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The Performative Knowledge of Ecstasy: Jane E. Harrison's (1850 – 1928) Early Contestations of the Textual Paradigm in Religious Studies

1 Aesthetics of Performativity

In the 1990s a shift in focus occurred in cultural studies, which drew attention to cultural practices, events and acts and their power in creating and transforming meaning. Within this context, the body and body knowledge (Koch 2007; 2012, 3–42) gained significance in the cultural sciences. This shift to material culture and sensuous practices, which was partly inspired by ethnographic research, offered important new resources for the study of religion; see David Morgan (2011). Especially the new significance of ritual studies re-centred the study of religion into everyday life and cultural practices. Religious studies increasingly found its way beyond the equation of religion and belief, leaving the library and moving into “lived religion” (Hall 1997). As one of the main promoters of the so-called *performative turn* in the United States, the theatre anthropologist Richard Schechner looked back in 2003 to his own start in performance theory: “Taking a cue from Erving Goffman’s 1959 breakthrough book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, [I was] [...] learning about ‘body language’ and a whole range of expressive behaviour outside of spoken or written words” (Schechner [1988] 2003, ix–x). The “so-called performative turn, in the social sciences, leads toward an explicit reception of performance and theatre studies in the study of ritual” (Kreinath 2009, 235; Brunotte 2001, 85–102; 2000, 349–367; 2013a, 35–522). In the European sphere, following early works by Stanley J. Tambiah (1981), it was, and is, primarily the theatre studies scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2004, 2008), who, furthering early approaches of the theory of theatre and ritual of the *fin de siècle*, such as that of Nikolai Evreinov (1908), expanded the radius of the performative to include the moment of the theory of theatricality. At the same time she has opened up the perspective to an aesthetics of the performative that links art and religion: “Evreinov introduced the concept of theatricality as an anthropological category, which aims at the human capacity to creatively change ‘the world as we perceive it’ [...] and view performativity [...] as constituting reality. [...] [H]e coined the term ‘theatricality’, which he defined as a ‘pre-aesthetic instinct’ which underlies all cultural activity, i.e., reli-

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gion, art, customs, law, etc.” (Fischer-Lichte 2000a, 294–295; 2005, 99; Evreinov 1923).

In this context, the focus is directed away from the text and toward the transformative potential of human action to influence meaning. The term “performative” was coined by John L. Austin in his language philosophy. He introduced it in his lecture series *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin 1962). The current heterogeneous discourse on performativity links Austin and Searle’s theory of *Speech Acts* and the concept of *performance* in theatre studies with the notion of *performative acts and gender constitution* introduced by Judith Butler (1990) and the theories of *social drama* and the *liminal*, as advanced by the anthropologist Victor Turner (1969, 1974). “Ceremony *indicates*, ritual *transforms*” (Turner 1982, 80) was Turner’s concise and fitting distinction for a reading of ritual actions that is both somatic and aesthetic (i.e., aisthetic). Common to all of these approaches is a special link between speaking and acting, which suggests the power of the speech act to produce and transform reality. Austin developed the crucial innovations in his *Words and Deeds* lectures (1952–1954 in Oxford) and *How to Do Things with Words* (1955 in Harvard). Although Austin did not incorporate the long religious and juridical tradition of performative speech acts into his theory, it is apparent “that many of the performative utterances he examined represent the carrying out or ‘part of the carrying out of a ritual,’ that is, ‘ritual phrases’” (Därmann 2013). This has to do with both the event *aspect* of completing a ritual and the *emergent* aspect of the physical and theatrical dimension of their perception and presentation. It is first and foremost the magical performative quality of rituals—their capacity to let something inaccessible appear—that represents an intermediary field between religion, culture, and art.

Like Mary Douglas in *Natural Symbols* (1970) and Marcel Mauss in “*techniques du corps*” (1935, 271–293) before him, Pierre Bourdieu also speaks of “performative magic” in his early analyses of North African Kabyles (Bourdieu 1991, 106; see Wulf et al. 2001, 8), that is, ritual practices that go beyond the mere *embodiment* and *enactment* of social patterns of thought and expression. For his sociology of social practice, the *habitus*, the “social made body” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 127), is not to be understood solely in the sense of a normative system of social dispositions; instead, the changing potential of an *ars vivendi* is at the same time always immanent in the *habitus*; see Kraiss and Gebauer (2002, 6).

All current approaches in ritual theories (see Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg 2006) which are part of the *performative turn* are embedded in a broader theoretical discourse and stand in tension with the two preceding turning points in the 20th-century European and Western theory of rituals, one in the late 1970s and the first around 1900. Especially in the field of theatre studies, the

arts and in *comparative anthropology*, different “thrusts of performativity” (Fischer-Lichte 2001, 113) at the *fin de siècle* led to a knowledge transfer from the “colonial frontiers” (Chidester 1996, 2014)¹ to European societies. The “discovery” of a ritualistic approach to culture in Europe revolved around symbolic power and the corporeal, communicated practice of rituals. At the same time, under the conditions of modern pluralisation through “newly emerging needs for meaning” (Gladigow 1995, 36; 2009), the dialectic of the secularisation and constant transfer of religion to various segments of society (such as science, literature, and the arts) *and back* became meaningful—and was viewed by Burkhard Gladigow as key for the European history of religion.

In this sense, the approach of an aesthetics of ritual performances as developed especially by Jens Kreinath (Kreinath 2006, 2009) for religious studies—following Susanne K. Langer (1945, 1953), Fischer-Lichte, and Klaus Peter Köpping (Köpping and Rao 2001)—is part of the “non-traditional, dynamic concept of the European history of religion” (Kugele and Wilkens 2011, 10; see also Kippenberg, Rüpke and von Stuckrad 2009).

