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Transcendence, Self-Transcendence, Making Transcendence Together: Toward a New Paradigm for Phenomenology of Religion

Abstract: Reflecting the contemporary context of the »return of religion« and the changing role of religion in our late modern social imaginaries, we argue that we need a revised phenomenological account to confront the »phenomenon of religion« today. By way of a charting middle course between, on the one hand, »radical phenomenology« and its focus on the invisible (Levinas, Marion, Henry), and the widely exported hermeneutics of religion (Ricoeur), on the other, the author of this article proposes a novel understanding of transcendence: this account emphasizes a constitutive correlation of experiences of transcendence with practices of self-transcendence and liturgies of making transcendence together. In the last analysis, the author sketches how this conception can help us to confront the ambiguous poetic potential of religious practice and thus shed some light on the difficult relationship between religion and violence.

Key words: phenomenology (of religion), transcendence, self-transcendence, return of the religious, religious violence, Paul Ricoeur

Povzetek: **Transcendenco, samo-transcendenco, skupaj ustvarjati transcendenco: novi paradigmi za fenomenologijo religije naproti**

Glede na sodobni kontekst »vračanja religije« in njeno spreminjajočo se vlogo v naših pozno modernih družbenih imaginarijih avtor članka zagovarja potrebo po novem fenomenološkem pristopu, ki se bo sposoben soočiti s »fenomenom religije« danes. Ta pristop, ki začrta srednjo pot med »radikalno fenomenologijo« z njeno osredotočenostjo na nevidno (Levinas, Marion, Henry) na eni strani in med razširjeno hermenevtiko religije (Ricoeur) na drugi, predlaga novo razumevanje transcendence. V tem razumevanju je poudarek na konstitutivni soodvisnosti med izkušnjami transcendence in med prakticiranjem samo-transcendence ter liturgij skupnega ustvarjanja transcendence. V zaključni analizi avtor pojasni, kako nam to pojmovanje lahko pomaga pri soočenju z dvoumnim poetično ustvarjalnim potencialom religijskih praks in na ta način osvetli težavno razmerje med religijo in nasiljem.

Ključne besede: fenomenologija (religije), transcendenco, samo-transcendenco, vračanje religioznega, religijsko nasilje, Paul Ricoeur

1. Introduction

This article¹ elaborates on the potentials of a revised phenomenological account to think through the »phenomenon of religion«. Given the lasting influence of reductionist theories of religion derived from Enlightenment rationalism, we are in deep need of such an account in order to gain a more sensitive outlook on the disconcerting realities that the »return of religion« confronts us with. But what does a distinctly phenomenological account of »religion today« look like? As Heidegger had shown early on, a key problem that a »phenomenology of religion« has to reflect upon is the fact that religion needs »to be explained from out of our own historical situation and facticity« (2004, 89). In other words, it is only against the backdrop of our lived pre-understanding of »religion« and the hermeneutic circles that it entails that a phenomenological analysis may proceed. This involves an insight that has far reaching implications for the eidetic status of our enterprise.

As for our context, this implies that we need to consider two novel qualities of our pre-understanding. The first concerns the vexed situation of globalization and its discontents. In this context we must not anymore pretend that we may approach religion in the singular or in terms of some »singular eidetic structure«. Today, this difficulty is further aggravated since with the »return of religion« it is, as Derrida has emphasized, not clear what it is that returns. Hence, we need not only take care to avoid any »hyper-imperialist appropriation« (2002, 66) of religion in the singular; we not only need to expose ourselves to the risky dialogue between the religions (Bernasconi 2009; Moyaert 2014).

As to the second quality, we need to reflect on the disconcerting fact that faith and reason today appear to be inextricably intertwined, a fact that is epitomized in the joint uses of globalized tele-technology by the practices of both reason and religion. Or as Derrida puts it: »No faith, therefore, nor future without everything technical, automatic, machine-like supposed by iterability. In this sense, the technical is the possibility of faith, indeed its very chance that entails the greatest risk, even the menace of *radical evil*.« (2002, 83) For Derrida, in a nutshell, religion figures the »ellipse« of »two distinct sources or foci«, i.e., »the experience of belief (trust, trustworthiness, confidence, faith, the credit accorded the good faith of the utterly other in the experience of witnessing)« and »the experience of sacredness, even of holiness, of the unscathed that is safe and sound (*heilig*, holy)« (82).

