybody who entered them from *disintegration* and *dislocation*.⁹⁷ Here, Christians were saved alongside their

95 *De civitate Dei* I/1 (2/4). “Huc usque cruentus saeviebat inimicus, ibi accipiebat limitem trucidatoris furor, illo ducebantur a miserantibus hostibus, quibus etiam extra ipsa loca pepercerant, ne in eos incurrerent, qui simile misericordiam non habebant.” Transl. Bettenson, 6.

96 *De civitate Dei* I/1 (4).

97 “[...] quod autem novo more factum est, quod invisitata rerum facie inmanitas barbara tam mitis apparuit, ut amplissimae basilicae implendae populo cui parceretur eligerentur et decernerentur, ubi nemo feriretur, unde nemo raperetur, quo liberandi multi a miserantibus hostibus ducerentur, unde captivandi ulli nec a crudelibus hostibus abducerentur [...]” (*De civitate Dei* I/7 (12/14)).

previous tormentors, the Romans who had once persecuted them. Grace even extended to the Visigoth looters and pillagers, who, contrary to the customs of war, spared them (*praeter bellorum morem truculenti barbari pepercerunt*).⁹⁸ With this report, Augustine makes the location of the dead a starting point for his further discussion by additionally introducing a certain quality to the places in question, namely their capacity for human salvation in general. The places of the dead, therefore, have impacts that reach far beyond the dead themselves. The whole work seeks to answer questions about the nature of the place those interested in their salvation really belong to.

It is further significant that Augustine's introductory considerations also turn toward the body, and the female body in particular. These thoughts are also relevant regarding questions of religious space. Augustine engages in an emphatic attack on the practice of 'honor suicides', taking his point of departure from the rape of Christian women during the sack of the city. Here, Augustine utilizes a spatial shift of focus, claiming that the honor of a woman is based upon the purity of her holy will and not on her body. Thus, the violation of her body cannot damage her soul. As such, the space of honorable conduct—directedness towards God—is located in the soul and not in the corporeal space of the human body.⁹⁹ Disposing of the body by suicide is, therefore, not an option as it contradicts the Fifth Commandment.¹⁰⁰ The Roman practice of suicide for reasons of honor, to Augustine, is an example of spatial disorientation as to the places where notions of honor are valid. Roman idols of old, such as Lucretia and Cato are, thus, bereft of their honor due to their deaths—which had been acclaimed by the Romans for the very same reason.¹⁰¹ At the same time, Augustine also relocates the body in the referential context to determine what makes an exemplary conduct of life.

Having set the overarching theme of the book in the introductory chapter with regard to the spatial characteristics associated with the body and the dead in 'true religion', Augustine continues his considerations on the particular space of the City of God. The contrasting relationship to the conquered

98 *De civitate Dei* I/1 (4).

99 "Quocirca proposito animi permanente, per quod etiam corpus sanctificari meruit, nec ipsi corpori aufert sanctitatem violentia libidinis alienae, quam servat preserverantia continentiae suae." (*De civitate Dei* I/18 (40)).

100 On the concrete religious contexts of Augustine's ideas about self-killing ("The new attitude was forged in the throes of the violent sectarian conflicts in Africa in the first decades of the fifth century, in which self-killing had a prominent role.") see Shaw, *Sacred violence*, 728–730.

101 See *De civitate Dei* I/19 (42/44): "Hoc fecit illa Lucretia; illa, illa sic praedicta Lucretia innocentem, castam, vim perpressam Lucretiam insuper interemit." Compare Rosen, *Augustinus*, 165.

and plundered Rome for this space is of vital importance to his argument. His book, thus, manifests a situation of contrasting contacts, emerging from an object language perspective in which the prevailing parts struggle about the notion of space. First, Augustine explicitly contradicts ideas that consider the former cult of the Gods necessary for the welfare of human society. Secondly, he opposes those who, by means of religious utilitarianism, assume the cult of the gods is appropriate, thanks to its prospect of a future life.¹⁰²

In Book I Chapter 12 of *De civitate Dei* Augustine gives another relevant statement on how to space the corpse in a religiously appropriate way in his discussion of the problem of the proper burial of the dead, which could not be accomplished after the conquest. Though many escaped into the sanctuaries, there were, nevertheless, many Christian victims whose bodies had to be left unburied (*At enim in tanta strage cadaverum nec sepeliri potuerunt*).¹⁰³ To counter the accusation that the Christian God was not even able to protect the dead bodies of his believers, Augustine raises the proposition that as Christians do not fear death in the form of the destruction of the body as the soul is unaffected, they should not fear the destruction of the body after it is dead, for this too leaves the soul untouched. There is no special earthly place for the dead, even if they are not buried, as they always 'remain in the Sphere of Heaven and earth, which the Lord fills with His presence'.

And so many Christian bodies have not received a covering of earth, and yet no one has separated any of them from heaven and earth, and the whole universe is filled with the presence of him who knows from where he is to raise up what he has created.¹⁰⁴

As the above lines suggest, the bodies of Christians are always spatially close to salvation, no matter if and where the corpses are actually buried. This idea suggests a revision of the spatial aspects of distance and closeness with regard to religious ideas. The care of the dead body, and the burial itself, are therefore merely comforts for the living, not a necessary service for the dead.

¹⁰² Compare also Rosen, *Augustinus*, 168.

¹⁰³ *De civitate Dei* I/12 (28).

¹⁰⁴ *De civitate Dei* I/12 (28). "Multa itaque corpora Christianorum terra non texit, sed nullum eorum quisquam a caelo et terra separavit, quam totam implet praesentia sui, qui novit unde resuscitet quod creavit." Transl. Bettenson, 21.

Such things as a decent funeral and a proper burial, with its procession of mourners, are a consolation to the living rather than a help to the departed.¹⁰⁵

Accordingly, the living bear no guilt to the dead in a situation where a respectful burial is impossible, as was the case during the conquest of Rome.¹⁰⁶

On this point, Augustine notes that comparison with another religious tradition shows some basic accordance with his view. Augustine points out that even the philosophers—Cicero in his discussion of death in his *Tusculanae disputationes* or Seneca's *De tranquillitate animi*—and poets of old, treated as authorities by Augustine's accusers, despise excessive care over burials.¹⁰⁷ Both Augustine and the philosophers, however, were set against a situation where the majority felt differently.

This solidarity with the philosophy of old, nevertheless, has some dangerous theological implications, which Augustine must carefully avoid. The apparent carelessness concerning the corpse and its burial is not to be confused with a general hostile attitude towards the physical body, a stance Augustine might associate with the Manicheans.¹⁰⁸ In his theological efforts, Augustine has to find some middle way between two misinterpretations of the body—either overestimating or underestimating its religious relevance.

His solution is the following: as the dead bodies, when interpreted and located correctly, may serve as an important means for the consolidation of the living, the care for the dead (body) should not be completely abolished, as the Holy Spirit had already made ample use of them in their lifetime, particularly in the case of the just and the believers:

This does not mean that the bodies of the departed are to be scorned and cast away, particularly not the bodies of the righteous and faithful,

105 *De civitate Dei* 1/12 (28). "Proinde ista omnia, <id est> curatio funeris, conditio sepulturae, pompa exequiarum, magis sunt vivorum solacia quam subsidia mortuorum." Transl. Bettenson, 21.

106 The Augustine caring society ('Solidargemeinschaft' (J. LeGoff)) between the living and the dead refers to the name, but not to the body of the deceased, which is in community with God.

107 Seneca quotes Theodorus: "... nam quod ad sepulturam pertinent, o te ineptum, si putas mea interesse supra terram an infra putrescam." Seneca, *De tranquillitate animi*/ *Über die Ausgeglichenheit der Seele*, trans. and ed. Heinz Gunermann (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 62.

108 See also Fredricksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 335.

of which the Spirit has made holy use as instruments for good works of every kind.¹⁰⁹

In Augustine's description, the body is thus characterized as a possible open space for the epiphany of the Spirit, who uses it in doing good and holy works. It follows from this idea, however, that despising the body, or rather, the dead body, is a severe misunderstanding of the body as a useful vessel for the action of the Divine.¹¹⁰

Examples from the Scripture, for instance, in the case of Tobias, who gained merit by burying the dead, and in the burial of Jesus, show there is some sense to rites of burial and caring. This sense is grounded in the fact that the body belongs to man's nature itself.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the rites and practices have been a practice of old and may claim the title of a tradition that is not easily cast aside.

So, Augustine describes the correct interpretation of burial rites by formalizing them in the sense of emptying space for the directives of the Divine Powers. It is the Deity itself that might use the bodies as 'organs and vessels' for its salvational action. This action does not take place on behalf of the dead, who are, of course, bereft of any feelings, but rather, via the corpse for the sake of the living and caring. In *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, Augustine states that whatever is spent on the burial of the body is of no assistance for its salvation, but is merely a humane ceremony in accord with that feeling by which 'no man ever hates his own flesh': "corpori autem humando quidquid impenditur, non est praesidium salutis, sed humanitatis officium secundum affectum, quo nemo unquam carnem suam odio habet."¹¹² Seen in this light, the human ceremony does not belong to religion at all. It becomes religious if, through caring for the dead, the dead body serves as an *indicator* for resurrection to the living, thus strengthening belief.

These authorities are not instructing us that dead bodies have any feeling; they are pointing out that the providence of God, who approves such

109 *De civitate Dei* I/13 (30). "Nec ideo tamen contemnenda et abicienda sunt corpora defunctorum maximeque iustorum atque fidelium, quibus tamquam organis et vasis ad omnia bona opera sancta usus est Spiritus." Transl. Bettenson, 22.

110 On Augustine's attitude towards the care of the body, see Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, 87–88.

111 "Haec enim non ad ornamentum vel adiutorium, quod adhibetur extrinsecus, sed ad ipsam naturam hominis pertinent." (*De civitate Dei* I/13 (30)) On the significance of the figure of Tobias for late antique Christian discussion of burial duties, see Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, 101.

112 *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 439.

acts of duty and piety, is concerned with the bodies of the dead, so as to promote faith in the resurrection.¹¹³

The empty space of the dead body, thus, becomes a sign, a directive for possible salvation, and, as a consequence, a space for further thinking and action.¹¹⁴

3.3 *De Cura Pro Mortuis Gerenda*

Augustine considered the argumentation contained in the first book, chapters 12 and 13, of *De civitate Dei* to be so important that he quoted it verbatim in his later treatise *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*. This text forms a part of his *Retractationes*, the reconsideration, and rewriting of his previous work, and hence *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* can be considered part of Augustine's self-assuring project as a religious writer. Furthermore, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* has additional significance for theology and the scholarly study of religious practices, for it is "the only early Christian treatise dedicated to burial and the care for the deceased."¹¹⁵ Augustine, in general, is the most important source for our knowledge of early Christian funerary customs.¹¹⁶

As with the previous texts studied here, this text emerged as an occasional work, as a reaction to a theological challenge imposed on Augustine by his environment. It is written in the form of a letter as an answer to a question posed by Augustine's admirer and colleague, the former Roman senator and convert to severe monasticism, Paulinus of Nola. The two theologians had maintained a correspondence since 395. Situations of religious contact are both the frame and subject matter of their exchange: thanks to their correspondence, Paulinus was well acquainted with Augustine's works targeting the Manicheans and praised them hymnally as a new Pentateuch (*hoc Pentateucho tuo contra Manichaeos*)¹¹⁷ to help further the church in many cities.¹¹⁸ Furthermore,

113 *De civitate Dei* I/13 (30/32). "Verum istae auctoritates non hoc admonent, quod insit ullus cadaveribus sensus, sed ad Dei providentiam, cui placent etiam talia pietatis officia, corpora quoque mortuorum pertinere significant propter fidem resurrectionis astruendam." Transl. Bettenson, 23.

114 Compare the chapter on Secret.

115 Rose, *Augustine on the Relations between the Living and the Deceased*, 17. As for the text of *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, I shall, in the following refer to this extensive commentary on the work.

116 Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century," 47.

117 Paulinus von Nola, *Epistolae/ Briefe*, vol. I-III (Freiburg: Herder 1998), here: vol. I, 158.

118 "O lucerna digne super candelabrum ecclesiae posita, quae late catholicis urbibus de sepiiformi lychno pastum oleo laetitiae lumen effundens densas licet haereticorum caligines discutis et lucem veritatis a confusione tenebrarum splendore clarifici sermonis enubilas." Paulinus, *Epistulae* I, 156/158.

Augustine warned him of the dangers of Pelagianism. These various struggles form the background of *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* as well.¹¹⁹

In the surviving letters of their correspondence, the ways to theologically deal with death, the grave, and the body, particularly as the resurrected body, were a recurring subject. There are reports of miracles said to have occurred at the grave of saints, on the proper reactions to the loss of a close relative, and considerations on the nature of the body in and after resurrection.¹²⁰ To Paulinus, the question of the space of the corpse is of particular importance. He was an admirer of the martyr Felix of Nola and settled near his grave, later building a place of reverence and pilgrimage there, and moreover composed annual hymns in his honor. Around 410, he became bishop of Nola, his place of reverential residence.

The establishment of a place of reverence for a martyr is a spatial event. As Peter Brown has shown, the very establishment of places devoted to the cult of the saints involved a remarkable spatial shift in the late antique landscape and a corresponding redefinition of the space associated with the dead bodies of the saints. The redefinition involved an increase of emphasis due to the presence of a particular (dead) body, considered to be exemplary. In the course of time, the landscape “came to be dotted with clearly indicated *loci*, where heaven and earth met. The shrine containing a grave or, more frequently, a fragmentary relic was very often called quite simply ‘the place’: *locus sanctorum*, ὁ τόπος. It was a place where the normal laws of the grave were held to be suspended. In a relic, the chilling anonymity of human remains could be thought to be still heavy with the fullness of a beloved person.”¹²¹ In the concrete case of Paulinus, Brown even goes so far as to speak about the ‘haunting presence’ of Saint Felix in his life, thus making clear that, with regard to spaces of dead bodies, object language authors can also be influenced by ghosts.¹²²

Not without personal stakes in this issue, in a letter written late in his correspondence with Augustine around 420 CE, Paulinus inquired whether a person benefited when his body was buried at the tomb of some saint after he

119 See Rose, *Augustine on the Relations between the Living and the Deceased*, 33.

120 See Matthias Skeb, “Einleitung,” in Paulinus von Nola, *Epistolae/ Briefe*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1998), vol. 1, 93–95.

121 Peter Brown, *The Care of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (London/Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 10–11.

122 Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 55. “Thus, when Paulinus writes about his relationship with Saint Felix, he pointedly and lovingly transfers to a dead human being all the sense of intimate involvement with an invisible companion that men in previous generations had looked for in a relationship with the *non*-human figures of gods, *daimōnes*, or angels.” (Ibid.)

had died.¹²³ The question is of great spatial significance, not least because the space of burial was not yet controlled by ecclesiastical regulation “concerning who can be buried where, except when the burial is to be in a space controlled by the Church.”¹²⁴ Paulinus argued that caring for the body of one’s deceased is not merely some useless act habitually performed by religious and faithful minds. As the entire Church was accustomed to offering prayers for the departed, it may be conjectured that it indeed does help if a body is buried by faithful believers in a spot where the aid of the saints might be drawn upon.¹²⁵ As a consequence, Paulinus was deeply worried about the contradiction that appears between these findings and the biblical idea that benefit is only to be achieved by deeds before death, not after it. Unfortunately, the letter in which he raised the issue of the *depositio ad sanctos* and asked his colleague’s opinion has to be reconstructed from Augustine’s answer, as it was lost to the afterworld.

Through his request, Paulinus sets the stage for Augustine’s object language attempt to deal with a particular situation of contact, dealing at once with intra-religious and interreligious elements and the question of the contact of the divine and the temporal sphere. *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* is Augustine’s pastoral answer to the letter written by his theological colleague and fellow

123 “[...] quaerens a me, utrum prosit cuique post mortem, quod corpus eius apud sancti alicuius memoriam sepelitur.” *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 75. See Skeb, “Einleitung,” 68: “Das Faktum, daß Paulinus sein mönchisches Leben gerade an einem Reliquiengrab führte, das das Zentrum eines offiziellen Wallfahrtsortes bildete, hat seine historische Voraussetzung in der engeren Verbindung zwischen Kloster und Kirche im westlichen Mönchtum und seine theologische in Paulinus’ parallelisierendem Verständnis von asketischer Nachfolge (geistlichem Kampf) und Wunderheilung, die sich beide am Grab eines asketischen und darum wundertätigen Heiligen, Felix, ereigneten.” As such, the grave of Felix and the relics of the saint established Paulinus’s new home and a new family: “Der heilige Felix wird für Paulinus die neue Heimat, er stiftet eine neue Familienbindung.” (ibid., 70) Rose relies Paulinus’ interest on the issue to a personal family catastrophe: “During this second Spanish journey a son was born to Paulinus and Therasia, a child described years later as *exoptata diu suboles*, ‘a child dearly desired’. This son, Celsus, died after only one week; his parents buried him in Complutum, right beside the graves of the martyrs Justus and Pastor. In *carm.* 31 Paulinus mentions the burial of his son *ad sanctos*.” Rose, *Augustine on the Relations between the Living and the Deceased*, 30.

124 Rebillard, “The Church, the Living, and the Dead,” 224.

125 Rebillard, however, stresses that in late antique times the role of the Church was not yet as extensive or as well-defined as in later times: “In Late Antiquity, relations between the living and the dead were achieved for the most part without the intervention of church representatives. The role of the clergy as intermediaries between the living and the dead did not become exclusive before the twelfth century, when every Christian had to receive upon his death the viaticum—the Eucharist for the dying—in order to be admitted to the cemetery and benefit from the prayers offered by the Church for his remembrance.” Rebillard, “The Church, the Living, and the Dead,” 220.

bishop.¹²⁶ There is also a close connection between the considerations in *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* and the considerations on death and burial that can be found in Augustine's other work, above all, in his *Confessiones*.¹²⁷ With regard to funeral practices, Augustine was concerned with the pagan customs still prevailing in Christian practices, such as feasting at the graves.¹²⁸ Regarding the main point of Paulinus' request, however, it is conspicuous that nowhere in his text does Augustine explicitly address the manner in which the dead may take advantage of their burial *ad sanctos*. Scholars suggest that one should think of either the protection of the buried remains, which would enable the dead to regenerate at the time of the resurrection, or of the support the martyrs may offer to the dead, referring to their ability to plead for the deceased on the occasion of the Last Judgement. Perhaps the effectiveness of prayers of the living on behalf of the deceased is increased by the saints who

126 On the dating of the work, see Rose, *Augustine on the Relations between the Living and the Deceased*, 26–27.

127 Rose scrutinizes the relation of *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* to the *Confessiones* as follows: "It is difficult to examine the opinion on burial and commemoration prayers Augustine laid down in *cura mort.*, without taking into account the details he recorded in his writings concerning death in his inner circle. In *cura mort.*, Augustine emphasizes the importance of finding rest for the soul; prayer for the souls of the dead is one of the most important ways in which the surviving relatives may take care of the dead. Burial of the body is also important but is secondary to the care for the soul. The description in *conf.* 9 (written 397–401 CE) of his mother Monica's death matches in several respects the view Augustine expresses in *cura mort.* At her deathbed, Monica refused to grieve over the fact that she would not be buried next to her late husband, Patricius, in Thagaste. A careful comparison between Monica's utterances in *conf.* 9 and Augustine's opinion in *cura mort.* gives room to the view that in *conf.* Augustine deliberately depicts Monica as an example of fearlessness with regard to physical death." Rose, *Augustine on the Relations between the Living and the Deceased*, 24.

128 "Too much paganism, Augustine charged, had already warped Christians' expectations and had transformed Christian's funerals into raucous celebrations." Peter Iver Kaufman, "Augustine, Martyrs, and Misery," *Church History* 63 (1994), 4. Brown, however, suggests that Augustine was more concerned with the social function of feasting at the grave that is with privatization and social divisiveness of such practices than with its supposed superstitious content: "He was, therefore, prepared to accept some form of feasting as long as it did not become too competitive, exclusive, or an occasion for a family to flaunt the extent of its own dependents." Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 35. On the banning of funeral banquets and Augustine's part in it, see Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century," 47.

amplify them.¹²⁹ Taking a measured view¹³⁰ of practices associated with the cult of the saints, and thus, showing an awareness of the linkage between the body and new forms of piety, Augustine answers that it depends on the kind of life one has led in the body whether pious acts will help.¹³¹ Whether the soul of the dead profits from the place where it lies or does not requires a more careful investigation. Augustine here hints at a comparison of religious traditions. He draws on the example of Virgil, who states that the unburied are prohibited from crossing the river Styx and reaching Hades.¹³²

However, for believers of the 'true religion', this is not a problem, for harm to the body is not inflicted on the soul either before or after death, as Augustine described in *De civitate Dei*. Nevertheless, there is another space at stake beyond the place of burial. Augustine refers to the example of the martyrs in Gaul as described by Eusebius, whose bodies were fed to the dogs, then cremated, and the ashes scattered upon the Rhone River. He concludes, then, that these atrocities were permitted by divine providence to show this life is, in fact, of little value compared with a confession of Christ and that being buried is of even less importance. If the savage treatment of the bodies could have harmed the martyr's 'most victorious souls', then, Augustine suggests, God would never have allowed this to happen:

[...] quod non ob aliud credendum est diuinitus fuisse permissum, nisi ut discerent christiani in confitendo Christum, dum contemnunt hanc uitam, multo magis contemnere sepulturam. Hoc enim quod ingenti saeuitia de corporibus martyrum factum est, si eis quidquam noceret, quo minus beate requiescerent eorum uictoriosissimi spiritus, non utique fieri sineretur.¹³³

129 See Rose, *Augustine on the Relations between the Living and the Deceased*, 75–76. See also *ibid.*, 42: "In fact, Augustine's interpretation of *depositio ad sanctos* centres on the intensity of the prayers said by the relatives of the dead. In the case of the young Cynegius, buried by Paulinus in the vicinity of the memoria of Felix at Nola, the place of burial may serve to intensify the prayers by Cynegius' mother Flora; this effect of the location of burial on her prayers would be optimal if she has his place of burial near the memorial of Felix in mind."

130 As he, in fact, did with regard to the practice of feasting at the graves, thus accommodating it with Christian ideas; see Johannes Quasten, "'Vetus Supersitio et Nova Religio'. The Problem of Refrigerium in the Ancient Church of North Africa," *The Harvard Theological Review* 33 (1940): 262.

131 Hunter, "Augustine on the Body," 364.

132 These are, consequently, the most dangerous dead who may haunt the living. See van Gennepe, *Übergangsriten*, 154.

133 *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 188, 191.

Though “no one ever hates his own body” (*nemo unquam carnem suam odio habet* Eph. 5:29), it is merely the future prospect of the destruction of the body that is painful for the living, for the lifeless body itself can experience no suffering.¹³⁴ Accordingly, burial rites are merely comfort for the living (*sed cum talia uiuorum solacia requiruntur*), albeit a desirable one.¹³⁵ However, as Augustine has elaborated in *De civitate Dei* and quoted again in *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, dead bodies are not to be neglected, for they fulfill an important function. They signify that the providence of God is also concerned with the bodies of the dead ‘in order that our faith in the resurrection might be strengthened.’¹³⁶

Above all, the care for the dead, not least in *placing* them near the places of martyrs and saints, is always a *sign*, and particularly “a mark of good and human disposition.”¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the good disposition refers to the living who remain to care; the only way the deceased might profit from being placed near religious sites is semiotic. To Augustine, the proper grave might function as an *indicative instruction* for the afterworld: first, in the sense that it allows remembrance of the deceased, and secondly, in the sense that it allows the pious to commend the departed to the relevant saints by means of their prayers:

When therefore a mind recollects where the body of a very dear friend lies buried, and in the process the place represents itself to his thoughts as a place made reverent by the name of a martyr, such a state of mind then commends that soul to that martyr by his remembrance and prayer.¹³⁸

134 On Augustine's use of these biblical lines, see Rose, *Augustine on the Relations between the Living and the Deceased*, 199 f.

135 *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* 153.

136 “uerum istae auctoritates non hoc admonent, quod insit ullus cadaueribus sensus, sed ad dei prouidentiam, cui placent etiam talia pietatis officia, corpora quoque mortuorum pertinere significant propter fidem resurrectionis astruendam.” (*De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 141).

