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New environments and categories of religion

Point of departure: Religion as a field of mediation

The intellectual endeavours of those advancing modern cultural trends have for some time now been penetrating research focused on various forms of contemporary religions. One cannot help but notice that these are present also in social sciences and the humanities, sharing the rekindled interest for the demystification and demythologization of the existing cultural frameworks.

Religion's participation in broadly conceived social dynamics causes the emergence of new cultural forms, the more manifest and stronger the process the more religion legitimizes its proceedings by reference to its essentials conceived in extra-empirical terms. It is precisely these terms that form the substance of mediation, of certain uses (abuses, if you like), and of contestation and the adaptation in socially organized schemes of behaviour and collective activity. The extent to which religion exists in newly-materialised cultural forms as an instrument, substance and problem reflects its proactivity in carving out a framework for social dynamics, as well as economic, cultural, and political processes.

I mean here not only its traditional links suggested by Durkheim (its potential for ideological integration of the social system at large), or Weber (catalysis of socio-historical formations) in their sociological models of religion containing various conceptions of secularization and secularism. Those aside, contemporary sociology has also embarked on a singular "cultural turn", with its explicit "discourse" setting course for systematic religious studies in other sciences, philosophy, or anthropology. Any particular experience of religion, individualised and privatised, belongs always and unexceptionally to some sociocultural environment, thus contributing to its discourse. Those who shape the discourse are also among individuals studying the notion of religion along with its modifications and relocations within the cultural structure. Sociocultural environments,

individuals identifiable by a clear criteria of adherence to the given worldview or ideology, scientific schools, followers of a certain persuasion, fashion, intellectual current, paradigm, theory, or those who, if you wish, care not to be indifferent – all contribute to modifications and relocations of the notion of religion within the cultural structure. The dedication, with which philosophers pursue this end, is not exactly surprising anymore, the trend ranging from the late Derrida, to the proponents of critical theory or critical liberalism, to Slavoj Žižek, Julia Kristeva, Alain Badiou, Charles Taylor or Richard Rorty. They do not conceal, on the contrary, they explicitly embrace the legacy of Lukacs, Foucault, Sartre, Adorno, Benjamin, or the late Chomsky. Their writings nurture the cultural turn, which itself harnesses their conceptual frameworks to probe the mutual links and influences occurring between new media, communication technologies, and religious phenomena[1]. At this point, one may offer a possible generalization of the turn in question: religions participate in processes that create new meanings, and their place in culture hinges on the role they play within the socio-historical formations. The structures of socio-historical formations may be conceived as phenomena associated with new social structures, processes, institutions and occurrences. It may be of use to apply this term in a Weberian sense, treating some socially defined community as a "historic individual, i.e. a complex of elements associated in historical reality which we unite into a conceptual whole from the standpoint of their cultural significance"[2]. To those formations belong, *inter alia*, new types of collective order, not least modern democracies and new organizational setups of the national state; new frameworks of global arrangements; processes and centres of resistance (various movements of indignation), change, transformation, conflicts and chronic tensions; ever-present wars; political authority invariably administering as a state of exception-structure; network communities operating in a form of social hives, liquid associations, groups and communicating agglomerations; religious movements in the public sphere of a post-secular culture[3]. They all are interdependent. Those initiatives, variously institutionalised, correspond with academic and other environments that diffuse religious studies and knowledge. Dealing with new social formations, their core theoretical and practical assumption is: religions play a unique role in the contemporary manifestation of socio-historical formations[4]. Note, however, that the notion of formation is not to be confused with the notion of social forms. The authority of religion is rooted within the relations of the system it happens to be part of. If so, it cannot be examined exclusively in terms of structures of political coercion. Formations simultaneously use multiple languages, messages, constantly modified communication systems that include post-, pre-, and near-canonic mutations of the original pattern.

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[1] See P. Siuda, *Religia a internet*, Warszawa 2010.

[2] M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge 2005, p. 13.

[3] J. A. Beckford, *Public Relations and the Postsecular: Critical Reflections*, „Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion", 2012, no. 1, vol. 51, p. 1-19.

[4] M. Kępny, *Socjologia ponowoczesnych form społecznych – wspólnoty i kultury „bez korzeni", czyli o tym, jak próbuje się uchwycić naturę relacji społecznych w świecie ruchu i mieszania się*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo", 2006, no. 1-2, year I.