To confront this elliptical constitution of religion is a daring undertaking. It calls upon us to escape the undercurrents of our beloved modernist waters that have tacitly lured us to oppose reason and faith in terms of rationality and irrationality; and to bear witness to the very fact that reason obliquely constitutes religion as its other, thus at once camouflaging and disavowing it as its own »originary supplement«. If this is the case, however, we need not only take care to avoid any »hyper-imperialist appropriation« of religion but also any hyper-rationalist expul-

¹ This article was conceived and written in the frame of the research project The Return of Religion as a Challenge to Thought (I 2785) granted by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF).

sion of »religious truth«. This refers to a basic problem that is mirrored in the political solution substituted for the philosophical problem of religion: relegating religion to the private realm, thus substituting the categories of discursivized reason to the existential problem of the »truth of religion«,² indeed is to misconstrue or rather »duck« the question of such truth:

»Religious truth is more a matter of doing than of knowing, as when Kierkegaard said that the name of God is the name of a deed. That means that religious truth flies beneath the radar of both the theism and the atheism of the Enlightenment. Its truth has to do with a more elemental experience that precedes this distinction.« (Caputo 2015, 33–34)

The wager is to confront this zone that opens up beyond our beloved modernist dichotomies of rationality and irrationality, of theism and atheism, of myth and Enlightenment – a zone that is mirrored quite explicitly in contemporary social imaginaries and how they propose to re-incorporate the »truth of religion« – what Habermas (2010, 18) calls its »unexhausted force« (*das Unabgegoltene*) – in the context of an all too soberly disenchanted world.

In what follows, we will first embark on a discussion of these novel social imaginaries and their ambivalent stance toward the question of religion. In a second part, we will argue for a revised phenomenological account of religion and will delineate its major contours; this will, finally, allow me to lay out the potential of this account for rethinking the vexed issue of »religious violence« beyond the extremes of blank irrationality and functional instrumentality. Whereas this problem cannot be treated here adequately, we will still attempt to sketch the general framework of such an undertaking.

2. Contemporary social imaginaries and their discontents

In contemporary continental philosophy of religion Heidegger's dictum that we »can neither pray nor sacrifice to this God [of philosophy]«, that »before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall on his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god« (1969, 72), has received serious attention. Religion, in this perspective, is recovered as a matter of »being-in-the-world«. It is not anymore about doctrines, beliefs, or invisible ideas taken to be located in some »inner self«, but rather about practice or »deeds«.

It is in this post-metaphysical context that Levinas, Ricoeur and Derrida's (more or less explicit) reflections on religion reveal their full potential. Whether it is about Ricoeur's reflections on the possibility of a »post-religious faith« that succeeds the »hermeneutics of suspicion« (1974); about Levinas' »atheist« distancing from the lure of idolatrous fusion with totality that articulates an inherently religious relation

² As for this argument, we may not only refer to deconstruction but also to accounts that emphasize the anthropological-practical irreducibility of »religious truth claims«: Rentsch 2001; Höhn 2007.

with the »wholly other«; or Derrida's elliptical inquiry into the structure of a so-called »religion without religion« that imagines another »God to come«, a vulnerable, suffering and divisible »God« (2005, 157) – these positions embrace one joint insight: it is the idea that a »double and supplementary gesture of abandonment and retrieval of God« (Kearney 2009, 167; Kearney 2011) is necessary in order to finally leave the old God of metaphysical causality and theodicy behind.

This ideal, as we know since Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, is but the conceptual idol of a God fixed onto our unavowed projections of omnipotence and omniscience. That, however, there exists a possibility to »return to God after God«, that is after the »death« of the metaphysical God, this »ana-theist wager«, as Kearney has felicitously termed it, calls upon us to reflect about the practical implications of this »return«. As to Kearney, it involves not so much a simple return to a yet unthought facet of some »ineffable other«. The »return« he has in mind rather signifies a truly liberating move exposing us to the idea of (an) »enabling God«, understood in the context of narrative and »creative imagination«.