1.1 Affective Archives: The Ephemeral Remembered

For the new study of the aesthetics of religion the findings of *performative studies* could be fruitful, because a performative mode of observation pushes the sensual completion of the action and the effective ritualised situations, ritual performances and staged depictions into the focus of interest. As Erika Fischer-Lichte claims, an aesthetics of performativity bridges the field of the arts, theatre, everyday life and religion. Another field of research connecting performative studies and the study of the aesthetics of religion can be found in the recent debate on performativity, affect and remembrance (Plate and Smelik 2013). In these debates cultural memory is no longer seen as a static archive but as performative one: especially art objects and artistic practices are analysed as modes and media to perform the past in the present. However, the paradox of re-mediation, re-enactment, and experiences of immediacy is an intrinsic quality of religious cults and a focus of the Christian doctrine of the “real presence”. In recent years this context has gained significance through the Christian material and media theory approach of religious studies analyses, such as those of David Mor-

¹ David Chidester proposed the term “colonial frontier” as a fiercely contested zone where knowledge was produced and impacted in both directions.

gan and Birgit Meyer (Morgan 2005, 2011, 2012; Meyer 2006; 2009; 2011, 23–39; 2013b, 309–326).

The debates on the performativity, memory and the role of affect and media revolve around the question if and how the performative—which exists only in the present and in the immediate execution (performance) and then disappears—can be remembered and archived. Within the framework of the *affective approach* (Gregg and Seigworth 2010) inspired by a revival of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), performative acts are no longer understood as “immaterial”, ephemeral and thus transient, but as affective and thus “material”. Ritual performances often release and transmit affective discharge that can exceed the boundaries of an enclosed time frame. They can constitute an affective archive, as affects are “material, physiological things” (Brennan 2003) that can create an “*in-between-ness*, [...] the passage of forces or intensities” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1).

Recent research on the *performative* and *cultural memory* has raised the question of how a material/affective ephemeral can be remembered. Rebecca Schneider asks: “What is the evidentiary status of the trace [of past events] carried forward and backward in the form and force of affective, incorporated, ‘live’ actions?” (Schneider 2011, 38). In answering this question, it can be helpful to concentrate on the material-religion approach (Meyer 2006; Houtman and Meyer 2012; Keane 2008; Goa et al. 2005; Meyer et al. 2011) and the aesthetics of religion, because ritual enactments and religious feasts were not only, following Jan Assmann, the “primary forms of organizing cultural memory”, they also provided the media which as “poetic form, ritual performance, and collective participation” captured the unifying knowledge in a manner that would preserve it (Assmann 2011, 41–42). It is the ritual *frame* (Jungaberle and Weinhold 2006, 7) that makes experiences of immediacy and the “presence” of the past possible in the first place. Carried forth in theatricality, “the embodied cycles of memory [...] do not delimit the remembered to the past” (Schneider 2011, 32). In religious as well as performative-artistic events, the very past-ness of the past can be challenged; re-enacted, re-felt emotions are then experienced as immediacy and absolute presence.

Cultural and especially performative studies today try to consider an “affective archive” and, as André Lepecki has put it, even a body-to-body transmission of cultural knowledge and “*embodied actualizations*” of remembrance (Lepecki 2010, 31). The “redefining action is carried out through a common articulator: the dancer's body. As we will see [...], in dance re-enactments there will be no distinctions left between archive and body. The body is archive and archive a body” (Lepecki 2010, 31). In this context it can be very insightful to refer back

to researchers of ritual, affect, and images such as Jane Ellen Harrison und Aby Warburg.

Around 1900, Warburg—art historian, religious studies scholar, and founding father of iconology—already thought about a body-to-body and image-to-image-in-motion transmission of cultural memory and a gestural archive of embodied emotions. For his *energetic* concept of body-, image-, and affect-based figures and emotional forms of cultural remembrance he coined the term *pathos formula*, or “emotive formula”. Warburg’s pathos formulae are body-centred, comprising figures of movement and (often mythical) scenic actions—such as the rape of Persephone or the beheading of Holofernes—that, from antiquity to modernity, mediated archaic trauma. However, they were also scenes and gestures of ambivalent and highly emotional intensity: the embodied knowledge of emotions of joy, terror/horror, passion or ecstasy. He conceptualised these formulae firstly around the figure of woman-in-movement, his “Nympha” or “Ninfa Fiorentina” (Warburg [1900] 2010), but his life project focused on developing a *Mnemosyne image atlas* (Warburg 2000, 2009): “Undertaken between 1926 and 1929, the atlas of images entitled *Mnemosyne* is Aby Warburg’s nearly wordless account of how and why symbolic images of great pathos persist in Western cultural memory from antiquity to the early twentieth century” (Johnson 2012, 4).

In the following I will draw on Warburg’s and Harrison’s pioneering work on an emotional, performative (*avant la lettre*) and transformative approach to ritual and culture, and mark ritual and theatrical (dance) as a field of study within the *aesthetics of religion*. Thereby I’ll focus on the paradox of the capacity of rituals to create a virtual space of “absolute presence” and immediacy through mediation and, at the same time, to provide a symbolic gestural “form” for embodied cultural experience and memory. Not directly in line with Warburg and Harrison, but instead following Ernst Cassirer’s theory of symbolic forms, Susanne K. Langer, in her 1945 book *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (see also Langer 1952), also developed a theory of human symbol formation based on ritual and dance performances, which reinforced the role of “formed” feelings. Birgit Meyer’s concept of “sensational forms”, which stresses the importance of the senses as media of knowledge production without negating the role of meaning production, provides a helpful analytical tool to reflect and further elaborate on this paradox (Meyer 2006, 2011). Drawing on Webb Keane’s notion of “semiotic ideology” (Keane 2007, 16) she writes:

Sensational forms are relatively fixed modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, offering structures of repetition to create and sustain links between believers in the context of particular religious regimes. [...] [A]ddressing the paradox of mediation and

immediacy requires developing a new synthesis of approaches that stress the importance of the senses and experience with those stressing the forms and codes that are at the basis of cultural and religious systems (Meyer 2011, 29–30).