One witnesses today the emergence of "modern demotism" and "religious demotics". The term "demotics" denotes religious identification, symbolisation, illustration, representation and communication based on relatively loose associations of religious meanings. One should not confuse demotics with semiotics. The former uses a semiotic framework, but ignores some of its requirements. Demotics is a mode of "demotic" representation, i.e. symbolic, cognitive, embodying certain ways of communication. Viewed as an instrument for social communication, which is also its primary function, religion is demotic. This is so because it employs religious semiotics and methods applied in the semiotics of culture (to which it belongs much in the manner of folklore), as well as codes developed and used without official approval of an institutional religious authority (German *demotisch*, Italian *demotico*, stand for folk, popular). Carols and other religious hymns belong to the semiotic repertoire of Polish Catholicism. Pastorals fit in the demotic repertoire. Religious processions are sanctioned by the official cult. Their demotic counterparts would be popular, urban or rural, parades visiting sites of hierophanies or apparitions, however unofficial they may be. Demotic is anything that belongs to extra-canonical manifestations of religious behaviour unsanctioned by religious semiotics of a given creed – provided it is a part of a cultural message, presentation, representation, custom, ritual, or cultural practice inspired by religion and/or mythology. The notion of demotism is applied in linguistic studies, for example in Wilhelm Spiegelberg's *Demotische Grammatik* (1925), and W. Erichsen's *Demotisches Glossar* (1954). In *Thus Wrote 'Onchsheshonqy – An Introductory Grammar of Demotic*[5], Janet H. Johnson uses the term in linguistic vain to denote the popular form of writing and certain phase in the development of the Egyptian language. It has been demonstrated that Demotic, language of folkloric pedigree, is akin to Late Egyptian and Coptic, respectively its predecessor and descendant. Especially in the beginning, Demotic bore much more resemblance to oral language than its archaic, "classic" type which is preserved in religious texts and hieroglyphic inscriptions. Demotic writing, first used under Psammetichus I (ca. 650 BC), the first ruler of the twenty-sixth dynasty, became a standard in commercial and daily activity. Until the Ptolemaic period, Demotic was also dominant in literary output. The last evidence of demotic inscriptions, like the one from Philae, comes from the middle of the fifth century AC. It did not, of course, form one seamless linguistic system, on the contrary, there always existed differences, some of them minor, and that could be traced in writing, vocabulary, morphology and syntax depending on the geographical area, historical period, and genres. It was used to produce a wide variety of texts from business, legal letters, to documents, private correspondence, religious, medical, or magical texts, to funerary and administrative stelae, and to literary texts, such as wisdom literature, tales, or stories.

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[5] J. H. Johnson, *Thus Wrote 'Onchsheshonqy – An Introductory Grammar of Demotic*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 45, Chicago 1991 (second edition revised), 2001 (third edition).

Religion relocated: contributions of the aesthetics of religion

According to contemporary religious studies (*Religionswissenschaft*), religions emerge from spheres where culture and society interact and enter mutual relations. Specific configurations of those components reveal that religion is being relocated and deposited in a memory of special sort – a semiotic museum. "Museality" or "musealisation" as critical categories of aesthetics of religion appear to have a great explanatory potential[6], as "museality" is an element very much present in the European history of religion. The term, coined by Z. Z. Stránsky in the wake of his museological studies[7], is of a descriptive nature. In cultural studies it is employed to synthesise cultural framework, in which one positions, displays and contextualises objects conceived as museal constructs; also, it conceptualises exhibiting in and structuring of museal space outside the traditional museum. One may examine museality of an object, action or behaviour. When embraced by social anthropology, museality seeks to describe behaviour centered on artifacts (objects) that indicates and exposes their aesthetics (object perception, object semiotics, its performativity), further explaining it in terms of value and quality related to practices of their accumulation (collection), display, naming, or designation of their purpose. The term "museality" belongs to the aesthetics of religion and has socio-anthropological functions. It is precisely this meaning of the term that is favoured by Hubert Cancik and Hubert Mohr[8]. They postulate a multi-paradigmatic approach to religious studies, which would include combining new analytical perspectives with aspects of religious traditions ignored heretofore, formed into one major subject of study belonging to the practical research of social aesthetics.

Such a methodological move must be seen in a historical perspective, as it plays on the eighteenth-century debate undertaken by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartner (1717-1762) and revolving around the notion of *aiestesis*. The term refers to sensory and usually synesthetic cognition ("synesthesis", from Greek *synaísthesis* – simultaneous perception indicated by *sýn* – together, and *aísthesis* – sensation) and functions as a key ingredient of semiotics and theory of symbolism. Religion is a "synesthesis", that is, it enables and simultaneously engages various *modi* (manners and patterns) of sensory perception, symbolic communication, and presentation of its material content and applied tools of communication. It is no wonder, then, that it has become an object of major interest for many a "visual sociology" poised to describe its presence, structure and functions in contemporary media or material culture. Their findings are presented in "Material

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[6] H. Mohr, *Reflections on "Museality" as a Critical Term in the Aesthetics of Religion*, "Journal of Religion in Europe", 2011, no. 1, vol. 4, p. 55.