In light of the vexed realities that the »return of the religious« affords us, this conception, however, remains ambivalent. On the one hand, it refers to a »God« that is taken to be truly dependent upon humankind and has to risk a possibilizing and, hence, liberating dance with it. This dependency is something we may realize clearly, e.g., in the Song of Songs and the exemplary way it depicts a theo-erotic dimension of openness and radical hospitality of (and also to) the wholly other. (Kearney 2001, 53–58)

On the other hand, this concept also needs to retain and mediate the violence that is a constitutive part of the experience of »transcendence«, the »sacred«, etc., and the ways it comes to the fore concretely. Isn't indeed »violence« haunting many contemporary attempts at »recovering the sacred« in a time that appears marked by a »pervasive sense that something has been lost« (Taylor 2011, 115)? Isn't the appeal to something »unconditional«, which is part and parcel of many religious semantics suffused with violence, or at least some »violent potential«? Isn't idle talk about religion being a vessel of peace hence a self-righteous disavowal of a much more disconcerting truth of religion(s) that is only insufficiently shrouded in a semantics of inherent ambiguity? (Appleby 1999)

It might be worthwhile to pause here for a moment. To talk about violence as being constitutive for religion is easily misleading. If we start from the widely shared premise that such a correlation exists, we need to be careful in order not to misunderstand it in essentialist, substantialist or functional terms. Violence in this case, like in fact in any other, is not one. It neither simply is »the heart and secret soul of the sacred«, as Girard (1979, 31) claimed in his functional account, nor does it necessarily revolve around some basic experience of the »numinous«, as Otto (1958) suggestively argued. The relationship between religion and violence rather is inherently contingent. It is articulated in a variety of different but inter-related experiential layers.

As Srubar (2018) demonstrates, »violence« firstly is – due to the inherently excessive experiential status of the sacred, transcendent, etc. – an inherent part

of religious experience (as concepts like hierophany or revelation clearly demonstrate) and, thus, also a structural part of our (due to its embodied nature basically a-semiotic) communication with the sacred.

Second, the socio-cultural grammar that is used to spell out this correlation on the level of our life-worlds, implies its practical translation into topologies of the sacred and the profane which entail an inherently violent logic of inclusion and exclusion.

Thirdly, violence is symbolically incorporated in the narrative semantics of religious systems of knowledge, i.e., in discourses which may consequently engender actual violence as a means to »define one's situation« in the light of pre-given religious scripts.³

Given this interrelated implication of various forms of violence and the religious, we need to accept that an intrinsic relationship exists between religion and violence. Yet, we also need to see that this relation finds its concrete actualization under inherently contingent conditions. We hypothesize that the novel and oftentimes indeed violent form that the »quest for transcendence« takes on today, is dependent upon a variety of such motivating conditions, including, first and foremost, the structural violences that the »maelstrom of globalization« (Appadurai 2006) entails.

Yet »religious violence« – or rather »religiously justified violence« – still is, as any violence in general, always only an option of action. It must not be reduced to a causal necessity mechanically driven by some assumedly unchangeable »human condition«. Given this, our argument is not about an arcane logics of violence shrouded in the mysteries of revelation, etc. It rather concerns the unprecedented constellation of human finitude, vulnerability and exposure today and the way it is related to the creative articulation of human capabilities in the light of empowering »tales of transcendence« (Giesen 2005). It is on these »tales« and their reactivation or rather performative re-creation in practices or »liturgies« (Riesebrodt 2010, 72; 84), as we prefer to call them, of self-transcendence that we need to focus in order to confront »religious violence« more adequately.