2 Ritual and Theatricality: The Pre-eminence of Bodily Performance over Text

Until the late 1980s, the notion of “culture as text” dominated cultural studies and the Protestant bias governed religious studies, which privileged texts and beliefs over bodily expressions and rituals as the prime religious media. Specific cultural phenomena as well as entire cultures were conceived as structured webs of signs waiting to be deciphered. “Numerous attempts to describe and interpret culture were launched and designated as ‘readings’” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 26). But already around 1900, as ritual studies emerged in Great Britain, Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928), the first female Hellenist and the head of the so-called Cambridge Ritualists, revolutionised the very concept of antique Greek religion and culture: her innovation was to elevate rituals and images as means of religious expression to a status equal to that of literature. Prior to this move toward ritual around 1900, research pursued a more or less enlightened protestant understanding of religion. Jane E. Harrison herself described the eighteenth-century text paradigm of the history of religion, using as an example her research on Greek religion: “Religion, we have seen, was in the last century regarded mainly in its theoretical aspect as a doctrine. Greek religion, for example, meant to most educated persons Greek mythology” (Harrison 1915, 151–152; [1909] 2009, 506). This changed with the shift to a more ritual-centred approach around 1900; see Segal (2006, 101). Harrison described the development to a performative understanding of religion, whose point of departure was not belief and dogmas, but cultural and religious practices, again based on her research on Greek religion:

Yet even a cursory examination shows that neither Greek nor Roman religion had any creed or dogma, any hard and fast formulation of belief. In the Greek Mysteries only we find what we should call a *Confiteor*; and this is not a confession of faith, but an avowal of rites performed. When the religion of primitive peoples came to be examined it was speedily seen that though vague beliefs necessarily abound, definite creeds are practically non-existent. Ritual is dominant and imperative. [...] In examining religion as envisaged to-day it would therefore be more correct to begin with the practice of religion, i. e. ritual, and then pass to its theory—theology or mythology (Harrison 1915, 152; 2009, 498–499).

Furthermore, not only in her book *Ancient Art and Ritual* (Harrison [1913] 1951), but already in her early studies, such as *Myth of the Odyssey in Art and Literature* (Harrison 1882) and *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* (Harrison 1885), her pioneering work on the analysis of ritual scenes on vase paintings, she “draw[s] a direct genealogical connection between ritual and theatre, emphasizing the pre-eminence of performance over text” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 31). Like other women of her time (see Fiske 2008), Harrison thus turned around her presumed incomplete linguistic training in the Greek language, attempting a different sort of appropriation of ancient tradition, one conveyed via non-linguistic means. However, Harrison went a step further by questioning the very concept of rational, scientific objectivity that was normative in her time. This was due to her method of “sympathetic imagination”—as she put it (Harrison 1991, 164)—which very early on made her scholarship subject to criticism for its “female” qualities (Arlen 1996, 165), at the time also considered “unclear” or even “irrational”. Harrison turned around this attack *ad feminam*, formulating an epistemological programme that pursued the creative role of emotion and desire in ritual and narrative processes, and in fact in the production of knowledge per se. In the aesthetics of religion today, the concept of *knowledge* and the role of sensational knowledge have got new relevance: “For the aesthetics of religion the very idea of an aesthetics of knowledge is important in order to show how knowledge is created and understood, and how different claims and different qualities of knowledge emerge” (Grieser, Hermann, and Triplett 2011, 45).

In 1913 she published her essay “Women and Knowledge”, which is still relevant today, in the *New Statesman* (Harrison [1913] 1915). In the article Harrison seriously questioned an ostensibly neutral rationality: “Knowledge is never, or very rarely, divorced from emotion and action”, she asserted. “M. Bergson has shown us very clearly that all science grows up out of the desire to do and to make” (Harrison 1915, 125). With respect to the role of “sex/gender” (which Harrison viewed as both biological and culturally influenced) and intellect, she continued: “To deny sex in intellect would seem to me a desperate pessimism, and would be in intent to reassert the *old obsolete dualism between body and soul*. [...] Intellect is never wholly and separately intellectual. It is a thing charged with, dependent on, arising out of, emotional desire” (Harrison 1915, 140, emphasis added).

Concerning her study of Greek tragedy, Harrison was inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy: From the Spirit of Music* (Nietzsche 1872). In her book *Themis: A Study of the Social Origin of Greek Religion* (Harrison [1912] 1977), she developed a theory of Greek theatre as originated out of social practices, mainly ritual dance and song.

2.1 The Dual Nature of the Dionysian Cult

When Harrison explored the sources of Pausanias for her edition of *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens* (Harrison and Verrall 1890), she developed her initial ideas on the dual nature of the Dionysian cult while in the Dionysian theatre in Athens: “The theatre of the Greeks was originally an orchestra, or dancing-place, *that and nothing more*, yet enough for Dionysos the Dance-lover—an altar and a level place about it” (Harrison and Verrall 1890, 286). She then discovered in ritual dance the crucial connection between cult and tragedy. In the midst of the ruins “Harrison suddenly understood a Greek vase she had seen in Naples” (Peters 2008, 1). The vase had two entirely different sides. One side, she said, showed “all the ordered splendour and luxury of a regular dramatic representation—masks, tripods, costly raiment; while Bacchus and Ariadne watch the preparation of the chorus from their sumptuous couch”; and the other side depicted “the wild dance of Maenads and Satyrs—such a dance as went on by many a rustic altar” (Harrison and Verrall 1890, 288). What Harrison suddenly realised, according to Julie Peters, was “that the dancing Maenads and Satyrs, the sacrificial goat, and the primitive god were the key to the ‘ordered splendour and luxury of [the] regular dramatic representation’” (Peters 2008, 1). This was because on the other side of the same vase the Maenads and Satyrs had transformed into the tragic chorus, which the goat (*tragos*) had given his name (*tragoedia*). The German archaeologist Wilhelm Dörpfeld, whom Harrison had visited on some of his excavations, had drawn her attention in Epidaurus to the fact that the circular *orchestra* was the original centre of the dramatic performances. Harrison also saw a similar, round “dancing-place” in the Athenian theatre (see Brunotte 2013a, 200). Now she was able to imagine “*the old original orchestra on which the plays of Aeschylus were performed*” (Harrison and Verrall 1890, 285–286, emphasis in original). At the same time her imagination delved yet further into the past and she saw “the early Dionysiac dance” (Harrison and Verrall 1890, 285). The ritual itself, the starting point of the tragedy, was in fact rather simple. Harrison continued, “all were worshippers, [...] none were actors, none spectators” (Harrison and Verrall 1890, 290). It is already clear from her early vision of the performative-ritual origin of theatre, in which the boundary between player and spectator is eliminated, why Harrison’s work became an “essential source for the primitivist rhetoric of modern theatre” and why she “was pivotal in the transformation of theatre from the narrative and socially mimetic institution that it had been from the Renaissance into the anti-mimetic organ it became for the twentieth-century avant-garde” (Peters 2008, 3). At the same time Harrison contributed early on to resolving a key question of contemporary religious studies research on rituals by expanding her theo-