[7] Z. Z. Stránsky, *La museology science: science, ou seulment travail pratique du musée?*, quote in: J. Kugele, K. Wilkens, *Relocating Religion(s) – Museality as a Critical Term for the Aesthetics of Religion: Introduction*, „Journal of Religion in Europe", 2011, no. 1, vol. 4, p. 11.

[8] See H. Cancik, H. Mohr, „*Religionsästhetik*", in: *Handwörterbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe 1*, H. Cancik, B. Galdigow & M. Laubscher (eds.), Stuttgart 1988, p. 121-156.

Religion", a magazine which was launched in 2005. Indeed, this *journal of object, art and belief* is greatly merited when it comes to the promotion of studies related to anything that manifests religion in material culture, be it pictures, objects of piety, semiotics of liturgical units, architecture or sacral space, religious objects of art and mass-manufactured products even having the slightest connection with religion, religious practices, rituals, communication, ceremonies, instructions and mediations that make use of religion, festivals, propaganda, pilgrimages, religious and magical plays, virtually anything that links the products of religious material culture with their interpretation and social practice. Also, one cannot fail to mention the German review "Visible Religion: Annual for Religious Iconography". Borrowing from the natural sciences, cognitive theories, neurology, physiology, and psychology driven by quantitative and qualitative research, the journal has developed arguably the finest formula for the insightful inquiry into the aesthetics of religion. Since its inception in 1980, it has been edited by an accomplished expert in religious studies, Hans G. Kippenberg, to whom full credit for its success must go. These new developments in contemporary religious studies, not least the sociology of religion, may be perceived as a counterbalance for traditional cultural semiotics and analyses that focus on the structure of symbol and expressivity of meanings. The aesthetics of religion never dismiss this or that theory of culture – even when those exercise self-reflection with exalted seriousness, – but harnesses alternative tools of analysis, imposing on them theoretical commitment to study religion in terms of somatic experience, symbolic communication, sensory knowledge, basic networks of personal and public instruments of religion. In a thorough critique and re-evaluation of a textual approach in religious studies, **aesthetics of religion initiates a new paradigm, in which religion's liveliness is construed as an opposition to the European theory of secularization**. In a sense, the project may be conceived as an advanced phase of post-phenomenological studies.

This is not some minor shift within the discipline, but rather crafting an environment in which religious studies would stand on their own, released from this or that philosophical framework, project, complication. This is what must have inspired Jürgen Mohl to proclaim the aesthetics of religion as a leading paradigm in contemporary religious studies[9]. It is no coincidence, of course, that its critical categories, or key words (German *Grundbegriffe*), are meant to advance certain specific methodology and theories of culture. They may be compared with *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*[10], where D. Morgan recapitulated the latest developments in Anglo-American studies that are analogical or related to the project pursued in the aesthetics of religion. Religions are chains of trans-border gestures, that is, they not only indicate the position of the object in relation to *sacrum*, but virtually make it come into being in the act of representation. *Sacrum* thus no longer stems from Eliadian *epiphany* or Rudolf Otto's *tremendum*. It now emerges as

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[9] See J. Mohl, *Von der Religionsphänomenologie zur Religionsästhetik: Neue Ansätze einer systematischen Religionswissenschaft*, „Münchner Theologische Zeitschrift", 2004, vol. 55, p. 300-309.

[10] *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, D. Morgan (ed.), New York & London 2008.

a source of tissue linking sensuality and spirituality, transcendence materialised in the act of its own glory. A trans-border gesture in religion rises to the manifestation of the religion itself. It reveals itself in the desire to be found, firm in readiness to be subject to further cognition, where study and adoration happen all at once. And *vice versa*, piety is study, where a cognitive act is constituted in the light of a special reciprocal relationship between the individual and the group. Cognition is here mediated by this very object of adoration, this very act of adoration, this very form which hoards and reveals elementary notions of religion held dear by the given society. Yearning for religious experience contributes to the hermeneutics of social anthropology, while simultaneously emerging as a source of some confusion. This is so because it implies consent for manipulation with one's own religious and cultural identities, at times declaring them one and the same, only to distinguish them analytically later, encouraging both to find one's source in the other. Once, perhaps from the 1960's onward, those hermeneutics were used to trace sources of theatricality and theatre in culture, finally finding its non-reducible components and processes in the ritual. This is what, in its heyday, was happening in the Laboratory Theatre established in Poland by Jerzy Grotowski in the mid 1960's, later continued in Pontedera outside Florence, Italy, now stripped of stage directions and purified into the sheer exploration of its own possible sources: confession and testimony.