Thus viewed, the following questions remain to be answered: how is the relationship between violence and religion worked out in man's attempts to poetically re-configure everydayness in light of revitalized tales of transcendence, i.e., articulations that follow the so-called »death of God« in late modern life forms? How does the resurgent »quest for transcendence« enliven novel social imaginaries, especially those that entail violence as a viable medium of social action? How does this quest affect man's never ending »struggle for concordance in discordance«, a struggle that has until quite recently been conceived in plainly secular terms? And finally, but most importantly, does the creative potential of this quest remain within the limits of »a poetics of the human will« – that is, a poetical articulation – which, in confronting the abysmal character of his capabilities, sets out to explore and de-

³ This is also an argument propounded by Kippenberg (2011) and his attempt to decipher the logics of religious violence from the viewpoint of action theory and, most basically, the »Thomas-theorem«.

scribe the fact of its creation and investment with liberating, god-like powers? Or does it transform into »a poetics of the will« – i.e., a poetical transformation of the world – that seeks to overcome human finitude by becoming itself creator-like?⁴

These vexed questions, which put the »ana-theist wager« on existential trial, are by far not only of theoretical importance. Practically viewed, the ambiguity of this liberating potential becomes manifest in the ways the irreducibility of religious »truth claims« is dealt with today. As recent discussions have shown, procedural, functional and discursive accounts of religion remain inadequate to incorporate these liberating claims into the normative fabrics of late modern societies. Quite the contrary, the mere attempt to do so quickly results in sacrificing them on the cognitivist altar of one self-same brand of reason, be it fashioned in teleological, discursive or dialectical terms. This general criticism and related proposals to substitute for this deficiency by contemporary discourses of »inter-religious hospitality« or »cosmopolitan justice« do not, however, suffice either.

This becomes evident if one takes into account the larger picture. In the wake of contested sovereignties and with the (structural) violences of globalization, neoliberalism and neocolonialist geo-politics becoming endemic constituents of a »modernity threatening to spin out of control« (Habermas 2010, 18), it becomes more and more problematic to analyze the »return of religion« with a view to its potentially universalizing »cognitive potential«. Be such a potential ascribed to a principle of translation, a teleological principle of progress, or »procedural justice« that shall finally feed into the process of reason's self-explication or lead to dialectical reconciliation, religion thus viewed is all too quickly perceived in an integrationist way. Yet such an integrationist vision, endorsed in a tradition from Kant to Habermas and beyond, dangerously overshadows the motivating power of religion. It results in a self-righteousness of reason further acclaiming itself and its unity via its encounters with its assumed other – an other who either needs to incorporate reason's standards into his own (religious) business or will unmask itself as a corrupted form of social practice. While this criticism may be well accepted today, the question yet remains how to confront »religion« beyond this bad alternative of either integrating its assumedly infinite otherness into a unified vision of reason and its claim for autonomy, or projecting onto it the qualities of some ineffable irrationality, opaque alterity, or uncommunicable heterology.

3. Toward an integrative phenomenology of religion

An answer to this vexed problem can be provided only if we consider that the »return of religion« does not refer to some clear cut and self-same event. It is not something that interrupts our seemingly unified contemporary social imaginaries

⁴ The both basic and irreducible ambivalence that we are referring to here is stated most clearly in Wall's (2005, 53) succinct assessment of Ricoeur's understanding of religion which, in the last analysis, cannot avoid this »tantalizing religious possibility« concerning its reserves of violence, even if he hardly ever reflects on it.

out of nowhere. It rather takes place in a cultural constellation of shifting images of transcendence that attests to a variety of fault lines undermining traditional social imaginaries.

As Stoker (2012) demonstrated, the experience of transcendence today does more than resonate across a variety of fields beyond the narrow domain of religion, including culture, art and politics. It also has changed most basically since our contemporary articulations of transcendence are called upon to translate a variety of existential truth claims that lead us beyond the aforementioned traditional dichotomies of rationality/irrationality, theism/atheism, or myth and Enlightenment. These dichotomies have shaped the modern rationalist framework that in turn has helped Western societies keep separated our disenchanted life-worlds from some neatly demarcated spaces of the holy whereto »the varieties of religious experience« have been relegated.

