Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design
Doctoral School
Art Theory (Design Theory) / Design Culture Studies PhD

Art, Religion, and Spirituality in the Design Culture of the Postsecular Age

Doctoral Dissertation

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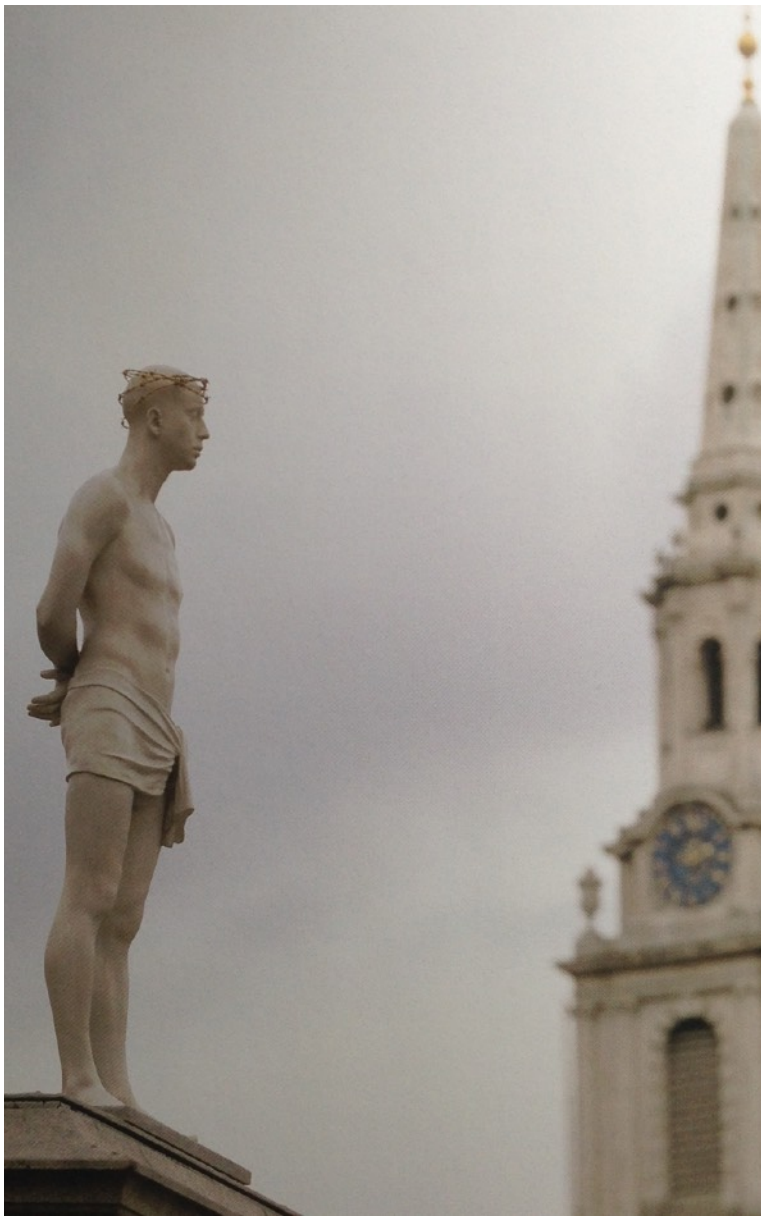

Mark Wallinger: Ecce Homo (1999). White marbleised polyester resin, gold-plated barbed wire, life size. First installation, Fourth Plinth Project, Trafalgar Square, London, UK, 1999.

Összefoglaló

Napjaink posztszekuláris világában a művészet területén is érzékelhető, hogy megnövekedett az érdeklődés a vallás és a spiritualitás iránt. Ezzel együtt a kérdés már fogalmi szinten sem egyértelmű: az általában kortárs szakrálisként definiált művészet kategóriájába tartozónak tekintett alkotások és alkotók recepciója az elméletalkotásban, a kritikában, az alkotói és intézményi gyakorlatban, az oktatásban, az intézményesült vallások és a szekuláris megközelítések nézőpontjai és érvelése szerint is különböző értékítéleteket mutat fel, és visszatérő vita tárgyát képezi. A doktori disszertáció alapjául szolgáló kutatás e széles körű kérdés aspektusainak feltérképezésére, a kapcsolódó megközelítési lehetőségek, nemzetközi és hazai diskurzusok és alkotói gyakorlatok bemutatására vállalkozik, amelyhez a szerző vizsgálati és értelmezési keretrendszerként a befogadó designkultúra-tudomány nyitott szemléletű megközelítését kínálja. A kutatás elméleti fókuszának disszeminációja mellett a szerző empirikus kutatás, oktatási és művészeti-kurátori programok, ismeretterjesztést és transzkulturális kapcsolatépítést szorgalmazó gyakorlatok segítségével érvel. Célja a kutatás folyamatának lezáratlansága tudatában is, hogy elősegítse a terület aktorai közötti párbeszédet, valamint rámutasson, hogy a vallásos és spirituális tapasztalathoz köthető művészet annak különböző módozataival, megközelítésével és hozzáállásával is megfelelően tudja szolgálni a jövősítés módozatainak megteremtését.

Kulcsszavak:
művészet, vallás, spiritualitás, designkultúra, posztszekularizáció

Szerző:
Körösvölgyi Zoltán

Értekezés címe magyarul:
Művészet, vallás és spiritualitás a posztszekuláris kor designkultúrájában

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Abstract

In today's postsecular world, the increased focus on religion and spirituality is also tangible in the field of art. At the same time, not even the concepts involved are clear: the reception of works and artists generally considered as belonging to the category generally defined as contemporary sacred, receive varied judgments in theory, criticism, artistic and institutional practice, education, institutionalised religious as well as secular approaches, and, accordingly, is the subject of recurring debate. The research serving as the basis of this doctoral dissertation undertakes to map aspects of the wide horizon of this issue, to present related approaches, international and local discourses in Hungary, as well as artistic practices. To this end, the author presents the open-minded approach of inclusive Design Culture studies as a framework for research and interpretation. In order to apply the theoretical framework developed in the research, the author examines empirical research, educational programs, art and curatorial programs, and practices promoting the sharing of information and transcultural networking.Aware of the unfinished nature of the research process, the author aims to foster dialogue between actors in the field, and to point out that art related to religious and spiritual experience can suitably support futuring with its different modes, approaches and attitudes.

Keywords:
art, religion, spirituality, design culture, postsecular

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Tézisek

(a) Az általában „szakrális művészet” néven tárgyalt művészet létező fogalom, amely a vallásos, illetve spirituális tapasztaláshoz köthető más jelenségekhez hasonlóan meghatározó napjaink posztszekuláris világában.

(b) A „kortárs szakrális művészet” fogalma még bizonytalanabb: az e kategóriába sorolt vagy idetartozónak vélt alkotások heterogén csoportot alkotnak – a liturgikus vagy egyházművészeti alkotásoktól kezdve a közösségi vagy magántermészetű vallásos, illetve spirituális tapasztaláshoz köthető művekig.

(c) A terület aktorai (művészek, kurátorok, a művészeti világ, a szervezett vallás és az oktatás szakemberei, valamint a befogadók) közötti kommunikációt lehetővé tévő nyelv elveszettnek látszik; azonban léteznek ennek újrafelfedezésére irányuló, visszatérő kísérletek – az elmélet és az alkotói gyakorlat oldaláról egyaránt.

(d) A nyitott szellemű és befogadó designkultúra-tudomány alkalmas keretet és alapot biztosít a felvázolt terület vizsgálatára.

(e) A vallásos és spirituális tapasztaláshoz kötődő művészet – számos területen, különböző meghatározott módozatokkal, megközelítésekkel és attitűdökkel – segít a jövősítés útjairól gondolkodni, azt kutatni és azon dolgozni.

Theses

(a) Art generally referred to as ‘sacred’ exists, and—similarly to other phenomena related to religious and/or spiritual experience—is decisive in our postsecular era.

(b) The notion of ‘contemporary sacred art’ is more precarious: the works of art categorised or signified by the term are heterogeneous—from liturgical or ecclesiastical art to art related to communal or private religious and/or spiritual experience.

(c) The shared language enabling communication between the actors of the field (i.e., artists; curators; professionals at artistic, religious, and educational institutions; as well as recipients/audiences) seems to have been lost. Nevertheless, recurring attempts have been and currently are being made to rediscover it—both in theory and practice.

(d) Design Culture studies, with its open-minded and inclusive nature, offers a suitable framework and basis to investigate the subject.

(e) Art related to religious and spiritual experience—in several fields, with distinct modes, approaches, and attitudes—can support thought, research and work on ways of futuring.

Abbreviations

ASMR:	autonomous sensory meridian response
BME:	Budapesti Műszaki és Gazdaságtudományi Egyetem (Budapest University of Technology and Economics), Budapest, Hungary
BPSS:	bio–psycho–social–spiritual (model)
ELTE:	Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (Eötvös Loránd University), Budapest, Hungary
ICOM:	International Council of Museums
ITIA:	Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts, St.Andrews, Scotland, UK
LFZE:	Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem (Liszt Academy of Music), Budapest, Hungary
MKE:	Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem (Hungarian University of Fine Art), Budapest, Hungary
MM:	Magyar Művészet folyóirat (Hungarian Art, journal)
MMA:	Magyar Művészeti Akadémia (Hungarian Academy of Art)
MNG:	Magyar Nemzeti Galéria (Hungarian National Gallery), Budapest, Hungary
MNM:	Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (Hungarian National Museum), Budapest, Hungary
MOCRA:	Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, St. Louis, MO, USA
MODEM:	Modern and Contemporary Ars Centre, Debrecen, Hungary
MOMA:	The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, NY, USA
MOME:	Moholy-Nagy Művészeti Egyetem (Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design), Budapest, Hungary
MIF:	Magyar Iparművészeti Főiskola (Hungarian College of Applied Arts – predecessor to MOME), Budapest, Hungary
NRM:	New Religious Movement(s)
OP:	Ordo Praedicatorum (Order of Preachers, Dominican Order)
OSB:	Ordo Sancti Benedicti (Order of Saint Benedict, Benedictine Order)
OSZK:	Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (National Széchényi Library), Budapest, Hungary
PTE:	Pécsi Tudományegyetem (University of Pécs), Pécs, Hungary
SLU:	Saint Louis University, St. Louis, MO, USA
UX:	user experience (in design)

Acknowledgements

When I graduated in Art History in 1992, I didn't think I would return to the world of academia. It was Umberto Eco's idea of the 'bank of favours' that changed my mind. I translated it to returning to education, forwarding and sharing the knowledge that I had received, which lead to the first few classes at ELTE, then some more at LFZE, and, finally, after quitting the world of business, to doctoral studies at MOME.

I cannot be thankful enough to Andrea Vigh, President of LFZE, for giving me a chance to return to Art History, and persuading me to begin my doctoral studies; as well as to Tamás Kieselbach, who in course of an interview gave me the final kick in picking my research subject. I thank József Fülöp, President of MOME for connecting me with the Doctoral School; Márton Szentpéteri and Bálint Veres, my supervisors, for guiding me back to academic research that was practically unknown to me before; J. A. Tillman, then Head of the Doctoral School, for trusting me; and, last but not least, Júlia Gáspár, for her tireless support throughout these six academic years. I also thank my professors for their valuable ideas, as well as my fellow doctoral students, for the exciting atmosphere, the vivid discussions, their kindness, and the fun we had.

I wouldn't attempt to list all the people,—scholars, artists, designers—who opened new windows and doors for me, influenced and shaped my thoughts, were open to discuss issues, involve me in debates, exhibitions, conferences, as most of them are mentioned in this dissertation, but I wish to thank all the students I worked with in education, in the communities of LFZE and MOME, for their fresh ideas, and the unforgettable experiences. I thank the New National Excellence Program, and the Szluha Fund for their generous support.

This dissertation is a station on a long journey, and hopefully not the final destination. I couldn't have reached so far without the support of my wife, Zsuzsi; the patience of my son, Márton; the early eye-opening experiences, the exemplary work ethic and the ceaseless support of my parents; as well as the encouragement of my brother, my family, and friends.

I hope that I will be able to contribute to the dialogue that set me out on this road, to making art related to religious and spiritual experiences matter—raise questions that lead us to fill out the gaps we experience in life, in institutionalised religion, in the art world, in education, as well as in the everyday. The direction is clear, we just need to find the suitable roads to our common future.

Contents

Berndnaut Smilde: Nimbus Sankt Peter (2013). Self-made cloud in Sankt Peter Kunst-Station, Cologne. Photograph.