Aesthetics of ritual, coupled with the examination of possible configurations of religious identities, delimit a sphere where religion mediates in the postmodern society. Research agenda can no longer ignore the persisting ambiguity of this process. In his book above-mentioned resetting Anglo-American religious studies, Morgan employs fifteen categories accommodating main themes and procedures of the said process to invigorate the discipline. First comes aesthetics, followed by audiences and circulation. Further, one focuses on community, culture, economy, image, media, narrative, practice, the public sphere, religion, soundscape, technology, and text. At any rate, source studies in religion, much like any source studies of culture, must follow instructions laid down by Raymond Williams in his exceptional book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, first published in 1976. It prescribes to use keywords – cultural forms. Not all notions, never mind words, do important cultural work, only some of them. For this reason, Morgan declares that *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture* seeks to capture an important and recent turn in the social analysis, historical study, and humanistic interpretation of religion as media"[11].

As media, religion is both a sphere in which mediation occurs and a sphere in which it actively mediates itself. Keywords-forms an open innovative perspective, delivers content for heuristic terminologies, and enables analytic precision in a chronic complexity of culture. These are of paramount importance in the scientific approach to religious studies, predominantly in the critique of Europocentrism and its powerful structures. Without them, an analysis of religious communities' self-images would not be credible. *Größe und Kolossalität und ästhetische Kategorie*, Cancik's exploration of the monumentalisa-

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[11] Ibidem, p. xi.

tion of religious representation, is here immensely inspiring. *Kolossalität* is an analytical term in the aesthetics of religious illustration that makes it possible to go beyond meanings bestowed by the believers upon their own religious language. This would also be a reason why "museality" as a critical term promises insight into the material that one's own notions of exposition, object, action, and behaviour could never effectively disclose.

Research into the aesthetics of religion testifies to peculiar dynamics of European history of religion, which is greatly characterised – museality aside – by incorporation of the natural sciences and pluralised humanities into its own conceptual apparatus. The singular context of its fluctuating structure may be explained by the notion of "vertical transfer" that shows how religious knowledge is preserved, discovered and created by nineteenth-century philology and religious studies. This knowledge is the object of a critique exercised by the emancipation movements emerging in new social environments (most notably the modern bourgeoisie), since emancipation movements are forged in debates revolving around religion. Meanwhile, science embarks on self-reflection, positioning itself as privileged knowledge, that is, a system of reference superior to the offering of institutionalised religions. Convergence, very much present and perceived in the nineteenth century, between the progress of science and vertical transfer of religion was embodied in both constant attempts to prove religious truths and their rebuttal in critical operations. This convergence occurs most notably between occult practices and the development of magnetism or imagining techniques in science. Unserious as it may seem, it points to the cultural coexistence of two opposite poles bound by a great force of attraction. Museums, then, and various exhibition projects, constitute a starting point for the popularization of both philological and religion-conscious knowledge, with special emphasis on the religions of bygone eras that seem exotic to contemporary man. Simultaneously, such undertakings offer new ways for the discovery of religion as an act, or testimony. Presentation is representation. Needless to say, those relocations and specific dehistorisation of objects of religious processes and discourses belonging to particular religious practices and traditions deprive such content of their legitimising authorities, cutting it off from its original environment. This is what causes the emergence of new "synesthetic contexts, synesthesia as a cultural practice".

Synesthesia points at connections. It is a structure for the active synthesis of ingredients belonging to various aesthetical experiences into ones of a religious nature, and *vice versa*. This sociological interpretation of synesthesia does not advance, God forbid, anything close to some modern, popular or folk pseudo gnosis, or worse even, homebred Neo-Platonism compiled for the sake of the commercialisation of religion. It does not abolish the typical dichotomies of religions, its multiple variations, it does not wreck the wall separating transcendence and immanence. Let us leave this task to not so small a circle of self-proclaimed anthropologists from the popular press. Also, it does not strive to imitate the sociological moonshine offered by Thomas Luckmann in *The Invisible Religion*, nor does it publicise the agenda for the abolition of institutionalized religion disguising it as a historical trend. It does not say that in its core synesthesia is merely an anti-confessional