ry of ritual action to acts of everyday life, that is, combining *dromena* (things done) with religious *drama* (performance). As Guggenmos, Laack and Schüler state, in the “Ritual Dynamics” Collaborative Research Centre in Heidelberg (see Harth and Michaels 2003, 5) “similar questions have been raised regarding the context of ‘rituals’; whether ‘ritual’ should be conceptualised as a distinctive mode of action coinciding with non-ordinary states of mind” (Guggenmos, Laack, and Schüler 2011, 116). Following Birgit Meyer, religious rituals can therefore represent “ways in which people link up with, or even feel touched by, a meta-empirical sphere that may be glossed as supernatural, sacred, divine, or transcendental” (Meyer 2006, 6). For Harrison, however, there is no “beyond”, no separate area of the sacred or divine. Instead, she views rituals as a means of re-translating religious action into human collective emotions in action. Also in Harrison’s later analysis of the so-called *Hymn of the Kouretes* (Harrison 1912, 1977, 7–8) she claimed a radical anti-essentialist, aesthetic, and practical approach to religion. “In some sense, for Harrison, society is always ritualised, seamlessly shifting between worldly and aesthetic praxes” (Comentale 2001, 481). In *Mythology and Monuments* not only does she already unfold the formative and theatrical potential of the Dionysian cult, she also illuminates the broad spectrum of the god (see Harrison 1991, 34), from wine-god and theatre-god to the deadly extreme of a sacrificial dance that takes place “around an altar [...] flecked with the blood of the slain goat” (Harrison and Verrall 1890, 286).

3 The Material Knowledge of Daemons: From Anthropomorphism to Hybridity

Harrison’s second innovation in the study of Greek religion was her rejection of a classical approach to Greek religion with its anthropomorphism and cult of beauty. As the first female Hellenist, she devoted a monograph to the study of monsters, spirits and Greek daemons, and discovered what Eric Robertson Dodds would later define as an *irrational* antiquity of ecstasy, fear and (cultic) madness (Dodds 1951).²

² It was not Harrison who would reap the glory of having pioneered research on Greek irrationality, but Eric Robertson Dodds, who had been inspired by her work. Dodds succeeded Gilbert Murray as the chair of Greek studies at Oxford. He supported Harrison with his interpretation of maenadic ecstasy, its “reality” and the false assumption of its Thracian origins (see also Schlesier 1994, 169n74). Dodds gained fame through his book *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951).

But she effected yet more innovations. From 1879 to 1897 Harrison lived in London, worked at the British Museum as a lecturer and studied classical archaeology. The influence of the still young field of archaeology on Harrison was great, as was her enthusiasm for the excavations in Greece and elsewhere, which were revolutionary at the time. Harrison developed her own method of comparative image analysis. The “proof” for her thesis on the origins of the mysteries of the god Dionysus and her interpretation of his rituals, according to Mary Beard, “... are founded in visual evidence: more than one hundred and fifty ‘figures’ (from a modern African initiation dance to ancient coins, Minoan seal stones to Attic vase paintings) are analyzed and compared” (Beard 2000, 106). Every lecture she performed on the “stage” of the British Museum was a drama, in which she tried to demonstrate and quasi re-enacted to and before the audience the ritual embedding of the artefacts and made them “live” again: “They were also lavishly illustrated with up-to-the-minute lantern slides, laboriously handmade by Harrison’s friends and pupils. These slides are the closest we can now get to the atmosphere of her lectures. Four large wooden boxes in the Newnham College Archive still contain more than a hundred of the fragile squares of glass” (Beard 2000, 55). Harrison travelled with her lectures beyond the limits of London, and she won over a large audience: “At the height of her popularity she was able to draw an audience of 1,000 in the Midland Institute in Birmingham and 1,600 in Dundee” (Evangelista 2011, 517). As a researcher in religion who was also trained in archaeology she followed a material approach to religion. For her the artefacts, especially vase paintings, figures and sculptures, which recent archaeological discoveries had brought to light, were not only important as mere illustrations of myths and rituals, “but as ‘commentaries’ or ‘variants’ of myths in their own right” (Schlesier 1994, 155).

Furthermore, in her studies on religious traditions, which were consistently connected to modern debates and questions of modernity, and which she integrated the latest approaches in psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology and philosophy, she was more concerned with the role of emotions than with that of belief, more with the sensual impulse behind ritual actions than with text-based theological systematics. Nowadays her work, which was rediscovered for German-language comparative religious studies by Walter Burkert and Renate Schlesier in the 1970s, is increasingly being re-read by literary, theatrical and religious studies scholars as well as by researchers on performativity. (Carpentier 1998; Prins 1999; Peters 2008; Evangelista 2011; Klironomos 2008; Robinson 2001; Fiske 2008; Wright 2009; Brunotte 2013a).

As previously mentioned, Harrison’s performative focus was strongly connected to her shift from an approach to Greek art that was looking for “beauty” and mostly anthropomorphic works of individualised artists, to the new focus on

“ugly” or “frightening” monsters. These were often hybrid animal-human figures. Her teacher, colleague and dear friend, the Greek scholar and Euripides translator Gilbert Murray, described Harrison’s interest in hybrid, formless and “ugly” figures in the eulogy that he held in Newnham in October 1928, five months after Harrison’s death:

A well-written hymn to Zeus the supreme judge, the father of gods and men, left her cold. Athena the armed virgin, the seeker of wisdom, [...] was too obvious in her beauty, and slightly repelled her. But a smiling dragon with a blue beard, or a man and woman poorly carved on a stele, bearing a speechless sacrifice to a great snake, called for her understanding, for sympathetic interpretation, and always got it. She loved, and doubtless idealised, the thought or desire that could not express itself; she loved to help it out, to strip it of its mere externals and expound the aspiration that lay at its heart (Murray 1928, 8).