It is impossible to talk sensibly about religion and at the same time address art in an informed and intelligent manner: but it is also irresponsible not to keep trying.

—James Elkins[1]

[1] James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 116.

1. Introduction

Even if you have no interest in religion or art, you can recognise that their relation, or rather the discourse on the subject, has changed over the past years and decades. When I began my journey in researching this subject, the relations between contemporary art and religion or contemporary sacred art, I found a slightly different arena than what I now see. Formerly, I found the discourse on this subject in Hungary to be limited, and even that limited discourse—with a few exceptions like the 2007*Space and Prayer* and the 2008 *From the Ikon to the Installation* exhibitions at the Pannonhalma Archabbey,[2] or the 2009 *Messiahs* exhibition at MODEM[3]—was rather hostile and excluding, and the works of art mostly narrative and outdated, as if they came from long ago.

Today, we can read and hear much more about the subject, and also experience more works of art openly addressing questions related to religion and spirituality. Whether that comes with the fresh spirit of the era, the increased attention to international works of art and scholarly literature, the appearance of a generation hungry for spiritual experience and searching for it outside the limiting frameworks of established religions, or whether it results simply from the very fact of my investigation, a sharper focus on the subject, I don't know. What I do see is that we are experiencing protracted years of crisis, in the original meaning of the word as turning points, with the obvious result that we will not emerge from them the same as when they began, as Pope Francis reminds us.[4] And as Santiago Zabala suggests "only art can save us", in that it has an outstanding role in leading us to important understandings and move us from our passive, enervated positions towards actively taking part in securing our common future. That is why, in agreement with James Elkins' words, I do not regret that I attempted to investigate this territory—it would have been irresponsible not to do so.

In the opening section of *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art,* Elkins claims that "Sooner or later, if you love art, you will come across a strange fact: there is almost no modern religious art in museums or in books of art history."[5] Slightly more than a decade and a half later, this claim seems to have weakened, just like its paraphrased version: *if you go to church, you will come across a strange fact: there is almost no contemporary art in churches or*

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[2] *Tér és imádság / Space and Prayer*, Temporary Exhibition, Pannonhalma Archabbey, March 21 to November 11, 2007. *Az ikontól az installációig / From the Ikon to the Installation*, Temporary Exhibition, Pannonhalma Archabbey, March 21 to November 11, 2008.

[3] *Messiások—A nyugati ember és a megváltás gondolata a modern és kortárs vizuális művészetben / Messiahs—Western man and the idea of redemption in modern and contemporary visual arts*, Temporary Exhibition, MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts, Debrecen, August 13 to December 31, 2009.

[4] "I see this time as a reckoning. I think of what Jesus tells Peter in Luke 22:31, that the devil wants him to be sifted like wheat. To enter into crisis is to be sifted. Your categories and ways of thinking get shaken up; your priorities and lifestyles are challenged. You cross a threshold, either by your own choice or by necessity, because there are crises, like the one we're going through, that you can't avoid. The question is whether you're going to come through this crisis and if so, how. The basic rule of a crisis is that you don't come out of it the same. If you get through it, you come out better or worse, but never the same. We are living a time of trial. The Bible talks of passing through fire to describe such trials, like a kiln testing the potter's handiwork (Sirach 27:5). The fact is that we are all tested in life. It's how we grow." Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, "Prologue," in *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 4–5.

[5] Elkins, *On the Strange Place,* ix.

in the publications of organised religion. The fact that the discourse on religion and art has begun—at least in the English-speaking world—is partly due to the brave pioneering work of several scholars, theorists, and practitioners. Elkins phrases the difficulty of this scholarly challenge:

> *For people in my profession of art history, the very fact that I have written this book may be enough to cast me into a dubious category of fallen and marginal historians who somehow don't get modernism or postmodernism. That is because a certain kind of academic art historical writing treats religion as an interloper, something that just has no place in serious scholarship. Talking about religion is like living in a house infested with mice and not noticing that something is wrong. I know, on the other hand, that some religionists (as academics tend to call believers outside of academia) will assume I am fallen because I've fallen from some faith.*[6]

If a recognised art historian and professor at a prominent secular university can face this challenge, why couldn't I, as someone with so much less to lose, follow? We now see the theory and concept of secularisation—an ideology of European modernity—questioned by postsecularisation; postmodernity questioned by metamodernism (or postmodernism understood by modernism as a critique to initiate and support the renewal of modernism); and the frameworks of art history and visual culture challenged by design culture. Modern and contemporary art appear on the horizon of organised religion, as do religion and spirituality in the art world. All this testifies to what S. Brent Plate expressed in his 2017 writing as "Reports of the death of religious art have been greatly exaggerated."[7]

Today, we can more often encounter works, exhibitions and events of contemporary art in churches, and also meet art that reflects on spiritual experience or is connected explicitly to religiosity in the spaces of the art world. To express this experience, we can paraphrase the words that appear in the Surrealist painter, René Magritte's *La Trahison des images* (The Betrayal of Images, 1929) as *Ceci n'est pas un musée. Ceci n'est pas une église.*[8] Certainly, this is not a museum, and this is no longer a church—at least not the one we have been accustomed to.

It is beyond question that religion is generally resurgent and is recognised as an influential agent in many fields of life, from politics to media. Religion also seems to play a crucial and explanatory role in understanding what exactly happens in our world, as well as the reasons why. Furthermore, it offers possible ways out of (or into) the current situation and problems. The situation is no different in the discourse on the relation between religion and art. Accordingly, both the scholarly and popular discourses have become more lively on this subject. If we search for 'religion and art today' in Google Scholar, we can receive 2,950,000 results[9]—

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[6] Elkins, *On the Strange Place,* xi.

[7] S. Brent Plate, "Reports of the Death of Religious Art Have Been Greatly Exaggerated," *Los Angeles Review of Books* (LARB) January 24, 2017, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/233865/, 10.01.2021.

[8] This paraphrased version of the text—visible in Magritte's work, The Treason of the Image,—appeared in a poster presentation by the author. Zoltán Körösvölgyi, *Art and Religion Today: An On-Going Doctoral Research in Design Culture Studie*s, Poster Presentation, (Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Doctoral School, September 2019).

[9] The search was completed on January 10, 2022.

the earliest from a member of the Frankfurt School of philosophers, Theodor W. Adorno's 1945 chapter, Theses Upon Art and Religion Today.[10]

Although Adorno claims that the lost unity between art and religion cannot be regained at will, and that unity is and was always problematic,[11] I'd rather share Cheryl Nafziger-Leis' disagreement with Adorno's view. Nafziger-Leis claims that art and religion "continue to evolve according to the dynamic of the dialectic."[12] Following this opinion, and also in view of the high number of studies within the discourse, we can claim that although the dialogue or intersection between the two domains is neither easy nor obvious, at least it is not impossible.

Decades ago, during my university studies in Art History, as we left behind the art of the middle ages, it struck me that slowly and gradually, religious and spiritual works of art seemed to disappear from the canonised stream of art considered contemporary at all times. More recently, shortly before I started my doctoral research, and perhaps also serving as a trigger for my investigation into this subject, the focus of my interest turned to why spiritually engaged or explicitly religious art in synchronicity with our present time is nearly entirely missing; why, at most, dominantly figurative painting and sculpture, as well as church buildings recalling the planned or extant church architecture of the 1930s, were commissioned in Hungary. Although, I must acknowledge, there are exceptions, still, that was my first hand experience. This phenomenon is very well phrased by Robert A. Orsi's *headlinese*-styled chapter title, The Un-Modern, Or What Was Supposed to Have Disappeared But Did Not.[13] The poet, critic, former Benedictine friar and teacher Mátyás Varga defines the problem sharply, claiming that

> *[T]he phenomenon observed throughout European culture (probably a unique one in the history of culture) is that many turn to authors, works and styles of earlier centuries instead of the art of their own time; or—and this is perhaps even more general—become consumers of mass culture.*[14]

Yet this problem set-up raises the question why. One characteristic opinion is that modern and contemporary religious and spiritually engaged art is paradoxical, and one categorisation would exclude the other. Elkins makes his starting point very clear:

> *As a rule, ambitious, successful contemporary fine art is thoroughly nonreligious. Most religious art—I'm saying this bluntly here because it needs to be said—is just bad art. Virtually all religious art made for homes and churches is poor and out of touch. That is not just because the artists happen to be less talented than Jasper Johns*

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[10] T. W. Adorno, "Theses upon Art and Religion Today," *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1945): 677–82, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4332678, 21.11.2020.

[11] "The lost unity between art and religion, be it regarded as wholesome or as hampering, cannot be regained at will. (…) The exalted unity of art and religion is, and always was, highly problematic itself." Adorno, "Theses," 677.

[12] Cheryl Nafziger-Leis, "A-Dialogue with Adorno: So, What About the Impossibility of Religious Art Today?" *The Conrad Grebel Review*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 62.

[13] Robert A. Orsi, "Everyday Religion and the Contemporary World: The Un-Modern, or What Was Supposed to Have Disappeared but Did Not," in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes – An Anthropology of Everyday Religion,* eds. Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 146.

[14] In original: "[A]z egész európai kultúrában megfigyelhető (kultúrtörténetileg valószínűleg egyedülálló) jelenség, hogy az emberek jó része saját korának művészete helyett néha több évszázaddal korábbi szerzők, művek és stílusok felé fordul; vagy – és ez talán még általánosabb – a tömegkultúra fogyasztójává válik." Mátyás Varga, "Kinek a teste?" *Nyitott rítusok* (Budapest: Vigilia Kiadó, 2008), 75. If not indicated otherwise, all translations are by the author of this doctoral dissertation, Zoltán Körösvölgyi.

> *or Andy Warhol; it is because art that sets out to convey spiritual values goes against the grain of the history of modernism.*[15]

If that is so, why can we still meet relevant religious contemporary fine art? If art is openly religious, does it have no place in galleries and museums or the art world? If a work is modern or contemporary in the tone of voice, genre, or medium, does it automatically need to be distinguished from ecclesiastical (commissioned by and present in churches of organised religion) or liturgical art? Are enchantment and modernity categories and qualities explicitly excluding each other? And what then can we do with opinions such as the one attributed to the poet János Pilinszky, that the concept of sacred art is a tautology, since all art is sacred?

At the beginning of my doctoral research I had only rough and preliminary ideas of the field. My attitude was mostly a general though deep and honest interest, curiosity, and a desire to dig deeper, learn, and understand—though perhaps also with something of my own position, the reason for my interest. My starting point was that in the history of western art it was sacred art (art related to religion and spirituality) that dominated, broadened the field, and created space and possibility for the renewal of art. In the last centuries, however, a turn was experienced: such works of art have been pushed in the background, and regarding their quality for the most part could no longer be linked to contemporaneity or progression. At the same time, the need for sacred art persists: churches are built, liturgical art, design and vernacular objects are made, and the general interest of the audience has remained—within the museums as well. What's more, attention to this field has been awakened. Elkins proposes an explanation for this situation based on historical analysis:

> *Once upon a time—but really, in every place and in every time—art was religious.*[16] *[…] But something happened in the Renaissance. The meaning of art changed, and for the first time it became possible to make visual objects that glorified the artist and even provoked viewers to think more of the artist's skills than the subject of the artwork.*[17] *[…] Now, […] it appears that religion has sunk out of sight.*[18]

Even if all this is clear, it does not explain the lack of contemporary art either in the world of organised religion or in the non-institutional everyday. The comments I have received from my supervisors and fellow doctoral researchers during my doctoral studies have turned my attention to the inevitability of investigating the relations of my research in a broader spectrum; hoping that it might open a possibility of creating a tangible result, like a program to reconstitute the dialogue, support the broadening of the discourse, or result in other artistic activities.

My field of research, according to the terms set out at the beginning of my studies, is contemporary / present age / living (twenty-first century) sacred art (art related to religiosity and spiritual experience), as well as its representation. Beyond the obvious expectations for doctoral research and and its consequent dissertation, and due to the unclear use of the terms, I found clarifying the terminology to be of fundamental importance. Furthermore, I wished to denote

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[15] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 20.

[16] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 5.

[17] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 7.

[18] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 12.

and specify the field by mapping and analysing even the extremely idiosyncratic ways and oeuvres of contemporary art related to religiosity and/or spiritual experience.

The initial definition of my research thesis remains partly unchanged: although art generally named 'sacred art' exists, as a result of a profound misunderstanding, the language that would enable the communication between the actors in the field (artists, curators, professionals of artistic, religious, and educational institutions, as well as the recipients/audiences) has been lost. Accordingly, carefully listening to and understanding each other, as well as the works of art, do not receive adequate, open attention, and the works of art cannot fulfil their roles and tasks in their entirety.