137 “profecto etiam prouisus sepeliendis corporibus apud memorias sanctorum locus bonae affectionis humanae est erga funera suorum.” *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 149.

138 “cum itaque recolit animus, ubi sepultum sit carissimi corpus, et occurrit locus nomine martyris uenerabilis, eidem martyri animam dilectam commendat recordantis et precantis affectus.” *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 162. On this point, see Kaufman, “Augustine, Martyrs, and Misery,” 7.

Thus, the burial place serves as a catalyst for prayer, which then directs the piously remembered 'object' towards a higher goal. This directional pathway, Augustine might say, is even made firmer by the directive power of martyrs.¹³⁹ Hence, it is the living affection of those remembering that makes the burial place beneficial; the grave and the body lying there are spaces of resonance for the inner dispositions of the pious living. Accordingly, even a holy place like a martyr's grave does not gain its specific aura via the holiness of the body buried there, but rather due to the powerful history of mourners in past and present who showed their affection in that place, for "the mind's recollection of that holy spot renews and increases the affection which came first."¹⁴⁰

In a sense, Augustine's argument is directed against the religious idea manifested in the lines of Virgil (*Aen.* 6.326–328),¹⁴¹ on the impossibility of the unburied crossing the river in Hades: *an forte reuocandum est in opinionem, quod infernum fluuium insepulti non poterant transmeare?*¹⁴² This reference to Virgil gives Augustine the opportunity to clarify his standpoint unambiguously. The Christian concept of resurrection is quite different and completely independent from the corpse as such, not because of its insignificance but because of the *significance* of God's overall semiotic presence, which relates the body closely to Him. While spacing the corpse for Virgil meant spacing the body, in a Christian context, spacing the corpse means locating it in a relational context where the mind is directed towards Heavens and the actual body is an amplifier (reinforcer) of the directive-indicative structure connecting the believer's mind to its final aim. This amplifying function can only be accomplished if the dead body is considered to be an empty directional space.¹⁴³

139 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

140 "et illic corpore posito recordatus locus sanctus eum qui praecesserat renouat et auget affectum." *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 175.

141 "[...] portitur ille Charon; hi, quos vehit unda, sepulti./ nec ripas datur horrendas et rauca fluentia/ transportare prius, quam sedibus ossa quierunt." Vergil, *Aeneis*, ed. and trans. Gerhard Fink (Düsseldorf/ Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 2005), 262.

142 *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 226. Another example is the topography of Egyptian religion, compare van Gennep, *Übergangsriten*, 152.

143 In this sense, the description of the inversion of the antique opposition between the dead and the holy by Philippe Ariès is quite fitting. Ariès suggests that the corpse of a Christian as such creates a religious space, though that space to Augustine does not emerge around it but is located in the dead body as such as an empty directed space that might be vessel for the Holy Spirit. See Philippe Ariès, *Geschichte des Todes* (München: dtv, 1982), 57. See also the chapter on Secret.

4 The Contested Dead Body and Its Directive Space—*Confessiones*, Book IV and IX

As Kurt Flasch has highlighted, the *Confessiones* is a recursive and reflexive work written in order to promote self-understanding through theoretical conception.¹⁴⁴ The autobiographical material is not presented as an element of a biographical account or a description of a certain historical situation. Rather, it is used to illustrate the conceptual idea guiding the whole enterprise. The book is a treatise on the directed guidedness of human existence, which follows from theological considerations on the nature of God and his divine mercy, displaying a non-traditional “ruthless theocentrism.”¹⁴⁵

The phenomenon of death and its results are also subject to the theological presupposition. In his *Confessions*, Augustine describes two ways of dealing with the dead, in the sense of spacing the corpse into a different context. This context becomes visible in two forms of affection the deceased inflicts upon his mind. As Johannes Brachtendorf has repeatedly shown, the two scenes in Book IV about the death of an unnamed friend and the lines concerning the death of his mother Monica in Book IX and the respective impacts of their passing on Augustine are parallel in their composition.¹⁴⁶ Augustine borrows the theme, most of the material, and the therapeutic solution from antique literature.¹⁴⁷ Virgil is once again a major source of reference, especially in Augustine’s description and analysis of his mother, Monica. Therefore, Augustine deliberately models his account of his mother after the model form provided by the *Aeneid*.¹⁴⁸

144 See Kurt Flasch, “Einleitung,” in Augustinus, *Bekenntnisse*, translated, annotated and edited by Kurt Flasch and Burkhard Mojsisch, pp. 5–31 (Stuttgart: Reclam 1989), 10.

145 Flasch, “Einleitung,” 12.

146 Johannes Brachtendorf, “... damit sie weinen lernen im Tal der Tränen. Augustin und die christliche Rehabilitation der Affekte,” in *Unruhig ist unser Herz. Interpretationen zu Augustins Confessiones*, ed. Michael Fiedrowicz (Trier: Paulinus, 2004), 124. See also Johannes Brachtendorf, *Augustins ‘Confessiones’* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2005), 87. Werpehowski considers Augustine’s account of his emotions while reading about the death of Dido and Monica’s grief over her son to be setting up a symbolic structure within which the accounts of sorrow over the loss of his friend and his mother might, furthermore, be located. William Werpehowski, “Weeping at The Death of Dido: Sorrow, Virtue, and Augustine’s ‘Confessions,’” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 19 (1991): 181.

147 Brachtendorf, “... damit sie weinen lernen im Tal der Tränen,” 138.

148 See the ‘typological kinship between the mothers of Augustine and Aeneas’ as scrutinized by Eric J. Ziolkowski, “St. Augustine: Aeneas’ Antitype, Monica’s Boy,” *Literature & Theology* 9 (1995): 1, 10–13.

However, the mirrored composition also allows a comparison of the two ways of mourning Augustine experienced, as well as an evaluation of the different ways of dealing with the dead bodies.¹⁴⁹ As they are associated with different practices regarding the dead, Augustine here explicitly compares and evaluates religious attitudes and ideas. The intellectual and affectual ways of dealing with death Augustine describes are also related to his own conversional process, as the death of his friend occurs before his conversion, as described in Books 7 and 8, and the death and burial of his mother after it. Moreover, his mother's death gains additional structural importance, for it concludes the 'autobiographical' account Augustine gives in his work.¹⁵⁰ Hence, the state of mind that Augustine describes for himself at this point in the narrative functions as a kind of formal baseline for how Augustine will structure his later thinking.

The setting of the first death scene is introduced as follows. A young Augustine, newly begun in his career as a teacher, was on friendly terms with a young man of the same age in his hometown of Thagaste. The friend, seduced by Augustine himself, shared the flawed ideas Augustine held this time, to the horror of his pious mother, Monica.¹⁵¹ Despite—and perhaps because of—these ideas, Augustine states his conviction that his soul could not live without his friend: *mecum iam errabat in animo ille homo, et non poterat anima mea sine illo*.¹⁵²

As Augustine's description makes clear, both he and his friend can be described as having a precarious and frivolous religiosity. As such, the friend is characterized by his similarities to Augustine rather than being marked off as a distinct individual—he even has no name in Augustine's account.¹⁵³ They both had fun in the presence of the other. Soon, however, things became

149 Miller considers the two accounts as being related to an anthropocentric imaginary on the one hand, and a theocentric imaginary, on the other hand. Richard B. Miller, "Evil, Friendship, and Iconic Realism in Augustine's 'Confessions,'" *The Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011): 391.

150 On the question of the autobiographical nature of *Confessiones* see BeDuhn, "Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 2," 416: "The Augustine of *Confessiones* is no more or less the 'real' Augustine than any other of his purposeful rhetorical performances. It is one of many performances of self that Augustine adopted as a stance of self-representation in the context of particular problems and conflicts he wished to engage."

151 These were mainly Manichaean ideas: "nam et a fide vera, quam non germanitus et penitus adulescens tenebat, deflexeram eum in supersticiosas fabellas et perniciosas, propter quas me plangebatur mater." *Confessions*, 35 (IV, 4). Compare Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions*, 201.

152 *Confessions*, 35 (IV, 4).

153 Miller, "Evil, Friendship, and Iconic Realism in Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 393.

serious. The unnamed friend was baptized whilst he was unconscious as he suffered from a serious fever. Although he first recovered, seemingly in opposition to the young Augustine's careless suggestion that the act of baptism was done only formally and was without any serious meaning, the beloved friend died shortly afterward when the fever returned. Augustine fell into deep grief, tortured by the friend's absence that made hell from everything around him by means of the empty space of the missing friend.¹⁵⁴ It is important that Augustine here is mainly concerned with the absence of his friend's bodily appearance, as perceived through sensory perception:

My eyes searched everywhere for him, but he was not there to be seen. I hated all the places we had known together, because he was not in them and they could not longer whisper to me 'Here he comes!' as they would have done had he been alive but absent for a while.¹⁵⁵

His heart drowned in a dark mood; his sensory perception only allowed Augustine to perceive death: "Black grief closed over my heart and wherever I looked I saw only death."¹⁵⁶ The description of mourning in the *Confessions* here is closely modeled after the description of grief in Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes* as some "hideous and cruel beast" (*taetram et inmanem beluam*) that is likely to destroy one's life.¹⁵⁷

Not by accident, in connection with the notion of the 'heart' being grieved, a basic motif of unrest reappears in this context via an intensified quotation of Psalm 41:6—"I asked my soul why it is so sad and full of unrest within me."¹⁵⁸ In the following, Augustine further emphasizes the deeply troubled state of his soul through scriptural and literary devices:

I lived in a fever, convulsed with tears and sighs that allowed me neither rest nor peace of mind. My soul was a burden, bruised and bleeding.

¹⁵⁴ "[...] temptavi apud illum inridere, tamquam et illo inrisuro mecum baptismum, quem acceperat mente atque sensu absentissimus [...]" *Confessions*, 36 (IV, 4).

¹⁵⁵ *Confessions*, 36 (IV, 4). "expetebant eum undique oculi mei, et non dabatur. et oderam omnia, quod non haberent eum, nec mihi iam dicere poterant: 'ecce veniet', sicut cum viveret, quando absens era", trans. Pine-Coffin, 76.

¹⁵⁶ *Confessions*, 36 (IV, 4). "Quo dolore contenebratum est cor meum, et quidquid aspiciabam mors erat." Translation from Augustine, *The Confessions*, introduction, translation and notes by Maria Boulding, O.S.B., New York: New York City Press 1997, 97.

¹⁵⁷ Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes/Gespräche in Tusculum*, ed. Ernst August Kirlfel (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), 338 (IV, 20)

¹⁵⁸ "[...] interrogabam animam meam quare tristis esset et quare conturbaret me valde [...]" *Confessions*, 36 (IV, 4).

It was tired of the man who carried it, but I found no place to set it down to rest. Neither the charm of the countryside nor the sweet scents of a garden could soothe it. It found no peace in song or laughter, none in the company of friends at table or in the pleasures of love, none even in books or poetry.¹⁵⁹

Facing the death of his friend, for Augustine, his entire existence is put into question; his self-understanding is alienated, the tranquility of his heart is lost, and the direction of his life is unclear. Augustine summarizes his state of mind as follows: "I had become a puzzle to myself [...]" (*factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio [...]*).¹⁶⁰

Augustine now explains why this is the case: this manner of dealing with death is a misinterpretation of the empty space that was formerly filled by the deceased. Following Augustine's description with regard to spatial structures, one could say that the deceased opens a hole in the structure of life that leads the unquiet soul to nothingness. Socially, one might follow van Gennepe in saying that those who are left behind now belong to a special sphere, neither living nor dead.¹⁶¹ The pertinent open space intensifies self-reference to the point when self-reference becomes painful and impossible to endure. Accordingly, Augustine writes: "As I tried to put my soul to rest, it slipped into a void and lapsed back upon me"—and, thus, he finds himself in an ill-fated space (*infelix locus*) that is characterized by opposing directives and the impossibility to flee oneself as the main cause of mischief:

The god I worshipped was my own delusion, and if I tried to find in it a place to rest my burden, there was nothing there to uphold it. It only fell and weighed me down once more, so that I was still my own unhappy prisoner, unable to live in such a state yet powerless to escape from it. Where could my heart find refuge from itself? Where could I go, yet leave myself behind? Was there any place where I should not be a prey to myself?¹⁶²

159 *Confessions*, 37 (IV, 7), trans. Pine-Coffin, 78.

160 *Confessions*, 36 (IV, 4). *factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio [...]* Trans. Pine-Coffin, 76.

161 Van Gennepe, *Übergangsriten*, 143–144.

162 *Confessions*, 37/38 (IV, 7). "[...] vanum phantasma et error meus erat deus meus. si conabar eam ibi ponere, ut requiesceret, per inane labebar et iterum ruebat super me, et ego mihi remanseram infelix locus, ubi nec esse possem nec inde recedere. quo enim cor meum fugeret a corde meo? quo a me ipso fugerem? quo non me sequeretur" Trans. Pine-Coffin, 78.

Thrust into a vicious circle by the empty space of the dead body, the affectation as permanent self-affectation threatens the very existence of the living. It is the hidden cult of the dead that lies behind the affection Augustine describes, which endangers human existence with despair. It is death or the dead body taken as such that makes the experience of loss devastating: that is, to fail to see the directional-indicative structure of human existence. This blindness seduces the human mind into thinking of humans as entities grounded in their own right.¹⁶³ Here, the experience of death shakes the security of existence in a more profound manner than simply the threat of the finiteness of life. Augustine puts the decisive contrast between the wrong and the right way to deal with the dead in spatial terms: in emotion and habit, it is wrong to be directed toward oneself, and it is right to be directed toward God.¹⁶⁴

A well-acknowledged structural feature of the *Confessiones*, the directedness towards the divine is represented in the series of ascents “by which Augustine mentally attempted to rise out of the material world and approach the immaterial realm of God. He presented these ascents as the goal of his spiritual development, despite his being officially committed to the very different Catholic goals of physical resurrection and last judgement.”¹⁶⁵ However, ascent and hope for resurrection are not necessarily contradictory, as Augustine characterizes the proper order of human existence in this world as being directed toward God, and hence, a spiritual ascending can be described as an expression of this direction. Accordingly, Augustine deals with the transcendence/immanence distinction of the *vera religio* by means of contemplating and propagating a directed ascent. The most impressive example of such an ascent is the visionary experience he shares with his mother shortly before her death. Here, the temporal and spatial elements of the description are of great importance, not least in the setting of the scene. Following God’s secret direction, Augustine and his mother were standing at a window that led to a garden in the house:

Not long before the day on which she was to leave this life—you knew which day it was to be, O Lord, though we did not—my mother and I were alone, leaning from a window which overlooked the garden in the courtyard of the house where we were staying at Ostia.¹⁶⁶

163 Augustine’s notion of sin “as a retreat into the privacy of self-absorption” thus, definitely plays a role in his description of his emotional reaction to his friend’s death. Hunter, “Augustine on the Body,” 357.

164 See Brachtendorf, *Augustine’s ‘Confessiones’*, 85.

165 BeDuhn, “Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma 2,” 329.

166 *Confessions* 113 (1X/10). “Impendente autem die quo ex hac vita erat exitura (quem diem tu noveras ignorantibus nobis), provenerrat, ut credo, procurante te occultis tuis modis, ut

It is here at the permeable borderline, overlooking a garden, that the following ascent occurs. It consists of an intensifying discussion, leading to a denunciation of the pleasures of the world *vis-a-vis* the joys of the life eternal. Through discussion, they transcended the physical world and reached the divine sphere:

Higher still we climbed, thinking and speaking all the while in wonder at all that you have made. At length we came to our own souls and passed beyond them to that place of everlasting plenty, where you feed Israel for ever with the food of truth. There life is that Wisdom by which all these things we know are made, all things that have ever been and all that are yet to be. But that Wisdom is not made: it is as it has always been and as it will be for ever [...] ¹⁶⁷

Ascension, thus, is intended to reach a sphere in which temporality plays no more role. It marks a particular space that should, according to Augustine, characterize the directed religious existence of the Christians. However, in this world, the paradisiac sphere can only be *indicated*. As Robin Lane Fox shows, the directive is associated with a certain place that bears religious significance, namely, as in Milan where the decisive words have reached him, a garden: "In Ostia, he ascended to God while looking calmly over another garden, which lay beyond a window. Neither garden was a literary fiction: they were two real gardens, the settings for two different encounters with God." ¹⁶⁸

The ascension scene, which leads Augustine's mother to question her spatial existence (*Quid hic facio?*), provides the background for the following narration on death and burial and, as a consequence, on the proper way to deal with the deceased. The solution to the problem of how to deal with the dead, however, was already hinted at in Book IV with the remark on Monica's uneasiness about her son's beliefs, which she held to be literally dangerous. Her own death after the decisive conversion of her son is subject to quite a different description, which focuses mainly on the sites and rites of death. It is also about religious space, as Augustine indicates in the introductory sentences to the account of his mother's death:

ego et ipsa soli staremus, incumbentes ad quondam fenestram, unde hortus intra domum quae nos habebat prospectabatur, illic apud Ostia [...]", trans. Pine-Coffin, 196–197.

¹⁶⁷ *Confessions* 113 (IX/10): "Et adhuc ascendebamus interius cogitando et loquendo et mirando opera tua. Et venimus in mentes nostras et transcendimus eas, ut attingeremus regionem ubertatis indeficientis, ubi pascis Israel in aeternum veritate pabulo, et ibi vita sapientia est, per quam fiunt omnia ista, et quae fuerunt et quae future sunt, et ipsa non fit, sed sic est ut fuit, et sic erit semper." Trans. Pine-Coffin, 197.

¹⁶⁸ Fox, *Augustine*, 356.

We discussed where we could most usefully serve you and together we set out to return to Africa. While we were at Ostia, at the mouth of the Tiber, my mother died.¹⁶⁹

While searching for the proper and most useful (*utilius*) place to serve God, Augustine and those with him are directed toward their former home. On his way to Thagaste, where the emotionally challenging incident of his friend's death had occurred, he is confronted with a corresponding event. It is during this twofold directed movement that his mother's dead body, a body of special importance, enters the narrative, signifying a space the circumstances render particularly important in terms of religious meaning.

First of all, the location of the event is of significance. Monica dies in Ostia while on the journey back to her North African home country and thus remains ultimately separated from her former life. The location of her death, thus, comprises a dynamic directional perspective, which is contrasted with the stability of a residential home. There is no return to the worldly home. She suffers from a fever, loses consciousness, and recovers for a short period. On reawakening, she asks for the place she has been: *ubi eram?* Facing the emotions of her family, she makes a spatial decision: she should be buried at this very spot: '*ponitis hic*,' inquit, '*matrem vestram*.'¹⁷⁰ As Augustine's unnamed friend in his recovery period had been concerned about his baptism, the Christian Monica is concerned about how her corpse should be spaced in a manner commensurate with her belief. She asks not to be buried at home but at the place of her death—quite against common custom: "[...] but my brother said something to the effect that he wished for her sake that she would die in her own country, not abroad."¹⁷¹ The very idea of being buried at home causes her emotional torment. The suggestion made by Augustine's brother and her reaction makes clear that she fears the misinterpretation of the dead body, typical of the cult of the dead. Accusingly, she addresses her faithful son Augustine:

'See how he talks!' and then, speaking to both of us, she went on, 'It does not matter where you bury my body. Do not let that worry you! All I ask

169 *Confessions*, 110 (IX, 8). "quaerebamus quisnam locus nos utilius haberet servientes tibi: pariter remeabamus in Africam. et cum apud Ostia Tiberina essemus, mater defuncta est," trans. Pine-Coffin, 192.

170 *Confessions*, 114 (IX, 11).

171 *Confessions*, 114 (IX, 11). "frater autem meus quiddam locutus est, quo eam non in peregre, sed in patria defungi tamquam felicius optaret," trans. Pine-Coffin, 199.

of you is that, wherever you may be, you should remember me at the altar of the Lord.¹⁷²

Though it was customary for the relatives to tend the grave and, hence, “burial in Italy would be lonely”, these last words of his mother, her spatial and spiritual testament, nevertheless, make Augustine happy.¹⁷³ They most explicitly show that the previous idle wish (*ista inanitas*) of hers to be buried beside her husband has been finally abandoned. He recalls his mother’s earlier worries as follows: “[I remembered now my mother’s] great anxiety to be buried beside her husband’s body in the grave which she had provided and prepared for herself. [...] that the earthly remains of husband and wife should be joined as one and covered by the same earth.”¹⁷⁴ Monica clearly no longer minds: Augustine suggests that if asked whether she feared to be buried far from home, she would have answered: “Nothing is far from God, and I am not afraid that He could not find the spot from where he could awake me on Judgment’s Day.”¹⁷⁵ As Augustine puts it, the same earth to be covered with would be the whole world, filled with God’s presence. As Jonathan Z. Smith has defined the term, Monica, in her spatial placement of her grace, has joined the “religions of anywhere.”¹⁷⁶ Hence, she had freed herself from the last remnants of the cult of the dead.

This way of spacing her own dead body has a strong effect on Augustine’s affections, beginning with the strange happiness he feels in witnessing his mother die this way and the zealotry he displays in condemning her former plan to be buried next to her husband. Augustine’s mother’s burial is the final nail in his father’s coffin as to his significance; the marginalization of his father is now completed. Perhaps Kurt Flasch is right in suggesting that Monica’s statement to Augustine means a final spatial victory over his near-pagan father

172 *Confessions*, 114 (IX, 11). “vide’ ait, ‘quid dicit.’ et mox ambobus: ‘ponite’ inquit, ‘hoc corpus ubicumque. nihil vos eius cura conturbet. tantum illud vos rogo, ut ad domini altare memineritis mei, ubiubi fueritis,” trans. Pine-Coffin, 199.

173 James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions III. Commentary on Books 8–13* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 138.

174 *Confessions*, 115 (IX, 11). “[...] quanta cura semper aestuasset de sepulchro quod sibi providerat et praeparaverat iuxta corpus viri sui. [...] ut coniuncta terra amborum coniugum terra tegetur,” trans. Pine-Coffin, 199.

175 *Confessions*, 115 (IX, 11). “‘nihil,’ inquit, ‘longe est deo, neque timendum est, ne ille non agnoscat in fine saeculi unde me resuscitet.’,” trans. Pine-Coffin, 200.

176 See Jonathan Z. Smith, “Here, There, and Anywhere,” in *Relating Religion. Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 330. The ‘transcendence of earth as a goal’, as Smith put it, gave “comparative advantage to a religion of ‘anywhere.’”

in a religiously sublimated form of the Oedipus complex—his mother now belongs entirely to him and his faith, not at his father's side.¹⁷⁷ Augustine, nevertheless, finds a proper place to bury his father by his mother's side in the literary memorial that is his book.

For our general theme, the more relevant description is on the semiotic level. Augustine describes the death and the burial of his mother as a constant struggle against the customs and habits that are emotionally and conventionally associated with such an occasion. Here, Augustine himself is the place of this struggle. Though he admittedly experiences indescribable grief, he is also conscious of the fact that a tearful burial is not appropriate for someone who does not take death too seriously. The intense relationship to both grave and body is gone, for Augustine, as well as the others present at the burial, had no tears, even as his mother's body lay next to the grave "as it was the custom in these parts."¹⁷⁸

When the body was carried out for burial, I went and returned without a tear. I did not weep even during the prayers which we recited while the sacrifice of our redemption was offered for my mother and her body rested by the grave before it was laid in the earth, as is the custom there. Yet all day I was secretly weighed down with grief.¹⁷⁹

Accordingly, against custom, she did not want her body to be dressed splendidly and to be perfumed, nor did she request a monument or a grave at home. Her body had to be spaced differently; that is, by remembering her at the altar, the empty space of her dead body becomes a sign of the direction of salvation by which the unquiet heart (*cor inquietus*) may come to rest. As such, this particular space becomes an example of the principle that "place directs attention", combining spatiality, directedness, and the mental pole into a dynamic whole: place directs attention—*quando ubi sepeliantur adtenditur*.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ See Flasch, *Augustin*, 252. Compare also Flasch, "Einleitung," 24–30.

¹⁷⁸ See Fox, *Augustine*, 360.