In her first major work in 1903, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Harrison [1903] 1991), Harrison already looked beyond the anthropomorphically formed Olympian gods and the immaterial *logos* of philosophy and asked about the material knowledge of daemons and spirits. She was concerned again and again with the relationship between art and religion, or more precisely art and ritual. In *Themis* (1912) she pointedly stated that the Olympians were “*non-religious*, because really the products of art and literature” (Harrison [1912] 1977, xi).

In 1903, at the end of *Prolegomena*, Harrison summarised her ambivalence toward the popular opinion among researchers, asserting that religion develops in a linear progression that culminates in the anthropomorphism of the Olympian gods. She views the beautiful, harmonic world of Olympian mirth and well-formed (super)human divine bodies, as depicted in Germany in, for example, Schiller’s poem “The Gods of Greece” ([1788] 1901), but she also sees therein a loss. She critically emphasises in particular the loss of *formlessness*:

We are apt to regard the advance to anthropomorphism as necessarily a clear religious gain. A gain it is in so far as a certain element of barbarity is softened or extruded, but with this gain comes loss, the loss of the element of formless, monstrous mystery. The ram-headed Knem of the Egyptians is to the mystic more religious than any of the beautiful divine humanities of the Greek. Anthropomorphism provides a store of lovely motives for art, but that spirit is scarcely religious which makes Eros a boy trundling a hoop, of Apollo a youth aiming a stone at a lizard, of Nike a woman who stoops to tie her sandal. Xenophanes put his finger on the weak spot of anthropomorphism (Harrison 1991, 258).

Her pronounced fascination for monstrous classical daemons, which were always connected to the “lusts of the flesh” (Harrison 1991, 168) and hybrid in na-

ture, implied a heightened interest in embodied, immanent or “tacit knowledge” (McCauley and Lawson 2002).

One of the resulting achievements of her ritualistic approach was to clearly show—very similar to the way Bruno Latour (1993) did this with the self-myths of modernity—that the classicism invoked by Schiller and Hegel and many others never existed in ancient Greece. Harrison did this by focussing her attention on the cultic site and the ritual embeddedness of the figures, and thus the sensuous presence and practices of the *sacred gaze* (Morgan 2005). As soon as she reconstructed the ritual enactment of the sculptures and pictures, the clear lofty serenity of the figures, which were stored separately in the museum, disappeared. David Morgan introduced the term “sacred gaze” to analyse “the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance” (Morgan 2005, 3). For him the very act of seeing is always embodied in a sensuous grounded cultural network of practices; see Morgan (2012). In the cultic context of protection, cleansing and death rituals, which she examined in *Prolegomena* in addition to the Dionysian rituals, to Harrison the figures appeared painted, draped with jewellery or animal skins, or even smeared with wine and blood. They did not contain an isolated meaning, but their meaning was performed; see Brunotte (2013a, 91–105). Harrison’s distinction between Olympian and chthonic divinities is historically not unequivocal, as Renate Schlesier has emphasised (Schlesier 1994, 175). However, any reservations do nothing to change the radically new view of the ancient world of the gods that Harrison, through her concentration on a performative and “daemon-ic” Greek antiquity, was already able to introduce in *Prolegomena*, particularly regarding apotropaic protection and death rituals.

4 Dionysian Ecstasy: Religious and Aesthetic Impulse

The anthropomorphically fixed and individualised Olympian gods, according to Harrison, were “losing touch with life and reality”; but then “there came into Greece a new religious impulse, an impulse really religious, the mysticism that is embodied for us in the two names Dionysos and Orpheus” (Harrison 1991, 363–364). Dionysus, as representative of the group, always attended by a *thiasos*, the flock of his intoxicated admirers, and often merging with them, embodied for Harrison “what Professor Bergson calls *durée*” (Harrison [1912] 1977, xii), the “the impulse of life through all things, perennial, indivisible” (Harrison [1912] 1977, 476).

As an analyst of images and rituals she was interested, as was the somewhat younger art historian Aby Warburg, in what took place within the affective, reli-

gious and aesthetic impulses of ritual behaviour: how the violent emotional thrusts of frenzy—in other words, what the maenads, the female followers of Dionysus, experience and do (*mainomai*)—were transformed into inspirational madness (*mania*) that can create wisdom, literature and art. In this connection, she pursued a body-focused theory of art inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche which, proceeding from an impulse of movement and visionary exaltation that may be defined as Dionysian, placed the accent on the dynamics of the expressive potential inherent in the gestural patterns and inner visual forms of Dionysian ecstasy (see Brandstetter 1995).

Harrison integrated religion and art – which she viewed neither as otherworldly nor in its “autonomy”—into the plurality of social practices (see Bertram 2014). Her understanding of art and ritual is thus expanded in the direction of more general research on narrativity and performativity *avant la lettre*:

Religious convention compelled the tragic poets to draw their plots from traditional mythology, from stories whose religious content and motive were already in Homer’s days obsolete. A knowledge of, a sympathy with, the *milieu* of this primitive material is one step to the realization of its final form in tragedy. It is then in the temple of literature, if but as a hewer of wood and drawer of water, that I still hope to serve (Harrison 1903, viii).