In the West, this loss is rooted in the changes brought by the Enlightenment and secularisation, the walls erected between all that is somehow related to religion, belief, the divine, spirituality —and everything else. John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock capture it in their fundamental work, *Radical Orthodoxy*:

> *For several centuries now, secularism has been defining and constructing the world. It is a world in which the theological is either discredited or turned into a harmless leisure-time activity of private commitment. And yet in its early manifestations secular modernity exhibited anxiety concerning its own lack of ultimate ground—the scepticism of Descartes, the cynicism of Hobbes, the circularities of Spinoza all testify to this. And today the logic of secularism is imploding. Speaking with a microphoned and digitally simulated voice, it proclaims—uneasily, or else increasingly unashamedly—its own lack of values and lack of meaning. In its cyberspaces and theme-parks it promotes a materialism which is soulless, aggressive, nonchalant and nihilistic.*[19]

Investigating such a broadened horizon and a world with interrelated fields, art and religion, both connected to several arenas of life—economics, politics, science, education, as well as design, to name a few—needed a different perspective, which I found in Design Culture studies. I am grateful for having been accepted with my research proposal at the Doctoral School of MOME. The subject of my research is not as far from the spirit of the university as it seems. Besides the funny coincidence suggested by the name Moholy including 'holy'—as found and applied in the new visual identity of the Moholy-Nagy Foundation designed by Pentagram in 2020[20]—there have been several doctoral and graduate research and art projects related to the field at MOME. Among the doctoral projects are *Initiative Ways* by Klára Szilágyi (Architecture DLA, 2013),[21] and *Deviations* by Krisztina Vigh (Design DLA, 2017),[22] whereas in the graduate studies *The role of visuality in religious practice and communication,* and *Totally Different* by

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[19] John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock, "Introduction—Suspending the material: the turn of radical orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, eds. John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

[20] See the introduction to the new identity at the website of Pentagram, https://www.pentagram.com/work/moholy-nagy-foundation, 25.01.2022.

[21] Klára Szilágyi, *Iniciatikus utak: Kortárs monostorok Szent Benedek Regulája tükrében*, Doctoral Dissertation (DLA) (Budapest: Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, 2013), https://corvina.mome.hu/dsr/access/da5bb125-ec0d-42f7-a934-791f6017afc1, 25.01.2022.

[22] Krisztina Vigh, *Deviációk: Szakrális megnyilvánulások napjaink művészetében*, Doctoral Dissertation (DLA) (Budapest: Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, 2017), http://corvina.mome.hu/dsr/access/1905a8fd-a1c3-435b-b4e5-150c7f3ad987, 25.01.2022.

Boglárka Éva Zellei (Photography MA, 2017),[23] and *"Mother Earth, I Can Hear Your Voice"– Reflective Spirituality and New Pagan Movements in Postsecular Hungary*, and *Middle World* by Eszter Asszonyi (Photography MA, 2021)[24] are good examples.

The reason I propose Design Culture studies as a framework for investigation is that it offers an open and inclusive, interdisciplinary and actively developing discipline to appropriately investigate, analyse, and explain the contemporary importance of this heterogeneous field. Design Culture, which emerged as an academic and professional term around 2000, places "itself across the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,"[25] allows studies in contemporary societies by paying attention to the networks and relationships between the different domains of practice, production and everyday life. It "maintains a sharper emphasis on the deep understanding of design objects and their interrelationships with the multiple actors engaged in their shaping, functioning and reproduction,"[26] as in the definition provided by Guy Julier and Anders V. Munch. Using this contemporary methodology for research in Hungary might also result in more effectively catching up with the international scholarly dialogue and a better understanding of how important this subject is.

Due to my pragmatic attitude, as an expected research outcome, I also wished to help resolve the above-mentioned misunderstanding, support the (re)birth of dialogue among the actors in Hungary, as well as the Hungarian speaking communities in the neighbouring countries. I planned to aid the dialogue, reconstitute education in contemporary sacred art (within the education of art, art history as well as theology) by means of creating a program; and to support the representation of contemporary art related to religiosity and/or spiritual experience in church environments and the secular art world—by curating exhibitions, organising symposia or even establishing a framework to connect theory and practice, knowing and doing—in events or even a contemporary gallery or collection focusing on this field.

As already outlined, my research—thanks to the disciplinary focus of the Doctoral School of MOME—turned from a more traditional theoretical approach towards Design Culture studies. Accordingly, my vision for the field investigated—as a new solution—is applying the views of design, design studies, and design(erly ways of)[27] thinking, especially the radically novel approach thereof: using traditional research and artistic research toolkits and methodologies, providing, sharing and utilising an understanding that can bridge the views and concepts of

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[23] Boglárka Éva Zellei, *A vizualitás szerepe a vallásgyakorlatban és -kommunikációban / Egészen más*, Photography MA Diploma Thesis / Masterwork (Budapest: Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, 2017), http://diploma.mome.hu/2017/ma/zellei-boglarka-eva, 25.01.2022.

[24] Eszter Asszonyi, *"Földanya, hallom a hangod" – Reflexív spiritualitás és újpogány mozgalmak a posztszekuláris Magyarországon / Középső világ*, Photography MA Diploma Thesis / Masterwork (Budapest: Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, 2021), https://diploma.mome.hu/2021/ma/asszonyi-eszter, 25.01.2022.

[25] Guy Julier and Anders V. Munch, "Introducing Design Culture," in *Design Culture: Objects and Approaches*, eds. Guy Julier, Anders V. Munch, Mads Nygaard Folkmann, Hans-Christian Jensen and Niels Peter Skou (London–New York–Oxford–New Delhi–Sydney: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019), 1.

[26] Julier and Munch, "Introducing Design Culture," 1.

[27] The concept emerged in the late 1970s in association with the development of new approaches in design education. Nigel Cross first articulated it in his paper "Designerly Ways of Knowing" in 1982. Since then, the field of study has grown considerably, as both design education and design research have developed. See, Nigel Cross, "Designerly ways of knowing," D*esign Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, (October 1982): 221–227, https://larossa.co/cross_1982_designerlywaysofknowing.pdf. 21.01.2021. A revised version "Designerly Ways of Knowing: Design Discipline versus Design Science" was published in *Design Issues*, vol. 17, no. 3, (2001), 49–55, prepared for the Design+Research Symposium held at the Politecnico di Milano, Italy, May 2000.

different actors, cultures, disciplines, theological and congregational (ecumenic and even interfaith) explanations.

In my mid-term doctoral Complex Exam paper, I wrote that "I admit, I'm only at the beginning of the road. However, my interest, the need to share insights and turn them into action, remains unchanged."[28] This claim is still valid, though with the passing of the years within this research process, new horizons keep opening up. And it brings back the memory of a sentence I uttered as an introduction to the congregation on the occasion of my confirmation many years ago: I stand here with the complete certainty of the inaccessibility of completeness. In my understanding, this statement expresses the opposite of hopelessness: the hope of forever expanding horizons.

Accordingly, and to proceed, I have been—and am still—seeking cooperation with researchers investigating this field in similar or different ways, as well as progressive and complex thinking local and international institutions, actors, and artists. This work began with my doctoral studies, and has been going on since—in the form of establishing contacts, continuing correspondence, attending conferences, keeping lectures and courses, writing, translating and editing publications, as well as performing and participating in curatorial and other related projects.

[28] In original: "Belátom, csak az út elején járok. Az érdeklődésem, a meglátások megosztásának és cselekvéssé változatásának igénye azonban változatlan." Zoltán Körösvölgyi, *"Ott szükség van rá." Napjaink spirituális tapasztaláshoz köthető alkotásairól*, Complex Exam Study (Budapest: The Doctoral School of the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest, May 25, 2018), 34.

Eszter Asszonyi: Virgin Mary and the Tree—from the Middle World series (2021). Photograph.

With the notion of sacredness, we are more and more like St. Augustine with that of time: if they ask what it is, we don't know; if they don't, we do.

—Mátyás Varga[29]

[29] In original: "A szakralitás fogalmával egyre inkább úgy vagyunk, mint Szent Ágoston az idővel: ha kérdezik, nem tudjuk mi az, ha nem kérdezik, tudjuk." M. Varga, *Nyitott rítusok*, 41.

2. Key Terms

Cards Against Humanity, a party game invented in 2011, is as entertaining as it is provocative, and sometimes also annoying. One of its cards reads "Being knowledgable in a narrow domain that nobody understands or cares about." With a bit of sarcasm, it could have been created in relation to contemporary sacred art, the subject investigated in this dissertation. When uttering or writing down these three words together,30 one can expect at least two types of reactions, in my experience. Most of the time—as a popular, somehow difficult to grasp understanding among the non-scholarly audience—success is granted: people think of something difficult to define, but slightly interesting, something that reaches beyond the frameworks of practicing religiosity, yet, at the same time is spiritually affected, perhaps even religious, in a confessional sense. And of course also appealing, at least to speak about it: being proud of having attended such an exhibition, event or festival, reliably creates a positive reaction and recognition. In scholarly dialogue, however, (at least polite) interest is shown, though at the same time an instantly flaring debate about what we mean by the concepts of contemporary, sacred, and art—separately or especially together—is guaranteed. Therefore, it is worth clarifying exactly what concepts we can use to denote the things and phenomena belonging to the subject of this research.

2.1. The Contemporary

The concept of contemporary generally refers to the present (i.e., someone's contemporary), that arises in the present tense, in the present time of our lives. We can call the artists living in the present contemporary, the works created in the present contemporary works. (As best practice, in literary studies in Hungary, works written and published in the last thirty-five years; in fine arts, works of art from living artists.)

Yet, the aspect of chronological simultaneity implied in the expression 'present age' does not necessarily provide a sufficient definition. What can we do with works that are created in our days but do not fit into the context of the present and are not related to the age and environment of the origin? Using it as a collective term, the weakness of the definition of contemporary is that, based on the time of their creation, works and creators that are related to an already bygone art discourse can also be classified in this category.

This is why Arthur C. Danto suggests post-historical instead of contemporary,31 whereas the Iranian architects Abbas Gharib and Bahram Shirdel, following the idea of Primo Levi,

30 This combination is infrequently mentioned: Google Scholar offers 117 results. Search completed on 18.01.2022.

31 Arthur C. Danto, *After the end of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), xiii.

introduce the term *post-contemporary* ("Post-Contemporary" or "PoCo"),[32] a term also used by the late László Beke in Hungary. However, none of these are widespread.

In assessing the reasons for the popularity of contemporary as a category, Claire Bishop traces it back to the post-World War II American art-museum world when, in Alfred J. Barr's words, the "modern denoted aesthetic quality (the progressive, original, and challenging) compared to the safe, academic, and 'supine neutrality' of the contemporary, which simply meant work by living artists."[33] Bishop also points out that the designation 'contemporary' is fundamentally culture-dependent: it designates one thing in the Western world, another one in China (there: since the late 1970s), and yet something different in Africa (where it refers to the period since the end of the colonial era, which varies from country to country). With regard to contemporary as a denotation and categorisation, Bishop defines two striking approaches:

> *These discursive approaches seem to fall into one of two camps: either contemporaneity denotes stasis (i.e., it is a continuation of postmodernism's post-historical deadlock) or it reflects a break with postmodernism by asserting a plural and disjunctive relationship to temporality. The latter is of course more generative, as it allows us to move away from both the historicity of modernism, characterised by an abandonment of tradition and a forward propulsion towards the new, and the historicity of postmodernism, equated with a 'schizophrenic' collapse of past and future into an expanded present. Certainly, an assertion of multiple, overlapping temporalities can be seen in many works of art since the mid-1990s by artists from countries struggling to deal with a context of recent war and political upheaval, especially in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.*[34]

Today the international scholarly literature, mainly in English, typically uses the category of modern together with or separately from contemporary (i.e., contemporary and modern, or modern), which is not chronological, but rather attitude-determined: denoting progressive works that recognise the problems of the age, are open to its challenges, socially sensitive, action-

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[32] "PostContemporary (PoCo) means finally going beyond the adjective »contemporary« that has been voiced for more than three decades, because it has become completely empty.—We don't deny either the postmodern or the contemporary, since we, too, came out of it. In the same way, the post-socialist, post-communist live on. We could also say 'postcontemporary,' (utókortárs) but it sounds forced in Hungarian. The 'post' prefix means 'after something' and 'the last phase of something' at the same time. PostContemporary does not mean just art, but more generally a 'situation,' a 'system of conditions.'" In original: "A PostContemporary (PoCo) annyit jelent, hogy végre túl kell lépni a több mint három évtizede hangoztatott 'kortárs' jelzőn, mert az teljességgel üressé vált.—Nem tagadjuk sem a posztmodernet, sem a kortársat, hiszen mi is abból jöttünk ki. Ugyanígy a posztszocialista, posztkommunista is él tovább. Mondhatnánk 'utókortársat' is, de magyarul erőltetetten hangzik. A 'post' (poszt) prefix egyszerre jelent 'valami utáni'-t és 'valaminek az utolsó fázisá'-t. A PostContemporary nemcsak művészetet jelent, hanem általánosabban 'helyzet'-et, 'feltételrendszer'-t." Exhibition at Telep, Budapest, September 6–24, 2017. See, "PostContemporary," *artportal*, https://artportal.hu/program/postcontemporary/, 13.05.2021.