¹⁷⁹ *Confessions*, 116 (IX, 12). "Cum ecce corpus elatum est, imus, redimus sine lacrimis. nam neque in eis precibus quas tibi fudimus, cum offerretur pro ea sacrificium pretii nostri iam iuxta sepulchrum, posito cadavere priusquam deponeretur, sicut illic fieri solet, nec in eis ergo precibus flevi, sed toto die graviter in occulto maestus eram [...]," trans. Pine-Coffin, 201.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *To Take Place*, 103.

He further *uses* the corpse of his mother as a directional indicator with maximum effect, in the sense of the Augustinian notion of *utor*.¹⁸¹ To him, the place of the death and the burial of his mother have been most useful (*utilius*) in revering God properly, as he was looking to do when he began his return to Africa. Accordingly, the *Confessiones* themselves might be considered as the proper burial place for his mother's dead body. Augustine contextualizes dealing with his mother's dead body within his directive framework, that is, his exemplary development towards God, and thus uses her corpse as a concluding and highly significant example of this directedness. Therefore, the work is rather a necrography, rather than an (auto-)biography.¹⁸² At the very end of his 'autobiographical' account in Book IX, he expresses his wish that everyone who reads his book may remember Monica and Patricius at the Lord's altar. It is the only place in any of his works where Augustine mentions his mother's name:

O my Lord, my God, inspire your servants my brothers—they are your sons and my masters, whom I serve with heart and voice and pen—inspire those of them who read this book to remember Monica, your servant, at your altar and with her Patricius, her husband, who died before her, by whose bodies you brought me into this life, though how it was I do not know.¹⁸³

Therefore, his mother's last wish that she become a salvational indication is not fulfilled by him or his relatives by doing service at the altar but rather by

181 See Horn, *Augustinus*, 47. Compare also Brachtendorf, *Augustins 'Confessiones'*, 199–200 who connects the proper way of *uti* with spatial reconfiguration: "Augustinus hat gelernt, auch sich selbst zu 'gebrauchen', d.h. sich nicht in sich selbst, sondern in Gott zu lieben. Sich selbst 'gebrauchen' impliziert somit eine Dezentrierung des Ich. Weil Augustinus sich selbst 'in Gott' liebt, vermag er 'vor Gott' über sich selbst und für sich selbst zu weinen."

182 With reference to O'Donnell, Eduard Iricinchi has stressed a corresponding point related to Augustine's former convictions: "In the *Confessions*, Augustine chronicled the death of his Manichaean self" The death of his mother and the action Augustine performs, then, correspond to the death of the Manichean within and his burial within the *Confessiones*. Eduard Iricinchi, "Tam pretiosi codices vestri. Hebrew Scriptures and Persian Books in Augustine's Anti-Manichaean Writings," in *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity*, eds. Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidus (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2011), 160.

183 *Confessions*, 118 (IX, 13). "et inspira, domine meus, deus meus, inspira servis tuis, fratribus meis, filiis tuis, dominis meis, quibus et corde et voce et litteris servio, ut quotquot haec legerint, meminerint ad altare tuum Monnicae, famulae tuae, cum Patricio, quondam eius coniuge, per quorum carnem introduxisti me in hanc vitam, quemadmodum nescio," trans. Pine-Coffin, 204–205.

his readers and their proper action. Monica's last wish is fulfilled by the many who read his 'Confessions' rather than by his own prayers.¹⁸⁴

The corpse is, therefore, formalized twice: first as a corporeal sign indicating salvation, then as a literal sign, thus it is made a sign of signs. Due to the directness of human existence, (true) religion to Augustine is *semiosis*.¹⁸⁵

Concerning contestations of religious practice in spacing the corpse, the account given by Augustine is similarly relevant. In his description of the funeral, religious contact is still present and forms an indispensable element of the presentation of events. Apart from the portraits of people who belonged to the church, Augustine's account is the only description of the funeral of a lay-person that has survived.¹⁸⁶ First of all, in late antique times, religious officials were not yet in control of funerary practices.¹⁸⁷ It is important to remember that Monica died without the institutionalized solace of the official church, so that solace, therefore, became an individual, or rather, a family problem.¹⁸⁸ The family organized funeral and burial; "the Church has no say, except to encourage some moderation."¹⁸⁹ Church regulations and practices here were in a state of evolution; there is not even the mention of a need to bless or sanctify the place of burial.¹⁹⁰ Consequently, as death and burial remained under the control of the family, the rites performed before death, at funerals, at places of burial, and, finally, the ways of commemorating the dead were still a contested issue.¹⁹¹ Thus, the occasion of the funeral was a matter of negotiation over the way it should be done.

As one can conclude from his descriptions of the burial of Monica, the pagan patterns of burial still largely prevailed in Christian contexts at the time.¹⁹²

184 See also Fox, *Augustine*, 362.

185 See Miller, "Evil, Friendship, and Iconic Realism in Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 392. To Miller, Augustine argues for an iconic perspective of the universe rather than an idolatrous one, mutable goods pointing beyond their surface to objective values that, provide order and direction to human affection.

186 Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, 128.

187 See Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century," 59.

188 See Quasten, "Vetus Superstitio et Nova Religio," 256. See also Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, X. With regard to Augustine's home province, Rebillard states: "At the request of the family, the clergy might have participated in the funeral procession, but there is no positive evidence for this in North Africa." (Rebillard, "Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity," 69)

189 Rebillard, "The Church, the Living, and the Dead," 223.

190 Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century," 49.

191 Rebillard, "The Church, the Living, and the Dead," 221.

192 See Marksches, *Das antike Christentum*, 87.

Augustine closes his mother's eyes and mouth (*Premebam oculos eius*)¹⁹³ as it was customary in pagan burial ceremonies.¹⁹⁴ There is also a mandatory linguistic pattern of dealing with death, though the voluminous pagan lamentation is replaced by a moderate Christian prayer and weeping.¹⁹⁵ In Augustine's narrative, the conflicting rites, here, cause some family friction—a friction that further demarcates the line between pagan custom and moderate mourning as advocated by the church. Prominently and most impressively, Augustine's son, Adeodatus, is rebuked by all when he cries too loudly for his grandmother—a conventional emotional reaction that Augustine himself has to fight and overcome due to his status.

As she breathed her last, the boy Adeodatus began to wail aloud and only ceased his cries when we all checked him. I, too, felt that I wanted to cry like a child, but a more mature voice within me, the voice of my heart, bade me keep my sobs in check, and I remained silent.¹⁹⁶

Augustine describes the battle taking place inside himself, the pains he feels, and the tears he cannot avoid, but a mighty spiritual imperative causes him to hold back his tears.¹⁹⁷ In retrospect, Augustine criticizes himself for his weak performance. Nevertheless, the reason for his opposition to such a

193 *Confessions* 115 (IX, 12).

194 On the custom and Augustine's unique position toward it, see Zangré, *Les rites funéraires*, 58: "Le fait de fermer les yeux d'un mort est une pratique qui relève du geste funéraire, à ne pas assimiler automatiquement au rite. Ce geste traverse toutes les époques et n'est donc pas l'appannage environnement pagano-chrétien du 3ème au 5ème siècle. La littérature païenne à laquelle nous nous référons n'attache pas de sens particulier à ce geste. Du côté de la littérature chrétienne d'Afrique du Nord, Augustin est le seul qui fasse mention de l'expression. Il nous informe par l'expression équivalente *premere oculos*, dans un contexte spécifiquement funéraire, en lui donnant une signification symbolique. Il est aussi le seul qui soit acteur du geste."

195 On a similarly adequate and modest behavior of mourning see Paulinus of Nola's letter to Augustine: "[...] docuisti me in spiritu veritatis salubre modernadi in occiduis mortalibus animi temperamentum, quo et illam beatam matrem et aviam Melaniam flevisse carnalem obitum unici filii taciturno quidem luctu, non tamen sicco a maternis lacrimis dolore vidisti. Cuius quidem modestas et graves lacrimas sicut proprior vel aequalior animae eius spiritus altius intellexisti [...]" (Paulinus von Nola, *Epistulae III*, 980, 982).

196 *Confessions*, 115 (IX, 12). "tū vero, ubi efflavī extremum, puer Adeodatus exclamavit in planctu atque ab omnibus nobis coercitus tacuit. hoc modo etiam meum quiddam puerile, quod labebatur in fletu, iuvenali voce, voce cordis, cohercebatur et tacebat," trans. Pine-Coffin, 200.

197 "[...] confluebat in praecordia mea maestitudo ingens et transfluebat in lacrimas, ibidemque oculi mei violento animi imperio resorbabant fontem suum usque ad siccitatem, et in tali luctamine valde male mihi erat." *Confessions*, 115 (IX, 12).

conventional reaction to death is based on the particular handling of contingency with regard to the transcendence/immanence distinction as found in Christian belief. This way of dealing with death renders the conventional reaction improper, demarcating it from the prevailing custom of the times:

For we did not think it right to mark my mother's death with weeping and moaning, because such lamentations are the usual accompaniment of death when it is thought of as a state of misery or as total extinction. But she had not died in misery nor had she wholly died. Of this we were certain, both because we knew what a holy life she had led and also because our faith was real, and we had no reasons to doubt it.¹⁹⁸

The main difference regarding the dead body is topological. Spacing it into the context of traditional affection theory may lead to despair and nothingness; spacing it into the context of traditional burial practices is irrelevant or even dangerous if they focus the mourner's mind on the dead instead of indicating the direction to salvation. Augustine must abolish the cult of the dead by refusing all attempts to consider death, the dead body, and its burial place. For him, it marks the conclusion of his individual development, something that may result in apotheosis.

This formal way of spacing the corpse is the correct way to prove one's concern for the deceased through demonstrating a proper Christian way to love. Its space is characterized by multiple directives that revise the relation of distance and closeness. In the words of Hannah Arendt, writing about Augustine and his mother:

The *dilectio proximi* is the concrete realization of the recursive reference beyond the world, and, at the same time it pushes the other out of that world he perceives as providing the meaning for his existence. In correspondence of the meaning of 'Sein=Ewig-sein' she does not love the other as a *moriturus*, but rather as that, that which is persistent in him, his own 'From-where'. [...] Via the beloved, the lover reaches for God, in whom alone his existence and his love make sense. For the *dilectio proximi* death

198 *Confessions*, 115 (IX, 12). "neque enim decere arbitrabamur funus illud questibus lacrimosis gemitibusque celebrare, quia his plerumque solet deplorari quaedam miseria morientium aut quasi omnimoda extinctio. at illa nec misere moriebatur nec omnino moriebatur. hoc et documentis morum eius et fide non ficta rationibusque certis tenebamus," trans. Pine-Coffin, 200.

is meaningless, for death, separating him from the world, does the very same thing that she herself by loving that being that is alive within him as his origin, anyway does.¹⁹⁹

By means of the deceased beloved, the loving one is directed towards God as the real indicational nexus of his existence, in which direction gives sense to his affection. In a corresponding manner, for Augustine, friendship is not self-sufficient: it is not directed towards itself but rather has its final goal in God to whom it is ultimately directed.²⁰⁰ It is precisely this accumulation of directions and directives pointing from here to some greater beyond that makes the body's space religiously relevant. With reference to *De vera religione*, Augustine defines the notion of religion in his *Retractationes*, correspondingly, relating the notion etymologically to processes of direction and connection:

“Ad unum deum tendentes [...] et ei uni religantes animas nostras, unde religio dicta creditur, omni superstitione careamus.” In his verbis meis ratio, quae reddita est, unde sit dicta religio, plus mihi placuit.²⁰¹

As such, Augustine establishes a very specific way of dealing with the transcendence/immanence distinction through defining two particular spaces and the contrasting distance between them, a distance that can only be overcome by the directedness Augustine describes—not least with regard to the dead body.

199 “Die dilectio proximi ist also die konkrete Verwirklichung des Rückbezugs über die Welt hinaus, und in eins damit stößt sie den anderen aus der Welt, in der er den Sinn seines Seins sieht. Entsprechend dem Sinn von Sein=Ewig-sein liebt sie den Anderen nicht als moriturus, sondern das in ihm, was ewig ist, sein eigenes Von-wo-aus. [...] Der Liebende greift über den Geliebten zu Gott, in dem allein seine Existenz und zugleich seine Liebe ihren Sinn hat. Der Tod ist für die dilectio proximi ohne Bedeutung, denn der Tod, der ihn aus der Welt herausnimmt, tut nur das, was sie von sich aus in der Liebe zu dem Sein, das in ihm als sein Ursprung lebendig ist, ohnehin getan hat.” Hannah Arendt, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin. Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation* (Berlin/ Wien: Philo, 2003), 103, my translation.

200 See Gerhard Krieger, “Selig, wer Dich liebt und den Freund in Dir’. Augustin und die Freundschaft,” in *Unruhig ist unser Herz. Interpretationen zu Augustins Confessiones*, ed. Michael Fiedrowicz (Trier: Paulinus, 2004), 52. Krieger quotes Sermon 361: “Ille enim veraciter amat amicum, qui Deum amat in amico, aut quia est in illo, au tut sit amicum in te.”

201 *De vera religione* 199.

5 Conclusion: Aspects of Space in the Dynamics of Religions

Augustine was a seminal figure in the history of what was later called Western thought, who deeply influenced the world that came after him in fields far beyond theology. His influence on the very basic concepts of intellectual discourse, for example, on the concept of will, language, memory, divine mercy, and not least the concept of time, is unquestionable. The concept of space, however, has triggered less interest among Augustine's successors and interpreters. In both theology and philosophy, Augustine is important for the sake of his directional topology, and less for his anthropology. His topology is closely connected to the notions of order and being ordered. It is the proper space and place of the human being, and that space's inner, dynamic structure is the main subject of his thinking. As a directive, religious space is a function of religion's stabilized dynamics. Augustine's thoughts on the phenomenon of space, derived from his concrete characterization of the space of the dead body, hint at the dynamic structure of a religiously meaningful space, dynamics that are not dependent on temporal change as a trigger or background. Such a space may also display dynamic processes of intensification.²⁰² In any case, spaces *remain* dynamic, as their stability depends on the dynamic aspect they present.²⁰³ Religious spaces, accordingly, are not passive or immobile frameworks of process and events but rather indispensable elements in the process itself.²⁰⁴

With regard to the study of religion, Augustine's thoughts are important as a pertinent object-language attempt to develop a meta-language in order to deal with a contested subject that has been ascribed religious sense. This is, not least, exemplified in his considerations on the dead body. The space of the corpse is by no means indifferent to religious traditions. As such, it can become a subject of controversy. Augustine's ideas on the particularity of the directed space emerged in a situation of contact. His writings thus form an argument with his multi-faceted religious environment on the proper way of spacing the corpse.

Funeral customs and rites, which exemplify the handling of contingency, are a basic element of religions in general. The space used and constructed by

²⁰² See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

²⁰³ Regarding religious spaces the analytical dichotomy of solid and fluid also does not indicate categorical opposition but rather refers to the actual result of a formational and intensifying process in which something momentarily solid becomes a symbol of temporal resistance and is reflected as such in object-language considerations. Rau, *Räume*, 167.

²⁰⁴ See Rau, *Räume*, 164.

them thus can become subject to possible comparison, not only by the scholar, but also by the religious traditions themselves as protagonists of those traditions are challenged to clarify their standpoint towards this issue. Therefore, the concepts of space associated to the dead body and its place may well serve as a *tertium comparationis* between Augustine and his intra-religious and interreligious opponents.²⁰⁵

Augustine's ascription of religious sense to the phenomenon of space is based on a reconsideration of the inner structure of space as directedness towards God. Relying on a strongly specified transcendence-immanence distinction that poses the greatest contrast possible between the worldly and the divine sphere, Augustine illustrates his theological basic concept by comparison of considerations on the place of the deceased in a Christian context of indication.²⁰⁶ As a consequence, he describes proper religious spatiality as vectorial directedness (in our terms, *attraction* or *propensity*) towards God,²⁰⁷ thus associating the immanent and the transcendent sphere together in a relationship of both stern opposition and one-sided dependence.²⁰⁸ "To join Heaven and Earth at the grave of a dead human being", rendering religion of the late antique Mediterranean not otherworldly but "most emphatically upperworldly";²⁰⁹ therefore, it is essentially a hierarchical enterprise intended to cause a certain drift that directs the world-after in a certain direction.²¹⁰ The directedness is here responsible for the particular dynamics which, to

205 The (directional) 'topography of the afterlife' as expressed in Ancient Chinese grave paintings may be a candidate for further comparison that goes beyond Augustine's object-language comparison: "Heaven, where the ancestors resided, was up [...], not below. The Baoshan evidence likewise suggests that while one or some aspects of the soul were contained by the tomb, others, what we are calling the spirit, did escape. I believe, as do most scholars, that the Mawangdui painting does in fact represent transcendence and a journey out of the tomb [...] While one aspect of the deceased [...] may have remained with the body in the underworld, there is no question that some other aspect of the deceased's identity [...] journeyed beyond the tomb up through the gates to the spirit world." (Constance A. Cook, *Death in Ancient China. The Tale of One Man's Journey* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 132–133).

206 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

207 Compare on the vector-term of space in Tibetan Buddhism Esler, *Effortless Spontaneity*, 39.

208 See chapter on Attraction.

209 Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 2.

210 Compare Slater's notion of the direction of transcendence: "The direction of transcendence is vertical rather than horizontal, skyward to eternity rather than ahead to novelty." To describe the direction of religious space, however, it seems to me preferable to characterize it as vectorial, as a possible combination of both. Peter Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion. Continuity and Change in Patterns of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 85.

Augustine, render human existence and the human heart fundamentally troubled and uneasy—in contrast to the peaceful divine existence they will possess in the life eternal when they rest in God:

[...] we [...] shall rest in the Sabbath of eternal life [...] But you are Goodness itself and need no good besides yourself. You are for ever at rest, because you are your own repose.²¹¹

The peace of God directs the process of the proper religion towards Him, thus rendering the spatial existence of the Christian vectorial or directed.²¹²

Ultimately, Augustine's considerations characterize religious space in its vectorial directedness as a space of semiosis.²¹³ By interpreting temporal items as signs of a higher order and the existence of the human being as directed towards God, thus indicating the divine, the Christian author Augustine both employs and deals with a highly specified form of the transcendence-immanence distinction (TID).

211 *Confessions*, 205 (XIII, 36 and XIII, 38). *sabbato vitae aeternae requiescamus in te. [...] tu autem bonum nullo indigens bono semper quietus es, quoniam tua quies tu ipse es*, trans. Pine-Coffin, 347.

212 See Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De civitate Dei*, 148: "The peace of the city of God is *pax perfectissima*, and it is an object of Christian hope. In their pilgrimage, the citizens of God's city have a relation or reference to this perfect place in faith. Augustine says emphatically that this peace is *pax ordinate in fide*. Consequently, it can never be transformed into a political or social programme. The transcendental-eschatological peace is, however, the source of reference for the Christian so that all his attitudes and activities may be motivated by that peace."

213 On Augustine's linguistic semiotics, see Neumann, *Augustinus* 98–103.

Sleep: “Haec est somni et ratio naturalis et natura rationalis”

Tertullian on Sleep as a Promotor of Contact

In the following, I shall explore the significance of sleep as a device or rather as an *interface* that might be examined as a promotor of religious contact.¹ Concluding from the emphasis that had been laid on the overall importance of dynamic situations of contact for the study of religion in the previous chapters, it might come as a surprise that in this final chapter, I set my sights on the case for putting the contact of religious traditions to sleep. The eminence of sleep seems counter-intuitive as the possibilities of contacting anything while sleeping seem considerably reduced from a mundane perspective. However, to me, sleep as a form of being that is described as being devoid of content is, in fact, a more promising candidate for comparison than the presumed content of sleep, namely dreams. Though dreams are one of the most common means of reaching the divine sphere, I shall argue that sleep is clearly a more suitable way of getting into contact with another religious tradition.

1 Tertullian and the Question of Religious Contact

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (c.160–c.212 CE), a resident of Roman Carthage, is best seen as a product of religious contact situations, as well as a promotor and designer of them. Little is known about his biography apart from allusions in his own writings.² Consequently, clichés abound concerning him and his thinking. Tertullian's image is characterized by various charges laid at his head, including rigorism, ethical radicalism, misogyny (*Tu es diaboli ianua*—“You are the devil's gateway.” *De cultu feminarum* 1.1.2.),³

1 An earlier version of this chapter was presented on the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) workshop ‘Sleep in Classical, Late and Eastern Antiquity. A Comparative Inquiry’, 26 and 27 September 2017, organized by Eva Kocziszky.

2 For a discussion of the biographical traces in Tertullian's writings, see Henrike Maria Zilling, *Tertullian. Untertan Gottes und des Kaisers* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 21–82.

3 On the context of this phrase, see F. Forrester Church, “Sex and Salvation in Tertullian,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1973): 83–101. Of course, the phrase is likely to draw attention of feminist critique, for instance, see Donna-Marie Cooper. Her thesis mentions an

obscurantism, and even of 'being of a dark mind and a dark language'.⁴ The most persistent prejudice against him, however, is "his reputation as the enemy of argument and the apostle of unreason," the idea that Tertullian is the main promotor of the *sacrificium intellectus*.⁵ If there is any good in these clichés, it is probably the fact that they should prevent us from expecting more from Tertullian's writings than an object language expression of a situation of religious contact. His writings work as an intellectual incident, a case of an object language author trying to develop a suitable metalanguage to deal with a challenging situation.

It may well be the case that his geographic position in the flourishing harbor, trade hub, and metropolis of Carthage⁶ located in a marginal province striving for more independence (Northern Africa), contributed significantly to his theoretical position.⁷ Archaeological evidence concerning the size and the density of the population suggests "[t]he impression we are left with is one of extensive overcrowding."⁸ Any kind of contact, thus, must have happened under the conditions of this spatial closeness. Above all, his place of living was doubtlessly religiously fertile. In retrospect, Carthage, a center of cultural and religious encounters even before the advent of Christianity, can be

important contact-related general point about Tertullian's utterances, not only with regard to his misogynist slogans: "The problem with feminist scholars' readings of the 'Devil's gateway' passage is that they have used this one passage as the hermeneutical key with which to read Tertullian as a whole. In so doing they treat Tertullian like a systematic theologian and fail to take into account the wider context of *De cultu feminarum*, whilst also ignoring other relevant passages throughout his corpus. However, on many topics Tertullian is not a systematic theologian. [...] In his treatises Tertullian writes as an orator, reacting to various controversies which had arisen, with the intention of winning an argument or persuading his audience to follow a particular course of action. As a skilled orator, Tertullian employed techniques from ancient rhetoric in order to make his case more persuasive. [...] I argue that, in order to understand the meaning behind a certain passage, it is necessary to understand the rhetorical context of that passage." Donna-Marie Cooper, "Was Tertullian a Misogynist? A re-examination of this charge based on a rhetorical analysis of Tertullian's work" (PhD Diss., University of Exeter, September 2012), 5–6.

4 See Eva Schulz-Flügel, "Tertullian. Theologie als Recht," in *Theologen der christlichen Antike*, ed. Wilhelm Geerlings (Darmstadt: WBG, 2002), 13.

5 Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, first theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27.

6 See Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Jews and Christians in Tertullian's Carthage," in *Texts and the Material World: Essays in Honor of Graeme Clarke*, eds. Elizabeth Minchin and Heather Jackson (Uppsala: Astrom, 2017), 255.

7 See Christel Butterweck, "Tertullian, Quintus Septimus Florens" in *Metzler Lexikon christlicher Denker*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 670.

8 Dunn, "Jews and Christians in Tertullian's Carthage," 256.

described as the center of North African Christianity.⁹ It was the birthplace of the cult of martyrs and the veneration of relics, and the location of numerous councils.¹⁰ It was also a city congested with gods: "It was impossible to live in a Greco-Roman city without living with its gods."¹¹ Tertullian both had to and, in fact, did cope with this situation in a particular manner.¹²

As some authors argue, it was above all Hellenistic philosophy that provided the main challenge for the emerging Christianity, not least because of political reasons. For example, Platonism and Stoicism were perceived as an ideology of and for the ruling (*Herrschaftsideologie*), which Christianity since Paul has claimed to have nothing to do with.¹³

Therefore, throughout Tertullian's lifetime and within his space of living, opponents and challenges were not lacking in number. In sum, Tertullian's major motivation as a religious writer can be described as his challenging contact situation. As Eric Osborn put it, "Most thinkers write under the stimulus of controversy, and Tertullian was fortunate to have many opponents to make him think. He denied the existence of eirenic theology. Confrontation was a fact of life and the only way to maturity (*Marc. 2.29.4*). Life and thought for a Heraclitean (*PP* 211, 212) were adversarial (*Marc. 1.25.6*). [*porro nihil sime aemulatione decurret quod sine adversario non erit*]."¹⁴ Whether Tertullian considered himself happy in his challenging situation or whether the after-world may be considered lucky that it made him think in this way is a matter of debate. However, the very fact of object language evidence of the preeminent importance of confrontation makes Tertullian a worthy subject to turn to.