In this linking of ritual and theatre, the written text of the tragedy, which manages to put a frightening event into word form, does not lose its emotional validity. Instead it is interpreted as a container of older ritual knowledge, and “theatre history [is shown] to be intimately linked to the broader history of human performance” (Peters 2008, 3). In a certain way, Harrison’s dialectic of archaic and modern served the self-reflexive presentation of the performative affect potential of modern culture and art in the “mirror of the primitive” (see Schüttpelz 2005).³

4.1 Intoxication and Art: Ecstasy and Form

In Dionysian song and ritual dance Harrison localised the classical origin of intoxication *and* art (Harrison 1991, 449). The ritual pantomime dance creates a creative, powerfully symbolic space of performative events, from which aesthetic and social transformations can emerge. In her popular 1913 work *Ancient Art and Ritual*, in which she summarised her research theses for a broader audience of

³ English translation as “The Scene of (Media-)Technological Superiority,” in Schuettpelz (with-out date, <http://www.ny-magazine.org/issues.html>).

laypeople, her goal to connect theatre and religion, and to establish her performative approach as a connective concept, is stated programmatically:

The title of this book may strike the reader as strange and even dissonant. What have art and ritual to do together? The ritualist is, to the modern mind, a man concerned perhaps unduly with fixed forms and ceremonies, with carrying out the rigidly prescribed ordinances of a church or sect. The artist, on the other hand, we think of as free in thought and untrammelled by convention in practice; his tendency is towards licence. Art and ritual, it is quite true, have diverged to-day; but the title of this book is chosen advisedly. Its object is to show that these two divergent developments have a common root, and that neither can be understood without the other. *It is at the outset one and the same impulse that sends a man to church and to the theatre* (Harrison 1951, 9, emphasis added).

Grouping together church and theatre, religion and art, in this way suggests an ultimately *aesthetic* notion of religion, that is, one which emerges from sensuous perception, collective emotions and the performative acts nurtured by them. This aesthetic approach, however, does not bring the researcher to an essentialist notion of religion as an ontological value or social sphere *sui generis*; ultimately Harrison's ritualism shields her from this. In contrast to Nietzsche, who in *The Birth of Tragedy* attempted to establish a new cult surrounding Wagner's music in Bayreuth (see Cancik and Cancik-Lindemaier 1999), Harrison is instead concerned with the reconstruction of the transformation potential of concrete ancient ritual acts (see examples in Brunotte 2013a, 144–150).

All her life Harrison acted as an intermediary between the scholarly world of Cambridge and the artistic circles of the London metropolis. In doing so, ritual dance represented for her the decisive link between scholarship and art and between art and ritual: “We shall find in these dances”, Harrison wrote in 1913, “the meeting-point between art and ritual” (Harrison 1951, 28).

4.1.1 Emotional Communities and Aesthetic Formations

It is hardly surprising that it is the religious material of the Dionysian cult on which Harrison based the development of, above all, her theory (theories) of ritual. For that reason too, she classified rituals as affective means of shared agitation and of producing “emotional communities” (Rosenwein 2006), since a special mode of perception and experience is inherent in them. The concept of “emotional communities” was introduced into historical research on emotion by Barbara H. Rosenwein. She uses the term to refer to communities that are larger than the nuclear family and not necessarily comprising only relatives, but smaller than the nations and societies that Benedict Anderson referred to as *imagined communities*. “Emotional communities” are connected to one another

er through a certain emotional style and emotional patterns, and they also share values that evolved out of emotions. In religious studies research, Birgit Meyer developed the term “aesthetic formations” (Meyer 2009, esp. 6–11) with a similar intention. The new coinage “aesthetic formations” emphasises the emotional, visual, and physical-psychological elements in ritual events. Harrison’s concept of an emotional or even ecstatic collectivity is derived from ritual and cultic practices, usually those of the Dionysian mysteries. In cultic acts, early forms of concrete sensual mediation occur with a claim to general validity. Here we are dealing with aisthesis, that is, with the perceptions, experiences and knowledge of seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing and feeling in all of their intermediate and extreme stages. Thus, according to Aldous Huxley, “religious dances provide a religious experience that seems more satisfying and convincing than any other. ... It is with their muscles that [the faithful] most easily obtain knowledge of the divine” (Huxley 1937, 232 and 235, as cited in Dodds 1951, 271).

Harrison’s early religious-psychological approach is unthinkable without Nietzsche’s thesis from *The Birth of Tragedy*, according to which the Dionysian experience is at one and the same time a psychological and a collective experience and according to which individuals are transformed into a new Dionysian collective subject during their orgiastic “disintegration” in the intoxicating experience of the cult. At many points in her work, Harrison explicitly refers to Nietzsche’s description of the mystical communion between man and nature in “limitless excess [...] ecstasy” (Harrison 1991, 445–446n4). Harrison first learned about Nietzsche’s theory through the scholar Erwin Rohde, a friend of Nietzsche’s. Rohde had placed the theory of a collective Dionysian ecstasy, albeit without mentioning Nietzsche by name, at the focus of his reflections concerning the Dionysian cult in part two of his 1894 work *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (Rohde [1925] 2000). He also restored the central role of the maenads—one made invisible by Nietzsche—in the cultic experience of dance and intoxication. Already in an early review of the book, Harrison formulated her aesthetic approach to religion and claimed a sensuous knowledge (of the god) to be both physical and spiritual. There Harrison found enthusiastic words to describe the dance of the women intoxicated by the god: “And what a madness it must have seemed! [...] To dance till we are dizzy, to toss our heads in ecstasy” (Harrison 1894, 165). She admittedly qualifies this by raising doubts that this “may not seem to us the best means of promoting spirituality”, but she “nevertheless insists that the true spirit of Dionysus is experienced through the senses. The sensuous immediacy of this experience defies the ‘common sense’; ... the women who follow Dionysus have greater access to the truth, even though it is dubbed ‘dangerous, disreputable, immoral, a peril to hearth and home’” (Prins 1999, 62–63, citing Harrison 1894, 165).

