COMMENTS ON THE PAPER BY MEMBERS OF THE DORISEA NETWORK

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Boike Rehbein and Guido Sprenger present three "configurations of the religious" in detail, and note that "many other possible and actual configurations can be distinguished from the three we focus on here" (p. 7). This statement can be read as a sort of arbitrary proposition that there are many other possible configurations yet to be discovered. It can also be read as an invitation to rearrange the proposed elements. In this case, the authors offer a box of bricks, and encourage their colleagues to play with and create their own configurations.

I opt for the latter and will apply some of their construction devices on my field of research, namely the communication with the dead in Western spiritualism and Southeast Asian ghost movies.

Obvious and applicable connections with Rehbein and Sprenger's configurations show the concept of animism as communication of humans with non-human beings, and "as a practical means to integrate humans and non-humans ... into local communities" (p. 7), the question of 'is animism religion?', and the modern concept of religion, especially the relation of capitalism, science and religion. I will use two examples to draw such connections, Western spiritualism in the 19th and early 20th century, and contemporary Southeast Asian ghost movies.

My first example, spiritualism, refers to Western modernity between 1850 and 1920. Although spiritualism emerged from Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture and kept some liturgical features such as Sunday services and hymn singing, it soon detached itself from Christian religion. The ritualized contact with the spirits of the deceased took place on a theatre stage or in private rooms. The audience was predominantly but not exclusively part of the urban bourgeoisie. The popularity of spiritualism in the United States and all over Europe (and even Japan) also contributed to the creation of a translocal and transnational community. The trance medium on stage contacted ancestor spirits of some of the attendees, historical entities such as Napoleon, Beethoven, Shakespeare, or mythic figures such as Egyptian kings, (North American) Indians, sages from Roman and Greek antiquity and the mystic East. This kind of communication with the spirits of the dead functioned as a practical means to integrate the dead into the community of a new emerging class, the bourgeoisie. This new class whose members attended spiritualist sessions needed the contact with highly esteemed ancestors as a source

of moral protection and collective identity building. Thus, the spirits of the dead moulded the bourgeois spirit. Looked at that way, Western spiritualism resembles the configuration of Southeast Asian animism as outlined in the text by Sprenger and Rehbein, and since spiritualism deals with the dead and afterworld, managing transcendence and immanence as well as human/non-human sociality, one would not hesitate to place this sort of Western animism in the realm of 'the religious'.

On closer inspection, however, we detect discrepancies. Prominent spiritualists and the majority of the adherents articulated staunch church criticism and distanced themselves from Christian religion and 'the religious' in general. They considered spiritualism as a practical means to gain knowledge of the afterworld. Spiritualism was understood as the science of communication with the dead (Auerbach 2004, 282). Learned societies (of psychic research, for example) were founded and natural-scientific methods applied to achieve insights into the 'realm beyond' and prove the immortality of the human soul (Conrad 1999; Sawicki 2002). Spiritualism was for many a rational endeavor, and leading spiritualists (in Germany) wholeheartedly embraced Late Enlightenment philosophy (Cyranka 2008). The scientific search for superior knowledge corresponded with an obsession with new media (e.g. telegraph, telephone, photography) to facilitate communication with the dead and to document this communication (Sconce 2000). The actual communication with ghosts took place on stage and was inseparably linked to the modern spheres of entertainment, spectacle, and show business (Natale 2013). Spiritualist sessions provided not only superior knowledge of the otherworld but also fun and thrill. The mechanisms of celebrity culture and consumerism sometimes encouraged mediums to deploy trickery, and professional stage magicians exposed trance mediums as impostors.

Spiritualism challenges historians of religion as well as historians of science. Historians of science usually declare spiritualism as pseudo-science (Bohley 2008; Zander 2008), whereas historians of religion try to 'purify' spiritualism. As a result, 'authentic' spiritualism is based on belief in 'real' ghosts and belongs therefore to the realm of the religious (and, of course, not to the scientific). 'Inauthentic' spiritualism is based on fake (or at

least artificial) ghosts and belongs to popular culture and the entertainment industry. The scholarly observation strictly separates science (rationality, knowledge), the 'religious' (irrationality, belief), and popular culture (the sensational, consumerism).