9 See Maureen A. Tilley, "North Africa," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Vol. 1: Origins to Constantine*, eds. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 382–384.

10 Regina Hauses, "Einleitung," in Tertullian, *Adversos Iudaeos/Gegen die Juden*, trans. and intro by Regina Hauses (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 24.

11 Paula Fredriksen and Orded Irshai, "Include Me Out: Tertullian, the Rabbis, and the Graeco-Roman City," in *L'identité à travers l'éthique. Nouvelles perspectives sur la formation des identités collectives dans le monde gréco-romain*, eds. K. Berthelot, R. Naiweld, and D. Stökl Ben Ezra (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 117.

12 "Given how the gods saturated ancient urban time and space, this attempt at separation took considerable effort, self-consciousness, and discipline." Fredriksen and Irshai, "Include Me Out," 121.

13 See Günther Mensching, "Vom Apostel Paulus zu Tertullian und Augustinus. Zum Gegensatz von Philosophie und Glauben im römischen Reich," in *Herausforderung durch Religion? Begegnungen der Philosophie mit Religionen im Mittelalter und Renaissance*, ed. Gerhard Krieger. *Contradictio 11* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 103–105.

14 Osborn, *Tertullian*, 246.

Usually, Tertullian is described as a Christian author writing in the Latin tongue. In fact, he is often considered to be the first such figure, the first Latin theologian to establish Latin Christianity as such.¹⁵ Scholarship has debated his profession extensively. In many of his writings, he appears to be a cunning jurist as well as an excellent orator, willing to take the time to read the medicinal and philosophical literature of his time and, not least, performing the role of a teacher (having changed the *toga* for the *pallium*).¹⁶ Though he sharply articulated his protest against classical education and separated “Athens” categorically from “Jerusalem” and indeed “Academia” from the “Church,”¹⁷ he is also considered to be a great master of style, one of the ‘Second Sophistics’.¹⁸ He became notorious for the line, ‘I believe because it is absurd’ (*credo quia absurdum*), an expression that is not to be found in his writings in this form.¹⁹ The correct quotations are *credibile est, quia ineptum est* and *certum est, quia impossibile est*.²⁰ Moreover, he willingly separated Christianity from scientific knowledge and progress, declaring *We have no need for curiosity since Jesus Christ, nor for inquiry since the Gospel*. Despite that, he is nevertheless a

15 “L’opinion de Tertullien est interessante, non seulement parce qu’il a beaucoup parlé de ces questions éminemment pratiques, mais encore parce qu’il est le premier à en parler beaucoup.” Charles Guignebert, *Tertullien. Études sur ses sentiments À l’égard de l’empire et la société civile* (Paris: Leroux, 1901), 491.

16 By doing so, Tertullian performs a quite literal act of *metaschematism* for the sake of religious transfer. He not only not metaphorically wears the opponent’s garments in order to subvert and challenge his claims, in this case, pagan philosophers, but Tertullian fills the form of the philosopher and uses it to propagate his Christian ideas. On the role of the *pallium* in contemporary discourse, see Arthur P. Urbano, “Dressing a Christian: The Philosopher’s Mantle as Signifier of Pedagogical and Moral Authority,” *Studia Patristica* LXII (2013): 221: “In styling himself a philosopher by his dress, Tertullian does not identify himself as a Stoic or Cynic, as a second-century audience might have expected. Instead, he publicly declares himself a philosopher of Christianity, ‘the divine sect and discipline’. He concludes his speech by praising the pallium, identifying it as the robe of the Christian philosopher: ‘A better philosophy has deigned you worthy, from the moment you began dressing a Christian.’”

17 “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, or the Academy with the Church?,” “Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? quid academiae et ecclesiae?,” Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* VII.

18 Christoph Marksches, “Tertullian,” in *Personenlexikon Religion und Theologie*, ed. Martin Greschat (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (UTB), 1998), 471.

19 On the invention and attribution of this line to Tertullian, see Peter Harrison, “‘I Believe Because Its Absurd’: The Enlightenment Invention of Tertullian’s *Credo*,” *Church History* 86 (2017): 339–364.

20 Tertullian, *De carne Christi liber*, c. 5,4–5: “Cruxifixus est Dei Filius: non pudet, quia pudendum est. Et mortuus est Dei Filius: prorsus credible est, quia ineptum est. Et sepultus resurrexit, certum est, quia impossibile est.”

serious intellectual. He is an intellectual in his ready employment of the intellectual mode to outbid an opponent and in his intellectually founded arguments for simplicity.²¹ Tertullian wrote a large number of texts, thirty-one of which are preserved, alongside some additional fragments of other works. He dealt intensely with widespread topics relating to the theme of Christian existence in a multicultural, mostly antagonistic, if not hostile, environment.²² As Tertullian put it, “Every day we stand siege; every day we are betrayed; above all in our gatherings and our assemblies we are surprised” (*Cotidie obsidemur, cotidie prodimur, in ipsis plurimum coetibus et congregationibus nostris opprimimur*).²³

Around 197 CE, Tertullian converted to Christianity and almost immediately started to write and publish in its defense and promotion, most famously in his *Apology*. An important motivation was his aim to achieve the status of a *religio licita* for Christianity, a status that Judaism had been granted by the Roman state.²⁴ Judaism, perceived as an institutionalized entity, thus became a foil that Tertullian could compare his own true faith to and thereby model it after.²⁵ He considered the Roman government of his time to be favored by divine providence, given the prosperous and peaceful state of the

21 On Tertullian's ‘lust for simplicity’, as supported by superlatives and persisting throughout his work, see Osborn, *Tertullian*, 1 f; Von Campenhausen suggests that the need to outbid opponents in radicalism and consequence ultimately led him to heretical Montanism. Hans von Campenhausen, *Lateinische Kirchenväter*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978), 31.

22 See the first literary document of African Christianity, the *Acta Scillitanorum*. Wiebke Bähnk, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens. Die Theologie des Martyriums bei Tertullian*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 28 f.). Tertullian's writings, Bähnk states “[...] spiegeln [...] ein Klima grundsätzlicher Gefährdung durch repressives Verhalten der Magistrate, durch Angriffe seitens des Volkes und Denunziationen bei den Behörden wider [...]” (ibid., 37).

23 Tertullian, *Apology. De Spectaculis, with and English Translation by T.R. Glover and Minucius Felix, Octavius with and English Translation by Gerald H. Rendall* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1931), 38–39.

24 Thus making, as Dunn put it, the struggle of Jews and Christians “a struggle of legitimacy not a struggle for survival,” Dunn, “Jews and Christians in Tertullian's Carthage,” 263. On the problematics of the notion of *religio licita*, see Gorge K. Hasselhoff and Meret Strothmann, “*Religio licita*. Rom und die Juden,” in ‘*Religio licita*. Rom und die Juden, eds. Gorge K. Hasselhoff and Meret Strothmann. *Studia Judaica* 84 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017).

25 See *Apology*, 21.1: “But now that we have stated that this school rests on the very ancient books of the Jews—this school which most people know to be rather modern, as dating from the reign of Tiberius,—a fact we ourselves admit—perhaps some question may be raised as to the standing of the school, on the ground that, under cover of a very famous religion (and one certainly permitted by law), the school insinuates quietly certain claims of its own; because (waiving all question as to age) as regards forbidden food, sacred days,

empire under Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Geta.²⁶ Nevertheless, he also denounced the realm of Caesar as the realm of the devil, so the notion of a Christian Caesar to him is an *contradictio in adjecto*.²⁷ “Tertullian is evidently convinced that one can only be *either* emperor *or* Christian. [...] The only possible explanation may well be the intimate interweaving of civil society and its institutions, especially of the emperor’s office (as ‘supreme pontiff’ (*pontifex maximus*) of the official cult), with idolatry.”²⁸ As well as his apostasy from the philosophy of Athens, “[h]is apostasy from *Romanitas* is complete.”²⁹

Most of his earlier works are devoted to apologetic purposes. In his *Apologeticum*, Tertullian aims to prove that persecution of Christians is illegal and that Christians do not constitute an illegal association.³⁰ He also wrote diverse polemics against Gnostics and heterodox Christian teachings, above

the ‘bodily’ seal, or common designation, we have nothing to do with the Jews, as should surely be the case, if we were servants of the same God.” Tertullian, *Apoloogy*, 103.

26 On Tertullian’s stance towards the emperors and their cult as dependent on his notion of majesty see Tobias Georges, “Tertullian’s Criticism of the Emperor’s Cult in the *Apologeticum*,” in *Emperors and the Divine—Rome and its Influence*, ed. Maijastina Kahlos. Collegium 20 (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2016), 90: “The emperors’ position as ‘second’ after God is what Tertullian, in *apol.* 35.5 then called the *secunda maiestas*. With this term, his stress on *maiestas* and on the distinction between God and man coincided, and it illustrates how Tertullian could, at one and the same time, strictly criticize the emperors’ cult and emphasize his reverence for the emperors.”

27 Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and classical Culture. A Study of thought and action from Augustus to Augustine* (London/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 155, 113, 213. Compare also Richard Klein, *Tertullian und das römische Reich* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1968), 39, 44. Klein points out that Tertullian never polemicizes against the Roman state as such, only against its connection to pagan gods. According to him, Tertullian might well have imagined a Christian emperor, Christ himself (*ibid.*, 46–47).

28 Adolf Martin Ritter, “Church and State up to c. 300 CE,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Vol. 1: Origins to Constantine*, eds. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), 532–533.

29 Cochrane, *Christianity and classical Culture*, 213.

30 See Tertullian, *Apoloogy*, 171: “Should not this school have been classed among tolerated associations, when it commits no such actions as are commonly feared from unlawful associations? For, unless I am mistaken, the reason for prohibiting associations clearly lay in forethought for the public order—to save the State from being torn into parties, a thing very likely to disturb election assemblies, public gatherings, local senates, meetings, even the public games, with the clashing and rivalry of partisans, especially since men had begun to reckon on their violence as a source of revenue, offering it for sale at a price. We, however, whom all the flames of glory and dignity leave cold, have no need to combine; nothing is more foreign to us than the State. One sate we know, of which all are citizens—the universe.”

all, against Marcion.³¹ He was an early writer of anti-Jewish polemics, inaugurating the tradition of the *Adversus Judaeos* writings with his own treatise of the same name.³² Perhaps it is a correct impression of his that he had to fight at all possible fronts that shaped the particular form of his writings and his personality—although perhaps it is rather the other way around.³³

31 Harnack repeatedly praises Tertullian's care with regard to Marcion's text. See Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion. Neue Studien zu Marcion* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1996), 43–56. For Harnack, Tertullian's writing against Marcion deserves 'highest respect' as an original, and is in fact, his best work (ibid., 328–332). Harnack argues that Tertullian attacks Marcion by means of an examination of language, i.e. as a philologist, trying to prove that Marcion distorted the original text of the Scripture (Ibid., 331).

32 Tertullian's authorship of parts of the text has been contested in scholarship, while some scholars, however, have also stressed Tertullian's closeness to certain Jewish traditions as his writings show some "affinity between Tertullian's arguments and the rabbis." Though the evidence may be circumstantial, it, nevertheless "suggests that Tertullian may have availed himself of the scholarship of the Jewish teachers in Carthage during the time he was seeking to rebut Marcion's heresy, and, if one takes a representative group of Tertullian's Montanist works, one can demonstrate Tertullian's acquaintance with Jewish thought." J. Massingberd Ford, "Was Montanism a Jewish-Christian Heresy?," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 17 (1966): 155. Ford considers *De anima* in particular to provide evidence of consonance between Jewish ideas on the soul and Tertullian's thought (ibid., 156), above all, with regard to the line "Deliquit, opinor, divina doctrina ex Judaea quam ex Graecia oriens" (*De anima* 111.3). On the immediate cause of his text, see Shaw who warns: "It is one matter to understand the theological and historical dimension of a treatise like Tertullian's *Against the Jews*, but quite another to understand the actual working out of hatreds in the neighborhoods of his own Carthage." Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence. African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 269; on the case in question see ibid., 269–270.

33 See Zilling's concluding characterization of his personality: "Aus Tertullians Sicht greifen von allen Seiten feindliche Mächte das Christentum an, wobei nicht nur das *Apologeticum* an einen Kriegsschauplatz denken läßt, sondern auch die antihäretischen, katechetischen und montanistischen Schriften diesen Eindruck erwecken: In einem großen Rundumschlag wird die Vielfalt philosophischen Denkens als Ursprung der Häresie abqualifiziert und als Bedrohung der einzigen Wahrheit, der *doctrina Christiana*, hingestellt, und immer wieder werden mit schneidender Polemik Widersprüche zwischen Lehre und Lebenswirklichkeit heidnischer Denker angegriffen. Große Teile von Tertullians Schriften konzentrieren sich darauf, gegnerische Einwände zu entkräften. Dabei verzichtet Tertullian nicht auf advokatische Polemik und Gehässigkeit, so daß der Eindruck des argumentativen Übereifers entsteht. [...] Tertullians Wahrnehmung des von außen bedrohten Christentums und der von innen heraus durch Häresien gefährdeten christlichen Lehre begründen offenbar die Vehemenz und den Eifer, mit dem er die Sache vorträgt, der er Gehör verschaffen will. Hier offenbart sich ein Zug in seiner Persönlichkeit, der am besten als eine an Fanatismus grenzende Überspanntheit beschrieben wird und sich vor allem in seinen überzogenen ethisch-moralischen Forderungen artikuliert." Zilling, *Tertullian*, 207.

In any case, although deeply engaged in the challenges of religious contact, Tertullian himself is a good example of the fact that the contacting parts in situations of religious contact are far from being solid and unchanging entities.³⁴ The situation was very much in flux and allowed more internal and external tension than later doctrine would permit. Tertullian became ever more critical of official Christianity over the course of his life. Around 205 CE, Tertullian possibly joined and certainly shaped a 'charismatic' movement that was later declared heretical, named the New Prophecy by Tertullian and later as Montanism, after its founder, the charismatic and prophet Montanus, possibly a former Priest of Kybele.³⁵ Augustine, who counted Tertullian among the heretics, further reports that Tertullian left the Montanists in order to found a sect of his own, the Tertullianists.³⁶

Tertullian's ethical rigidity, already present in his more 'orthodox' writings, seems to have found a more fertile environment in the New Prophecy/Montanist movement.³⁷ For example, he argued for the veiling of women (*De virginibus velandis*), condemned theatres, and held a second marriage after the death of one partner to be adultery.³⁸ He also held any attempt to flee should a

34 See Klein, *Tertullian und das Römische Reich*, 68: "Es gibt hier im Ganzen keinen unüberwindlichen Gegensatz. Mannigfache Brücken bieten sich angesichts der Divergenz im Lager der Heiden (und auch der Christen) zur Verständigung an. [...] Möglich wurde dies aber erst dadurch, daß beide Parteien keine monolithischen Blöcke darstellten."

35 On the problem of Tertullian's Montanist defection, see Osborn, *Tertullian*, 176–177.

36 Zilling comments: "Ungewiß ist indes, welche Verbindung tatsächlich zwischen Tertullian und den Tertullianisten, abgesehen vom Namen, bestand. Augustinus und der *Praedestinatus* erheben lediglich den Anspruch, es zu wissen." Zilling, *Tertullian*, 26.

37 It is not at all clear that the New Prophecy movement was excluded from the 'official' church in Tertullian's lifetime. It seems that at this point of time emerging Christianity was able to endure certain tensions, rather than cleanse itself through separation. This viewpoint also helps to prevent oneself from the assumption of two Tertullians, the orthodox champion and the heretic. "[...] even Tertullian's latest works are 'orthodox' in later theological terms, and are important to the emergence of that orthodoxy, despite also showing the clear influence of the New Prophecy. For that matter, the idea of a transformation from orthodox theologian to heretical polemicist depends on the view that there were two quite separate churches or groupings, 'Catholic' and 'Montanist,' across whose distinct borders one could clearly and definitively move. It seems far more likely that there was profound contention among and within a network of small communities at Carthage, rather than a clear 'schism' between two." Andrew Brian McGowan, "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origin of 'Orthodox' Trinity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006), 438.

38 On Tertullian's Montanism as a consequence of his rigidity, see Bernhard Lohse, *Askese und Mönchtum in der Antike und in der alten Kirche* (München/Wien: Oldenbourg, 1969), 145–148.

Christian face martyrdom to be forbidden.³⁹ Martyrdom, to him, is the ultimate proof that someone belongs to the apostolic church and a guarantee of the spread of Christianity: "We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed."⁴⁰ Hence, he envisages an absolute duty to be prepared for martyrdom.⁴¹ His rigidity with regard to the original sin of idolatry seems to have led him into the pitfalls of impracticability, excluding Christians from many occupations of everyday life.⁴² To him, being a Christian and doing wrong are mutually exclusive, so any mistake in life conduct expels the wrongdoer from the Christian community, which, in turn, tends to become very small indeed.⁴³ Though he was in many regards "an intellectual Genghis Khan,"⁴⁴ he was not considered worthy of honor as a church father. His teachings, nevertheless, had a great impact on 'orthodox' Christian literature of late antiquity, both with regard to its content, for example, his theology of the Trinity⁴⁵ and his particular Christology *and* its linguistic form and language. For some scholars, he is the 'first theologian of the West', the founder of Western Catholicism before Augustine.⁴⁶

The example of Tertullian and his ambivalent status shows that in a situation of polemical contact, it is not 'Christianity' that meets 'Judaism', or 'Orthodoxy' meeting 'Montanism', but rather certain persons deploying and shaping the language games that take place in talking to each other. This can be the case even if the persons themselves might not be considered as belonging to the religion they represent, either latterly or during the situation itself. Religious belonging is a matter of ascription, including self-ascription, ascription by others, and ascription by others not present at the time—among them later scholars. As a consequence, one might argue that a situation of contact triggers

39 Bähnk, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens*, 176.

40 *Plures efficimur quotiens metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum. Apol. 50,13.* Tertullian, *Apology*, 226–227.

41 On North Africa as particularly prominent place within Christian martyr cults, see Bähnk, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens*, 9. On martyrdom as a duty of obedience see *ibid.*, 125.

42 See E.R. Dodds, *Heiden und Christen in einem Zeitalter der Angst* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 101.

43 See Christine Mühlenkamp, *'Nicht wie die Heiden.' Studien zur Grenze zwischen christlicher Gemeinde und paganer Gesellschaft in vorkonstantinischer Zeit* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2008), 125.

44 Osborn, *Tertullian*, 255.

45 See Osborn, *Tertullian*, 116.

46 See the title of Osborn's book, although Osborn himself states more precisely: "The importance of Tertullian for cultural history is immense, and he may rightly be called the 'first theologian of the West,' provided this does not limit his influence to the West or obscure his massive debt to Irenaeus." Osborn, *Tertullian*, 7.

a situation of *meta-stability*: the assertions of each side are stable only in the contact situation itself but could later develop into stable teachings or even dogma.⁴⁷ In the case of *Adversus Iudaeos* one could argue that Tertullian himself suggests that Christian theology from the very beginning has been marked by the struggle with Judaism, thus introducing both sides as such. It is the later tradition of religious contact that then burdens the mutual relationship.⁴⁸ Tertullian's own rigidity, separating him from 'orthodox' Christianity and posing a permanent contestation to it, might be understood as a significant expression of this process toward stability in the context of a dynamic and yet undecided religious situation.⁴⁹ In Tertullian's writings, the place of contact turns into a problematic location, where the borderline between the Christian community and pagan society is manifested as rigorist ethics on the brink of turning into rigid, dogmatic teachings.⁵⁰

2 Contact and Language

Tertullian's language is of particular significance. His ability to coin striking phrases, acclaimed and repudiated by the world-after alike, has won him some notoriety. He himself made good use of his skills: "Though often remembered for something he never said, Tertullian did contribute a few bold lines to his own caricature."⁵¹ However, these bold lines display their rhetorical-argumentative potential in an open discussion, dependent on a certain time and place, rather than in a scholarly treatise.⁵² The fact, however, that his writings emerge only occasionally does not render them opportunistic. Rather, his context and opponents provided good opportunities for self-reflection and, thus, are a vital part of the theoretical outcome of his considerations, above all with regard

47 See chapter on Dynamics and Stability.

48 See Regina Häuses, "Einleitung," 19.

49 See Fredriksen and Irshai, "Include Me Out," 122 on the case of Carthage: "Tertullian witnesses to multiple Christian sects in the city: Valentinians, Marcionites, Cainites, Montanists, and, of course, his own church. The boundaries were not always clear; indeed, Tertullian's polemical rhetoric strives to erect such borders and to patrol them. Carthage had no one single Christian church."