Today, however, these demarcations become more and more porous. They give rise to what has frequently been termed »re-enchantment«, which is, according to Taylor, not simply the undoing of our secular »disenchantment« (2011, 117). In this situation, the semantics of »re-enchantment« breaches novel affective pathways for effectively legitimizing yet-to-be-fought struggles for recognition (Rogozinski 2017) – struggles that are taken to respond to a dangerous decreasing of »an awareness of the violation of solidarity throughout the world« (Habermas 2010, 19). This response, however, happens amidst a conception of the »public square« that due to its normative rationalism is notoriously overburdened at integrating the variety of such »demands« or truth claims. Especially when confronted with »unconditional claims« concerning, e.g., a »livable life« under conditions of scarcity, systemic vulnerability, or social suffering, i.e., claims that can indeed be formulated more properly with a little help from the narrative semantics of religious systems of knowledge, we begin to realize that our conceptions of discursive or »disengaged reason« lack the capacity to account for what is still able to absolutely affect us.

Thus, the symbolic relegation of religion to the confines of an assumed »other of reason«, is a nearby and probably systemic reaction to such an overburdening challenge, albeit one that easily disavows »pure reason's« own participation in the (not only symbolic) production of its very »other« – upon which it is structurally parasitic.⁵ Not only the unprecedented alliance of contemporary religious practices with hyper-rationalist technologies but also the tendency of »disengaged reason« to hypostatize itself in an auto-idolatrous fashion testifies to this yet largely unthought intertwining of religion and reason. This becomes most clear with regard to »our new wars of religion«, as Derrida points out:

»Wars or military ›interventions‹, led by the Judaeo-Christian West in the name of the best causes /... /, are they not also, from a certain side, wars

⁵ This insight that order is dependent upon the production of dis-order, has been outlined forcefully by Bauman (1989).

of religion? The hypothesis would not necessarily be defamatory, nor even very original, except in the eyes of those who hasten to believe that all these just causes are not only secular but pure of all religiosity.« (2002, 63)

But the point is not only that wars waged »in the name of reason« become religious since they render reason sacrosanct; the »reasonable transformation« of war in terms of enhanced technologies also creates an atmosphere of being exposed to »superhuman powers« on the part of the victimized, as Whitehead explains:

»The contemporary cannibal war-machine directly reflects the globalized, digitized and immaterial forms and relations of power /... /. War becomes an infinite possibility for the enactment of an *Infinite Justice*, in response to the infinite threats of terror and insurgency, criminality or civil disobedience. /... / This ordering and disordering of social life through violence also invokes, and is a mimesis of, sorcery and witchcraft. The occult and hidden nature of high-tech military weapons /... / create a magical military violence. Sacred empowerment comes not just through human sacrifice but through the sorcery of military killing /... /.« (2011, 11–15)

For Derrida, too, the ambiguous spectacle of »religious« violence, i.e., the fact that it appears to belong to »two ages« (2002, 88–89) at once, exemplifies the unavowed intertwining of reason and religion. Yet even if it exemplary in this regard, »religious violence« is only a case in point. Recently, it has been observed in various contexts that traditional religious semantics and pragmatics have structurally dispersed into a variety of late modern social imaginaries (Höhn 2007). Not only religious fundamentalism in its subtle coalition with hyper-modern tele-technology, but also the return of religious communities (Kippenberg 2013), the emergence of popular spiritual imaginaries (Knoblauch 2009), or the resurgence of »political theologies« in the post-secular world (de Vries and Sullivan 2006) testify to this development. What is striking about this »post-secular« constellation, however, is not simply the (sociologically often contested) »return of the religious«. Truly striking is that novel articulations of religion seem to revolve around a largely unthought transformation of traditional understandings of transcendence. Recently, this transformation has been described in terms of »transcending transcendence« or under the header of »shifting images of transcendence« (Caputo and Scanlon 2007; Stoker 2012). At issue here is not only the scope of our experiences of transcendence which has shifted into other cultural realities (especially art and politics) and their capacities of articulating such experiences. The true shift rather concerns the fact that novel social figurations of transcendence are taking precedence.

Now »transcendence« neither refers any more to the classical onto-theological figure of the absolute, ultimately transcendent, »wholly other«, nor can it be recast as a »transcendence within the confines of immanence alone« (be it the immanence of the *logos*, history, or inter-textuality). This development calls upon

us to re-conceptualize transcendence in the context of our late modern individualist social ontologies and the social technologies they entail, in terms of self-transcendence. Self-transcendence here refers both to individual practices of self-transcendence and the poetics of making transcendence together that they entail.