Harrison's remarks on the ritual and ecstatic origins of ancient tragedy stood in direct contact with the parallel reforms of modern theatre (see Fergusson 1949 and Peters 2008, 3–4). To be sure, precisely with an eye toward her reconstruction of maenadic ecstasy, Harrison at the same time influenced and commented on the movement to innovate “free dance” (see Brandstetter 1995, 33), whose break with classical ballet—just think of Isadora Duncan—proceeded via a *revival* of ancient models of movement. Her work as a whole is thus positioned in a twofold interstice—between antiquity and modernity, and between religion and art. However, she also played a great role for modern literature—from Virginia Woolf to T. S. Eliot to James Joyce, to name just a few—due in particular to the key significance she gave concrete, albeit therefore formed, emotions and desires as dynamic potentials in literature and art. The poets and artists who followed the fixed and essentially immaterial “eikonism” (Harrison 1915, 202) of classical Olympian religion “lose all touch with the confusions of actuality” (Harrison 1991, 215), which, initiated through passions, fears, and affects, were still present in earlier mythology and rites. The mysteries of Eleusis, for example, for Harrison have maintained some of that formlessness. They cultivated sensuality and desire as media of divine epiphany and revelation: “It is indeed”, she said, “only in the orgiastic religions that these splendid moments of conviction could come” (Harrison 1991, 568). In *Themis* and then in *Ancient Art and Ritual*, rituals are first and foremost representations of “thing[s] desired” (Harrison 1951, 18), whose performative potential, according to Harrison, lies in its transformative quality. Like Harry C. Payne (1978), Kathy J. Phillips claims that: “Harrison could well be represented in anthologies and classes as one of the key background forces of modern literature. [...] Her linking of anthropologists with contemporary artists reveals that Harrison [...] was participating in the elaboration of Modernism in general” (Phillips 1991, 467 and 476).

4.1.2 Thiasotic Cult, Sensational Form and Remembrance

Through her search for concrete gestural forms as intermediaries between body and soul even in the ritual expressions of the deepest emotion, Harrison's work is closely allied with Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne* project. For Warburg the “*thiasotic cult*” of Dionysus already “formed” more chaotic “confusions” of emotions, impulses, and gestures:

The process of de-demonizing the inherited mass of impressions, created in fear, that encompasses the entire range of emotional gesture, from helpless melancholy to murderous cannibalism, also lends the mark of uncanny experience to the dynamics of human movement in the stages that lie in between these extremes of orgiastic seizure—states such as

fighting, walking, running, dancing, grasping. [...] Through its images the *Mnemosyne Atlas* intends to illustrate this process, which one could define as the attempt to absorb pre-coined expressive values by means of the representation of life in motion (Warburg 2000; 2009, 277).

Warburg focused his psycho-historical research on the models—which he referred to as “pathos formulae”—in which the “unhindered release of expressive bodily movement, especially as it occurred amongst the followers of the gods of intoxication in Asia Minor, [was performed] in all mimetic actions” (Warburg 2009, 279). For Warburg as well as for Harrison, “thiasotic” ecstasy is thus not a chaotic frenzy per se but rather an early “traceable inventory of pre-coined expressions, which demanded that the individual artist either ignore or absorb this mass of inherited impressions” (Warburg 2009, 280): It is embodied in *pathos formulae* of cultural remembrance. In the context of this gestural archive of emotional remembrance the figure of the woman-in-motion and ecstasy played a central role. Aby Warburg’s *nympha project* (Warburg 2010) as well as Harrison’s fascination for the female followers of Dionysus were embedded in a general “renaissance of the maenads” around 1900 (see Prins 1999; Brunotte 2013a, 190–215).

If one reviews Harrison’s various interpretations of maenadic intoxication and its “daemonic” god, the entire religious polarity which she otherwise describes as the opposition between chthonic *daimones* and the “Apollonian” Olympian gods is condensed in the double face of Dionysus himself (and his cult). Thus, in Harrison’s view, in addition to orgiastic dance and frenzy, there is also the relaxing, inspiring and soothing (“limb-loosening”) quality of wine as an intermediary between the body and the soul. The Dionysian cult shows “how in the breaking of bread, and still more in the drinking of wine, life spiritual as well as physical is renewed, thought is re-born, [man’s] equanimity, his magnanimity are restored, reason and morality rule again” (Harrison 1991, 452). All in all, according to Harrison, “the constant shift from physical to spiritual” makes up the “essence of the religion of Dionysos” (Harrison 1991, 453). Soon, however, Harrison abandons the sacramental reading of breaking bread and drinking wine—something that for her was too narrow and Christologically coded—to emphasise the aesthetic quality of Dionysian wine intoxication, which she feels goes beyond it. She enters the realm of aesthetic inspiration and erotic stimulation when in the style of the *fin de siècle* she stresses that only those who truly enjoy themselves know “what it is to be drunken with the physical beauty of a flower or a sunset, with the sensuous imagery of words, with the strong wine of a new idea, with the magic of another’s personality” (Harrison 1991, 453). In such rather incidental interpretations of the ambivalence of deep Dionysian

emotion, Harrison pursues only the issue of the Nietzschean dualism between Apollonian form and Dionysian formless intoxication in her earlier work; later, she instead attempts to reconstruct in the ritual ecstasy itself those elements which both create distance and provide sensational and artistic form. It was out of this immanent process of determining form, Harrison claims, that Greek tragedy developed:

Not only did the Greeks mix their Thracian wine with water, tempering the madness of the god, but they saw in Dionysos the god of spiritual as well as physical intoxication. It cannot be forgotten that the drama was early connected with the religion of Dionysos; *his nurses are not only Maenads, they are Muses*, from him and him only comes the beauty and magic of their song: "Hail Child of Semele, only by thee. Can any singing sweet and gracious be" (Harrison 1991, 449, italics added).

Not distance-creating Apollo but rather ecstasy-producing Dionysos and his mysteries—with this I once again relate Harrison to Warburg—are the basis for the creation of *sensational forms* (Meyer 2011, 29–30) of emotional remembrance that connect ritual to arts and the performative creation of "presence" to collective embodied memory. According to Harrison maenads can transform themselves into muses and can even "dance out" their emotive knowledge of fear, joy and frenzy in highly expressive bodily movements, in songs and music. In his famous introduction to his *Mnemosyne* project, Aby Warburg, too, wrote about the liminal and creative role of the primal orgiastic experience in "thiasotic tragedy":

Since Nietzsche's time it has no longer been necessary to adopt a revolutionary attitude in order to view the character of antiquity through the symbol of the double-headed herm of Apollo-Dionysus. On the contrary, when looking at pagan art, the superficial daily use of this theory of opposites makes it difficult to take seriously the role of *sophrosyne* [prudence] and ecstasy as a single, organic functional polarity that marks the limit values of the human will to expression (Warburg 2009, 279).