50 Mühlenkamp, '*Nicht wie die Heiden*', 38.

51 Church, "Sex and Salvation in Tertullian," 83.

52 In consequence, Tertullian's polemical encounters are concrete rather than abstract: "Denn er verwendete die stoische Tradition ebenso wie die antike Kulturtradition überhaupt eklektizistisch, immer mit Blick auf den Kontext und den konkreten Gegner, den es zu besiegen gilt." Petr Kitzler, "*Nihil enim anima si non corpus*: Tertullian und die Körperlichkeit der Seele," *Wiener Studien* 122 (2009): 169.

to object language shaping metalanguage to deal with the contingent other in a contingent situation of contact.⁵³ Both contentwise and with regard to form, Tertullian's language was shaped in a polemical context that clearly differs from the quiet study of a reclusive thinker. His language was rather the outcome and medium of a situation of contact.⁵⁴

As it is quite common in situations of religious contact, the 'reactive theologian' (Cooper) Tertullian reacts to the challenge of the religious other by means of a reflection *on* and elaboration *of* language.⁵⁵ It is his particular use of the Latin language that draws attention to Tertullian.⁵⁶ He deals with

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- 53 See Zillig, Tertullian, 44: "Das verzweifelte Ringen gegen vielgestaltige Feinde ist, da es alle seine Schriften durchzieht, bezeichnend für Tertullian. Ein weiterer Aspekt kommt hinzu: Tertullian erfährt in seiner literarischen Auseinandersetzung mit den Gegnern beständig Bestätigung der eigenen Glaubensüberzeugungen." Compare on the self-reflexive aspect involved in polemical situations of contact Guy G. Stroumsa, "From anti-Judaism to anti-semitism in Early Christianity?" in *Contra Iudeos. Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews*, eds. O. Limor and G.G. Stroumsa (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1996), 18: "Polemics, then is the literary reflection of the conflictual relationship between competing religious groups. But it serves multiple purposes. It does not intend only, or even mainly, to convince and convert, but also to strengthen the faith, or the self-confidence, of those who are already converted. Polemics, indeed, serves as a major tool in group-identity building and affirming."
- 54 Accordingly, as Donna-Marie Cooper puts it, Tertullian is not a systematic theologian but a "[...] 'reactive' theologian, responding to a particular controversy and in order to win an argument. For example, one should not look in *De baptismo* and expect to find a systematic treatment of the sacrament of baptism. Rather, Tertullian wrote this treatise in response to a Cainite heresy which had denied the necessity of baptism for salvation. [...] [U]nderstanding Tertullian's purpose and motivation in writing a particular treatise is crucial if one is to have an accurate understanding of the meaning of a certain passage within the treatise." Cooper, "Was Tertullian a Misogynist?," 9.
- 55 See chapter on Language in Contact; see also Görg Hasselhoff and Knut Martin Stünkel, "Introduction: The Emergence of Religious Language in Situations of Contact," in *Transcending Words. The Language of Religious Contacts Between Buddhists, Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Premodern Times*, eds. Görg Hasselhoff and Knut Martin Stünkel (Bochum: Winkler, 2015).
- 56 Schulz-Flügel, "Tertullian," 13. See also von Campenhausen's enthusiastic opinion on Tertullian's language: "Aber was ist das für ein Latein, das Tertullian auf einmal zu schreiben wagt! Etwas derartiges war auf dem literarischen Felde bis dahin unerhört. In Tertullians Schriften stoßen wir auf die lebendige Sprache der damaligen Christen, das Latein der werdenden lateinischen Kirche, eine Sprache, in der es dementsprechend von Lehnwörtern und Neubildungen wimmelt, um die neuen Dinge und Vorstellungen des christlichen Alltags zu bezeichnen, und zugleich bis ins Grammatische hinein die wirklich gesprochene Sprache der Gesellschaft und des Volkes Karthagos, das Tertullian kennt, beobachtet und sucht. Vor allem aber: es ist die eigene Sprache Tertullians, Ausdruck seiner gewalttätigen Gestaltungskraft, die nicht unerprobt läßt, um das neue, selbstgesteckte Ziel zu erreichen." von Campenhausen, *Lateinische Kirchenväter*, 15.

language problems on diverse levels: firstly, he is an attentive critic of the careless everyday use of language. Out of habit, Christians still use pagan language, especially with regard to curses—by jove! *Mehercule!* Here, Tertullian clearly religiosifies the everyday use of language in the context of his work against idolatry *De idolatria*.⁵⁷ Above all, as a translator or mediator of Greek into Latin, he also contemplates meta-communicative issues, debating the nature of a suitable language to address a larger public. Writing on diverse topics of practical interest, he is able to establish a network of intertextual references in his work, thus achieving striking argumentative unity.⁵⁸ In recognizing the informative possibilities of publishing readable texts, he may be considered as Christianity's first major publicist. In doing so, he (thirdly) establishes a new vocabulary by metaschematically turning pagan language against itself. "Most of his words were not new, but the way he arranged them was. He purified a dialect by framing a vocabulary which enabled him to challenge the opponents of his kind of Christianity."⁵⁹

Thus, Tertullian is a major source of reference for the thesis *that religious contact triggers notion-building*. The Tertullian use of language is mainly two-directional with regard to both matter and audience; he aims to formulate adequately as well as effectively.⁶⁰ This includes the introduction of new words if necessary. One scholar even found that Tertullian has coined no less than 982 new words in the Latin language.⁶¹ However, Tertullian's inventiveness is not limited to words alone; it also comprises condensed slogans or formulae. The striking epithet 'mother church', coined by Tertullian, hypostatized

57 "Die heidnisch geprägte Alltagssprache ist nach seinem [i.e. Tertullian's, KMs] Urteil faktisch ein Medium, über das die Christen—wenn auch meist unbewußt—ständig mit der konkurrierenden heidnischen Religion verbunden sind. Damit ist die Sprache auch ein Schauplatz der Konfrontation zwischen Christentum und Heidentum. Tertullian fordert seine Mitchristen auf, im Umgang mit der eigenen Sprache wachsam zu sein, um nicht aus schlechter Gewohnheit oder aus Furchtsamkeit in verbale Idolatrie zu verfallen." Mühlenkamp, *Nicht wie die Heiden*, 109.

58 Mühlenkamp, *Nicht wie die Heiden*, 19.

59 Osborn, *Tertullian*, XIII.

60 See C.J. Classen, "Der Stil Tertullians. Beobachtungen zum 'Apologeticum,'" *Voces* 3 (1992): 98: "Bald spürbar, bald weniger spürbar durch christliche Besonderheiten bedingt, bald deutlich von griechischem Sprachgebrauch abhängig, bald völlig oder fast völlig unabhängig von ihm zeigen die bisher behandelten Wörter, daß Tertullian stets bemüht ist, den jeweiligen Gegenstand angemessen und zugleich wirkungsvoll zu formulieren, und sich dabei nicht scheut, neue Wörter, auch Hapax Legomena, zu bilden oder übliche Wörter mit neuen Bedeutungen zu verwenden."

61 See Gert Haendler, *Von Tertullian bis zu Ambrosius. Die Kirche im Abendland vom Ende des 2. bis zum Ende des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen 1/3) (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1981), 22.

a simple gathering of people into a meaningful community.⁶² Tertullian's most famous invention in this regard is the introduction and theoretical establishment of the notion of *Trinitas*, being the formula for the relationship of God's majesty as the one God and its explication due to his will for the sake of mankind, sending out the Son and the Spirit 'like the rays of the sun'—thus differentiated, but not being separate from their origin.⁶³ His line 'one nature, three persons' established the orthodox viewpoint on the matter and served as a reference point in future discussions.

However, Tertullian also uses language as an instrument of contact. To achieve his aims as a publicist, he mobilizes all kinds of formal devices with virtuoso skill,⁶⁴ such as aggressive polemics, coarse exaggeration, fine irony,⁶⁵ and sophisticated allusions that require a common classical education as a basis for understanding. The *Apologeticum*, for instance, is closely related to the *Apology of Socrates*, his idea of the paraclete therein the counterpart of the daemon of Socrates.⁶⁶

A special case in Tertullian's linguistic creativity with regard to the invention or reinvention of notions is his practice of giving names to his subjects

62 See Tilley, "North Africa," 394.

63 Butterweck, "Tertullian," 672–673.

64 Tertullian's style, as Moreschini puts it, is "indeed is baroque and ornate in nature and aims to strike the reader by means of the overabundance of rhetorical devices," thus gaining Tertullian the title of a 'Christian Sophist'. Claudio Moreschini, "Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem* and Middleplatonism," *ZAC* 21 (2017): 144–145.

65 See the famous line measuring the manifold unificatory potential of hatred for the Christians from *Apologeticum* 40: "Si Tiberis ascendit in moenia, si Nilus non ascendit in arva, si caelum stetit, si terra movit, si fames, si lues, statim Christianos ad leonem! adlatur. Tantos ad unum?"—"If the Tiber reaches the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky doesn't move or the earth does, if there is famine, if there is plague, the cry is at once: 'The Christians to the lion!' What, all of them to one lion?" Tertullian, *Apology*, 182–183.

66 Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 415. On Tertullian's ambivalent and context-dependent use of Socrates, see Lucia Saudelli, "Le Socrate de Tertullien," *Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques* 59 (2013): 49: "L'étude comparative des divers témoignages révèle que l'attitude de Tertullien à l'égard de Socrate est ambiguë et opportuniste, tantôt apparemment—mais pas en réalité—favorable et tantôt explicitement hostile au philosophe, en fonction des besoins particuliers de sa cause." Socrates' demon, however, serves as a negative foil of Tertullian's ideas about the Paraclete: "Contrairement aux auteurs qui soulignaient les résultats positifs de l'intervention divine dans la vie du philosophe, Tertullien veut montrer que Socrate, comme tous ceux qui n'ont pas embrassé la vérité chrétienne, a été manipulé par les forces du mal du début à la fin de son existence. Le démon de Socrate n'est pour le chrétien qu'un des esprits maléfiques dont Satan est le souverain." Ibid. 42. In sum, "Tertullien fait de Socrate la victime paradigmatique de l'action d'un démon malfaisant." Ibid., 43.

of theological consideration, regarding both phenomena to demarcate himself against and phenomena considered to be in accordance with the 'true' teaching—New Prophecy, Praxeas, for instance.⁶⁷ Brent T. Shaw describes Tertullian's praxis as follows: "The writings of Tertullian, the pre-eminent Christian ideologue in the Africa of his age, a stern Catonian moralizer, are focused on his struggles with the enemies of true belief. The names that he provides for them are a guide to identifying the most dangerous of these hostiles as they were perceived at the time."⁶⁸ Therefore, linguistic *baptism* or *branding* of this sort is a particular means to deal with challenging situations of contact, both through identification and for establishing possible linguistic control of challenging phenomena. This is achieved above all by the introduction of certain 'groups' that future elements might be subsumed to and treated in an inclusive and generalizing manner. Baptism, in this sense, establishes a necessary relation between name and bearer(s), inaugurating a stable relationship or tradition of brands that may be used in synchronic and diachronic consideration.⁶⁹

Metaschematism is another important linguistic device employed by Tertullian to deal with a situation of contact after Paul's manner. Here, Tertullian uses the linguistic forms and schemes of his opponents to infiltrate and convert their content and, in sequence, also themselves.⁷⁰ Metaschematism is a way to deal with schemata in a situation of contact—that is, it is a mode of processing. As the Greek notion *schema* may be translated as 'clothing' or 'traditional costume', the idea of metaschematism in a situation of contact might be explained metaphorically: to dress oneself in another one's (linguistic)

67 On the name of Praxeas as used in Tertullian's treatise *Against Praxeas* see McGowan, "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origin of 'Orthodox' Trinity," 441: "The purpose of *Against Praxeas* is to oppose the theology of a teacher otherwise unknown by that name at least, perhaps to be identified with the Roman bishop Callistus. Yet the historical Praxeas is distant in space and time; despite the personalized nature of the charges made against him, his 'real' identity is somewhat beside the point, and his persona functions in this text as a representative figure or rhetorical device through which local issues and persons can be addressed."

68 Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 307.

69 See Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980). See chapter on Retrospection.

70 See the corresponding description in Kitzler, "*Nihil enim anima si non corpus*," 169: "Die Kulturtradition, deren Angehöriger er selbst ist und deren er sich nie ganz entledigen kann, benützt er zugleich als Mittel, in christliches Glaubensgut intellektuell einzudringen und dieses zu festigen, er redefiniert die Tradition gewissermaßen in christlichen Begriffen, passt sie an die Bedürfnisse der neuen Religion an¹³¹ und trägt—um es mit einer Formulierung aus der klassischen Arbeit von Jean-Claude Fredouille auszudrücken—zu ihrer endgültigen 'Konversion' bei."

garments, thus performing a stylistic transformation of a given proposition. In Greek philosophy, the notion of metaschematism denotes a general process of re-formation. As used by Paul in his letters, the notion indicates the rhetorical reformulation of an assertion by stylistic means, thus changing the meaning of sentences by the replacement of words: see 1 Cor. 4,6: *And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes*. By doing so, that is, by ‘wearing’ one’s counterpart’s semantic garments or habitual forms, one might hide one’s true convictions within the context of another, possibly more powerful discourse. At the same time, however, by doing so, one might force one’s counterpart to follow the implications of his own rhetorical structure—though this might denote the opposite, or at least something profoundly different from what the counterpart, in fact, intended to express, now promoting the aims of the metaschematizory gambit.⁷¹

3 On Sleep as an Interface of Religion

There is a rich literature on the phenomenon of dreams, not least in religious studies. However, much less effort has been spent on examining and comparing object language reflections on the precondition of dreams and on sleep itself. This may not be very surprising, for it is not the existence of such a phenomenon that is in question, but the definition of sleep in scholarly metalanguage remains challenging due to its basic features.

Nevertheless, sleep as the condition and form or frame for dreams is a more promising candidate for a fruitful comparison than dreams themselves. Dreams are only reachable via description, and hence, they depend upon the vocabulary, narratives, and iconology of the tradition in which they are situated. This comparative eminence is precisely *because* sleep is not so easily grasped linguistically.

The advantage of examining sleep for the purpose of comparison is not primarily rooted in the fact that sleeping is an anthropological constant. Though supposedly ‘radically other’ to each other, all human beings, in fact, do sleep. There is another considerable advantage in examining the phenomenon of sleep: its ‘blank space’ character, which can be found in object language descriptions.⁷² In early mythical writings, such as in Homer and Hesiod,

71 See Knut Martin Stünkel, “Biblical Metaschematism as a Device for Religious Transfer. Paul’s Communicative Strategy in a Situation of Religious Contact,” *Entangled Religions* 2 (2015).

72 See chapter on Secret.

sleep is only considered through the use of negations: sleeping is to be without experience of the senses, without knowledge of space and time, and without will.⁷³ To Aristotle, sleep was basically a privation of being awake, an imprisonment of the common senses.⁷⁴ As a negation or imprisonment of all means of recognition, sleep introduces a blank space to the process of life. However, as a blank space, the establishment of a relationship to the other's ideas becomes easier, as the blank space structure is the same for both sides—and that is precisely *because* of its essential lack of content. Due to their manifold cultural preconditions, a comparison of the content of sleep dreams is much more complicated. Such an attempt is basically doomed to fail, as the scholar themselves knows, having experienced the purgatory of deconstructivism and postcolonial studies.

To give an example, let me briefly consider the phenomenon of secrets and secrecy in this context. It is often argued that a secret or the practice of secrecy prevents contact between different groups due to the fact that its content, by definition, cannot be revealed: the secret must necessarily remain a blank space. This may be true as a social strategy, but in many other cases, above all in cases of religious contact, secrets and practices of secrecy function in the opposite way. Herodotus, in his report on Egyptian mysteries, manages to explain them to his Greek readers by relating the Egyptian to the Greek mysteries that are, as he puts it, known to be unknown. Hence, there are blank spaces that are important for the practice of mystery in both Egypt and Greece. Having established such an interface of knowledge, he is able to relate the framings of the blank space to each other, thus coming up with a strategy that was later called the *interpretatio graeca*. Blank space structures in object language explanations are, therefore, promoters of religious contact rather than obstacles.⁷⁵

The same structure can be found in explications of the phenomenon of sleep. Sleep is considered to be a blank space that has to be filled with content, that is, dreams. Sleeping as such is often explained with reference to the status of non-being, such as relating sleep to death, as in the twin brothers *Hypnos* and *Thanatos* in Greek mythology, with Hypnos lacking any significant cultic relevance. Beginning with fragments of Heraclitus up to Joseph Fouché's radical reformation of funeral practices in 1793—instead of elaborated grave-stones, only a small sign with the motto *La mort est un éternel sommeil* was

73 See H. Homann, "Schlaf," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 8 R–Sc, eds. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Darmstadt: WBG, 1992), 1296.

74 Homann, "Schlaf," 1297.

75 See chapter on Secret.

allowed—the relationship of death and sleep as a metaphorical interrelation has prevailed, even over the *long durée* of the European cultural history.⁷⁶

As such, it is an important structural feature of sleep that it is part of an interrelated contrast: being associated with death, it opposes life, although it is essentially related to it and is not entirely separate from it. Heraclitus, who provided Tertullian with his central cosmological idea of the interplay of opposites,⁷⁷ put it in this way: “It is one and the same thing to be living and dead, awake and asleep, young and old. The former aspect in each case becomes the latter, and the latter becomes the former by sudden unexpected reversal.”⁷⁸ This kind of interrelated contrast can be considered as an example of the transcendence-immanence distinction.

4 On Sleep and Contact in Tertullian's *De Anima*

The relevant source for exploring Tertullian's opinions about the phenomenon of sleep is his treatise *De anima*, said to be the first Christian psychology advanced from a systematic perspective.⁷⁹ The enthusiasm about this claim, however, at least for apologists for a pure Christianity, should be slightly disturbed by the fact that the first ‘Christian’ psychology can be considered as nothing but a Christianized pagan psychology, as it is in both form and content heavily dependent on Soranus of Ephesus' (c.98–c.138 CE) medical treatise on the soul *Περὶ ψυχῆς*.⁸⁰ In a metaschematic manner, Tertullian here adapts, or perhaps infiltrates, pagan psychology through using the model form provided by Soranus's treatise and altering and inserting certain concepts due to Christian teachings.⁸¹ It is important to notice, however, that Tertullian's

76 See Thomas Macho, “Schlafen, Träumen,” in *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Metaphern*, ed. Ralf Konersmann (Darmstadt: WBG 2007, 325–326).

77 See Osborn, *Tertullian*, 67, 103: “Heraclitus [...] is closer to him than other ancient philosophers. There is nothing wrong with antithesis provided they are kept within one God.” Osborn even speaks of “Tertullian's Heraclitean God,” who produces change (*ibid.*, 110), and of “Tertullian's persistent Heraclitean optimism that nothing perishes except in order to be saved (‘nihil deperit nisi in salutem’).” *Ibid.*, 216.

78 See Heraklit, “Fragmente und Zeugnisse,” in *Die Vorsokratiker. Vol. 1: Thales/Anaximander/Anaximenes/Pythagoras und die Pythagoreer/Xenophanes/Heraklit*, ed. M. Laura Gemelli Marciano (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 2007), 305 (DK 22 B 88).

79 See Gerhard Esser, *Die Seelenlehre Tertullians* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1893), 232.

80 See Heinrich Karpp, “Sorans vier Bücher *Περὶ ψυχῆς* und Tertullians Schrift *De anima*,” *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 33 (1934): 31.

81 With regard to the belief in creation (*Schöpfungsglaube*), Karpp states: “Er [Tertullian, KMS] weicht von Soran darin ab, daß er die Seele aus dem Hauche Gottes entstanden

‘almost sole source’ for his work on the soul is again a product of an argumentative situation of contact, namely with philosophy.⁸² Furthermore, written between 203 and 213 CE, the text is considered to be a transitional work showing early indications of Tertullian’s turn to New Prophecy.⁸³

Following the title of his work, from the very start, the relationship between considerations of sleep and the paramount subject of the soul is obvious, and given the extant traditions of discussing this phenomenon, the context of *De anima* is predictable. As in his other writings, Tertullian in *De anima* aims at defining the place of Christianity in a world that mainly consists of contact situations, situations that allow for comparison as, for example, in his *Apologeticum*: “For we are no Brahmins, naked sages of India, forest-dwellers, exiles from life.”⁸⁴

It is highly significant that Tertullian introduces the subject of sleep while discussing the ideas of other authors. From the beginning, his considerations, therefore, are framed by the context of religious contact, which forces him to develop his own ideas on the phenomenon in question most clearly and sharply, distinguishing them from other concepts unsuitable for his Christian agenda. To a certain degree, Tertullian presents a perhaps philosophical or cultural contact situation as a religious one, introducing the concept of divine revelation (ultimate truth) to a philosophical discussion. In doing so, he dismisses the ideas of others as invalid sophistications, often turning to empirical counterarguments to do so.⁸⁵ Tertullian insists on the necessity of truth in

sein läßt, deshalb ihre Unsterblichkeit und die Herleitung aller Seelen aus einer einzigen lehrt, vielleicht auch in der Annahme des freien Willens. Der Schöpfungsglaube ist also die grundlegende und eigentlich einzige Abweichung von der Vorlage. Hier stehen bewußtes Christentum und literarische Abhängigkeit vom Heidentum nebeneinander.” Karpp, “Sorans vier Bücher *Περὶ ψυχῆς* und Tertullians Schrift *De anima*,” 39.

82 See Petr Kitzler, “*Ex uno homine tota haec animarum redundantia*. Ursprung, Entstehung und Weitergabe der individuellen Seele nach Tertullian,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 64 (2010), 364–365: “Tertullians Hauptanliegen bestand nicht darin, eine kohärente christliche Seelenlehre zu entwickeln, seine Ziele waren anscheinend auch diesmal polemisch. Es handelt sich um Tertullians oft einseitige Antwort auf die Seelenlehre oder ihre einzelnen Aspekte, wie sie die heidnische Philosophie präsentierte und von ihr ausgehende Vertreter verschiedener christlicher Häresien des zweiten und dritten Jahrhunderts.”

83 See Kitzler, “*Nihil enim anima si non corpus*,” 146.

84 “*Neque enim Brachmanae aut Indorum gymnosohistae sumus, silvicolae et exules vitae*.” *Apol.* 42.1. Tertullian, *Apoloogy*, 190–191.

85 To Karpp, this is prefigured in Tertullian’s sources. See Karpp, “Sorans vier Bücher *Περὶ ψυχῆς* und Tertullians Schrift *De anima*,” 43, 45 (regarding Plato’s position), and *ibid.*, 46: “Soran betrachtete den Schlaf offenbar nicht wie die Philosophen von der Voraussetzung einer unvergänglichen Lebenssubstanz aus, sondern empirisch, d.h. er sah auf seine Wirkungen. Deshalb galt ihm der gesunde Schlaf als etwas völlig Naturgemäßes.”

the operations of the human mind. As Eva Schulz-Flügel has stated, Tertullian makes use of a theology of linkage (*Theologie der Anknüpfung*), appealing to familiar modes of thought held by his addressees when trying to convey the basics of Christian beliefs.⁸⁶

However, it is philosophers he has to deal with: "I shall evidently have mostly to contend with the philosophers"⁸⁷ as he puts it in the first sentence of his book. Tertullian, here, explicitly follows Paul: "The apostle, so far back as his own time, foresaw, indeed, that philosophy would do violent injury to the truth."⁸⁸ As he remarks ironically, philosophers do so because of a feeling of profound indignation connected to the unrespectable origin of the Christian teachings: "The fault, I suppose, of the divine doctrine lies in its springing from Judea rather than from Greece. Christ made a mistake, too, in sending forth fishermen to preach, rather than the sophist."⁸⁹ After all, it is here that an apologist can claim most honor in matters of faith, possibly culminating in the highest honor of martyrdom.⁹⁰ So, given Tertullian's supposedly stern opposition to philosophical thinking, his overall task is clear: "Whatever noxious vapours [...] exhaled from philosophy, obscure the clear and wholesome atmosphere of truth, it will be for Christians to clear away [...]"⁹¹ Hence, for Tertullian, his major opponent producing intellectual air pollution is Plato, with whom he felt most heretical opinions originated and who thus became a (self-service) shop for spices for heretics (*Platonem omnium hereticorum condimentarium factum*).⁹² At the very end of his treatise, he proudly claims to have encountered no less than "every human opinion concerning the soul, and tried its character by the teaching of (our holy faith),"⁹³ thus shaping the Christian position by means of comparison and evaluation of ideas, and

86 Schulz-Flügel, "Tertullian," 30.

87 J.H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De anima, edited with introduction and commentary by J. Waszink* (Leiden: Brill 2010, 1). [De anima] All following translations from the Latin by Peter Holmes.

88 *De anima*, 4.

89 *De anima*, 5. On Tertullian's ambivalent use of the notion 'Sophist', see Moreschini, "Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem* and Middleplatonism," 142–143.

90 See Mensching, "Vom Apostel Paulus zu Tertullian und Augustinus," 107: "Es charakterisiert die Auseinandersetzungen in dieser Zeit, in der das Christentum noch nicht römische Staatsreligion war und im Gegenteil Verfolgungen ausgesetzt war, dass die Philosophie als die Apologie eben des Staates angesehen wurde, der die Christen verfolgte. Wer das Martyrium erlitt, war in den Augen der Apologeten somit—zugespitzt ausgedrückt—ein Opfer der Philosophie, die den heidnischen Staat stützte."

91 *De anima*, 5.

92 *De anima*, 31.

93 *De anima*, 79–80.

making it acceptable for those readers acquainted with all, or at least some, of the human opinions Tertullian is talking about.

This is all the truer for his thoughts on sleep, expounded at length in Chapter 43 of *De Anima*. As no chapter of *De Anima* lacks polemical discussions, this chapter is the manifest expression of a challenge as well. Here, Tertullian alludes to an impressive amount of knowledge on the subject of sleep. However, this knowledge is not simply displayed but used with a certain polemical intention. As Leslie Dossey has shown, the positive account of sleep in Tertullian is an expression of an antagonistic situation of contact in the form of an actual opposition over the interpretation of the phenomenon observed between Greek and Latin authors.⁹⁴ The Greek authors, here, represented the predominant philosophical and, as a consequence, theological current of this debate in advancing a largely negative assessment of sleep. In contrast, “many of the western church fathers, rooted in a Roman more than Greek intellectual heritage, retained a positive attitude toward sleep in late antiquity.”⁹⁵ Where the Greek philosophers abhorred the pejorative image of sleep as the inactivity of the rational soul, ‘Roman-based’ authors, such as Tertullian, Lactantius, and Augustine, considered sleep to be the welcome inactivity of the body.⁹⁶ This attitude had practical consequences insofar that “[w]estern monastic rules such as the *Rule of Benedict* were more generous in their regulations about sleep than their eastern equivalents.”⁹⁷

Tertullian explicitly refers to the Greek authors who laid down the basis for the predominant ‘Greek’ thought about sleep. However, he does so in a tone of critique, briskly condensing the opinions of others into a single sentence:

The Stoics affirm sleep to be ‘a temporary suspension of the activity of the senses;’ the Epicureans define it as an intermission of the animal spirit; Anaxagoras and Xenophanes as a weariness of the same; Empedocles and Parmenides as a cooling down thereof; Strato as a separation of the

94 See Leslie Dossey, “Watchful Greeks and Lazy Romans: Disciplining Sleep in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21 (2013).