Our overall hypothesis revolves around the old but hardly explored insight that self-transcendence may indeed be »more than casually linked to the transcendent« (Westphal 2007, 83). If the experience of transcendence by definition shakes our categories of understanding, we in fact need to transcend ourselves and our socially derived categories of understanding in order to be able to adequately respond to this disquieting call, e.g., by institutionalizing its transgressive potential in the framework of everyday existence. If, however, we »experience the transcendent as such, as truly other, only to the extent that we are able to transcend ourselves« (83), this at once raises the question how we may conceive of the relationship between transcendence and self-transcendence: is the experience of transcendence simply mediated (or otherwise occasioned) by practices of self-transcendence? Or could it perhaps be that »transcendence as such« is rather constituted by the experiential import of the practices of self-transcendence in which we partake?

Yet, such thinking in dichotomies does not help us at all to confront the phenomenon *per se*. We rather argue that we should rethink the relation between transcendence and self-transcendence in Merleau-Ponty's terms of an intertwining. In light of this paradigm, we contend that all here is about inherently affective experiences of transcendence and meaningful practices of self-transcendence co-constituting each other, finally to the effect that none of them may claim the precedence of being foundational. Self-transcendence, thus viewed, needs to be conceived as a practice that allows one to creatively confront experiences of transcendence without either sacrificing them to the totalizing effects of identification (e.g., the ontology of sameness) or relegating them to the unsayable realms of an ineffable alterity.

Given this, we can use the concept to describe the transformative »retrieval of selfhood through the odyssey of otherness« by exploring the fact that they do not stand unconnected. Or, as Kearney has formulated this methodological premise with utmost clarity: »Between the *logos* of the One and the anti-*logos* of the Other, falls the *dia-logos* of oneself-as-another.« (2004, 18)

The methodological precedence of an irreducible intertwining between self and other hosted at the very core of selfhood that can be deduced thereof, resonates in the ambiguous status of embodied selfhood and the »affective fragility« (Ricoeur 1968, 81) that it involves. It is exactly the articulation of this irreducible fragility in its basic ambiguity – that is, our openness to what affectively befalls us and shakes our categories of understanding and meaningful response – that we deem to be basic for coining the proposed account: being open or rather being exposed, to use Mensch's (2017) terms, to »impulses from below« (drives, affects) as well as »impulses from above« (reason), a philosophy of transcendence that

takes the abyssal problem of human freedom seriously, needs to start over »from the lower to the above«; its focus hence has to be on the »response of subjectivity to an appeal or a grasp which surpasses it« (Ricoeur 1966, 468–469).

As to our hypothesis, the phenomenon of religion unfolds in-between this ineffable call and the creative response given to it. Thus viewed, the intertwining of experiencing transcendence and responsive self-transcendence is of paramount importance here. The question remains how this intertwining may be explored more concretely.

To demonstrate what the »integrative account« is about, let us point out the deficits of the two leading paradigms in continental philosophy of religion, i.e., phenomenology and hermeneutics. In a nutshell, these accounts have focused either on the »counter-experience« of transcendence in terms of »otherness«, »saturated phenomena«, »excess«, or »absolute affection« etc. (Levinas, Marion, and Henry); or the emphasis has been cast on the hermeneutic potentials of historical responses to the »immemorial call« of such superabundant givens (Ricoeur). Whereas various radical phenomenological accounts have insistently attempted to carve out the specific phenomenality of »the transcendent«, an »unconditional givenness«, the »wholly other«, etc., hermeneutic positions revolve around the responsive dispositions, narrative articulations and generally speaking textual (and more recently pictorial) mediations of »the transcendent«, etc. The joint problem of both accounts is that phenomenology of religion thus conceived loses its genuine phenomenological status: in its focus on the superabundant qualities of transcendence it easily tends, on the one hand, to be turned into a religious phenomenology that can only assure adequate access to its key topics (this amounts to the well-known critique concerning a »theological turn« (Janicaud 2000)); with the hermeneutic focus on pre-given meaning-structures (especially texts), on the other hand, a reductive form of some merely descriptive phenomenology or »phenomenography« takes precedence, a kind of anthropological »thick description« that has been predominant in traditional accounts in religious studies.⁶ The restriction of focus hence concerns either a specific kind and quality of experience or a presupposed practice of endless interpretation; it is either narrowed down on »counter-experiences« of radical transcendence or restricted to the interpretive patterns, that is, the narrative semantics of religious systems of knowledge that are taken to symbolically represent an always already lost experiential origin.