Roughly twenty years earlier Jane E. Harrison developed a similar interpretation of ecstatic ritual dance as a liminal or thinking space, as well as a medium of self-perception and self-reflection.

5 Mimetic Anticipation and "Thinking Space"

Since *Themis*, whose programmatic subtitle is *A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Harrison [1912] 1977), Harrison viewed religion as a social institution, and the practices of the rituals that she studied, as primarily social prac-

tices. In her view rituals can both generate knowledge and, as creative social practices, be media of memory, desire and therefore also transformation:

A high emotional tension is best caused and maintained by a thing felt socially. [...] If [...] [the] whole tribe dances together [...] emotion will mount to passion, to ecstasy [...]. [A *dromenon*] is a thing *re-done* or *pre-done*, a thing enacted or represented. It is sometimes *re-done*, commemorative, sometimes *pre-done*, anticipatory, and both elements seem to go to its religiousness. [...] the drama or *dromenon* here is a sort of precipitated desire, a discharge of pent-up emotion [...] [the desire] breaks out into mimetic, anticipatory action. Mimetic, not of what you see done by another, but of what you desire to do yourself". (Harrison [1912] 1977, 43, 45)

With this approach, it is beyond question that Harrison can be considered a theorist of the performative *avant la lettre*. In recent theatre studies research, such as the work of Julie Stone Peters, Harrison's writings are read precisely in this new way:

Ritual was, then [for Harrison], in its origin, a kind of proto-drama, taking the form of mimetic dances and containing an 'element of make-believe.' This element did not, however, involve an "attempt to deceive, but a desire to *re-live*, to *re-present*" (*Themis* 43). Rather than being a mere imitative copying of life, it was a conjunction of acting, making, and doing that was essentially performative: a magic invocation of the object of desire, a creation of the event through its pre-enactment, and a collective discharge of pent-up emotion. It was *metheksis* more than *mimesis*, participation or *doing* more than imitation (126) (Peters 2008, 16).

Harrison viewed rituals as forming ecstatic states of orgiastic emotion through rhythmic movements, gestures, music and song. Thus not only is the Greek term *drama*, Harrison said, its "own cousin to the word for rite, *dromenon*" (Harrison 1913, 35), but "the beginnings of drama and of primitive magical rites are [...] intertwined at the very roots" (Harrison [1912] 1977, 31). These theatrical acts thereby open up a cultural and psychological space between the heightened collective affects and their direct realisation. This in-between space that emerges in ritual framing makes psychological and cultural creativity possible, as well as, ultimately, symbol formation: "If an impulse finds instantly its appropriate satisfaction, there is no representation," asserted Harrison. "It is out of the delay, just the space between the impulse and the reaction, that all our mental life, our images, ideas, [...] most of all our religion, arise" (Harrison [1912] 1977, 44).

Harrison's concept of the in-between space as a space of creative symbolic production not only anticipated Aby Warburg's concept of *Denkraum* ("thinking space") (Warburg [1923] 2010) and Victor Turner's theory of the transitional liminal phase in rites of passage, it is also related to Donald W. Winnicott's concept of "intermediate area" (Winnicott 1971, 1–35 and 87–114). Not least through her

positive assessment of *formlessness*, a central concept of Winnicott's, who was an English child psychoanalyst and theorist on creativity, Harrison's theory on rituals approaches the psychoanalytic theory of play. Like Harrison, Winnicott analysed objects of transition and figures of the intermediary imaginative space as a production site of symbols (see Neubaur 1987). In Jane Harrison's work, rituals are generally viewed as a liminal space between *dromenon* and *drama*, and—to borrow from Meyer again, as intermediate zones and sensational forms of affect modulation, not only for the sake of cathartic purification of the emotions, as in Aristotle's theory of tragedy, but for their presentation and lasting formation. She attempted to work out a cultural space that for her lies between the perception of extreme emotions and orgiastic seizure, and the immediate realisation of these affective, sometimes murderous impulses.

6 Harrison's Topicality for the Study of the Aesthetics of Religion

In *Ancient Art and Ritual* Harrison asks at the end if her endeavour is it a purely "antiquarian enquiry" and "Why is it, apart from the mere delight of scientific enquiry, important to have seen that art arose from ritual?" (Harrison 1951, 204). She answers with a reference to the "revival of the ritual dance" (Harrison 1951, 207) in the avant-garde movements of her time, in part inspired by the *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life school). This is yet further evidence of how much she participated in opening up the text-centred theatre of her time to another social field of cultural rituals (that is, cultural performances): "Some of the strenuous, exciting, self-expressive dances of to-day are the soil and some exotic, but, based as they mostly are on very primitive ritual, they stand as singular evidence of this real recurrent need. Art in these latter days goes back as it were on her steps, recrossing the ritual bridge back to life" (Harrison 1951, 207).

Harrison's work and her pursuit of the knowledge of the daemons offer a representation of the shattering of the elite, classicist Hellenism and its discursive glorification of a text-centred *logos*. The crisis of this hegemonic and male-coded order of knowledge, which to be sure was not brought about by Harrison alone, ultimately evolved into a democratisation of science and to multifarious appropriations of antiquity; see Fiske (2008). Harrison thus shed light on the performative dimensions of cultural practice that were lost in text-analytical approaches. In particular her attempts to illuminate the tension between ritual and theatre in what was then a radical new way contributed to an understanding of the specifically transformative *energeia* and the embodied knowledge of the performative *avant la lettre*. Especially in the area of English-language research

on religion and in Greek studies, Harrison's openness to the knowledge of the daemons, which developed so far as to acknowledge emotion in the research process itself, led around 1900 to upheaval in the order of knowledge. Within the scope of an innovative approach to an aesthetics of religion, it would be well worth taking this up again today.

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