spiritualism. It is far from that, as it does not tackle its major problems, namely how can one rekindle religious values in organized institutions, when the social nature of which rests on the denial of these very values. What it rather is, is the awareness, co-presence of discourse and system, the recognition that values constitute and consolidate both objects of experience and objects of study, that the experience itself is a foundation of study in which what is aesthetical, sensory and corporeal is transfigured in the light of cognitive operation, where the particular meets the collective in common interactions as they are re-narrated. Clearly, those are not free from the usual or extraordinary tensions described in the cultural sociology of religion, strong sociology, and broadly conceived contemporary cultural studies. Their diagnosis is like that. There is a totalization of theory as universal history, a preponderance of a contrasting approach in comparative studies, the ineradicable multivalence of any given object, and hybrid discourse of social practice. In the field of religious studies, synesthesia contributes to an understanding of specific tensions arising between explanatory and interpretive functions of theory, dilemmas resulting from historical approaches, autonomy of cultural studies within cultural clusters, unyielding demand for new configurations of critical endeavours in cultural studies, broken dialogues between particular disciplines of cultural and social studies, new cultural legitimisation of aesthetics, ethics, and religion. These and other tensions have been here long enough to become the object of inquiry themselves and are already well nested in the agenda of religious research. Picking museal presentations of the nativity scene and juxtaposing it with its homemade realisations, Jens Kugele, Johannes Quack and Maud Jahn undertook to trace the dynamics between the individual and collective re-narration, re-construction, re-experience, and remembering that leads to the construction of a collective memory within specific political contexts. Re-construction and decoration, arrangement of the museal and domestic space – these cultural phenomena appear as museal spaces that are no longer linked with their traditional purpose[12]. This process, so unusual in Polish Catholicism (religious holidays devoid of rituals – these *sacre reppresentazioni* collectively organised within the intimate confines of the family or community, – devoid of Christmas Eve dinner, a Christmas tree, the nativity scene on Christmas day, Easter feasting, etc., – this absence betrays certain cultural and social tensions), is rather lavishly manifested in large numbers of local variations in any diverse and culturally developed society where at work are instruments of modern and postmodern communication. The said process is therefore incurably multidirectional, embroiled in multiple appropriations of religious identities that are foreign from genetic, literary, and an aesthetic point of view. Only inspired research is able to discover this process in important structures. Religious meanings are being embedded in ever-refreshing contexts of social dynamics. Their specific senses transcend the limitations of syntax that initially legitimised or justified them within the given culture. Here lies the relevance of synesthesia, as it allows to read and practice religion in a way that magnifies spiritual experience, regardless of its fundamental or only

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[12] J. Kugele, J. Quack, M. Jahn, *Memory...*, „Journal of Religion in Europe", 2011, no. 1, vol. 4, p. 134-156.

accidental isolation from its original environment. Synesthesia dissolves the problem of religion's authenticity, especially in terms of its archetypes or basic symbolic lexicon. It justifies religious practice lacking faith, and faith lacking practice, encourages an extension of functions and meanings beyond the requirements of its own structure, invites substitution, and speaking-in-stead. Religion's relocation beyond its original cultural categories and structural commitments is a necessary process in a rapidly changing society. As it is, this process must be characterised by great formal variability.

Religion functions as an intertextual variant of culture. Its specific manifestations are variations of what is considered fundamental. The better it expresses a given definition of religion, the better it fares against its various predecessors and competitors. Debates on religious definitions, particularly those focusing on the "truth of religion or true religions", constitute a fair share of the history of religion, with the careers of some of their contributors, as we all know, coming to an abrupt end at the stake. Nevertheless, with the advent of modernity these religious strifes were largely extinguished. **When societies can no longer exercise institutional control over cultural, especially intergenerational, transfer, and cannot stabilize conditions for acceptable changes, religions emerge in numerous intertextual variants and transformations**. Only religious, not least ecclesiastical, institutions with "strong structures" capable of "vertical transfer" can ensure the transmission of a message that is repetitive enough to secure the value of social continuity and assure survival should a catastrophe arrive on the doorstep[13]. There is no reason to add, because sociologists stress it in any given handbook and elsewhere, that modernity and the ensuing post- and ultra-modernism released invariably fragile attempts to overcome a crises attributed to the pace of changes and their incidentally catastrophic aftermaths. Effective resistance against the destructive power of cultural pluralisms – preaching a freedom of choice with regard to anything that modern and postmodern pressure wishes to seize on – imitates what has triggered it in the first place. Religions, much like other cultural forms, turn into anti-forms, and only in this shape can they satisfy the needs of a mass audience. Postmodern religion dissolves authority to replace it with difference and opposition; it engages in trespassing to indulge in irenic and ironic contradictions. It advertises transgression as a vehicle for transcendence. Commenting on the post-Soviet countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Irena Borowik observed that the prevailing patterns of cultural religiosity – both of those involved an individual character – imitate processes characterised by deinstitutionalisation, subjectivisation and the individualisation of religion, sprawl of "religious *bricolage*". Typical to the entirely secularised Western Europe, those processes in a sense set the course for religion's relocations also in this part of the world, but the singularity of CEE lies in the fact that here they are by no means unambiguous[14], on the contrary, ambiguity and complexity are

[13] A. Wójtowicz, *Kościół jako struktura silna. Model pojęciowy*, „Przegląd Religioznawczy", no. 3, p. 3-20; A. Wójtowicz, *Kościół jest strukturą silną: rozwiniecie modelu podstawowego*, „Społeczeństwo i Kościół", vol. 2, p. 73-106.