[33] Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology—or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: Koenig Books, 2013), 12.

[34] Bishop, *Radical Museology*, 19.

oriented, actionable, and capable of renewal. As Beat Wyss' related remark reads: "The ever-newness of great art is always parallel to the twists and turns of the worldview."[35]

Connecting to one's own age, of course, has the same validity not only in works appearing in a secular context, but also in works related to religiosity. As Varga puts it, "no religious belief can ignore the spiritual and cultural environment in which the believer or community lives."[36]

2.2. Sacred

In relation to the term *sacred*, we can encounter a similar problem in relation to art. By this term we can mean a wide range of works related to religion: from ecclesiastical art made for liturgical use, to art of biblical subjects or depicting saints, art made by artists who define themselves as religious, and to spiritual art seeking the invisible or intangible, the directly unexperienced. The turmoil is not new, but inherited: as Michael Stausberg denotes in his recent study, in the nineteenth century the concepts of *holy* and *sacred* occasionally appear interchangeably as markers of places, rites, documents, and only at the beginning of the twentieth century, does *sacred* (among others, with Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Roger Caillois), the *holy* (with Nathan Söderblom, Rudolf Otto) and the *numinous* (Otto) come to the fore as key concepts in the emerging disciplines of religious studies.[37]

It is important to distinguish between these different concepts of the *religious* (which are typically all translated uniformly in Hungarian as "vallásos," and can therefore be confusing), by distinguishing between *religiosity* (following a religious system by practicing faith) and *confessionality* (following a faith as a system of belief, even without religious practice). The definition of religiosity, even in major surveys such as censuses, can cause problems of interpretation[38] on the part of respondents, and can result in significant differences between those defining themselves as religious (or like in the latest census in Hungary, defined as 'belonging to a religious community') and the number of those registered by the churches as actual practitioners of religion.[39]

In my research I find the concept of the *numinous*, which Otto sought to connect with something much more concrete and tangible, exactly in order to avoid the chance of

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[35] In original: "A nagy művészet mindenkori újdonsága mindig párhuzamos a világszemlélet felismeréseinek fordulataival." Beat Wyss, "A láthatatlan ikonológiája: A modern titkos tanai," trans. J. A. Tillmann, *Pannonhalmi Szemle*, Vol XIII, No 2. (2005): 61. The opening of the same study, which is a translation of the introduction of Beat Wyss, ed., *Mythologie der Aufklärung: Geheimlehren der Moderne* (München: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 1993), is a radical judgement on the classic theory making of art history, claiming, "In addition to the demand of absolute modernity, art history is so far surpassed as yesterday's newspaper." In original: "Az abszolút modernség igénye mellett a művészettörténet olyannyira meghaladott, mint a tegnapi újság." Wyss, "A láthatatlan ikonológiája," 59.

[36] In original: "(…) semmiféle vallásos hit nem hagyhatja figyelmen kívül azt a szellemi és kulturális közeget, amelyben a hívő ember vagy közösség él (…)" M. Varga, *Nyitott rítusok*, 77.

[37] Michael Stausberg, "The sacred and the holy—from around 1917 to today," *Religion*, 47:4, 549–556, (2017): 549, DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2017.1377887.

[38] I.e., What is the definition of religion? What do we mean by it? What makes someone be considered as religious?

[39] Of course the latter definition is questionable, too. Is it enough for the classification of religious practitioners to be included in the list of church voters, to pay a church maintenance contribution, to donate, to offer 1% in a PIT declaration, to participate in ceremonies during major holidays, or not? (At the same time the use of such generalising terms is understandable in empirical research practice, since a questionnaire could not provide room to clarify the potential meaning[s], and in most cases especially prompt [top of the mind] answers are needed.)

misunderstanding. In his book *The Idea of the Holy*, first published in German in 1917,[40] Otto sought to connect to the religious experience. His idea was carried on in the second half of the twentieth century by Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*, first published in 1957, also in German.[41] Eliade described the experience of the sacred, as opposed to and in isolation from the profane, primarily in a relational sense, in connection with the revelation of the holy / the divinity (as *hierophania / theophania*), in relation to ritual orientation in homogeneous space, referring back to the state of world formation and the need to become contemporaries of the gods. Eliade described the myths related to them as a guide to help people navigate in a world full of messages.

In his 2017 paper,[42] Stausberg draws attention to Steven Engler and Mark Gardiner's research on discourse related to the sacred,[43] in which four approaches are proposed for the discussion of the sacred based on the meta-perspective of underlying theories of meaning: 1) the inexpressible through words, which describes the sacred as "beyond the reach of language;"[44] 2) the non-denial of the expressibility through words, but requiring a specific mode of communication (and special forms of experience), which is linked to, among others, Otto and Eliade's conceptual framework; 3) the "polarised sacred,"[45] which defines the sacred through its opposite, typically against the profane (this is tied to Durckheim and Caillois, among others); and 4) "the contextualised sacred," placing the sacred in "a more nuanced set of relations to a broader variety of other concepts."[46] In relation to Design Culture Studies, as well as the multiple-layered contemporary scholarly discourse, the latter seems appropriate.

Sándor Békési, a theologian with a background in animation design, attempts to clarify the notion of the sacred in relation to art by an entirely different approach in his 2017 study. He claims,

> *The terms "sacred," "ecclesiastical," "spiritual," and "profane" in works of art are often confused in everyday parlance. Works with biblical-religious subjects are called "sacred," "ecclesiastical," or "spiritual," and works with an ordinary-secular theme are called "profane," while the subject of the works is the least dominant in this respect. This also obscures the fact that, since Western culture and art was defined by the 2,000 years of Christianity, its specific iconography and symbol system appear in non-religious, so-called "profane" works. Moreover, often works with a completely*

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[40] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), originally published as *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau: Trewendt & Granier, 1917).

[41] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, trans. Williard R. Trask, (New York: Harcourt, 1959). Originally published as *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957).

[42] Stausberg, "The sacred and the holy—from around 1917 to today," 549–556.

[43] See: Steven Engler and Mark Q. Gardiner, "Semantics and the Sacred," *Religion* 47:4 (2017): 616–640. doi:10.1080/0048721X.2017.1362784.

[44] Engler and Gardiner, "Semantics and the Sacred," 620.

[45] Stausberg, "The sacred and the holy" 551.

[46] Engler and Gardiner, "Semantics and the Sacred," 629.

> *"profane" content sometimes lead the viewer to a "spiritual" elevation, while works placed or performed in sacred space sometimes lack this kind of spirituality.*[47]

Békési's definition of sacred art as "the priestly function of art" is argued for according to its "use in the sacred liturgy," spiritual art as "prophetic art" because of its "inspiration," as well as its character of imparting to both its maker and recipient "some form of purification (*catharsis*)," while profane art is "the art of the secularised man at the foot of the walls of the temple (…) by a mythical presentation of the surrounding world, distant from God or not yet addressed, which, when touched by God's self-revelation, appears to man as judgment," and that is, in his understanding, "the royal function of art—the struggle with the devil."[48]

Using other terms, in the first chapter ("The Words *Religion* and *Art"*) of his earlier mentioned book, Elkins clarifies what he understands by these terms. By the word "religion" he means "a named, noncultic, major system of belief,"[49] which "also means the trappings of such systems,"[50] therefore it is at the same time "public and social."[51] He distinguishes the notion of 'religion' from 'spirituality,' which in his understanding is "private, subjective, largely or wholly incommunicable, often wordless, and sometimes even uncognised."[52] Although in the English original such a differentiation of what is denoted under the term 'religious' is understandable, in Hungarian and for the present discourse the use of 'spiritual' (spirituális) seems also needed. A good parallel is that in today's medical, psychiatric and caregiver-mental hygiene discourse, the human being is defined—following the so-called BPSS model—as biological, psychological, social, and spiritual, i.e., as a bio–psycho–socio–spiritual being.[53]

2.3. Art

In clarifying the concept of art, Elkins takes a firm position:

> *Art is whatever is exhibited in galleries in major cities, bought by museums of contemporary art, shown in biennales and the Documenta, and written about in periodicals such as Artforum, October, Flash Art, Parkett, or Tema Celeste. That way of defining art is called the institutional definition, and it was invented to make it possible to write about conceptual art, performance art, and other new kinds of work*

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[47] In original: "A műalkotások 'szakrális,' 'egyházi,' 'spirituális' és 'profán' elnevezései a hétköznapi szóhasználatban gyakran összekeverednek. A bibliai-vallásos tárgyú alkotások 'szakrális,' 'egyházi' vagy 'spirituális,' a hétköznapi-világi témájú művek pedig 'profán' elnevezést kapnak, miközben a művek témája a legkevésbé meghatározó e tekintetben. Megnehezíti a tájékozódást az is, hogy noha a nyugati kultúrában a kétezer éves keresztyénség határozta meg a művészeteket, azonban sajátos ikonográfiája és szimbólumrendszere mindmáig vallástalan, úgynevezett 'profán' művekben is megjelenik. Sőt, sokszor teljesen 'profán' tartalmú alkotások olykor 'spirituális' emelkedettségbe vonják a szemlélőt, míg a szakrális térben elhelyezett vagy elhangzó művekből néha hiányzik ez a fajta lelkiség." Sándor Békési, "A művészet szakrális, spirituális és profán jelentése," *Confessio* vol. 2017, no. 4, 101–105, (2017): 101.

[48] Békési, "A művészet szakrális, spirituális és profán jelentése," 101–105.

[49] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 1.

[50] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 1.

[51] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 1.

[52] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 1.

[53] See: Mónika Andrejkovics, Éva Gasparik, Petra Bokor, Ede Frecska, "Az orvoslás és a pszichoterápia új paradigmája: a bio-pszicho-szocio-spirituális (BPSS) modell," *Pszichoterápia* vol. XXII (April 2013).

that did not fit previous definitions. I am adopting the institutional definition in order to avoid having to say what art should be about, or even what it has been about.[54]

His definition seems too exclusive for the present investigation, but at the same time it helps to narrow down and clarify the field discussed in his book. This definition is also related to Békési's in many ways, according to whom,

> *With the work of art leaving the service of the liturgy by breaking away from Byzantine orthodoxy in Western culture, especially during the Renaissance, and even more so by Zwingli and Calvin withdrawing images from the space of worship, sacred objects became desacralised, and at the same time became art.*[55]

Although there seems to be a consensus in Western culture on the existence of the phenomenon of religion and contemporary art moving away from each other, separating, and the latter secularising in different ways, we can encounter significantly different views on this process and its status, often marked with different concepts.

Art on the other hand is a complex concept. According to the definition of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, art means "1) something that is created with imagination and skill and that is beautiful or that expresses important ideas or feelings; 2) works created by artists: paintings, sculptures, etc., that are created to be beautiful or to express important ideas or feelings; 3) the methods and skills used for painting, sculpting, drawing, etc.," and in a broader definition "1) skill acquired by experience, study, or observation; 2) a branch of learning; 3) an occupation requiring knowledge or skill; 4) the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects; 5) a. a skilful plan, b. the quality or state of being artful; 6) decorative or illustrative elements in printed matter."[56]

This broader collection of definitions already refers to a far wider range of meanings. It is, according to the etymology of the term, derived from the "Middle English, [meaning] »craft, principles of a craft or a field of knowledge, one of the seven fields of study comprising the medieval school curriculum, practical knowledge, code of behaviour,« borrowed from Anglo-French & Latin; Anglo-French, »skill, craft, knowledge, deceit, sorcery,« borrowed from Latin *art-, ars* »acquired skill, craftsmanship, stratagem, behaviour (in plural *artēs*), systematic body of knowledge and techniques, profession, artistic achievement,«[57] in the latter sense closer to the understanding of art in design culture, where, though with a specific, distinctive nature, it is cosily situated within the inclusive world of design culture. This understanding radically differs from those of mostly romantic origin, where art, especially 'high' or 'fine' art refer to painting, sculpture, etc. "concerned primarily with the creation of beautiful objects."[58] The broader understanding signified by the terms skill, craft, knowledge, etc., is reinforced by the Greek term, *techne* (tékhnē), which refers to "the knowledge of how to do things and make things,"[59]

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[54] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 1–2.