While these accounts may offer valuable regional insights, the problem with them is not only that both revolve around a »framework of high culture«.⁷ Furthermore, both accounts promise concreteness but do indeed not deal with »lived religion«. This deficit is a pity all the more since it affirms a frequent critique con-

⁶ On this overall dilemma that seems to be constitutive for phenomenology of religion since its very inception Waldenfels 2012, 353.

⁷ This reproach finds evidence in the major proponents of both a radicalized as well as a hermeneutic phenomenology of religion, that is, Marion and Ricoeur, who both focus such phenomena at the expense of »lived religion«.

cerning phenomenology's assumed pseudo-concreteness, a critique that it seems to be able to exorcise only by way of taking recourse to »incantations to the absolute« or what others have termed the »myth of the given«. As for hermeneutics, this reproach finds evidence in the fact that the restricted focus on texts perpetuates a still widespread mentalistic bias »preoccupied with immaterial ideas« (Meyer 2015, 335), thus prioritizing belief and meaning as correlates of some »inner self«.

Furthermore, this criticism is backed by the fact that no coherent examination of religion in terms of a »total social phenomenon« can be found in contemporary phenomenology. Its focus rests on personal religious experience but structurally eclipses its larger social, cultural and political dimensions. The integrative account I envisage has to avoid both kinds of criticism in order to offer a consistent framework to explore these dimensions. Therefore, it may neither start from a »phenomenology of the invisible«; nor can it remain preoccupied with a hermeneutic analysis of »textual worlds« and the original message that they are taken to translate. The fact that Ricoeur's »hermeneutic phenomenology of religion« at some point demands that »the absolute« has to »declare itself« (1980, 144) in order to interrupt the chain of interpretations and provide evidence for the genuine phenomenality of religion; and that, respectively, Marion's »radical phenomenology« finally needs to resort to the hermeneutic element in order to re-integrate the excessive nature of »saturated phenomena« into the intelligibility of everyday life (2013) – both these »turnings« attest to the importance of an integrated account.

4. A concluding argument concerning the relationship of religion and violence

As we argue, an exploration of the intertwining between experience (affective call) and interpretation (meaningful response) in terms of self-transcendence will enable us to develop such an account. Our related hypothesis is twofold. Firstly, we argue that the phenomenality of religion unfolds in-between experiences of »transcendence« (»absolute affection«, »saturated phenomena«, etc.), and the autochthonous role of imaginative interpretation, which has always already helped to respond creatively to such limit-phenomena and to integrate their claims into everyday existence. Secondly, we hypothesize that our embodiment figures the medium for this interplay between call and response. Yet, the »lived body« figures not only as the affective medium for experiencing transcendence but also as the practical vehicle of self-transcendence that allows one to practically translate the affective intelligibility of faith into the pragmatics of everydayness.

The »poetic imperative« derived from the shaking encounter with the transcendent (the »original violence« of revelation, etc.), however, involves not only to »see through« (Schutz 1962, 257; Augustine 1991, 184) a world basically ruled by our »pragmatic motives« in a different light (salvation, unconditional love, grace, etc.). It also calls for, and this is important here, the translation and con-

crete institutionalization of the »transcendent call« in the fabrics of everydayness. Following Srubar (2018), we argue that we need to understand this translation as a kind of »a-semiotic communication with the sacred«, transcendent, etc., i.e., as something inherently embodied.⁸ Consequently, we contend that we need to look at the ambiguous status of the »lived body« – as both being »beyond sense« and as yet appresenting a socially meaningful »symbolic order«; as being both vulnerable and capable of transcending its vulnerability by its very mastery (Levinas 1991, 164) – in order to understand its foundational role in religious communication. It is this amphibolic nature of our embodiments and the »intertwining of incommensurables« it incorporates that assures its power to break with the given and unleash the truly poetic power of religious communication.