95 Dossey, “Watchful Greeks and Lazy Romans,” 211.

96 See Dossey, “Watchful Greeks and Lazy Romans,” 226.

97 Dossey, “Watchful Greeks and Lazy Romans,” 211. “This belief that *sleep deprivation* hindered one’s ability to turn the spirit toward God is strikingly different from the promotion of sleep asceticism in Greek monastic texts. Here it was the lack of sleep that was a danger to the mind.” Interestingly, this positive attitude of sleep can be found in Celsus as well. *Ibid.*, 233.

(Soul's) connatural spirit; Democritus as the soul's indigence; Aristotle as the interruption of the heat around the heart.⁹⁸

Much brainwork here is condensed into simple assertions that are simply listed without explanatory context, and these simple assertions are easily refuted by Tertullian by means of everyday experience:

As for myself, I can safely say that I have never slept in such a way as to discover even a single one of these conditions.⁹⁹

Through this sarcastic remark, the overall tone of Tertullian's examination is set. He makes ostentatious use of pragmatic observations and decidedly rational and 'natural' explanations. The main thing he seeks to prevent is any association of sleep with supernatural events or explanations, as he makes uncompromisingly clear in the very beginning of his considerations:

Now sleep is certainly not a supernatural thing, as some philosophers will have it be, when thy suppose it to be the result of causes which appear to be above nature.¹⁰⁰

Having said this, he easily disposes of the explanations of sleep given by the philosophers: sleep removes weariness and refreshes; it in fact warms the body instead of cooling it. Given the undoubtable fact for Tertullian that the soul is immortal, indivisible, and always active, as opposed to the body, there can be no intermission of an animal spirit, an indigence of the spirit, or a separation from the soul's connatural spirit.¹⁰¹ In conclusion, Tertullian claims that sleep does not belong to the sphere of the soul but rather belongs exclusively to the natural sphere of the body:

98 *De anima*, 58. The scholarly list of opinions as well as the idea that sleep is a natural phenomenon is to be found in Soranus; see Karpp, "Sorans vier Bücher Περὶ ψυχῆς und Tertullians Schrift *De anima*," 40: "Soviel läßt sich aber sagen, daß auch die Behandlung des Schlafes (43–44) auf Sorans Darstellung gegründet ist."

99 *De anima*, 58.

100 *De anima*, 58.

101 On Tertullian's body/soul dualism see Eliezer Gonzales, "Anthropologies of Continuity: The Body and Soul in Tertullian, Perpetua, and Early Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21 (2013): 483–484. On the evolving 'decided opposition' of body and soul in formative Christianity see Jan Bremmer, "Die Karriere der Seele. Vom antiken Griechenland zum modernen Europa," in *Der ganze Mensch. Zur Anthropologie der Antike und ihrer europäischen Nachgeschichte*, ed. Bernd Janowski (Berlin: Akademie, 2012).

It is indeed on the body, which is subject to mortality, and on the body alone, that sleep graciously bestows a cessation from work.¹⁰²

But souls do not sleep even when men are alive: it is indeed the business of bodies to sleep, to which also belongs death itself, no less than its mirror and counterfeit sleep.¹⁰³

Thus, sleep is associated with nature and mortality in the sense that the body is, by definition, natural and mortal. Accordingly, sleep can only be considered a natural phenomenon. To a Christian, however, all natural things follow a certain rationale as they were created. Natural phenomena can be explained rationally by the Creator's plan and without reference to supernatural causes. Therefore, it is Christianity that fulfills the needs of the rational soul.¹⁰⁴ Sleep is a thoroughly reasonable arrangement, showing the immanence of God's ratio in the world.¹⁰⁵ To deny sleep as a marker of a late antique philosopher, such as Pythagoras or later on, Proclus, in turn, shows the incommensurability of philosophy and being a Christian.¹⁰⁶ Above all, it is evident that sleep is of essential importance to life.

Since, then, sleep is indispensable to our life, and health, and succor, there can be nothing pertaining to it which is not reasonable, and which is not natural. [...] [S]leep is perfectly natural.¹⁰⁷

Thus, the (first) Christian theologian Tertullian naturalized and, in consequence, rationalized sleep so that to him, sleep as such cannot be described as an example of the transcendent. But given the rigidity by which Tertullian separates sleep from a region that is commonly associated with religion, the transcendent or the supernatural, how can the phenomenon of sleep be of any importance for a treatise concerned with a religious purpose?

102 *De anima*, 59. According to J. Massingberd Ford, the idea that the soul does not sleep corresponds to a similar idea in the midrash to Deuteronomy (Deut. R., II. 37). See Ford, "Was Montanism a Jewish-Christian Heresy?" 156.

103 *De anima*, 78.

104 Esser, *Die Seelenlehre Tertullians*, 11. See *ibid.*, 19: *Quippe res die ratio, quia Deus omnium conditor nihil non ratione tractari intelligique voluit* (*De poen.* 1).

105 Esser, *Die Seelenlehre Tertullians*, 161.

106 See Dossey, "Watchful Greeks and Lazy Romans," 222.

107 *De anima*, 59–60.

Sleep is important with regard to the *process* of transcending. To Tertullian, sleep cannot be described as a supernatural incident but rather as a natural sign or an image. In his naturalistic conception, the human being is pre-conditioned by the priority of sleep toward all natural functions of the body. Tertullian draws this conclusion with regard to creation as it is reported in Scripture:

It is certain that, from the very beginning of his nature, man was impressed with these instincts (of sleep). If you receive your instructions from God, (you will find) that the fountain of the human race, Adam, had a taste of drowsiness before having a draught of repose; slept before he labored, or even before he ate, nay, even before he spoke; in order that men may see that sleep is a natural feature and function, and one which has actually precedence over all the natural faculties.¹⁰⁸

To explain the precedence of sleep over all natural functions, Tertullian refers back to the Christocentric lecture of the Scripture, relating the Old Testament to the New, and explaining the natural phenomenon of sleep as the very image of the equally natural phenomenon of death:

For as Adam was a figure of Christ, Adam's sleep shadowed out the death of Christ, who was to sleep a mortal slumber [...] This is why sleep is so salutary, so rational, and is actually formed into the model of that death which is common to the race of man.¹⁰⁹

The rationale of sleep is to function as a reminder of the naturally indispensable: to present the status of non-being in a visible and recurring manner. As an ever-present image of death, it defies all the feeble explanations of the philosophers:

God, indeed, has willed [...] to set before us, in a manner fully and more completely than Plato's example, by daily recurrence the outlines of man's state, especially concerning the beginning and the termination thereof; thus stretching out the hand to help our faith more readily by types and parables, not in words only, but also in things. He accordingly sets before your view the human body stricken by the friendly power of slumber,

108 *De anima*, 60.

109 *De anima*, 60.

prostrated by the kindly necessity of repose immoveable in position, just as it lay previous to life, and just as it will lie after life is past.¹¹⁰

As a mirror of death, sleep, which functions as a marker for non-being, becomes a sign of another life after resurrection. It is important to note that, using sleep as an image, the religious surplus of the phenomenon is not associated with the person actually sleeping but with the person (and this may include the sleeper as well) observing the phenomenon of sleep. Sleep, as such, does not connect to the divine sphere, but reflection on sleep does. For it is to those witnessing the processes of awakening from sleep that a religious lesson is taught:

Accordingly, when the body shakes off its slumber, it asserts before your eye the resurrection of the dead by its own resumption of its natural functions.¹¹¹

Examining the natural phenomenon of sleep, Tertullian describes a process of transcending by employing the levels of the TID: sleep to the observer (formal transcendence) becomes a sign (basic transcendence) for the resurrection of the dead (specified transcendence).¹¹² This function as a reminder of death and a sign of resurrection must be both the natural reason and the reasonable nature of sleep, according to Tertullian (*Haec est somni et ratio naturalis et natura rationalis*). For

If you only regard it as the image of death, you initiate faith, you nourish hope, you learn watchfulness, even while you sleep.¹¹³

Hence, what is the relationship between Tertullian's actual thoughts on sleep and the topic of religious contact? Sleep as such does not belong to religious language play, but the rational description of it as a manifest bodily sign does, according to Tertullian. What matters here is the phenomenology of sleep, i.e., the description of the basic phenomenon. Interestingly, Tertullian describes sleep via reference to another philosophical position, thus at the same time manifesting a situation of contact and a theology of linkage. He explicitly joins sides with the philosophical position of Aristotle, which described the phenomenon via negation (privation). The blank space of sleep resembles the

110 *De anima*, 60.

111 *De anima*, 61.

112 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

113 *De anima*, 61.

blank space of death. Having abolished every alternative philosophical view on the phenomenon, he states:

Our only resource, indeed, is to agree with the Stoics, by determining the soul to be a temporary suspension of the activity of the senses, procuring rest for the body only, not for the soul also.¹¹⁴

In sleep, there is no sense activity for purposes of rest, and, as such, sleep is without content provided by bodily functions. Sleep suspends the activity of the senses. Moreover, as Tertullian is of the opinion that the body's functions, such as affections, temperaments, and sense perception, determine mental capacities, even thought (mind *animus* as subordinated to *anima*) lacks its indispensable basis for action during sleep.¹¹⁵ No experience or intelligence is possible without the senses of the body.¹¹⁶ The mediating function of the senses is excluded in sleep, giving room for an immediate experience with the Divine.

As a blank space in this sense, a *space* is provided, in which the restless soul might be confronted with dreams, which are, according to Tertullian, mostly sent by demons.¹¹⁷ However in some cases, dreams can also be sent by God himself, as in the case of the unfortunate Nebuchadnezzar.¹¹⁸ So, ultimately, it is the blank space that enables the contact to the transcendent.

Later in *De Anima* (Chapter 45), Tertullian coins the notion of *ecstasy* (*ecstasis*) for this process, denoting the soul's power to act without actual effect on

¹¹⁴ *De anima*, 59. On the influence of Stoic philosophy on Tertullian's account of the soul, see Esser, *Die Seelenlehre Tertullians*, 65–73, 111–113. Moreschini, however, stresses the influence of Middle Platonism on Tertullian's work in general, sometimes rather at the expense of Stoicism. See Moreschini, "Tertullian's *Adversos Marcionem* and Middleplatonism," 157.

¹¹⁵ See Youval Rotman, "Reconstructing Late Antique Psychology: Reversion, Conversion and Introversion of the Soul," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 10 (2016): 19.

¹¹⁶ Rotman, "Reconstructing Late Antique Psychology," 20.

¹¹⁷ *De anima*, 65. As Bähnk points out, Tertullian does not attribute visions or prophetic gifts to martyrs as a proof of their special status. Bähnk, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens*, 165–166.

¹¹⁸ On dreams see his cynical account of Empedocles: "But the fact is, Empedocles, who used to dream that he was a god, and on that account, I suppose, disdained to have it thought that he had ever before been merely some hero, declares in so many words: 'I once was Thamnus, and a fish.' Why not rather a melon, seeing that he was such a fool; or aameleon, for his inflated brag? It was, no doubt, as a fish (and a queer one too!) that he escaped the corruption of some obscure grave, when he preferred being roasted by a plunge into Aetna; after which accomplishment there was an end for ever to his μετενσωμάτωσις or putting himself into another body—(fit now only for) a light dish after the roast-meat." *De anima*, 44.

the body and independently from its mental instrument (*animus*). The soul is shown to be directional, displaying a vectorial capacity and a corresponding movement caused by God. Rotman, having introduced the notion of *a-mentia* ('unmindedness') for this process, explains it as follows: "Tertullian defines the soul as a means of connecting between men and God, which is actually what his treatise is all about. The soul is the bearer of the proofs of Christian faith, not books or knowledge." Tertullian shows "that to encounter and to know God is not a process of the senses-mind-soul mechanism, but an encounter of the soul in a state of *amentia*."¹¹⁹ So, sleep is not ecstasy but may be combined with it, as dreams are incidents of sleep, their natural precondition. Natural and rational sleep provides the natural connection for an ecstatic experience, as it provides a free space for an event that takes place within another sphere. It allows the human being to be overpowered by a higher force.¹²⁰

In conclusion, to a certain degree, sleep may be counted among the *tertia comperationis*, at least in the present object language case. Here, it performs the salient function of a key concept as it opens up a perspective, allowing a new view in the study of the history of religion and its dynamics. To Tertullian, it is sleep that allows comparison between traditions, for it is here that the never-resting soul may come under the influence of demonic forces, as in divinatory dreams of pagan environment, or access the ecstatic possibility of contacting the (truly) divine sphere. Sleep is the form that relates the Christian interpreter to other traditions and allows addressing dreams as demonic or divine.

119 Rotman, "Reconstructing Late Antique Psychology," 20, 22.

120 Esser, *Die Seelenlehre Tertullians*, 138. There are other blank spaces that attract creative speculation and the possible comparison of religious traditions. Referring to Gershom Scholem's remark on the fertile Jewish disagreement concerning eschatological detail, Nicholas Conostas describes the 'inviting lacuna' of the middle state of the soul, the state between death and resurrection, often referred to as a kind of sleep, that motivated 'endless conjectures and speculations' by Patristic and Byzantine theologians. Concluding, Conostas describes the particular form of attraction the transcending lacuna displays: "The Byzantines had no 'system' around the last things. Eschatology remained for them an open horizon within theology, an openness perhaps intended to draw experience and thought toward that which lies beyond the bounds of the world of space and time. Perhaps the very inaccessibility of the last things rendered them all the more actual and compelling; a ferment in the present order." Nicholas Conostas, "'To Sleep, Perchance to Dream': The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 119–120, 124.

Prospect: Contacting the Future

Though sleep may be a welcome, if not necessarily satisfying, conclusion to this volume, I nevertheless would like to spend a few additional pages on the concrete prospects for future work that builds on the findings and insights of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg. The ‘Dynamics of the History of Religions between Asia and Europe’, which covered a time span from about 5000 BCE up to present times and a geographical space from Japan to Iceland, and framed an abundance of religious traditions and religioid phenomena, cannot be covered in its entirety by a single approach—or rather, it can only be covered in relation to a situation-dependent research question that highlights particular subjects. With the possible exception of Hilaire Belloc, one cannot write on everything.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. As the angel of history moves backward, gazing at the past, the future development is and should be undetermined. With a little luck, it may even be surprising. The way of inquiry cannot be blocked or concluded. Tentative and incomplete as it is, an enterprise like the present one cannot conclude but in the form of a hope for the future. Thus, we admit that many things were not addressed and outline some possible applications and developments of the issues that were addressed.

After all, if I have not succeeded in making my case for a reinterpretation of certain key concepts, I, nevertheless and in accordance with the points made in the considerations on Andy Warhol Syndrome, hope to have shown that other approaches to the concepts also fail. This would be at least a negative result that may help to free inquiry. The main obstacle here is ignorance concerning the explorative potential of concepts and the often hostile stances towards conceptualization efforts. Though an exaggerated focus on concepts may cause one to lose sight of those matters in the history of religion that are not and do not have to be expressed explicitly in terms of concepts, losing sight of concepts, in turn, means losing sight of everything. The creativity of concepts has been firmly reestablished, and key concepts in the study of religions have to be freed from unsuitable and reductive approaches. I have explored several in this volume, including the choice-centered account of attractiveness, the reductive material notion of dynamics, the use of the notion of identity, the idea of pure immanence, the anti-theoretical stance towards religious phenomena related to the senses, the exclusivity of secrets and secrecy, and the immovability of religious space (and, to add that, the irrelevance of sleep).

To check the validity of my arguments, it is most important that these findings and suggestions be applied to cultures and religious traditions beyond the ones my personal knowledge of language and history gives me some access to.

In a Popperian sense, the given hypotheses—that the concepts examined are indeed key concepts of the study of the history of religion—waits for corroboration or refutation. The main criterium, however, is less the supposed correspondence with ‘fact’ but the fertility with which they generate explanative perspectives. However, if I should be refuted, I shall, nevertheless, not abandon my theory but rather attempt to correct and adapt my theoretical considerations to the new evidence.

One suitable area of future research I have outlined is the model-form-based analysis of contact situations and the corresponding adaption of stories connected to the formation of model forms in religious traditions under study. Based on these findings, it may be possible to trace back the context determining the meaning of notions and concepts used to conceptualize both the situation of contact and the challenging or contrasting tradition. It is predominantly the form of contrast emerging from the contact situation that has to be measured, as it serves as a basis for object-language developments in conceptualizing or ‘model-forming’ future situations of encounter and challenge. Thus, the particular type of contact in a case at hand might be measured by the particular contrasts employed, which may be quite different for the diverse participants in contact situations.

Model forms may prove to be major instruments for understanding how religious traditions deal with situations of contact. Their function, therefore, as knowledge-generating devices has to be further scrutinized.¹ In this regard, the model forms and their usage become elements of practices that may extend the field of religion proper. Particularly in the inevitably asymmetrical forms of contact, for example, in colonial contexts, model forms are, however, not merely means of informing of imperialistic tools but are also likely to be more subversively used through practical *metaschematism*. To me, the practice of metaschematizing in situations of contact between religious traditions deserves more extensive research, above all, with regard to diverse religious traditions and the possible comparison of adaptations.²

1 See as a first attempt into this direction Patrick F. Krüger and Knut Martin Stünkel, “Indische Religion(en) im Bild. Religionskontakt vor dem, um das und im Objekt,” *Psychosozial* 45, no. IV (2022): 28–44.

2 See for an example of analysis of the subversive capacity of model forms as metaschematism: Knut Martin Stünkel, “Biblical Metaschematism as a Device for Religious Transfer. Paul’s Communicative Strategy in a Situation of Religious Contact,” *Entangled Religions* 2 (2015): 1–34. Also compare Knut Martin Stünkel, “Halle—Stockholm—Tobolsk and back stronger than ever. Curt Friedrich von Wreech and his Wahrhaftige und umständliche Historie von denen schwedischen Gefangenen (1725/1728).” *Entangled Religions* 14, no. 1 (2023). Some attempts in this direction have also been made by others. In his article “Tertius motus:

Moreover, the application of the structure of re-founded time—the *retrospective perspective*—may be an important tool for further work on the history of religions. Not only in abandoning fruitless attempts to find the ‘origins’ of things, but retrospection might also become important in the effort to rehabilitate the material of religious studies in the sense that, under this perspective, for example, layers of texts (say, nineteenth-century ‘misunderstandings’ of non-European religious textual traditions) may also contribute to the process of gaining insight into the dynamics of the history of religions.

To end this book, I would like to draw attention to some joint interdisciplinary efforts to continue the work of the КХК with regard to its major themes, special perspective, and the practice of scholarly work performed here. From the immediate context of the КХК, three projects have emerged that, hopefully, replenish or correct the present approach found in the field: namely, the online journal *Entangled Religions*, intended to provide case studies on the importance of the contact-based approach in the study of religion and articles on the basic notions of the КХК, a subsequent volume on the *typology* of situations of religious contact, and, last but not least, Volkhard Krech's *magnum opus* on religious evolution.

1 Typology of Contact

Contact is the decisive element in both the history and the epistemology of religions—in КХК terms, the dynamics in the history of religions and the possible interrelations of object-language and metalanguage. Discerning the possible forms of contact is, therefore, a vital task in the study of religion. To gain a better differentiated picture of the field and to provide scholarly metalanguage with more tools for detailed description, analysis, and explanation, a well-structured typology of contacts is necessary.

The forthcoming volume on the typology of contact, edited and written by long-term members of the КХК, aims to demonstrate the scientific fertility of researching contact situations between religious traditions in the study of

Die Erklärung der Präzession im Anti-Lucretius des Melchior de Polignac” Reinhold Gleib examines a diachronic situation of contact as manifested in cardinal Melchior Polignac's (1661–1741) work *Anti-Lucretius*. Aiming at establishing an anti-epicurean ethics, anthropology and theology, Polignac, interprets natural phenomena with scientific and rational means, thus metaschematically reenacting Lucretius' approach. Reinhold F. Gleib, “Tertius motus. Die Erklärung der Präzession im Anti-Lucretius des Melchior de Polignac,” in *Die Poesie der Dinge. Ziele und Strategien der Wissensvermittlung im lateinischen Lehrgedicht der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Ramunė Markevičiūtė and Bernd Roling (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 206.

the history of religions.³ Explicit attempts in this direction have already been made, notably by Günter Lanczkowski some fifty years ago⁴ and more recently by Martin Riesebrodt.⁵ The subject, however, has not quite attracted the attention it deserves, above all, regarding the theoretical significance of contact.

Over the years, the KHK has both produced and inspired a large number of studies on religious contact, as shall be described in the chapters of the planned volume. It will reiterate the basics of the contact-centered approach and also explain how the related concepts were refined in the course of the consortium's work. Accordingly, the production of a typology of religious contacts is an important next step in contact-centered research on religion. The volume will explain why such a typology can enrich the understanding of religion and further measure the possible scope of such a typology. The bulk of the volume will consist of research reports from the author's respective fields of expertise. Authors have been asked to discuss the state of the field, employ KHK terminology, and identify any possible patterns resulting from this. Each chapter will feature a comprehensive bibliography to be used as a point of reference for future research. The volume is intended to conclude with a systematic perspective motivating future case studies guided by the contact perspective: "In the concluding chapter, taking their cues from the reflections offered therein, the editors will take a birds-eye-view on the preceding research reports and discuss emerging patterns and structural similarities between cases. This will then lead to the suggestion of a number of types of religious contacts, which will be sketched and discussed. The chapter will end with the invitation to further research to add to the typology as well as refine, modify, and reject the suggested types."⁶

2 Evolutional Semiosis and Relationality

In the chapter on the transcendence/immanence distinction, I have already marked a possible point for connecting the considerations given here to

3 *Studying Religion through Religious Contacts: Conceptual Framework, Typological Sketches, and Bibliography* (Working Title), eds. Tim Karis, Volkhard Krech, Kianoosh Rezanian, and Knut Martin Stünkel. Planned for 2025.

4 See Günter Lanczkowski, *Begegnung und Wandel der Religionen* (Düsseldorf/Köln: Diederichs, 1971), 5, 95–160.

5 Martin Riesebrodt has elaborated on a preliminary typology of contact in his theory of religion, see Martin Riesebrodt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen. Eine Theorie der Religionen* (München: Beck, 2007), 44–74.

6 Volkhard Krech, Kianoosh Rezanian, and Tim Karis, "Outline," *Studying Religion through Religious Contacts: Conceptual Framework, Typological Sketches, and Bibliography*.

the elaborate theory of religious evolution (*THERE*) developed by Volkhard Krech.⁷ In his project, Krech aims to provide a triangulation between systems theory, the theory of evolution, and semiotically informed communication theory.⁸ Despite the fact that both approaches stem from the KHK context and rely on Luhmannian systems theory, I am, nevertheless, not sure if there is an ongoing connection between my understanding of the TID and Krech's work or if there is rather an indication of a point of bifurcation that distinguishes a semiotic or Peircean approach from a processual or Whiteheadian approach to the phenomenon of religion and the history of religions.

In a recent article from 2019, Krech produced a 'manifesto', arguing for the value of *relational religion* as a synthesis of approaches in the study of religion that might help to explain the interplay between mental and bodily processes, material objects, and socio-cultural communication systems called religion.⁹ The idea is by no means unpopular. As it seems, relational religion is the dish of the day and the obvious path forward in the study of religion. Above all, as Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, in their brilliant article *Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System*, put it, "[r]elational thinking is an antidote to the endless fragmentation threatened by the way current scholars of religion think about religious diversity."¹⁰ In his study on *Crossing and Dwelling*, Thomas Tweed already argued for a movement "toward a dynamic and relational theory of religion."¹¹ The notion and the concept of dynamics have been explained, and relationality will soon follow as the focus of attention. Religion, however, is relational in many regards. The salient relevance of situations of contact for the emergence, formation, and condensation of religion and religions has been the major subject of the KHK. In this sense, religions depend relationally on one another. Its relational approach to the study of religions examines religious traditions as entangled entities that constitute, develop and transform each other through contact.