[55] Békési, "A művészet szakrális, spirituális és profán jelentése," 103.

[56] See, *Merriam–Webster Dictionary*, online version, (Springfield, MA: Merriam–Webster Inc.), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/art, 16.01.2022.

[57] *Merriam–Webster Dictionary*.

[58] *Merriam–Webster Dictionary*, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fine%20art, 16.01.2022.

[59] See, *Oxford Reference*, online version, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803102804820?rskey=WDFo8M&result=2, 16.01.2022.

and could accordingly be a proper initial definition for design. Nevertheless, in this dissertation I focus on visual arts, sometimes also mentioning architecture, as well as works traditionally understood as design. Fields of art such as music, literature, film, etc., are mentioned less or omitted entirely due only to the need to preserve the focus and limits of this volume.

Ferenc Varga: Christ Pantocrator, Mary, Elijah and Angels (2018). Secco painting on wall.

Contemporary art, I think, is as far from organised religion as Western art has ever been, and that may even be its most singular achievement—or its cardinal failure, depending on your point of view.

—James Elkins[60]

[60] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 15.

3. Discourses

Achievement or failure: our position determines where and in which discourse we are in relative to the given issue. Do we see art in the art world as separate, disenchanted, and religious art as unmodern? Do we believe that there are works of art today that are sensitive to the events of our days, that reflect and act on it, and are related to spiritual experience? If not, is there anything else instead? And what would that be?

In the subject examined in this dissertation, not only the making of art, but also the scholarly and informative–educational discourse has enlivened: although it is far from easy and self-evident to cross the borders of the two worlds this way, we can at least declare that it is not impossible.

A series of critiques of secularisation and its effects in many disciplines provide a suitable basis for this: Theology, Theological Aesthetics, Religious Studies, Material Religion, Philosophy, Intellectual History, Sociology, Aesthetics, Art History, Art Theory, Cultural Anthropology, Museology, and even Design Studies. In the following, I review and structure the discourses of the mostly English-language literature, and provide a comparison to the discourse in Hungary.

3.1. Postsecularisation and Art

"Are we living in a post-secular world? That question has surged onto the academic agenda, marked by the increasing scholarly use of the notion of the 'post-secular'"—so opens a dialogue by Philip S. Gorski et al. in the first chapter of their comprehensive book, *The Post-Secular in Question.*[61] They continue with the agenda for research by adding:

> *The question of the post-secular poses two lines of inquiry: first, determinations about the state of religiosity in the world; second, understanding the new ways that social scientists, philosophers, historians, and scholars from across disciplines are and are not paying attention to religion.*[62]

The term "secularisation," which originally signified the legal act of a monk's or priest's return to the secular state, in Martin Luther's time already meant the privatisation of ecclesiastical estates, as required by the concept of the poor church. In modern religious studies, sociology of religion, and Christian theology, it denotes the exclusion or rather the process of the separation of the customs of religion and the church from the daily life of the entire society. The term can be traced back to the Latin *saeculum*, meaning the era and later the worldly, but in any case signifying temporary, as opposed to the timeless afterlife (*aeternum*). In the separation of the worldly and the otherworldly of Augustinian origin, one area or dimension of the cosmos

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[61] Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, "The Post-Secular in Question," in *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society,* eds. Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, 1–22. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), 1.

[62] Gorski et al., "The Post-Secular in Question," 2.

is sacred and the other is secular, between which the church and its sacraments mediate. According to the theory of secularisation, the separation of the two is reflected not only in the separation of the state and the church, but also in the distancing between religion and art.

It is worth noting that—since secularisation appeared in Western culture, in which Christianity is the dominant religion, the creator of culture, and the major commissioner of art,—it can be interpreted primarily in relation to the distancing between Christianity and art.[63]

A process in the opposite direction emerges from the *postsecularisation* theory popularised first by Jürgen Habermas. Accordingly, religious beliefs persist or resurrect/return after the beginning of postsecularisation or the end of secularisation. Habermas, in his study originally written for a university lecture in the Netherlands in 2007, writes about a "postsecular" society, in which he calls for a rethinking and revitalisation of the social discourse on secularisation: "So, if all is to go well both sides, each from its own viewpoint, must accept an interpretation of the relation between faith and knowledge that enables them to live together in a self-reflective manner."[64]

The topicality of the discourse on the relationship between postsecularisation and art is shown by the fact that Biola University organised their 12th Annual Biola Arts Symposium in 2017 under the title of *Art in a Postsecular Age*, where participants—including leading researchers of the field, such as James Elkins, Jeffrey Kosky, and Jonathan A. Anderson—examined the "return of religion" in their lectures and open-ended debates.[65]

Clayton Crockett writes of a "postsecularist turn,"[66] and claims that instead of a "return" this is rather a "deprivatisation" of religion, to use José Casanova's term.[67] As Crockett explains, "Religion abandons the mask of privacy and emerges on the political scene in non-liberal ways."[68] Crockett sees postsecularism as the breakdown of the separation between public and private religion, "but it also entails the end of religion as a modern concept because along with neoliberalism it points to the terminal crisis of modern liberalism."[69] Crockett also argues for the usefulness of the term "to help us see beyond the opposition of secular and religious, because they have never really been opposites.[70] They function together in modern liberalism, as I have shown, and we do not really have one without the other."[71]

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[63] This religion-based focus is supported by the notion of *proxemics* introduced int aesthetics by Katya Mandoki. (The concept was applied earlier in psychology, especially in environmental psychology.) According to this concept we are always closer to one certain religion—and consider certain values while ignoring others. See, Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007). In my case, in several respects, this is clearly the Abrahamic religions, especially Christianity and the Judeo-Christian culture.

[64] Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on a post-secular society," *signandsight.com,* 18.06.2008, http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html, 04.05.2018. The original German version is "Die Dialektik der Säkularisierung," *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* (4/2008): 33–46.

[65] The recordings of the lectures at the 12th Annual Biola Arts Symposium, *Art in a Postsecular Age* (2017), are available at http://ccca.biola.edu/resources/2017/mar/6/art-postsecular-age/. 13.05.2021.

[66] Clayton Crockett, "Neoliberalism, Postsecularism, and the End of Religion," *Religions* 12 (2021): 631, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080631.

[67] See, José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.)

[68] Crockett, "Neoliberalism, Postsecularism, and the End of Religion," 4/9.

[69] Crockett, "Neoliberalism, Postsecularism, and the End of Religion," 4/9.

[70] Clayton Crockett, "What is Postsecularism?" *American Book Review* vol. 39, no. 5, (July/August 2018): 6–14, DOI: 10.1353/abr.2018.0062.

[71] Crockett, "Neoliberalism, Postsecularism, and the End of Religion," 4/9.

There is a debate in the meaning of the concept of postsecularisation as understood by individual authors as to whether postsecular signifies a new social phenomenon or a new awareness of a pre-existing phenomenon. I see the question in a sense similar to the replacement of the modern by the postmodern or the survival of the modern by its renewal following the critique of the postmodern. What I see as an absolute virtue of Habermas is the inclusion of the issue in the discourse. I would especially appreciate if this discourse could spread from the wider socio-political arena to the sphere of art, and enable the discourse based on exclusive opinions and statements to be replaced by the possibility "that enables them to live together in a self-reflective manner," to quote the above lines from Habermas.

What we can do, is to introduce the debate into the scholarly dialogue on art (and design) in Hungary and the Hungarian-speaking community, and initiate an open discussion. An earlier attempt took place in a thematic issue of *Kalligram* (June 2011), where authors reflected upon Agata Bielik-Robson's essay "The Idea of Postsecularisation, or What Happens After the Death of God,"[72] including András Pályi, Béla Bacsó, Mihály Vajda, István Berszán, and Szilárd Borbély. As the list of these names suggests, the debate remained mostly in the field of philosophy, though Bacsó's "Postsecularisation and Art,"[73] as well as Berszán's "Postsecular Practice Research"[74] extended the scope of the discussion. Berszán's study is especially interesting from the point of this dissertation as an attempt to "draw the ethical lessons of such a functional, more specifically cultural-economic approach to cultural events, which involves a rhythm change in the practice of research."[75] He argues for the inseparability of culture and economics, and their complex relations with the practices, claiming, "It is not a question of choosing between practical orientation and economic study, but rather two different versions of practical orientation: one seeks to navigate through the economic systems of diversity, and the other through the diversity of events."[76] Yet, perhaps the most interesting for us and from the point of view of the importance of terminology, is Borbély's essay, "Enlightenment After Enlightenment,"[77] where he reminds us that

> *[L]anguages … disobey either rationality or the exile of mythology. Natural languages are indications that the human is not a rational being. Though they could drive out the king, and also God, still the language remained here, and kept resisting. It smuggled back the king and hid God. […] The world is in labour, and there are signs that a new*

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[72] Agata Bielik-Robson, "A posztszekularizáció eszméje, avagy mi következik az Isten halála után," *Kalligram,* trans. András Pályi, (June 2011): 69–71.

[73] Béla Bacsó, "Posztszekularizáció és művészet," *Kalligram* (June 2011): 77–81.

[74] István Berszán, "Posztszekuláris gyakorláskutatás," *Kalligram* (June 2011): 84–88.

[75] In original: "A továbbiakban – esettanulmányszerű kísérletképpen – a kulturális történések egy ilyen működéselvű, konkrétabban kultúra-gazdaságtani megközelítésének etikai tanulságait próbálom levonni, ami a kutatás gyakorlatának ritmusváltásával jár." Berszán, "Posztszekuláris gyakorláskutatás," 85.

[76] In original: "Nem arról van szó, hogy a gyakorlati tájékozódás és az ökonomikus vizsgálat közül kellene választani, hanem inkább a gyakorlati tájékozódás két eltérő változatáról: az egyik a sokféleség ökonomikus rendszerei révén igyekszik eligazodni, a másik a történések sokféleségében." Berszán, "Posztszekuláris gyakorláskutatás," 88.

[77] Szilárd Borbély, "A felvilágosodás a felvilágosodás után," *Kalligram* (June 2011): 89–92.

mythology is being born, which will again be narrated by language. […] Science will hardly help as it cannot. But the language of myth also knows the voice of hope."[78]

A decade later, a recent attempt is the thematic issue of *Helikon* ("Postsecularisation," 2020). It offers translations—including Jürgen Habermas' above-mentioned groundbreaking paper, as well as important studies by Samer Akkach, Laura Forlano, Tony Fry, Mike King, and Santiago Zabala,—and also studies by István Povedák, Ákos Schneider, Márton Szentpéteri, and József Tillmann. The editorial intention was to emphasise the relevance, timeliness, and importance of the concept from a wide perspective—from the basic concepts of postsecularisation, through posthumanist design, to the intricate issues of sacred design.[79]

Answering the initial question raised in this chapter, whether we live in a postsecular world, is far from being an easy task. As Adam Possamai warns in his book *The i-zation of Society, Religion, and Neoliberal Post-Secularism*, "One should also be aware of the difficulties of entering into such a post-secular dialogue,"[80] since "tolerance of otherness" and Habermas' "idea of religious and atheist groups living together in a self-reflective manner," though they seem attractive, are "hard to imagine."[81]

In reviewing the inequalities in present day *i-society*, Possamai finds that the society goes through "a process of 'i-zation,'"[82] and, accordingly, Habermas's post-secular project will occur, though "paradoxically, the religious message (or messages) is likely to be instrumentalised for capitalist purposes."[83]

"The past decades proved that in the age of 'theory after theory,'[84] the research of culture has resurrected in several forms"—so begins the editorial foreword to the Postsecularisation

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[78] In original: "A nyelvek (…) nem engedelmeskednek sem a racionalitásnak, sem a mitológia száműzésének. A természetes nyelvek lenyomatai annak, hogy az ember nem racionális lény. Elűzhették ugyan a királyt, szám űzhették az Istent is, a nyelv azonban itt maradt és folyamatosan ellenállt. Visszacsempészte a királyt, és bújtatta, rejtegette az Istent. (…) A világ vajúdik, és a jelek arra utalnak, hogy új mitológia születik, amelyet ismét a nyelv fog elbeszélni. (…) A tudomány aligha fog segíteni, mert nem tud. De a mítosz nyelve ismeri a remény hangját is." Borbély, "A felvilágosodás a felvilágosodás után," 94.