[14] I. Borowik, *The Religious Landscape of Central and Eastern Europe after Communism*, in: *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, Los Angeles – London – New Delhi – Singapore 2007, p. 654-669.

their signature features. Naturally, cultural differences between these two parts of Europe are clearly too large for adaptive trends to emulate each another. But we do not look here for a radical polarization of absolutized local differences. Rather, what is important is how in specific religious forms emerge (how one defines) particular ingredients and processes of individual and collective existence. The aesthetics of religion in its present shape seems to hold that religious definitions, behaviour and senses are derived from cultural models shaped by specific social actions. The notion of action must be construed in line with three of its insightful accounts offered, on the one hand, by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, and, on the other hand, M. Foucault. In anthropological studies, it is construed in opposition to the major concepts of structuralism, sociolinguistics, or semiotics. Additionally, one employs it in research exploring new religious movements, popular cultures, everyday religious life, religious discourse, religious media and artifacts. Pierre Bourdieu uses the concept in his studies of *habitus*, central category of socio-cultural practice and essential element of behavioural patterns followed by the individual in social activity. Always stressing connections between corporeal, spiritual, psychic, and the mind, *habitus* is shaped in the process of socialisation and features as an indispensable component in the internalisation of social structures. As it is widely known, body, and anything of corporeal nature, has been established as an element of social action in the wake of such permanent contributions to modern tradition, as sociology and the anthropology of culture practiced by Marcel Mauss and, later on by Mary Douglas, not to mention contributions of a much more recent origin delivered by the anthropology of medicine. This is not some minor theoretical development, as the intention here is to overcome opposition between a naturalistic perspective inclined to conduct a materialistic analyses of the body and constructivist stance maintaining that the body will always remain a cultural and social construct. Incarnation and the experience of incarnation is thematised by anthropology. For the sociology of religion and religious studies, the labour of the body becomes a religious issue. Although interdependence of the body and culture is not excessively present in religious studies, what immediately captures attention is its conceptualisation that combines traditions subscribing to social theories, discourse analysis, embodiment theories, cognitive sciences, and other approaches exploring the relationships existing between culture (society) and the incorporated individual.

The concept of "action" grasps this interdependence through all phases and forms in which religious objects are manifested. In particular, it reveals its "demotic discourse", that is, what is expressed in the element of everyday life. Demotic discourse is conceived in opposition to the prevailing patterns of discourse built from prescribed and preferred semiotic forms of a homogenous character. Demotic is contrasted with semiotic, much like singular is, in a way, contrasted with collective, as individual is contrasted with a group, as an element is contrasted with order, as *sacra rapprezentazione* – "holy performance" – transforms into a folk mystery play.

Demotic discourse, evaluative and neutral structures. *Demiosis*

As a concept, "demotic discourse" represents creative structures of sense produced by marginalised individuals and groups in response to the dominating view on collective identity and related objects. Differentiation between the prevailing semiotic discourse and one of "demotic" character enables an insight into the processes that shape individual perception and religious attitude. The growing subjectivization of religious experience is interpreted here as a process creating the social identity of the individual, releasing it from the prevailing national, ethnic, class, and other meta-structural collective identities[15]. This concept is unquestionably useful when examining the internal differences within a given culture and society. In intercultural studies, it can be used to investigate complex multicultural clusters or cultural shocks. In that case, it competes with categories developed in the comparative sociology of religion and religious comparative studies.

Emic and *Etic* is Kenneth L. Pike's conceptual innovation adopted by anthropological studies and contemporary sociology. The underlying idea is that tools used for linguistic analysis may successfully be converted into the descriptive categories of any human behaviour. *Emic* stands for the description of evaluative behaviour or conviction, with *etic* denoting their neutral character. This theoretical enterprise promises to bring some epistemological clarity to the typical problem of the social sciences, namely one of the objectivity and subjectivity of knowledge produced in those disciplines. Basing on linguistic terms, *phonemic* and *phon-etic*, K. L. Pike offered a distinction between intra (evaluative)- and extra-cultural types of knowledge, denoted respectively by *emic*, and *etic*[16], thus breaking the discourse into two varieties: dominant, or "semiotic", and marginalised, "demotic". Pike's distinction was further explored by W. Goodenough and M. Harris[17]. Their considerations shed new light on anthropological and sociological studies, with religious research benefiting from observations regarding the understanding of culture-specific meanings (Goodenough), or specific sources of explanation of behaviour (Harris).

Dilemmas

One particular field of study opened by those distinctions interests us here. More precisely, conflict that may arise between "emic" (intra-cultural) and "etic" (extra-cultural)

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[15] G. Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*, New York 1999.

[16] *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of Structure of Human Behavior*, K. L. Pike (ed.), Netherlands 1967.