7 A prospective insight into the project is provided by the article: Volkhard Krech, "Theory and Empiricism of Religious Evolution (*THERE*): Foundation of a Research Program. Part 1," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 26 (2018): 1–51. A 'short and compact' version of the three planned *THERE* volumes has been published in 2021: Volkhard Krech, *Die Evolution der Religion* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021).

8 Krech, "Theory and Empiricism of Religious Evolution," 10.

9 Volkhard Krech, "Relational religion: manifesto for a synthesis in the study of religion," *Religion* 49 (2019): 1–9.

10 Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013): 369.

11 Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling, A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 28.

As Krech indicates, the methodic relevance of relationality is not confined to these situations of contact between religious traditions: "On the basis of relational theory as a background independent theory, single religious matters form in relation to other religious matters and thus constitute religious fields. In turn, religious fields and the religious field as a whole form in relationships to other societal spheres. Thus, a dynamic network of relations emerges through the interplay between semantics, social structures, mental processes, and material conditions. The defining feature of any single subject matter is therefore not substantively specified but instead can only be identified in relation to other entities."¹² Basing on Bateson's notion of information as 'a difference that makes a difference' Krech describes the relational approach in the study of religion in the most general sense as follows: "Religion emerges and proceeds by relating single subject-matters to each other that are identified as being religious through their relation to each other."¹³

Here, Whitehead's theory of relationality, expressed in his 'principle of relativity', may prove a suitable background for relational religions.¹⁴ In the present context, I can only superficially allude to a line of possible further elaboration. The principle of relativity, as expressed in the relatedness of nature, denotes dynamics, by means of which every actual occasion is described as being in a continuous process of concrescence via *contrast* and contrasting.¹⁵ Relationality is additionally a basic characteristic of facts: "Fact is a relationship of factors. Every factor of fact essentially refers to its relationship with fact. Apart from this relationship it is not itself."¹⁶

To be stressed in the relational approach to phenomena of religion and the history of religions is the interplay between interrelational and self-relational aspects, the two aspects that characterize the dynamics of the history of religion. Here, religious self-reference is a major object-language phenomenon for the identification of scholarly subject-matter.

3 Explorative Conceptualizing

The study of religion has to overcome the 'fear of knowledge', as manifested in the present fear of concepts. Concepts are tools that are not only used to

¹² Krech, "Relational Religion," 2.

¹³ Krech, "Relational Religion," 3.

¹⁴ See Alfred North Whitehead, *The Principle of Relativity with applications to Physical Science* (Mineola: Dover, 2004), in particular Chapter 11: The Relatedness of Nature.

¹⁵ See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

¹⁶ Whitehead, *The Principle of Relativity*, 14.

secure results but also to generate, or rather, to unlock new perspectives or insights. They might be used in the way a device like a spoon is used or in the way the microscope was used—not only by its first inventors but by all knowledge-seekers who followed. Concepts do indeed have to be controlled carefully, but not in the way that their explorative capacity is lost.¹⁷

Theorists of religion have aimed to find a new language to provide a better picture of what is going on in the field and history of religions, preferably both.¹⁸ The new language is not least intended to allow more fertile communication between the material provided by specialists and the explanatory aims of scholarship as such. Reforming the colloquial language of the academic field does not necessarily mean overwhelming it with neologisms, which are all the more likely to fall victim to the familiar criticism that they are the product of armchair scholarship. It is also likely to lose contact with the results of previous research, particularly with its instructive failures.¹⁹ At points, it might be appropriate to come up with new concepts, but in most cases, it seems more adequate to refine well-known ones and to associate them with new, contrasting combinations. So, if, for example, the particular attraction of secrets is taken into consideration, there might be some new insight into the dynamics of contact between religious traditions and the particular characteristics of the main promoting elements of transfer processes.

Ringling a clarion peal against the notioclastic grain of the study of religion, the journal *Entangled Religions* follows a decidedly combinatorial approach in order to maintain the possibility of comparative work and theoretical generalizations in order to contribute to a possible growth of knowledge. Here, some of the key concepts discussed before are suggested as possible generic concepts to guide concrete work on the material. The journal gathers case studies on concrete situations of contact between religious traditions with reference to generic concepts (*tertia comparationis*) that allow for comparison and contextualization. By making use of the full possibilities of its online edition, the journal allows the application of computer-based methods for the analysis of diverse articles with regard to a common focus that might prove not to have been intended by the original author. Thus, patterns and references may be detected that otherwise would have remained undetected, thus allowing for description, analysis, and explication on a more refined level, not least for the sake of self-control of scholarly meta-language.

17 See chapter on More Than Semantics.

18 See Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 26.

19 See chapter on the Andy Warhol Syndrome.

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Index of Terms

- a-mentia 528
- abduction 7, 74
- acteurs, religious 23, 192, 420
- actual entity 76, 156, 161, 203, 205, 285, 346, 352
- adaptability 45, 213, 252
- adhan 396, 397, 398
- affatus 369–372
- afflatus 369–370, 372
 - See *affatus*
- agency of objects 152–153, 233, 246
- Andy Warhol Syndrome (AWS) 27–28, 35, 41, 43, 46
- angel of history 81, 91, 479
 - See also *retrospection*
- animal mask 116, 117
 - See also *model form*
- aphasia 30
- apocalypse, as apocryphoi 417
- aporrheton 402
 - See also *arrheton*
- aposiopesis 438, 441
- Arcanum 404–405, 428
- Areopagus 444–446
 - council of 444
 - speech 445
- arrheton 402
 - See also *aporrheton*
- ars generalis 333
- ascension 300, 302–303, 308, 310, 314, 375, 491
 - See also *vertical symbolism*
- ascription, process 48, 131, 152, 161, 243, 247, 265–266, 275, 313, 342, 358, 360–361, 365, 367–368, 377, 389, 391–392, 395, 399–400
- asymmetry 25, 460
 - asymmetrical dialogical situation 25
- attraction 119–166
 - basin of 163, 196, 198, 214
 - field of 161, 164
 - intentionalistic 119–132
 - model 120, 155
 - non-intentionalistic 132–150
 - objectified 149
 - process 119–120, 129, 132, 145, 146, 150–151, 154, 156, 158–159, 161–162, 199, 219
 - processing 163
 - propensities 147–150, 155–156, 161
 - unit of 125
 - See also *attractor, religious attraction*
- attractor 154–161
 - dynamic 158
 - religious 8, 161, 166, 198
 - types 156, 164
- aura
 - auratic cult object 141
 - auratic process 142
 - auratic unity 145
- auratization 8, 163
- authority 9, 93–94, 108, 141, 200, 212, 217, 231, 233, 237–239, 243–244, 252, 270, 273, 319, 337, 357, 375, 395, 433, 436
 - authority of scripture 9
- authorization 11, 224, 233, 243, 244, 246, 270
 - implicit authorization 243
 - self-authorization 11, 224, 233, 243, 244, 246, 270
- auto-poiesis 246
 - autopoietic system 212, 213
- axial rotation 190, 191, 204, 343
- background, Searle 133, 134, 137, 138, 140, 147, 150
- bipolar processuality 14
- bipolarity 14, 183, 184, 201, 203, 208, 221, 343, 346, 363
 - as self-reference 14
 - as theory 183, 346
 - elliptic stability of 346
 - See *Whitehead*
- black hole potency 157, 431
- blank space 423–451
 - context-related blank space 12
 - forgetting 238, 424
 - formally indicative blank space 450
 - importance of 424
 - spatial and temporal distance 424

- Bodhisattva 114, 116, 217
- body
as amplifier 485
as vessel 478, 485
social 365
- Buddhism 23, 45, 62, 75, 78–79, 112–113,
116–117, 127, 131, 134–135, 156, 158,
182–183, 185, 193, 201, 209, 217, 300, 347,
393, 399, 413, 501
- canon 25, 160, 200, 206, 208, 218, 219, 244,
306, 314, 413
See also *commentary*
- Catholicism 110, 321, 511
- causality 143, 148, 149, 155, 179, 197, 284, 360,
424
- chain of production 211
- chance 7, 61, 96, 104, 124, 179, 224, 310, 374,
414, 424
See also *blank space*
- chaos theory 129, 154, 163, 199
- China 38, 69, 72, 82, 104, 116, 117, 244, 281,
287, 291, 294, 296, 299, 300, 301, 303,
304, 308, 310, 311, 417, 418, 418, 419
- choice
rational 122, 123, 125, 129, 133
free 121, 127, 129, 156, 164
intentional 123, 127
situation of 123, 127, 132
possibility of 124, 128, 135, 137
- Christian liturgy 97–98
See also *model form*
- Christianity 121–123, 134, 137, 151, 154, 183,
185, 362, 364, 374, 380–381, 454, 456,
457, 458, 461, 464, 469, 470, 473, 504,
505–512
Christology 511
Japanese 112, 113, 114, 115
- church as maiden ecclesia 396
- cognitive optimum 158
- coincidentia oppositorum 338, 375, 377
commentary. See also *canon* 244, 275, 348,
418, 454, 467, 479
- communicatio idiomatum 98, 371
- communication 10, 14, 16, 22, 34, 36, 40, 51,
56, 84, 86, 91–95, 98–101, 115, 118, 152,
163, 194, 213, 230, 240, 251, 266, 275, 278,
282, 342, 349, 363, 369, 371, 286, 394,
395, 411, 415–416, 423, 427–430, 442,
447, 533
communicativeness 354
- concept (definition) 5 (note 12)
founding 64–65
key 7, 12, 14–15, 170, 223–224, 226, 249,
265, 267, 278, 286, 403
theory of 5
See also *notion*
See also *conceptual history*
- conceptual history 50, 54, 63–66, 235
- conceptualization 2, 32, 37, 61, 167, 176, 185,
201, 209, 221, 226, 282, 294, 299, 330,
529
- concrescence 203–205, 222, 343, 408,
433–435, 447, 534
- condensation 25, 41, 149, 154, 163, 164, 192,
533
- conflict 23, 25, 110, 122, 225, 251, 260, 275, 311,
456, 458, 460, 462, 475
intercultural 23, 25, 225
intracultural 25, 110
- Confucianism 38, 241, 291, 292
- connectability 423, 425
center of 218
- connectability. See also *model form* 218,
423, 425
- contact zone, (Search also *zone of
contact*) 413
- contact (religious) 2, 11, 20–23, 40, 59,
91–93, 104, 111, 114, 117, 124, 150, 183, 193,
201, 213, 215, 221, 280, 281, 315, 329, 333,
348, 350, 351, 365, 366–368, 374, 380,
398, 400, 407, 412, 422, 432, 435, 439,
443, 450, 457, 461, 468, 472, 479, 496,
503, 510, 512–514, 518, 520, 526, 531, 532
- contact dimension 164, 251, 276, 395,
408–409, 412, 420, 457
- contact-based approach 26, 61, 69, 280,
531
- dynamics of 174, 179, 350, 352, 535
- language of 63
- non-abstract 377
- typology of 531–532
See also *meta-stability*

- context of indication 54, 218, 341, 432–433, 439, 441, 444, 446–448, 450, 501
- contingency 2, 93, 94, 101, 104, 126, 160, 161, 179, 215, 269, 276, 282, 284, 293, 351, 453, 457, 498, 500
- contrast (religion as) 278–351
meta-contrast 345
- creativity 62, 203, 204, 236, 285, 334, 338, 348, 515, 529
- creed 96–97
performative of assent 96–97
See also *model form*
- cross 111, 151, 162, 392, 445
Buddha on 112
- cult of the dead 310, 470–473, 490, 492–493, 498
- cultural operator 8
- culturalism 28, 42
- cumulative tradition 224, 233, 234, 273
- Daoism (search Daoist as well) 195, 291, 300, 306, 314
- darshan 395
- de civitate Dei 464, 467, 468, 472–479, 483–484
- de cura pro mortuis gerenda 453, 468, 478–485
- dead body 452–502
as node of interaction 456
as space (search corpse as well) 361, 453–457, 463–468, 472–480, 485–486, 492–500
- death 106, 109, 113, 137, 185, 219, 284, 300, 307, 312, 315, 323, 355, 397, 405, 407, 452–458, 463, 466–467, 472, 475–477, 480–483, 486–499, 510, 518–519, 524–528
- deconstruction 5
deconstructivism 41, 42, 71, 518
- deictic center 297
- Deism 380
- deixis, See also *transcendence* 297, 298, 342
- demarcation 2, 11, 22, 25, 114, 121, 175, 215, 252, 276, 287, 316, 341, 350, 363, 397, 408, 409, 472
- depositio ad sanctos 481, 483
- designator, rigid 215
- Deus absconditus 373, 379
- diachronic community, See also *tradition* 247
- dialectic theology 31
- dialogue 24, 40, 43, 47, 48, 59, 60, 61, 67, 182, 245, 330, 333, 335, 338, 343, 483
philosophical 61
religious 24, 59, 60, 61, 362, 393
- dignity 29, 147, 247, 253, 258, 305, 390, 394, 508
universal 394
- dipolarity 203
See also *bipolarity*
- discursivity 275
- distance 141, 142, 144–145, 227, 241, 296, 424, 437, 476, 498–499
See also *blank space*
- distinction (*Transcendence/Immanence Distinction*, TID) 278–353
- docta ignorantia 333, 338
- dogma 17, 41, 158, 160, 191, 206, 219, 220, 407, 459, 460, 512
- Dönme 402, 412, 427
- dynamics 167–220
aspects of 184, 186, 202
bipolar 15, 204–205, 221–222
centrifugal 8
centripetal 8
evolutionary scheme 189, 191
horizontal 185–189, 192, 209–210
intensification 192, 194
materialism 202
organism 202
silk road 23, 105–106, 117
stabilizing 215
vertical 188, 189, 191–192, 204, 210
See also *stability*
- dynamis* 147, 179, 180–182, 187, 196, 200, 201, 206, 214
reflected 182
unreflected 182
- dynamism 7, 14, 168–169, 173, 195, 221
- embodiment 106, 162, 169, 174, 202, 298, 361, 386, 453
- emic 52, 60
- emotion 101, 193, 365, 490
- entelechy 178
- epiphany 179, 268, 340, 430, 478

episteme 180–181, 193, 218
 equilibriocation 195
 equilibrium 179, 211, 219, 228
 esotericism 12, 418, 422
 Christian 422
 esoterica 305
 in modern times 12
 role of the secret 12
 essentialism 26, 32, 75, 259
 trap of essentialism 177
 eternal object 164, 205
 ethnocentrism 38
 ethos of difference 32
 ex negativo 466
 exotericism 418
 experience
 bodily religious 390
 communicable 101
 lived 100–102, 355
 religious 11, 14, 17–18, 30–31, 47, 56, 235,
 354–368, 372, 375, 385–386, 390–393,
 395, 399
 sensate 11, 360, 391–395, 399–400
 sensory 355–363, 366–367, 370, 376–377,
 379–380, 383, 385–387, 391, 393–395,
 398
 sensuous 362, 366, 380
 exploration, (search also explorative) 14, 71,
 170, 261, 423, 424, 530, 534, 535

 fallacy (of misplaced concreteness) 67, 71,
 74–80, 356
 fangshi, See *esoterica*, See *magician* 305,
 314
 Feng and Shan sacrifices 303–306, 309
 fides ex auditu 399
 field (religious) 2, 10, 21–22, 48, 55, 59–60,
 65, 78, 104, 120, 125–128, 133–134, 153,
 159, 161–163, 174, 188, 209, 215, 221–222,
 240, 249, 252, 280–281, 284, 380, 399,
 416, 434, 454, 456, 457, 534
 fluidity 137, 139, 173, 216, 220, 257
 forgetting, See *blank space* 238, 424
 form
 contesting 9
 semiotic 390, 393
 sensational 364–366, 377, 390, 393

formal indication 85, 92–93, 336, 447–448
 See also *phenomenological*
 method under phenomenology
 See also *secret*
 formale Anzeige, See *formal indication* 448
 formula 97, 98, 106, 113, 130, 141, 148, 201,
 260, 274, 306, 309, 314, 339, 469, 515
 Freemasonry 405, 410, 415

 God
 as notion of notions 334, 336
 as sensory experience 355, 376–377, 380
 concept of 135
 non-conceptability of 333
 grave 35, 164, 318, 455–456, 471, 480–482,
 484, 485, 493, 494, 501
 Greece 265, 292, 431, 437, 441, 442, 443, 518,
 521

 habitus 26, 97, 101, 105, 152, 165, 370, 371
 heaven of reason 67
 Here and hereafter distinction 279
 hermeneutics 1, 41, 88, 99, 102, 238, 260, 419
 intercultural 260
 interreligious 260
 Hermetism 413, 447
 Hinduism 73, 90, 91
 history
 prospective method 82
 retrospective method 84
 holism 33, 72
 homo religiosus 362
 horizon of expectation
 (Erwartungshorizont) 235
 human existence 151, 159, 162, 207, 333, 449,
 457, 467, 486, 490, 496, 502
 humanities 27–31, 74, 83, 102, 125, 127, 171,
 174, 179, 211, 219, 224, 226, 255–256,
 259–260, 263, 265, 267, 271–274, 423,
 425, 455
 hypothesis 18, 40, 123, 150, 216, 281, 283, 296,
 363, 365, 366, 400, 408

 I-thou relation 342
 iconoclasm 431
 ideal form 190, 191, 205, 206, 222, 343
 identification 10, 120, 196, 245, 266, 268–271,
 275, 277, 292, 335, 341, 394, 442, 516, 534

- identity
 absolute 264
 as an event 275
 Goffman 136, 254–258, 261–277, 529
 logical 264, 273, 276
 narrative 103, 265
 personal 260, 266, 271
 philosophy of 264
 religious 113, 254–255, 257–258
 See also *identification*
- immanence 278–353
 as self-referential 252, 291
 pure 529
- immediacy 82–83, 203, 230, 377–380, 389, 391–400
 ascription of 377, 391–392, 399
- immortality 203, 300, 303–304, 306–313
- imperialism 3, 22, 29, 57, 90
 cultural 29, 597
- impetus 183, 352, 355, 362
 theory of 352
- incense 313, 356, 392, 394
- India 63, 117, 155, 183, 217, 395, 520
- individual as sociotext 99, 102, 105, 118
- inscription 92, 94, 95, 98, 99, 105, 111, 116, 191, 309, 445, 446
- institution 94, 111, 113, 246–247, 375
- intensification 8, 20, 52, 119, 163, 192, 193, 194, 201, 204, 205, 210, 275, 343, 352, 500
- intention
 intentionalistic vs intentionality 120, 133
 theory of intentionality 127, 133–138, 143, 145, 147, 165, 208, 374, 44
- interface 12, 94, 114, 190, 216, 276, 371, 386, 421, 423, 431, 433, 434, 439, 442, 444, 447, 503, 517, 518
- interplay 2, 9, 13, 56, 87, 129, 142, 145, 151, 160, 164, 174, 175, 183, 191–193, 195, 197, 202, 207, 217, 221–222, 226, 229, 234–235, 237, 242, 244, 252, 286, 297, 332–333, 341, 389, 399, 417, 419, 432, 519, 533–534
- interpretatio christiana 444, 447
- interpretatio graeca 107, 420, 435, 436, 518
- interpretation, inspired 199
- invented tradition 223, 224, 236, 237, 247, 248
- irreducible last instance 64
- Islam 23, 84, 85, 97, 131, 137, 185, 196, 210, 216, 224, 257, 364, 394, 409, 412
 Muslim 23, 115, 130, 210, 361, 374, 393, 396–397, 434
 Qur'an 84
- Israel 246, 281, 284, 292, 296, 319, 449, 491
- Japan 89, 112, 113, 220, 413, 530
- Jesuit Mission 109, 110, 112
- Judaism 22, 122, 135, 249, 397, 418, 430, 459, 507, 511, 512
- Jews 129, 135, 267, 412, 413, 444, 459, 507, 508
- Kabbala 413
- katahistory 91
- kinematics 178
- knowledge
 as semiosis 335
 gain of 435
 religious 48, 50–51, 54, 92, 218, 283, 363, 368
 sociology of 64
- language
 as instrument of contact 515
 orderly 384, 388
 philosophy of 60
 religious 48–49, 54–57, 59–60, 62–63, 69, 88, 372, 377, 403, 421, 428, 431, 448, 450, 451, 526
 written 388
- legalism 291
- linguistic 57, 78
 See also *pragmatics*
 See also *semantics*
 See also *syntax*
- logos 66, 336, 436, 438, 439, 443
- macro-states 79
 macro-level 79, 84, 85, 88, 193, 196, 209
 micro-level 79, 84, 209
- Manichaeism 3, 88, 196, 444, 462, 469
- martyr, martyrs 101, 109–110, 361, 407, 454, 474, 480–485, 505, 511, 527
- martyrdom 101, 511, 521

- material object 35, 111, 112, 122, 132, 152, 184,
191, 192, 195, 201, 218, 227, 232, 297, 356,
533
- as energetic 154, 201
- material
 - fetishism 35
 - materiality 65, 169, 170, 184, 200, 221,
243, 298, 426
 - religious 13, 161, 242, 295, 337, 394
- Matryoshka principle 344, 349
- mechanics 127, 178, 179, 184
- media 6, 10, 14, 22, 93, 94, 128, 169, 377, 378,
391
- mediation, mediator 11, 50, 94, 128, 136, 169,
230, 241, 286, 359, 360, 362, 364, 365,
366, 367, 368, 370, 372, 377, 386, 391,
392, 399, 457, 514
- mental pole 87, 184, 195, 204, 220–222, 494
- meta-communication 34, 51, 60, 429, 514
- meta-discipline 34
- metadiscourse 2
- meta-language 48, 52, 63, 92, 220, 222, 255,
258, 351, 368, 461, 462, 500, 535
- meta-metalanguage 49
- resemblance related 63
- situation-dependent 25, 63, 529
- metaphor, spatial 288–289, 297, 313, 315,
328–329, 332, 347
- metaphysics, immaterialist 387
- metaschematism 506, 516, 517, 530
- metastability 218–222
 - bipolar 221
- misunderstanding 32, 36, 40, 45, 62, 91, 105,
200, 226, 270, 279, 420, 435, 478, 531
- model form 97–118, 190, 205, 214
 - connective function of 100
 - in bureaucracy 93–95
 - meta-language model form 92
 - sociological theory of 99–100
 - See also *blank space*
- monotheism 97, 130, 131, 137, 210, 421
- montanism 507, 510, 511
 - See also *New Prophecy movement*
- Mosaic distinction 131, 159
- motif, of the Empty Throne 431
 - See also *hetoimasia*
- mystery cult 11, 122, 130, 145, 164, 402, 407,
417, 428, 432, 441, 443, 444
- ancient 11, 122
- Dionysiac 421, 437
- Eleusinian 406, 417
- Greek 145, 402, 428, 443
- Hellenistic 420, 444
- Roman 130
- Mithras 407
- mystery, mysterion 11, 27, 109, 122, 130,
244, 308, 402, 404–406, 420, 428, 434,
441–442, 445, 447, 449, 450, 518
- myth, death of 407
 - See also *context of indication*
- narration 84, 107, 149, 247, 435, 436, 438,
439, 445, 448, 491
- narrative form 47, 319
 - of objectivation 47
- naturalism 133
- negative theology 314, 349
- network (Searle) 133–146
- New Prophecy Movement 510
 - See also *Montanism*
- New World 299, 316, 317, 319, 320, 321, 323,
325, 327, 381
- non-aliud 31, 338
- non-intentionalistic 119, 132, 138, 139, 146
- notioclasm, (search notioclastic) 4, 67,
225, 535
- notion (definition) 5112
 - See also *concept*
- object-language
 - object-language phenomenon 534
 - religious 12, 48–49, 52, 67, 69, 101, 128,
199, 368, 372, 379, 428, 450, 455, 468
- object
 - agency of 152, 246
 - dynamic(al) 198–201, 340
- Occam's razor 277
- opaem 431
- organism 150, 164, 175, 190, 201–203, 297,
343
- orientalism, negative, positive 72
- original scene 22, 85–88, 314
- Ostwald's rule 220
- other, religious 60, 398, 513