[79] See, *Helikon Irodalom- és Kultúratudományi Szemle* LXVI, no. 3 (2020), https://epa.oszk.hu/03500/03580/00019/pdf/, 13.05.2021.

[80] Adam Possamai, *The i-zation of Society, Religion, and Neoliberal Post-Secularism* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 154.

[81] Possamai, *The i-zation,* 154.

[82] "I-zation" in Possamai's understanding refers to the fourth stage of capitalism "sited in the digital space of 'deterritorialized' capitalism" whereas with "the help of new i-technologies, this penetration of rational bureaucracy has filtered even further, from the streets to our everyday lives and to our personal biographies." Possamai argues "that our present society is going through a process of 'i-zation' in which (1) capitalism dominates not only our outer, social lives (through, for example, global capitalism) but also our inner, personal lives, through its expansion in the digital world, facilitated by various i-technology applications; (2) the McDonaldization process has now been normalized; and (3) religiosity has been standardized." Possamai, *The i-zation*, v.

[83] Possamai, *The i-zation,* vi.

[84] The idea of 'theory after theory' sprouted from Terry Eagleton's book, *After Theory* (New York: Penguin, 2004), in which he argues that the age of "high" theory has come to a close—and looks at what ought to follow. The expression as a whole appeared first as an investigation of the developments in literary theory after 1950. See, Nicholas Birns, *Theory After Theory: An Intellectual History of Literary Theory From 1950 to the Early 21st Century* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2010). A year later a comprehensive book followed, arguing that theory, far from being dead, has undergone major shifts in order to come to terms with the most urgent cultural and political questions of today. Offering an overview of theory's new directions, it included essays on affect, biopolitics, biophilosophy, the aesthetic, and neoliberalism, as well as examinations of established areas such as subaltern studies, the postcolonial, and ethics. This volume examines influential figures such as Agamben, Badiou, Arendt, Deleuze, Derrida and Meillassoux in a range of contexts, not only speculating on the fate of theory but showing its current diversity. See, Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge, eds., *Theory After 'Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).

thematic issue of the journal *Helikon*,[85] which reflects the above opinion and also points towards our subject of connecting theoretical issues with art by claiming that "The up-to-date representation of the philosophical humanism of the Enlightenment is resurgent, together with art, which has often been proclaimed dead; always open to the transcendent, and sensitive to real problems."[86]

I share the view of my doctoral supervisor, and co-editor of this thematic issue,[87] Márton Szentpéteri, that postsecularisation offers a view and a method with a range of theories which can lead us to a set of fresh, valid explanations and understandings of the current chaos of our thinking and that is apparent also in the phenomena of our world, and, at the same time, support art—to quote Santiago Zabala's 2017 book—as the sole instrument that can save us.

The critiques of secularisation—as is also obvious from the above quoted—are not merely a contemporary phenomenon. Milbank, Ward and Pickstock pointed out the eighteenth century roots of secularism and secular modernity,[88] and John R. Betz directs our attention to the late Enlightenment-period Johann Georg Hamann and his "post-secular vision," saying

> *Though ultimately of a piece, tracing back to his conversion in London, we may roughly divide this vision into its metacritical-deconstructive and positive-constructive aspects—the former being essentially philosophical, the latter essentially theological in character. With regard to the first aspect, Hamann's 'penetrating genius' (in Hegel's words) helps us to see past the veneer of the Enlightenment as a self-sustaining system of thought to its fallacious assumptions and unintended consequences — ultimately, to the black hole that he saw lurking behind its attempts to base everything from art and religion to morality and politics upon a secular foundation of "reason alone." In this respect Hamann figures as a prophet, having foreseen that the Enlightenment, having stripped away the supports of faith and tradition, standing upon nothing but a highly suspect doctrine of reason, would end in nihilism—understood here, firstly, as the absence of all theoretical foundations and, in due course, as the absence of all moral foundations. In short, Hamann foresaw where modernity would end and postmodernity would begin.*[89]

If—together with other early critiques of the Enlightenment and Secularisation—Hamann can be seen as a prophet foreseeing these dangers, as Betz claims, then the evangelist of postsecularisation would be Habermas. His theory calls for reconsidering the sociological debate on secularisation as a consequence of the connections of global changes and religious issues, which "give us reason to doubt whether the relevance of religion has waned." The "anthropocentric understanding of the 'disenchanted' world," he writes, creates the dichotomy that the "scientifically enlightened mind cannot be easily reconciled with theocentric and metaphysical world views." Habermas highlights the importance of the "shared basis of mutual

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[85] The Editorial Board, "Postsecularisation," *Helikon Irodalom- és Kultúratudományi Szemle* LXVI, no. 3 (2020): 314.

[86] The Editorial Board, "Postsecularisation," 314.

[87] The *Postsecularisation* issue of *Helikon Irodalom- és Kultúratudományi Szemle* LXVI, no. 3 (2020) was co-edited by Dr. Márton Szentpéteri and Zoltán Körösvölgyi.

[88] Milbank et al., *Radical Orthodoxy.*

[89] John R. Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann* (Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell, 2009), 312.

recognition" and tolerance in participatory culture, as well as the view of shared and equal citizenship with self-reflective experience, and expresses his hope that "If all is to go well both sides, each from its own viewpoint, must accept an interpretation of the relation between faith and knowledge that enables them to live together in a self-reflective manner."[90]

The question that remains for our investigation is how that theory would connect to art. An answer is provided by Mike King, who published the study "Art and the Postsecular"[91] in 2005, and the book *Postsecularism: The Hidden Challenge to Extremism*[92] in 2009. In his study, King "introduces the notion of 'postsecular' as a way of negotiating the work of contemporary and twentieth century artists whose work has a spiritual content or context." King warns of a "certain poverty of critical language" when addressing works of art related to "the word 'spiritual' (and what it may denote)." In his view the "lost language of the interior" should be reclaimed to fill the vacuum left by the abandonment of the spiritual as a language of interiority, as "the notion of spiritual became suspect after the Enlightenment." King proposes the introduction of the term "postsecular" into the discourse on contemporary art, as

> *One should be cautious in advocating yet another 'post' in our vocabulary, but the term 'postsecular' seems to capture something in the zeitgeist not reached by other terms. It can be simply defined as a renewed openness to the spiritual, though one is obliged to immediately acknowledge the problematics of that word, particularly in the context of contemporary fine art.*[93]

King reminds us that the visual arts in the twentieth century demonstrated this ambivalence of "on the one hand rejecting the perceived authoritarianism of mainstream religion, while retaining an interest in the spiritual."[94]

Zabala takes an even more radical perspective in his 2017 book *Why Only Art Can Save Us*.[95] He advances a new aesthetics centered on the nature of the emergency that characterises the twenty-first century. Zabala paraphrases Martin Heidegger's famous quote that "Only a God can save us" (Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten),[96] and draws on Heidegger's distinction between works of art that rescue us from emergency (in terms of cultural politics, as conservers of the status quo that conceal emergencies) and those that are rescuers into emergency (as disruptive events that thrust us into emergencies). Building on theories by Arthur Danto, Jacques Rancière, and Gianni Vattimo, whose writings expressed a more responsive approach to contemporary art on the part of aesthetics, Zabala argues that works of art are not simply a means of elevating consumerism or contemplating beauty, but are points of departure towards changing the world. Zabala justifies his interest by openly confessing that "When philosophers turn to art today it

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[90] All quotes are from Habermas, "Notes on a post-secular society."

[91] Mike King, "Art and the Postsecular," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 4:1 (2005): 3–17. DOI: 10.1386/jvap.4.1.3/1.

[92] Mike King, *Postsecularism: The Hidden Challenge to Extremism* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2009).

[93] King, "Art and the Postsecular."

[94] All quotes in the above paragraphs are from King, "Art and the Postsecular."

[95] Santiago Zabala, *Why Only Art Can Save Us* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

[96] Heidegger's claim refers to an interview given by him to Rudolf Augstein and Georg Wolff for *Der Spiegel* magazine on September 23, 1966, as well as in 1976: "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel* 30 (Mai, 1976): 193–219. An English translation by W. Richardson is available at http://www.ditext.com/heidegger/interview.html. 22.01.2021.

seems to be because they have lost hope in politics, religion, and philosophy."[97] His emergency aesthetics, similarly to the idea of the postsecular, reflects a direct return. As he writes,

> *Even though art, just like religion and politics (and even history), has been declared dead several times, it always returns with a vengeance—and with a demand. This is why the main goal of aesthetics today, as Michael Kelly points out, 'is to explain how the transformation of demands on art to demands by art is already a reality in some contemporary art.' Turning to these demands means that philosophers continue to search for a realm where Being emerges, that is, where our existential condition is disclosed.*[98]

3.2. From Secularisation Theory to the Pluralism of Modernity

It is impossible to speak about postsecularisation without mentioning the secular discourse, which it reflected upon. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary,* secular as an adjective means, among other things, "1. a) of or relating to the worldly or temporal, b) not overtly or specifically religious, c) not ecclesiastical or clerical; 2. not bound by monastic vows or rules."[99] In everyday use, secular means being 'without religion,' and secularisation refers to the (process or result of) separation of the state and the church, which started to take place in the Western world as a result of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and modernity. Yet, it is interesting to highlight that secularisation is dominantly present in the Global North, while in the Global South the number of people engaged with religions is on the rise, both in terms of Islam and even more so in charismatic Christianity (Pentecostalism in Africa, South America, South–East Asia) and Evangelical Protestant Christianity (in the USA).[100]

Secularism, promoted by secularists, refers to the belief that religion should be a private, personal, voluntary affair that does not impose upon other people. Secularisation theory has long been with us. As Anthony Giddens points out:

> *Sociological approaches to religion are still strongly influenced by the ideas of the three classical sociological theorists: Marx, Durkheim and Weber. None of the three was religious, and all thought that the significance of traditional religions would decrease in modern times. The advocates of different faiths may be wholly persuaded of the validity of the beliefs they hold and the rituals in which they participate, yet the*

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[97] Santiago Zabala, "Turning to Art's Demands," *e_flux* 1 June 2017, https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/santiago-zabala-on-emergency-aesthetics-and-the-demands-of-art/6688, 15.12.2019.

[98] Zabala, "Turning to Art's Demands."

[99] *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secular, 22.01.2021.

[100] Two remarks: 1) There is no doubt that the decrease of the domination and defining role of Christianity as organised religion in the world and culture dominated by the West is foreseeable: a return to the status of early Christianity, a "catacombs" or "underground" Christianity seems inevitable in the near future. 2) The above-mentioned rise in religiosity must be clearly separated from political religiosity, which, as a self-interested political and economical establishment—open to the use of religiosity as an instrument of branding or ideology shaping—is also increasingly apparent in both the Islamic and the Christian world, and could change their association with the major, traditional religions to any such new movements, like any forms of Neo-Paganism, or other "unorthodox" interpretations of established religions. István Povedák discusses such movements in "Újnacionalizmus és nemzetvallás," *Helikon* LXVI, no. 3 (2020): 354–363.

> *very diversity of religions and their obvious connection to different types of society, the three thinkers held, make these claims inherently implausible.*[101]

Like most sociologists of religion of his day, Peter L. Berger in the 1970s still proclaimed the all-encompassing secularisation of the world,[102] and became an engaged supporter of secularisation theory. By the 1990s, however, Berger admitted his own miscalculations about secularisation, saying that secularisation theory has been "falsified,"[103] and even started to speak of the *desecularisation* of the world.[104] Berger proposes 'pluralism' as the key word to understand the call of modernity:

> *The mistake, I think, can be described as a confusion of categories: Modernity is not necessarily secularising; it is necessarily pluralising. Modernity is characterised by an increasing plurality, within the same society, of different beliefs, values, and worldviews. Plurality does indeed pose a challenge to all religious traditions—each one must cope with the fact that there are 'all these others,' not just in a faraway country but right next door.*[105]

In other words, Berger concludes, "Modernity is not characterised by the absence of God but by the presence of many gods."[106] Berger goes on, adding a further remark which is not strictly related to the subject of this dissertation, but might as well be directly related to my country of origin, saying that there are two exceptions "to this picture of a furiously religious world":

> *One is geographical: Western and Central Europe. The causes and present shape of what one may call Eurosecularity constitute one of the most interesting problems in the sociology of contemporary religion. The other exception is perhaps even more relevant to the question of secularisation, for it is constituted by an international cultural elite, essentially a globalisation of the Enlightened intelligentsia of Europe. It is everywhere a minority of the population— but a very influential one.*[107]

This is strongly in line with David Morgan's claim that "scholars occupy a very small part of the world" and that the world thought as drained of enchantment was in fact never empty, it was only "the lens of scholars that saw secularisation everywhere in spite of the fact that enchantment is always happening."[108] Nevertheless, Gorski et al—partly in agreement with

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[101] Anthony Giddens, *Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 681.