[17] W. Goodenough, „*Describing a Culture*", in: *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology*, Cambridge 1970, p. 104-119; M. Harris, *History and Significance of the Emic/Etic Distinction*, "Annual Review of Anthropology", 1976, p. 329-350; M. Harris, „*Chapter Two: The Epistemology of Cultural Materialism*, "Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture", New York 1980, p. 29-45.

definitions of certain matters regarded in a given society as fundamental, especially when the said matters are of a religious nature. The problem may be satisfyingly explained by looking into controversies sparked by bioscience. To do this, we shall adduce an essay by Shimazono Sasumu where he traces ethical implications of biotechnologies within the context of religious culture. He concludes that bioscience is driven by such notions as value of life, and religious culture and that it has immense impact on the discipline in question. "Value of life" is a critical category. Religious cultures are aplenty. How can one reconcile, asks Sasumu, two different definitions of one absolutely fundamental issue, adding that if one wished to consider the dilemma as it exists today in the cultural and social environment of Japan (to which he feels closest by virtue of background, place of work, etc.), one would have to concede that this subject matter is barely touched on in public debates. Protagonists understand little from similar discussions in Western societies[18], where the majority is familiar with Christian, mostly conservative, views on the prohibition of eugenics, abortion, or birth control. At the same time, those who do not approve of such prohibitions will welcome any reason supporting both eugenics and abortion. They construe a woman's right for abortion as an implication of the choice of a certain cultural option that provides a conceptual framework for discourse on the value of life. Critics of such a right are also well fitted in the discourse, building on premises derived from the same dominant semiotic pattern. Both sides agree that the crux of the problem lies in weighing human dignity and the human being itself. Along this demarcating line Christian conservatives defend the sanctity of life, with their adversaries defending the right of human self-determination along the lines of Enlightenment-inclined progressivism. Public opinion can now be transparently divided into those preaching the supreme value of life and others preferring the right of individual choice. In short, the problem with biosciences boils down to the conflict between fundamental values. But in Japan, according to Susumu, this problem never arises and arise it cannot. There is no strong opposition against abortion, nor does it have a powerful pro-choice movement. The thing is, already prior to its modernisation Japan had to face the problem of population control (birth control). In any case, the prevailing view of the time was that there was no other way but to confront the issue if the nation was to survive under conditions of limited space and natural resources. In effect, abortion and infanticide were culturally and socially permissible. This went even further, as Buddhist morality appeared to support such behaviour. Rather than pushing people to observe moral norms, Buddhism prescribes to analyse conditions, in which people must behave contrary to a moral code. In consequence, Buddhist views tend to admit the inevitable reality by emphasizing human conditions in which persons cannot practice moral norms. Some may find it instructive to learn that traditional folk religions believe that the souls of dead foetuses and infants return to the other world and are reborn. One cannot help but remark that such a discourse

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supports the popular justifications of eugenics or abortion in Japan. That said, tensions do arise. As a cultural and social practice, population control in Japanese society belongs to a distant, but also quite recent past. Recent indeed, as Japan embraced anti-expansionistic ideology only after sacrificing millions of its citizens in wars waged between the 1920's and the end of the Second World War. Eugenic progressivism had its advocates on the political scene and received support in Enlightenment-inclined progressivism in the neo-Malthusian line, eventually leading to the enactment of the National Eugenic Law in 1940, followed by the Eugenic Protection Law in 1947. In the 1970's, however, some started voicing concerns over the legitimacy of eugenics. Their claims were motivated by the defence of human rights and a certain idea of family life. We can see now that, if compared with Japan, the Western conception of the value of life is largely different. Universalism and individualism rooted in the dignity of the individual belong to the cultural legacy of the West. It is not at odds, quite opposite, it shares ground with the Christian doctrine of promoting the sanctity of life in various forms, also if they, *fas et nefas*, enhance human rights. In Japan, however, the dominant view is that religious culture and traditional family rest on strong emotional bonds between parents and children, extending also to lost foetuses. Hence, reluctance to comply with the Eugenic Protection Law and resistance to mass prenatal genetic screening, leading often to new pro-family initiatives. According to 1996 statistical data, in Japan, 10% of the abortions of foetuses were diagnosed with Down syndrome, whereas in Great Britain and France the number rose to 50%. The cultural concept advancing the value of communal (family) life, also of life itself, on principle embraces any form of life, however imperfect it may be. What is more, Japanese feminists have put this very value on top of its social and political agenda.

Clearly, the critique and relocations of religion is a fairly new phenomenon, but as we can see it seems to be ubiquitous, invading at once macro- and microstructures while contributing to large and small projects of social change. As such, these processes intensify and escalate in an attempt to galvanize and reshape the surrounding world and trigger change in the critical environment. Being what they are, they must be considered essential processes of the postmodern world.