- paradox 244, 248, 378, 391, 419, 441, 443
 parousia 431
 Peircean idea 200
 Peircean semiotics 9
 Penglai Islands 306, 307, 315
 Pentateuch 479, 246, 247
 Pentateuch text 212, 213, 238
 perception
 sense 11, 355, 360, 385, 387, 399, 527
 visual 387–388, 399
 See also *experience*
 permanence 201, 202, 239, 253
 perspective
 external 52, 60, 130
 historical 54
 internal 60
 meta- 59, 60–61
 retrospective 85, 88, 90, 531
 systematic 54, 519, 532
 phenomenology
 Husserlian 197
 of corpse 463, 467
 phenomenological method 440
 phenomenon (religious) 2, 6, 8, 9, 15, 48–
 50, 69–70, 73, 74, 165, 169, 219, 226, 255,
 278–279, 299, 354–355, 359, 374, 529
 philology 57
 Philosophia
 occulta 413
 perennis 413
 philosophy
 of language 60
 of religion 5
 social 100
 task of 76
 piety 238, 310, 438, 439, 441, 443, 479, 483
 as mode of speaking 438, 440, 443
 pilgrim fathers 315, 316, 319, 320, 321, 323,
 327
 Platonism 90, 447, 468, 505
 neo- 462, 468
 genealogical 90
 pluralism 20, 449
 pole
 physical 204, 343, 399
 pompa funebris 466
 postcolonialism 6, 27, 28, 41–42, 46, 58, 71,
 256, 260, 374, 518
 postmodernism 71
 potentia activa 180, 181, 183
 potentia passiva 180, 181, 183
 potentiality 176, 180–187, 197, 205, 210, 222,
 363
 power (as a notion) 180, 217
 practice (religious) 157, 208, 258, 283, 358,
 364, 407, 414, 447, 455, 496
 pragmatics 66, 257, 457
 principium certitudines 261
 principle of identity 260–261
 principium identitatis 260–261, 268, 274
 principle of relativity 534
 See also *relationality*
 principle of unity 42
 principle of utility 133
 probability 40, 147
 definite directed 147
 See also *propensity*
 process
 dynamic 163, 185, 190, 192, 204, 208, 209,
 213, 215, 218, 221, 285, 317, 333, 433, 442,
 461
 macro-, meso-, micro- 106
 semiotic 390–391, 393
 projective foil 425
 See also *blank space*
 propensity
 as attraction 120, 146–151, 161–165, 501
 fields of 161–162
 prospection 83
 See also *retrospective*
 protention 187–188
 See also *retention*
 psychology 75, 152, 190, 206–207, 256,
 265–266, 519
 Puritan 33, 315–317, 319, 321, 327
 Puritan Separatist 319
 purity 6, 14, 113, 134, 157, 224, 364, 455, 475
 rational choice 122, 124, 125, 128, 133
 reciprocity 354, 362, 372, 379–380, 386, 389,
 391, 394–396, 400
 recognition 29, 31, 62, 101–102, 107, 202,
 204, 260, 287, 369, 375, 394, 397, 405,
 418–419, 518
 recursivity 156, 159, 198, 223, 228, 239–240,
 243, 245, 248, 252–253, 255, 278
 as a process 245
 recursive element 166

- self-recursivity 194, 221, 226, 246, 273, 274
 - See also *tradition*
- redemption 109, 130, 258, 264, 494
- reflexivity 71, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 245, 248, 274, 276, 292, 294
 - reflexive production 211
- relationality 146, 228, 237, 239, 245, 288, 532–534
 - relational 533–534
 - theory of 534
- religio attractiva 121
- religioid
 - material 10, 242, 243, 295, 299, 314, 337, 340, 351
 - space 242, 296
- religion
 - comparative 48, 414
 - concept of 3, 12, 45, 49, 53, 59, 62, 67, 68, 73, 74, 77, 78, 80, 82, 84, 88, 89, 176, 177, 222, 233, 256, 356
 - dynamics of 159, 166, 174, 176, 177, 182, 184, 187, 190, 192, 197, 222, 280, 340
 - genealogy of 84, 85
 - historical 166, 175
 - hydrodynamics of 172
 - lived 354, 358, 454
 - proper 502
 - relational 344, 533
 - sensory 362
 - supermarket of 124
 - theoretical 358
- religious communication 10, 14, 278, 283, 342, 343, 395
 - code of 279, 342, 343
- religious dynamics
 - pull-factor 128, 149, 251
 - push-factor 128, 149, 251
- religious experience
 - sensory 354, 359, 366, 367, 372, 391, 393
- religious market as contact situation 127, 134, 157
- religious space immovability of 530
- representation 5, 56, 82, 91, 115, 153, 217, 283, 431, 487
- reproduction 17, 123, 142, 192, 194, 212–214, 220, 222, 233, 245, 275
 - stability of 211, 214
- res religiosa 456
- retention 188
 - See also *protection*
- retrospection 80, 83, 90, 183, 218, 265, 314, 531
 - See also *prospective*
- ritual 193, 218, 219, 225, 247, 283, 304–311, 431, 437–440, 450, 454
- scholasticism 178, 284
- scienticism 52, 61
- scriptuality 354, 388, 391, 395, 396
- secrecy
 - culture of 427
 - in crypto-religions 402, 408–409, 412
 - in relation to publicity 417
 - secretism 11, 406, 409, 414–415, 427, 429, 447
- secret tradition 421
- secret 401–451
 - as formal indication 448
 - as interactive event 434
 - as passageway 449
 - as password 450
 - as pathfinder of contact as promoter of contact 408, 434
 - as symbolic capital 415–416
 - as zone of contact 408, 416
 - contact dimension of 408, 457
 - evading 430
 - function of 403, 423, 444
 - in economic theory 415
 - relative 406
 - religious 11, 12, 157
 - strategic 405
 - structural openness of 420
 - substantial 405
- secretizing 11, 414, 415, 416, 435
 - as action-directing attractor 416
 - as communication process 415
- self-reference 14, 20, 100, 104, 135, 191, 193, 213, 222, 230, 237, 240–246, 251, 271–276, 339, 441, 346, 349, 367, 489, 534
 - as discursive 275
 - as process 20, 193, 272, 274, 276
 - See also *other-reference*
- self-reflexivity 71, 243, 274
- semantics 3, 63, 65, 66, 152, 156, 192, 193, 212, 282, 377, 415, 426, 427, 435, 457, 534

- semiosis 280, 335, 340–341, 367, 496,
 502, 532
 evolutional 532
 semiosphere 432–436, 441, 446, 455
 semiotic structure 342
 sense 354–400
 common 79, 360, 365, 518
 coordination 357
 hierarchization 398
 language 357, 369, 372
 olfactory 11
 religious 20, 131, 138, 224, 242, 282, 322,
 342, 358, 360–361, 365–372, 379, 380,
 385, 389–400, 500–501
 sense-making device 259
 sense-making 360, 362, 367, 368
 sensory data 394, 397–398
 sensory marker 398
 sensory regime 365
 sensory perception 144, 361, 364, 367, 372,
 375, 378, 383, 384, 387–398, 488
 immediate 398
 religious 390
 sensus numinis 362
 separation 74, 177, 279, 324, 325, 463, 505,
 510, 522, 523
 Shiji 303–305, 307, 309, 312, 314
 Shiming 302
 Ship of Theseus 272
 sinology 29, 38, 41, 290
 situation of challenge 66, 266
 of introduction 62
 situation of contact
 synchronic 2, 101, 422
 diachronic 2, 531–532
 skepticism 264, 332, 381
 sleep 503–528
 as process of transcending 525–526
 as promotor of contact 503, 517
 smell 11, 355–358, 360–363, 384, 392, 394,
 398–399
 social norm 258
 sociotext 99, 102, 103, 104, 105, 118
 solipsism 38, 387
 Solomonian Temple 406
 soul 29, 315, 355, 370, 372, 393, 421, 463–465,
 469, 475, 476, 483–491, 519–528
 as directional 528
 rational 522, 524
 sound 389, 390, 396–398
 religious 396, 430
 space 452–502
 contested 452
 spacing 453, 455, 457, 468, 485–486, 493,
 496, 498, 500
 spirit 14, 50, 145, 202–203, 306–307, 321,
 331, 361, 367, 386, 392, 449, 465, 469,
 477–478, 485, 501, 515, 522–523
 Spiritus 68, 331, 369, 460, 478, 483, 497
 stability 166–222
 as chain of production 211
 dynamic 166, 195, 211–212, 214, 222
 of evolution 212
 stabilization (as permanent re-stabilization)
 188, 211
 statics 176, 177, 179
 strategies
 communicative 12
 legitimization 12
 semantic 415
 superject 203, 205
 superstructure 165, 362
 symbol 85, 111, 114, 116, 287, 392, 500
 symbolic capital 415–416
 synagogue 396, 459
 as blind maiden 396
 syntax 50, 66
 systemic universalism 191

 tautology 261–262
 temporality 90, 98, 187, 197, 228–230, 233,
 236–237, 239–240, 464, 491
 tertium comparationis 6, 58, 280–281, 444,
 535
 texture 9, 10, 100, 105, 111, 114–115, 117, 247,
 253, 426
 theologia affirmativa 333, 335, 378
 theologia negativa 333, 366
 theologism 51
 theology
 Barthian Dialectic 31
 eirenic 505
 of linkage 521, 526
 Pauline 145, 445
 theology of will 120
 theoria 284, 337
 theory of religious evolution (THERE) 533
 Theosophical Society 418

- Thomas-Theorem 84
- threshold zone 343
- time
 - boomerang 234, 274
 - refounding of 86
 - social 237
- Tokugawa shogunate 112
- topoi 226, 445
- topology 45, 66, 67, 68, 71, 77, 78, 473, 500
 - of notions 45
- tradition
 - as gift 229, 230
 - as phenomenon 83, 248
 - as process 216, 226, 228, 240, 244, 248
 - as result of temporal objectification
 - process 276
 - as self-communication 240, 275
 - compared to innovation 10, 197, 215, 223, 237, 244, 248–249
 - conrescence of 433
 - forms of 245
 - in relation to authority 231, 233, 237–239, 243–244, 252
 - in relation to philosophy 248–250, 253–254, 261, 263–265, 271–272
 - invention of 236–237, 247
 - recursivity of 239–240, 243, 245–246, 248, 252–253, 255, 273–274
 - relationality 228, 237, 239, 245
 - traditum 226, 229, 253, 275
 - See also *cumulative tradition*
 - See also *invented tradition*
 - See also *living tradition*
 - See also *religious tradition*
 - See also *secret tradition*
- trail 207–209, 222
 - trail-dependence 209
 - trail-making 209
- transcendence 278–353
 - as process of contrasting contrasts 344
 - basic 242, 286, 294–296, 299, 313, 328, 341–342, 349–350, 526
 - formal 193, 240–275, 280, 291–293, 296, 299, 313–316, 328, 339, 345–346, 349, 350–351, 466, 526
 - immanent 281, 295, 349
 - process of (search also transcending) 108, 191, 280, 285–286, 289, 293–295, 299, 301–303, 307, 312–316, 325–328, 332–333, 337, 340, 342, 344, 346–348, 350–352, 525
 - specific 280, 296, 299, 314, 332, 341, 347, 350
 - strong 242, 246
 - three level model of 77, 290, 309, 340
- Transcendence/Immanence Distinction (TID) 278–353
 - formally transcending process 330
 - metaphorology of 351
 - religious primary code 282
- transfer process 22, 215, 252, 423, 535
 - as cultural flow 22
 - as cultural translation 22
- translocation 315
- trinity 339, 380
 - trinitas 515
- vector 180–181, 183, 231, 288–289, 467, 470, 501–502, 528
 - See also *vertical order*
- vertical order 457
 - See also *attraction*
 - See also *propensity*
- vertical symbolism 314
 - See also *ascension*
- Vis 147, 331, 335, 336, 384, 463
- vision
 - as concept 395
 - as religious experience 284
 - blessed 379
- West 12, 33, 97, 117, 257, 287, 511
- 'Western' 28–33, 37–38, 68, 73, 361
- Xian 300–302, 346, 256–257, 272, 281, 286–287, 290, 315, 352
- Zoroastrianism 3, 9, 12, 19, 59, 88

Index of Names

- Adeodatus 497
Adorno, Theodor W. 230, 250, 259
Al-Azmeh, Aziz 97, 131, 177, 210, 244, 442
Ambrose 463, 471
Apollo 441
Aquinas, Thomas 131, 329
Arendt, Hannah 498
Aristotle 180–182, 187, 189, 200, 206, 292,
357, 518, 523, 526
Arnal, William 224, 237, 253, 270, 298, 460,
497
Artemis 441
Arthur, Shawn 312, 394
Ashbrook, Susan 355, 361
Assmann, Aleida 228, 230, 234, 267, 405
Assmann, Jan 107, 120, 131, 159, 212, 218, 240,
265, 274, 291, 403, 405, 421, 447
Auffarth, Christoph 121, 126, 210, 414
Augustinus; Augustine 13, 15, 53, 131, 284,
285, 376, 407, 452–502

Basil the Great 95
Beckstein, Martin 236, 251
Beckwith, Christopher 37
BeDuhn, Jason 19, 20, 83, 88, 126, 157, 222,
460, 461, 462
Benjamin, Walter 18, 81, 91, 132, 138–146, 150
Bentham, Jeremy 133
Berkeley, George 15, 149, 380–390
Berkwitz, Stephen C. 18, 45, 183, 185, 217, 347
Berman, David 381
Bhabha, Homi 269
Boghossian, Paul 28
Bourdieu, Pierre 125, 415
Boyer, Pascal 158, 216, 226, 450
Brachtendorf, Johannes 486
Bradford, William 315–328
Brecht, Bertolt 139
Bretfeld, Sven 173
Breuninger, Scott 380, 381
Bronner, Simon 229
Brubaker, Rogers 255, 273
Bruce, Steve 124
Bruner, Jerome 103

Buddha 112, 114, 116, 117, 158, 183, 185, 290,
392, 427, 430
Burkert, Walter 55, 104, 230, 401, 403, 406,
417, 432, 436, 443
Bush, Stephen S. 359

Cahill, Suzanne E. 117, 287, 303
Company, Robert F. 18, 50, 68, 148, 204, 243,
300, 304, 307, 311, 346, 352, 418, 419
Campion, Edmund 110
Carnap, Rudolf 48
Cecini, Ulisse 363, 366, 393
Chidester, David 169, 170–172
Cho, Francisca 32, 79, 158, 533
Cicero 465, 477, 488
Clement of Alexandria 407, 421, 448
Confucius 244, 290
Constable, Olivia Remie 396
Cooper, Frederick 255, 273
Crispin, Gilbert 24, 184
Cuffel, Alexandra 315, 359
Cusanus, Nicolaus 67, 68, 328–339, 344,
374–380, 394

D'Onofrio, Svevo 434
Danto, Arthur C. 28
Dara Šikoh, Muhammad 434
Deeg, Max 62, 104
Demeter 440, 442, 443
Descartes, René 33, 384
Di Giacinto, Licia 19, 45, 116, 230, 244, 278,
299, 344, 349, 359
Dodds, E.R. 137, 472
Dossey, Leslie 522

Eck, Diana 395
Eisenstadt, S.N. 226, 291
Eliot, T.S. 83, 346
Elison, George 113, 115
Elpert, Jan Bernd 336
Emperor Wu 303–314
Engler, Steven 233, 248
Erikson, Erik H. 265
Esler, Dylan 289
Eusebius 483, 68

Faivre, Antoine 413, 414
 Feltmate, David 134
 Ferdinand of Aragon 397
 Fitzgerald, Timothy 74, 75
 Flasch, Kurt 68, 334, 374, 378, 460, 486, 493
 Flügel, Peter 153, 160
 Foltz, Richard 186, 209
 Fouché, Joseph 518
 Fox, Robin Lane 458, 491
 Francis Xavier 112
 Franke, William 41, 278, 279
 Fredriksen, Paula 459, 465
 Freiburger, Oliver 10, 24, 69, 70, 281
 Frese, Jürgen 18, 100, 102, 424
 Freud, Sigmund 86, 90
 Freudenberg, Maren 183
 Frevel, Christian 10, 19, 234, 244, 247, 253
 Frieze, Heidrun 267

 Geerlings, Wilhelm 461
 Gennep, Arnold van 466, 483, 489
 Gladigow, Burkhard 421, 466
 Gleason, Philipp 260, 266, 267, 273
 Gleis, Reinhold 33, 114, 357, 531
 Gongsun Qing 308–312

 Hamann, Johann Georg 248, 452
 Handke, Peter 424
 Hansen, Miriam Bratu 139, 143
 Harvey, Graham 356
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 251
 Heidegger, Martin 92, 235, 448
 Heracles, Hercules 439, 465
 Heraclitus 179, 271, 272, 518, 519
 Herder, Johann Gottlieb 248, 251
 Herodotus 107, 435–444, 518
 Hesiod 517
 Hobbes, Thomas 249, 271, 272
 Hobsbawm, Eric 236
 Hölscher, Lucian 424, 425
 Homer 256, 281, 517
 Hornung, Erik 439
 Horyna, Břetislav 47, 55
 Huan Long Shi 116
 Hunt, Lynn 45
 Husserl, Edmund 92, 187
 Huxley, Aldous 269

Iricinchi, Eduard 495
 Iser, Wolfgang 423

 Jakobson, Roman 30, 51
 James, William 18, 30, 31, 198
 Jammer, Max 180
 Jaspers, Karl 291, 332
 Jesus Christ 109, 420, 460
 Julian of Eclanum 462
 Jurczyk, Thomas 283
 Justin Martyr 407
 Jütte, Daniel 416

 Kant, Immanuel 19, 33, 263, 287, 404
 Kapstein, Matthew 357, 360, 395
 Karis, Tim 19
 Keane, Webb 96, 243
 Kenna, Margaret 356, 392
 Kermodé, Frank 244, 419
 Kippenberg, Hans G. 34, 55, 404
 Kleine, Christoph 16, 211, 282
 Kloft, Hans 130, 145, 160
 Knoblauch, Hubert 102, 256, 344
 Kohl, Karl-Heinz 35, 184, 224
 Koselleck, Reinhard 64, 66, 235, 405
 Krech, Volkhard 1, 9, 18, 20, 52, 84, 90, 106, 152, 165, 189, 282, 531, 533
 Kripke, Saul 18, 215

 Lagarde, Paul de 26
 Lakoff, George 313
 Lanczkowski, Günter 532
 Latour, Bruno 52, 88, 136, 146, 152, 403
 Leeuw, Gerardus van der 66, 174–176
 LeFanu, J. Sheridan 453
 Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 178
 Leuba, James 42
 Li Shaojun 305–307, 312, 314
 Lloyd, Alan 441
 Lull (Lull/Lullus), Ramon (Raimundus) 333, 368–372, 381, 389
 Locke, John 261
 Lotmann, Juri 432
 Luhmann, Niklas 15, 16, 51, 53, 100, 152, 161, 211–214, 271, 276, 282, 286, 318, 342, 344, 348, 533
 Luke 445
 Luther, Martin 265

- MacIntyre, Alasdair 265, 275
 MacMullen, Ramsey 470
 Malone, Edmond 108
 Marcion 383, 407, 509
 Marenbon, John 473
 Marett, Robert Ranulph 168
 Mary 109, 112, 367, 413
 Masuzawa, Tomoko 86, 150, 453
 Meinert, Carmen 19, 286, 299
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 395
 Meyer, Birgit 359, 364, 365, 377, 391, 429
 Montanus 510
 Morgan, David 179, 190, 358, 365, 375, 394, 430
 Muhammad 97, 243, 291, 362, 396, 397
 Müller, Friedrich Max 57

 Najman, Hindy 199, 246
 Nebuchadnezzar 527
 Neelis, Jason 127, 155, 182

 Oevermann, Ulrich 237
 Osborn, Eric 284, 505, 511
 Osiris 443
 Ostwald, Wilhelm 219, 220
 Otto, Rudolf 4, 31, 139, 362

 Parsons, Robert 110
 Patton, Kimberley 58
 Paul 131, 325, 444–450
 Paulinus of Nola 479, 497
 Peirce, Charles S. 9, 18, 26, 146, 198, 200, 201, 272, 280, 360
 Philo of Alexandria 157, 292, 444
 Pinney, Christopher 395
 Plate, Brent 139, 184
 Plato 180, 181, 187, 200, 343, 407, 469, 520, 521, 525
 Plutarch 407
 Pons, Jessie 10, 14
 Popper, Karl R. 15–17, 132, 146–150, 187, 196, 251, 387, 530
 Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagita 285
 Puett, Michael 31, 72, 313

 Qin Shihuang 308
 Queen Mother of the West 117

 Rebillard, Éric 458, 481
 Remensnyder, Amy 114
 Rezanian, Kianoosh 3, 342, 348
 Ricoeur, Paul 264, 365
 Riesebrodt, Martin 532
 Rodríguez García, José María 321, 326
 Roetz, Heiner 10, 38, 236, 241, 291
 Rosenberger, Veit 425
 Röttgers, Kurt 275
 Rüpke, Jörg 20, 126, 130, 147, 153, 194, 227
 Russell, Bertrand 48, 262

 Said, Edward 32, 57, 73
 Schäfer, Jan 420
 Schäfer, Peter 418
 Schapp, Wilhelm 102
 Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph 264
 Schleiermacher, Friedrich 258
 Schmitz-Emans, Monika 424
 Scholem, Gershom 81, 528
 Schulz-Flügel, Eva 521
 Schulze, Reinhard 84, 345
 Schwartz, Benjamin 241, 280
 Searle, John 132, 133–138
 Seiwert, Hubert 38, 148, 177
 Sellars, Wilfrid 232
 Seneca 477
 Shaked, Shaul 428
 Shakespeare, John 109, 111
 Shils, Edward 83, 85, 159, 226, 332, 250, 346, 401
 Simmel, Georg 18, 24, 190, 191, 242, 294, 295, 408, 410–415, 421, 435, 449
 Slater, Peter 177, 184, 280
 Slingerland, Edward 29, 31, 51, 294
 Smith, W. Cantwell 224, 273
 Soranus of Ephesus 519
 Squier, Richard King 32, 38, 79, 158, 533
 Stolz, Fritz 249, 288
 Straub, Jürgen 265
 Stroumsa, Guy 26, 42, 128, 238, 417, 422, 448
 Stuckrad, Kocku von 34

 Tallis, Raymond 280, 296, 341
 Tarski, Alfred 48, 439
 Taves, Ann 26, 360

- Taylor, Charles 30, 256, 265
Teeuwen, Mark 157, 427, 431, 449
Tertullianus, Quintus Septimius
 Florens 503–528
Thomae, Hans 206, 207–209
Thomas, Konrad 267
Thurkill, Mary 363
Tilley, Maureen A. 457
Tweed, Thomas 44, 169, 358, 453, 533

Urban, Hugh B. 401, 413, 414, 415, 434, 449

Vásquez, Manuel A. 16, 78, 137, 169, 171–180
Virgil 483, 485, 486
Vismann, Cornelia 94
Volp, Rainer 98

Westerbarkey, Joachim 411
White, Harrison 268
Whitehead, Alfred North 163, 193, 201–206,
 222, 275, 280, 285, 342, 343, 344–351,
 433, 533
Whitehouse, Harvey 155, 158
Wick, Peter 11
Wiedenhofer, Siegfried 224
Winkelmann, Friedhelm 130
Wittgenstein, Ludwig 44, 73, 261–263, 332
Wolff, Christian 261

Yellow Emperor 304–312
Young, Walter 349

Zander, Helmut 43, 121, 200, 226
Zhang Longxi 39

There is no religion lest there are two religions. Therefore, it is only possible to examine the history of religions by taking the crucial situations of contact into account. Contact needs concepts. Not only scholars but also participants in situations of contact are forced to conceptualize themselves and the other. Taking its point of departure from the contact-based approach to the study of religion, the present volume examines and reassesses a selection of concepts and models (attraction, dynamics and stability, tradition, transcendence/immanence, senses, secret, space) used to come to terms with the phenomenon of contact as the dynamizing element of the history of religions.

Knut Martin Stünkel, Ph.D. (2002), University of Bielefeld, is Associate Professor of Literary Studies and Philosophy of Religion at Ruhr University Bochum. He has published monographs and many articles on intellectual history, including *Una sit religio. Religionsbegriffe und Begriffstopologien bei Llull, Cusanus und Maimonides* (2013).



ISSN 1878-8106

ISBN 978-90-04-51626-7



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