[102] Peter L. Berger, *The heretical imperative: contemporary possibilities of religious affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979).

[103] Peter L. Berger, "Secularism in retreat," *The National Interest* 46 (Winter 1996): 3, https://csrs.nd.edu/assets/50014/secularism_in_retreat.html, 22.01.2021.

[104] Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[105] Peter L. Berger, "Secularisation Falsified," *First Things* (February 2008), https://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/02/secularization-falsified. 18.07.2019.

[106] Berger, "Secularisation Falsified."

[107] Berger, "Secularisation Falsified."

[108] David Morgan, "Recognizing Jesus: Visuality and the Study of Religion," Lecture at the Innovative Methods in the Study of Religion Conference, London, March 2010. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324091388_Recognizing_Jesus_Visuality_and_the_Study_of_Religion, 13.05.2021.

Morgan's claim—propose to keep the gate wide open by saying, "The question is: Which world has changed—the 'real' one or the scholarly one? To some degree … the answer is 'both.'"[109]

3.3. From Disenchantment to Re-Enchantment

When discussing the magical and art, one cannot avoid the discourse of *disenchantment* and *re-enchantment*. Disenchantment is a term attributed to Max Weber, who borrowed the concept of the "de-divinising of the world" from Friedrich Schiller,[110] in his 1918 lecture, *Science as a Vocation:*

> *The increasing intellectualisation and rationalisation does not mean an increasing general knowledge of the living conditions under which one stands. Rather, it means something else: the knowledge of it or the belief in it: that one could experience it at any time, if one only wanted, that there are in principle no mysterious, unpredictable powers that play into it, that all things—in principle—can be mastered by calculating. But that means: the disenchantment of the world. Unlike the savage, for whom such powers existed, one no longer has to resort to magical means of control or to make requests of the spirits. But technical means and calculation does that. This, above all, means intellectualisation as such.*[111]

In a recent publication, Jason Crawford gives an account of the history and the "ideological baggage" of the language of enchantment and disenchantment.[112] Crawford points out that this "unmagicking of the world" was rendered by Weber's first English translators as "the elimination of magic from the world," and disenchantment is an extension of this concept, since "to read modernity as disenchantment is to activate the narrative of loss latent in the English usage of this word. If enchantment is dreaming or innocence, disenchantment is waking up or growing up," it is "also unsurprising that *the re-enchantment of the world* has become an icon of the postmodern, framed by narratives of loss and recovery."[113]

Crawford argues that the reason for the use of the term enchantment has its roots in early Protestantism (with reference to Roman Catholicism, referred to as the "Roman enchanter" by early modern Protestant writers) whereas recent authors who use the term "speak of re-enchantment less prescriptively and more descriptively, as something already happening on a

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[109] Gorski et al., "The Post-Secular in Question," 2.

[110] Schiller writes the words "Godless nature" (Die entgötterte Natur) in his 1788 poem *Gods of Greece* (Die Götter Griechenlands).

[111] Weber's "Wissenschaft als Beruf" lecture was presented at the University of Munich in 1918. It was first published in 1919 at Dunker & Humbolt in Munich. The above cited text in original: "Die zunehmende Intellektualisierung und Rationalisierung bedeutet also *nicht* eine zunehmende allgemeine Kenntnis der Lebensbedingungen, unter denen man steht. Sondern sie bedeutet etwas anderes: das Wissen davon oder den Glauben daran: daß man, wenn man nur wollte, es jederzeit erfahren könnte, daß es also prinzipiell keine geheimnisvollen unberechenbaren Mächte gebe, die da hineinspielen, daß man vielmehr alle Dinge – im Prinzip – durch Berechnen beherrschen könne. Das aber bedeutet: die Entzauberung der Welt. Nicht mehr, wie der Wilde, für den es solche Mächte gab, muss man zu magischen Mitteln greifen, um die Geister zu beherrschen oder zu erbitten. Sondern technische Mittel und Berechnung leisten das. Dies vor allem bedeutet die Intellektualisierung als solche." Max Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," 1919, in Max Weber, *Schriften 1894–1922,* ed. Dirk Kaesler (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2002), 488. Source: https://www.molnut.uni-kiel.de/pdfs/neues/2017/Max_Weber.pdf. 20.01.2021.

[112] Jason Crawford, "The Trouble with Re-Enchantment," *Los Angeles Review of Books* (September 6, 2020), https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-trouble-with-re-enchantment/, 16.01.2022. Thanks to Sára Tóth for calling my attention to this text.

[113] Crawford, "The Trouble with Re-Enchantment"

large scale in the world of late modernity" to name "the tendency of rationalised late-capitalist economies to manufacture their own forms of sacramental, charismatic, and magical experience."[114] Crawford's examples are apt picks from the postmodern gallery of design culture, including "new kinds of artificially flavoured experiences: biblical theme parks, Exorcist movie franchises, apocalyptic metal bands, megachurches as sites of communion via consumption."[115] Against Iago exemplifying "a Weberian ethic of self-discipline and managerial rationality," he claims, re-enchantment thus gives us "The Holy Land Experience." Such thinking might reflect that "modernity has always constituted itself around its enchanted others," and "prompt us to ask how disenchanted we really are." Crawford attempts to resolve the question by bringing Shakespeare's Prospero, the arch-magician and old enchanter at the cusp of a new age, as an example, who "frames his renunciation of enchantment not as an elimination of spiritual power but rather as a conversion of spiritual power into new forms."[116] This is in harmony with how Silvia Arca sees the situation in her 2019 MA thesis Spirituality and Contemporary Art, saying that "behind the idea of modern 'disenchantment' the search for transcendence never really disappeared from art but it uncovers under different forms."[117]

The history of the theory of disenchantment, a world deprived of all forms of magic and myth as mentioned and detailed earlier, which begins with Weber,[118] together with the notion of enchantment which served as the basis for disenchantment, as well as the counter-theory of re-enchantment, can all three be strongly related to the issues of secularisation, *desecularisation*, and *resecularisation*.

Rhyming with the concept of postsecularisation, the concept of *re-enchantment* has also appeared in several authors' works recently,[119] including ones connecting it to the field of art. A comprehensive example is *Re-Enchantment* edited by James Elkins and David Morgan, and published as Volume 7 in The Art Seminar series in 2009.[120] In his opening study of the volume, Morgan traces the elimination of magic from the world back to the prophets "who denounced »idols« as no more than blocks of wood and stone."[121] In *Re-Enchantment,* the work to link the concept with art is the mission of the editors, Elkins and Morgan, which they summarise as

> *The near-absence of religion from contemporary discourse on art is one of the most fundamental issues in postmodernism. Artists critical of religion can find voices in the art world, but religion itself, including spirituality, is taken to be excluded by the very project of modernism. The sublime, 're-enchantment' (as in Weber), and the aura (as in Benjamin) have been used to smuggle religious concepts back into academic*

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[114] Crawford, "The Trouble with Re-Enchantment."

[115] Crawford, "The Trouble with Re-Enchantment."

[116] Crawford, "The Trouble with Re-Enchantment."

[117] Silvia Arca, *Spirituality and Contemporary Art*, Thesis (Department of Art History, Curating and Visual Studies, The University of Birmingham, 2019).

[118] Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf."

[119] See, Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[120] James Elkins and David Morgan, eds., *Re-Enchantment* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009).

[121] David Morgan, "Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-Enchantment," in *Re-Enchantment,* Eds. James Elkins and David Morgan, (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

> *writing, but there is still no direct communication between 'religionists' and scholars.*[122]

Morgan's opening study "Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-Enchantment"[123] gives a highly detailed, balanced, and encompassing clarification of the phenomenon. Morgan not only recalls the history of removing magic (i.e., spirits, gods) out of objects, and thus creating a new type of aesthetics (*theophany* recalled in recited and written words), but also points to the later Romantic event of the sacralisation of art, the turning of artists into prophets. Morgan reminds us that in connection with art Suzi Gablik used the term in her 1991 book, *The Re-Enchantment of Art.*[124] He quotes Gablik, who expressed an interest—instead of traditional religion—in the work of contemporary artists in New York in 1991, declaring that

> *Re-enchantment, as I understand it, means stepping beyond the modern traditions of mechanism, positivism, empiricism, rationalism, materialism, secularism, and scientism—the whole objectifying consciousness of the Enlightenment—in a way that allows for a return of soul.*[125]

Morgan makes it clear that he sees Gablik's work as a gate-opener in terms of pointing out the broadly shared belief that "Art is a spiritual good, that it contributes importantly to the life of a society, to the enduring realm of values that ought to matter to everyone, even though most people won't be able to agree on many of what those values are."[126]

He reminds us again of the dichotomy that exists between scholarly discourse and the everyday. I see this as a point of outstanding importance, as it highlights "the responsibility of the literate" in shaping the common sense and understanding. Also, it justifies my choice of deviating from the classic approaches of research, and turning to the use of the wider, more open and inclusive approach of Design Culture studies:

> *Whatever else it may be, if we grant that enchantment is a human way of knowing, we should not be surprised at the desire among artists and large numbers of the public to make and appreciate art that involves spiritual meaning. What is perhaps more surprising is that many art critics, art school professors, and art historians should express contempt for art that intends to do so and viewers that welcome it. In the quest to control the profession, they exert a disenchanting influence, limiting art and its interpretation to their expertise.*[127]

In *Arts of Wonder,* Jeffrey Kosky speaks of 'Enchanting Secularity'[128] already in the subtitle, and takes the question further by asking: "Can the spell of modern disenchantment be

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[122] Elkins and Morgan, *Re-Enchantment,* n.p.

[123] Morgan, "Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-Enchantment," 3–23.

[124] Suzi Gablík, *The Re-Enchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991).

[125] Gablik, *The Re-Enchantment of Art*, 11.

[126] Morgan, "Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-Enchantment," 17.

[127] Morgan, "Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-Enchantment," 17.

[128] Jeffrey Kosky, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity: Walter de Maria, Diller + Scofidio, James Turrell, Andy Goldsworthy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

broken?"[129] His answer claims that religion and art have equally important roles in understanding our world:

> *One need not look only to traditional religion or religious traditions for refuge from the vicissitudes of human being in the world set up by modern disenchantment. A "secular" response to these challenges can also be cultivated, without fleeing the modern condition. But, having been trained in theology, I understand, too, that it is the task of religion, as much as of art, to help us creatively affirm our worlds (or not).*[130]

The issue of the disenchantment and re-enchantment debate received an unexpected and exciting impetus with Morgan's article published in 2017. Morgan recounts his personal experience of being invited to the Åland Islands in 2009 (the same year that *Re-Enchantment* was published) to give a lecture on two popular American artists whose families originated from there. One of them is Warner Sallman (1892–1968), whose work, *Head of Christ* (1940), Morgan claims to have been the most reproduced image if Christ. Morgan reports that the day after the official program, he saw a reproduction of the image by Sallman in a local souvenir shop, and the shopkeeper lady told him that she had personally seen Jesus quite a few times, looking exactly as in the portrait by Sallman, though dressed in different colours. Morgan summarises his experience by claiming:

> *The study of religion, especially the material aspects of lived religion, shows that the world we recently thought drained of enchantment was in fact never empty. It was the lens of scholars that saw secularisation everywhere in spite of the fact that enchantment is always happening. Whether it is mystical visions of Jesus or imaginative fabrications of nationhood, people, heritage, or folk, some human beings see things that other people do not. Visual culture is one of the powerful ways in which enchantment takes place.*[131]

Morgan's turn from re-enchantment to the recognition of magic that has always been present, confirms my idea that it is worth discussing works through spiritual experience. This idea, however, is not new. Graham Howes argues in his 2007 book *The Art of the Sacred* that instead of contrasting theology and art, they should be connected and attached to expression based on experience:

> *'Theology'—and especially Christian theology—and 'the arts'—and especially the visual arts—are not two discrete entities. They can be seen rather as twin media by which the world is interpreted and represented. Both are ways of perceiving and articulating memory, aspiration, community, celebration, loss, and a heightened sense of the natural order. Both can enhance our existing perceptions, and generate fresh experiences for us.*[132]

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[129] Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, xii.

[130] Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, xii.

[131] David Morgan, "Recognizing Jesus."

[132] Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred—An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and Belief* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 146.