Conclusions: towards the demystification of culture

This essentiality will prove even more profound if examined in terms of its heavy critique projected by modernity. These critical inquiries into the reconstitution of ideologies did not spare religion embroiled in various ideological liaisons – suffice it to mention self-congratulatory confidence in the cultural superiority of Judeo-Christian civilization, alleged backwardness of a non-Western world, or a colonizatory mindset belittling foreign cultures, beliefs, and, yes, religions. Simultaneously, these critics expressed concern over the proliferation of anti-democratic conspiracies in non-Western societies and cultures.

Viewed once as pathologies begging immediate treatment, their meanings and significance are now revisited and contribute to the now reversed critique of postcolonial modernity founded on the exploitation of a non-Western world.

The workings of a postcolonial setup were first exposed by F. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*[19] where he established new fields of research into conflicts of modernity. These were collected by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*[20] and further processed to forge a new perspective for a radical, symmetrical critique of culture, which nevertheless respected its paradigms[21]. These are very much present in Ali Mazrui's *The African Condition*, F. Ajami's *The Arab Predicament*, and Kanan Makiya's *Republic of Fear*[22], where they constitute a frame of reference for an affirmative approach, with their prerequisite being a respect for singularity.

Kanan Makiya's *Republic of Fear* only seemingly undermines the self-confidence of those who harbour convenient stereotypes of other societies. The book examines Iraqi society, culture, and history. What it does, however, is uphold those stereotypes, even pay them lip service by its obsessively monochromatic portrait of the country presented along the lines of a dehumanized, a historical and demonological perspective. For Makiya, Iraq is nothing else but the epitome of Arab fascism.

An exploitation of terms of European history for stigmatizing non-European societies is symptomatic and we shall live to see it repeat more than once. Same pertains to studies in religion. They are biased by the pre-assumption of chronic backwardness and immaturity. Anything non-European is pitiful in almost every imaginable way. Of course, those societies know, say, how to use a phone, but would never invent it. But where is the demystification of culture and its ontology? In the assumptions embraced by Hayden White. History, argues White, is a linguistic event. In its essence, historiography is writing, and one ought to take this thought seriously. It produces literary works and by this wages a cultural critique. History and culture are accessible only through language and must employ its means. Historical and cultural writing delivers figures of speech and tropes of representation such as metonymy, synecdoche, allegory, and irony. Thinking about the world has a narrative character. White's *Metahistory*[23] betrays a certain narrative twist already known from constructivist, postmodern rabidity, which may however be of some value, if only due to the clarity of the implied anxiety; namely, cultural hegemony can reproduce itself and exerts pressure on all of its forms; it controls and uses them for regulatory processes, which include violence. Religion at the service of violence points to a paradox. But is not a paradox the vocation of religion? Religion, conceived as the

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[19] F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, C. Farrington (tr.), New York 1963.

[20] E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London 1994.

[21] See D. Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Rowohlt 2006.

[22] See A. Mazrui, *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis* [The Reith Lectures], London 1980; F. Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967*, New York 1981; K. Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, Los Angeles 1989.

[23] H. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore and London 1973.

systematic taming of the paradox, must always spring from fundamental incomprehension. Religion can never shake it off[24]. This paradoxical situation of religion confronted with modern historical developments cannot be attributed to any of its immanent features. Rather, it can be traced in the convergence of two contemporaneous historical phenomena. First, the rising of religiousness and the Church as a source and deposit of individual and collective identity. Second, the emergence of nationalism with the same claims. Indeed, both these processes were triggered off by modernity, itself starting with the Reformation and the birth of nationalist movements, at least in Europe. If nationalism can take various shapes, flexible enough to accommodate liberalism, then religion, especially Christianity, reacts similarly, although it may not exactly imitate its strategies. If nationalism embraces conservative doctrines preaching the supremacy of tradition and national collective, then religions, including Christianity, are never far off with innovative approaches designed to reach similar ends. Ecumenical or cosmopolitical Christianity is equally common as its fundamentalist version. These national and religious, especially Catholic, types of identity correlate, respectively, with the idea of citizenship and conception of the Church as a community resting on the principle of *nulla salus extra ecclesia*. Although exclusive institutionally and organisationally, this formula offers a socially universalist framework, as Catholicism incorporates a universal pattern of religiousness. "Catholic religiousness", writes L. Kołakowski in his seminal work on e thnondenominational Christianity of the seventeenth century, is "infinitely broad and open, nesting each human condition in a prime place furnished with its own, special and exceptional sanctity"[25]. In a cultural model of which it is a component, religion does not demand exclusivity, but leaves a vast space for much more. The paradox of religion is ineradicable from the critique of culture that looks for its demystification.

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[24] J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection*, San Francisco 2011. J. Ratzinger understands Christological theology in terms of the theology of paradox. It is, so far, the most radical take on Christological dogmas in official Catholicism.

[25] L. Kołakowski, *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna*, Warszawa 1965, p. 63.