This »poetic license to start all over« (Kearney 2006, 13) and to refigure the ordinary, however, is not a monological act. As Riesebrodt (2010, 84) holds, it rather has to be understood as an »interventionist practice« that assures its referent, as Geertz (1973, 109) famously put it, a cultural »aura of factuality«. Conceived in terms of inter-corporal liturgies revolving around the inherently dialogical ambiguity of the body, it points at a true poetics – in the classical Greek sense – of making transcendence together.

Here we approach the critical point. The »poetic imperative« of making transcendence together in practices of self-transcendence not only assures the experience of transcendence its exceptional and potentially liberating character. It also creates its nimbus of being foundational. This becomes especially clear in regard to the poetics of religious violence and the way it exploits claims of transcendence for something originary, foundational, or absolute – claims that are birthed, as Ricoeur has demonstrated, in the »disproportion« of our affective condition, that is, in our »affective fragility« (1986):

»Dwelling in my finite capacity is something infinite, which I would call foundational. Schelling speaks of a *Grund*, a ground or foundation, which is at the same time an *Abgrund*, an abyss, therefore a groundless ground. Here the idea of a disproportion arises which is suffered and not simply acted upon, a disproportion between what I would call the excess of the foundation, the *Grund/Abgrund*, the groundless ground, and my finite capacity of reception, appropriation, and adaptation.« (1999, 3)

To see what is at stake in this situation of ambiguous fragility, frailty and poetic empowerment, we can turn to Derrida's claim that »religion is *the response*« (2002, 64). It is »the response« since it offers a general framework to respond to the »utterly other«, the irrespondable, the irresponsible, the loss of a common ground, the eclipse of community. It is »the response« since it affords us the possibilities to transform what shakes »us«, befalls or absolutely affects »us« into a self-transcending response to address whatever exceeds and shakes our capacities; and

⁸ In Bloch's terms, one could also describe this in terms of a »rebounding violence« that is part and parcel of the »conquering return« of the subject to this world from its »journey to the beyond« (1992, 5).

it is a transformation, consequently, of the longing for some unscathed (the whole, holy) belonging into the intersubjective performance of the credit (belief, faith, trust) that can only animate such a project. Religion, as Patočka (1989, 102) put it, is the taking of responsibility for that which escapes and overwhelms absolutely:

»Religion is not the sacred, nor does it arise directly from the experience of sacral orgies and rites; rather, it is where the sacred qua demonic is being explicitly overcome. Sacral experiences pass over to religious as soon as there is the attempt to introduce responsibility into the sacred or to regulate the sacred thereby. /... / Religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all. Its history derives its sense entirely from the idea of a *passage* to responsibility.«

Responsibility here signifies a responsibility for the other – not only, but, first and foremost, for the other in myself, and thus for »the menace of radical evil«, too. It concerns the irreducible »disproportion« that man's »affective fragility« – its dia-logically distorted being-oneself-only-as-another – necessarily entails. The »passage to responsibility« thus has to be understood, as Derrida (1995, 135) holds, as a project that always has to confront the risk of giving in to a »return of the orgiastic«. Put otherwise, the primordial »moral creativity« of human freedom to poetically refigure the ordinary, as Wall (2005, 52–53) remarks, is far from providing us with an unanimously good power that only needs to be set free. Rather, it is exactly in its radicality that nests, as Kant demonstrated in his reflection on »radical evil« (Ricoeur 2010, 28–29), the irreducible possibility of violence. As to Ricoeur's anthropological thesis, such »moral creativity« and its very other emanate both from our »affective fragility«. This insight, however, calls upon us to stop a manifold of useless discussions concerning whether or not violence is a structural attribute of religion or rather revolves around a temporarily misdirected implementation of the narrative semantics of religious systems of knowledge.

All we can do (but in fact this is a lot) is to describe the inherently contingent conditions under which the performative power of the »poetic imperative« appears as a viable way to transcend an ordinary world that appears replete with too many unavowed violences. The realization that »evil« is indeed »radical but not original« (35), may help us to suspend the deep rooted mental habit of violence and embark on imaging otherwise.

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