My second example, Southeast Asian ghost movies and their audiences, illustrates further difficulties with such demarcations. Ghost movies, extremely popular all over Southeast Asia, are, of course, products of the capitalist entertainment industry, and cinematic ghosts are not 'real', as every movie-goer knows. Most ghost-movie fans would flatly deny that, for example, the Japanese genre classic Ringu is a movie about religion or a religious movie. Therefore, is seems logical to put ghost movies in the popular culture box and label them as non-religious. The movies narratives, however, comment on the destructive side of capitalist modernity, because "modernity intensifies violation, violence, and the haunting of the dead," as Pattana Kitiarsa put it. Ghost movies "reveal the dark side of urban modernization" (Kitiarsa 2011, 216). Ghost movies convey moral tales. They show that communal solidarity and tradition are threatened and the protagonists always struggle with the task to integrate the demands of the dead into their lives.

Furthermore, ghost movies deal with the human quest for existential meaning: death and what comes after death. What state of afterlife existence can be expected? This question belongs to the spectrum of existential questions for which religions traditionally provide ultimate answers. Ghost movies test such ultimate answers, with the cinema functioning as a laboratory for such plausibility tests. The moviegoers experience the reality of ghosts through their senses. Ghost movies operate most effectively by arousing "somatic modes of attention" (Csordas 1993, 138). Thus, through creeping horror, attacks of sweating, goose bumps, elevated blood pressure and so on, ghost movies provide a sort of bodily knowledge of ghostly presence (e.g. Grodal 2009).

Contemporary Southeast Asian Ghost movies and the Western spiritualism of the 19th and early 20th centuries have substantial similarities. The spiritualist's stage performances and the cinematic performances in ghost movies offer a space for imagination, in which 'as ifs', sceptical popular subjunctivity, can be tested: "What if you were already dead?" The main hypothesis being tested is the question of whether ghosts exist or not, whether there is 'existence' after life or not.

Viewed in this light, spiritualism as well as Southeast Asian ghost movies can be linked to configurations of the religious as elaborated in Sprenger & Rehbein's text. Both forms of communication with the dead are related to the animism configuration but also to important aspects of the modern concept of religion, outlined in the second part of their paper. The examples, however, also show the insufficiency of underlying 'either-or'

attributions. The segregation of something 'religious' from science, knowledge, or entertainment is obviously unsustainable. We have to be constantly aware that Christian theology, especially its Protestant version, had tremendous influence on the common and scholarly concept of religion and 'the religious', as Talal Asad (1993) demonstrated. Referring to "the Christianity of Anthropology", Fenella Cannell (2005) rightly argued that anthropologists have reiterated clear-cut Christian divisions between heaven and earth, the human and the divine, immanence and transcendence. Against the background of this somehow 'taken for granted' Christian cosmology, immanent contact with the dead is not intended to be part of authentic religion. Seen from that perspective, spiritualist séances in public theatres and encounters with ghosts in cinemas are abstruse, and such common notions also affect scholarly assessments.

This sheds light on the efforts to conceptualize the category of 'religion' in the information age and under the conditions of 'post-theism', as philosopher Hent de Vries put it:

"If religion is, in a sense, everywhere, if 'religion' comes to stand for any relation to others or otherness that does not close itself off in some sameness (or totality, as Levinas would say), then it is also nowhere: no longer directly available as an empirically or conceptually determinable object of study. Paradoxically, then, in the interdisciplinary and analytically ambitious project of contemporary religious studies, 'religion'—formally defined—suffers a fate similar to 'theism' in the classical and modern forms of theology and Religionswissenschaft. Perhaps it should do so more consciously, even deliberately, having nothing to lose but everything to gain."

de Vries 2001, 30

Taking these critiques into consideration, proper configurations which portray spiritualism and ghost movies as forms of the religious have to include technical media, the human body, religious aesthetics, popular culture, the entertainment industry, science, and knowledge concepts. In the end, we have configurations of the religious which are permeated by and dependent on capitalism and science, but equally conditioned by sensational manifestations and very concrete, material dimensions (Meyer and Houtman 2012). This might contradict the statement on page 8: "religion thus produces and answers important questions which capitalism and science cannot address". Can we assign 'the religious' exclusively to the realm of ideas and ultimate questions, excluding media, mediatisation, matter and materiality? Are our questions such as "is animism/spiritualism/a ghost film religion?" fruitless exercises of boundary drawing? Are we not trapped in subtle Protestant notions of what

'religion' really is? Or does the proposed concept of configuration provide additional epistemological values and insights by transgressing boundary drawing? Are configurations snapshot-like models or Weberian ideal types? How, then, can the important aspect of the 'dynamics' of religion in Southeast Asia be addressed?

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