Based on data from a survey of visitors at the exhibition *Seeing Salvation* at the National Gallery in 2000, which recorded the experience of visitors with exceptional thoroughness, Howes draws the conclusion:

> *One is that, on the evidence of this case study at least, it is clear that in an overwhelmingly secular age (in which the sheer plausibility of religious perceptions of reality seems to be weakening among large numbers of people) it is still possible to pick up signals of transcendence—to gain a glimpse of the grace that is to be found in, with and beneath the empirical reality of our lives. The other is, more prosaically, that in a predominantly post-Christian culture like our own, it seems that the relationship between religion and the visual arts, and especially between aesthetic and religious experience, is not necessarily as tenuous or problematic as it is so often presumed to be.*[133]

In light of the above, viewed through this particular optics, it is perhaps better understood when I write that I am researching the works of art of today that can be linked to religious and spiritual experience. I try to supplement all this—by re-framing Heidegger's "paths, not works" expression[134]—in addition to the objective and material aspects of the works, by interpreting them in the complexity and process-like nature of the examined objects and systems of Design Culture studies. Citing Julier's definition:

> *Scholars of design research and design studies have moved toward the structuring of a systematic approach to understanding the dynamics and effects of material and immaterial relationships that are articulated by and through the multiple artefacts of design culture.*[135]

3.4. The Everyday and the Lived

Following the path of paying attention to the non-scholarly as marked by Gorski et al. and Morgan, as well as the multiple artefacts of design culture as pointed out by Julier, we can turn our attention to the discourse on religiosity in the everyday, vernacular conception and practice. In doing so, researchers in the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, Aesthetics, Religious Studies, and Theology, as well as their multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary formations, offer possible approaches.

As Peter L. Berger assumes in the "Foreword" to the anthology *Everyday Religion,* edited by Nancy T. Ammerman,[136] although diverse religious institutions play an important role in society, nevertheless "much of religious life takes place outside these institutional locales."[137] To justify the relevance of starting this discourse from the everyday, Ammerman claims, is "to privilege

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[133] Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 58.

[134] "'Paths—not works'—that is what Heidegger put at the front of the complete edition of his writings and lectures as the motto." ("'Wege—nicht Werke'—das hat Heidegger der Gesamtausgabe seiner Schriften und Vorlesungen als Motto vorangestellt.") Introduction of Heidegger Lesebuch, Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, website, https://www.klostermann.de/Heidegger-Lesebuch, 13.05.2021.

[135] Guy Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture," *Design Issues* (22) 1 (Winter 2006): 73.

[136] Nancy T. Ammerman, ed., *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[137] Peter L. Berger, "Foreword," in Ammerman, *Everyday Religion*, v.

the experience of nonexperts, the people who do not make a living being religious or thinking and writing about religious ideas."[138] Such an approach draws attention to the plural voices that Berger emphasised, the acknowledgement of "religiosities" in plural, which could then result in unpredictable discoveries.

While Ammerman and her colleagues approach the subject from the field of Sociology, a similar aim leads Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec in compiling an anthology in the anthropology of everyday religion. In *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes* they claim,

> *A key issue for the anthropological study of religion—especially of large world religions with long-lasting textual and institutional traditions—has been how to account for the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine.*[139]

In their view, such an attitude requires choosing a novel starting point and a complex approach, since "a religious life is inseparable from the wider course of life."[140] Their approach differs from Ammerman's, in that "everyday practice is not a matter of a social setting or a group of people, but a modality of action."[141] They lean on Michel de Certau's approach, who claims that pathways for further research "will be achieved if everyday practices, 'ways of operating' or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity."[142]

Robert A. Orsi in the "Afterword"[143] of the same volume reminds the reader that the concept of modern religion covers at least three things: 1) the subject of academic inquiry; 2) a normative discourse about religion and the self; and 3) lived practices since the eighteenth century. Orsi addresses the challenge posed by the persistence of everyday religiosities to modernist visions of world. He argues that in order to understand the "fundamentalist" movements across the world, one should take seriously the enchantment of the world beyond the binaries that so often characterise academic thinking about religion. "'Everyday religion,' he adds, "as the category is introduced and developed in this collection, offers … a theoretical framework for thinking through these issues with new insight."[144]

The focus on the everyday—together with religion—has also appeared in aesthetics: the 2005 anthology *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*,[145] as well as Katya Mandoki's *Everyday*

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[138] Ammerman, *Everyday Religion*, 5.

[139] Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec, "Introduction," 1–16, in Schielke and Debevec, *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes*, 1.

[140] Schielke and Debevec, "Introduction," 8.

[141] "Focussing on the everyday, we do not aim to make a distinction between experts and laymen, or between institutional and non-institutional forms of religion. In contrast to Nancy Ammerman who argues that 'everyday implies the activity that happens outside organised religious events and institutions' (Ammerman, *Everyday Religion*, 5), we argue that everyday practice is not a matter of a social setting or a group of people, but a modality of action." Schielke and Debevec, "Introduction," 8.

[142] Michel de Certau, "General Introduction," *The practice of everyday life*, trans. Steven Rendall, xi–xxiv, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), xi.

[143] Orsi, "Afterword," in Schielke and Debevec, *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes,* 146–161.

[144] Orsi, "Afterword," in Schielke and Debevec, *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes,* 159.

[145] Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, eds., *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

Aesthetics,[146] and Yuriko Saito's *Everyday Aesthetics*[147] (the latter two both published in 2007), all discuss this idea, and Wolfgan Welsch also argues for the need to extend the understanding of aesthetics beyond art in his study "Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics"[148].

While Saito confines mention of religion to the 'spiritual' (as spiritual enlightenment, spiritual foundations, spiritual training, and spiritual point of view), Mandoki's concept of 'proxemics'[149] as a modality I found a helpful tool in research, allowing the researcher to confess being closer to a certain field, language, religion, culture, its values, and thus feel it more approachable in research, as well as justify her/his choice. Since the aesthetic exploration of religions is lacking, Mandoki proposes the "religion matrix," to appropriately discuss works of art. She claims

> *Art history has been the closest to this endeavour, but unfortunately it has abstracted aesthetic manifestations from their matricial context attending only to its objects as 'works of art.' Art historians observe religion items as stylistic, iconographic, and formal objects from syntactic and semantic perspectives, particularly iconographic, ignoring the pragmatic facet that is primordial for understanding the very origin of their production and cultural function. Without the particular assemblage of aesthetic practices, the meaning of religion would disappear since the values, duties and objects of reverence in each doctrine require all registers and modalities to seem legitimate, be sensibly concretised, and acquire subjective adherence.*[150]

This novel approach rhymes aptly with other new approaches in aesthetics, as well as with the inclusive nature of Design Culture studies, and enables a link from the discipline of Somaesthetics proposed by Richard Shusterman in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*[151] as "the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aisthesis) and creative self-fashioning"[152] to Jules Evans' new concept of the "festival of ecstasy." Both approaches point out the importance of experience. Shusterman's approach is of bodily and sensorial nature, while Evans' speaks of the basic need for transcendence, the 'infused,' the 'peak experience,' the 'flow' moments or 'unselfing.'

These "deeper moments of ego-loss," claims Evans, are "known as 'ecstasy,'" an expression taken from mystical literature. The word 'ecstasy,' Evans reminds us, originally comes "from the ancient Greek *ekstasis*, which literally means 'standing outside' the self,"[153] a moment of uncertainty, and unknowing. Whereas Western culture, claims Evans, has a problematic

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[146] Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics.*

[147] Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[148] Wolfgang Welsch, "Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics," in Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen, and Tony O'Connor, eds. *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*, 178–192, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 178.

[149] "Proxemics (from the Latin *proximitas*, proximity) is a relatively recent field of study, developed particularly in the USA. Edward T. Hall (1963) coined the term to understand by it the use of space between individuals by cultural conventions." Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 149.

[150] Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 205.

[151] Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living, Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), originally published in 1992 by Blackwell.

[152] Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 267.

[153] See, Jules Evans, *The Art of Losing Control: A Philosopher's Search for Ecstatic Experience* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2017). I thank Bálint Veres for calling my attention to Evans and his book.

relationship with ecstasy, since it narrows our experience of reality, the enchanted world-view offers enrichment, a way of connecting to the spirit-world. In the disenchanted, materialist world-view ecstasy represented a demonic threat until the Great Awakening of the 1960s, and with the development of the digital, the trans-human, cybernetics, virtual and immersive realities, it offers a range of new possibilities. This experience of ecstasy, which is nowadays usually considered as something happy and high, can at the same time also signify, just as in art, illuminating or terrifying experiences—similar to what Eliade, recalling Otto's definition, calls '*mysterium tremendum*' besides the '*mysterium fascinans*.'[154] The two keep walking hand in hand. As Reverend Canon Mark Oakley, Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral in London between 2010 and 2018, said, "Good art, like good religion, questions our answers more than answers our questions and with a form and language that resist cheap paraphrase or seductive easy answers."[155] On the other hand, Daniel A. Siedell argues in his 2015 anthology of essays *Who's Afraid of Modern Art?,* that

> *Modern art is strange and off-putting. It doesn't behave like we think art should, not impressing us with the artist's technical capacity to represent a world with which we are familiar and helping us to decorate our interior and exterior environments. ... Perhaps modern art is dangerous. Perhaps it actually teaches us to see the world in ways that produce vice. Perhaps it is a practice that causes us to lose our faith. Perhaps modern art is something to fear.*[156]

Such an ecstatic, i.e., an uncertain and unknowing attitude can provide a useful opportunity to leave our routines, and gain new experiences by encountering works of art and thus new understandings of what's beyond.

3.5. Theological Aesthetics

"It has become common to say 'art is religion,' that we should have 'faith in science,' or that 'the market is God.' What is meant in these expressions is that something like faith and worship has come to be attached to art, science, and the economy,"[157] claims Kelton Cobb in the Introduction to *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture.* Accordingly, he adds that therefore "It is common today to view the artist as a prophet or seer."[158] This claim leads him to the conclusion that "Theology of culture depends upon the kind of trust that our cultural

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[154] "In *Das Heilige* Otto sets himself to discover the characteristics of this frightening and irrational experience. He finds the *feeling of terror* before the sacred, before the awe-inspiring mystery *(mysterium tremendum),* the majesty *(majestas)* that emanates an overwhelming superiority of power; he finds *religious fear* before the fascinating mystery *(mysterium fascinans)* in which perfect fullness of being flowers. Otto characterises all these experiences as numinous (from Latin *numen,* god), for they are induced by the revelation of an aspect of divine power. The numinous presents itself as something 'wholly other' *(ganz andere*), something basically and totally different. It is like nothing human or cosmic; confronted with it, man senses his profound nothingness, feels that he is only a creature, or, in the words in which Abraham addressed the Lord, is 'but dust and ashes' (Genesis, 18, 27)." Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 9–10.

[155] See, the page on Mark Wallinger's *Ecce Homo* (1999) at the official website of St. Paul's Cathedral, https://www.stpauls.co.uk/eccehomo, 13.04.2020.

[156] Daniel A Siedell, *Who's Afraid of Modern Art?* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 1.

[157] Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden–Oxford–Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 2.

[158] Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*, 2.

expressions can testify to a reality that transcends them—a reality that is really there, that matters, and in which providence is at work."[159]

Seeing the artist as a prophet is not a novel phenomenon in modern art. There are numerous examples, from the late-nineteenth century Les Nabis to the 1960s–1970s Viennese Actionism. Beat Wyss, however, argues for the need to explore the mythology of the Enlightenment—to avoid the call to Enlightenment having become a myth—and elaborating the iconology of the invisible, in *The Mythology of the Enlightenment: The Secret Doctrine of Modernity*,[160] thus witnessing to the latent theological involvement of modern art, already in 1993. The literature, especially in English, has since greatly expanded.

Although—despite the fact that the interdisciplinary study of theology and aesthetics has been "concerned with questions about God and issues in theology in the light of and perceived through sense knowledge (sensation, feeling, imagination), through beauty, and the arts,"[161] as claimed by Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen—it might seem strange that contemporary art, architecture, design, literature, drama, film, or music can appear in the thinking and education of theology. In fact this attitude and activity has been present for a while in organised religion, including in seminaries, faculties, symposia, galleries, and places of worship.[162]

Theological aesthetics, occasionally abbreviated as 'theoaesthetics'[163] "seeks to uncover and scrutinise the connections between the religious belief and sensory experience, including those associated with the arts"—claims James McCullough in an initial definition of the approach.[164]

A good starting point to start exploring theological or religious aesthetics is Frank Burch Brown's *Religious Aesthetics*, which advocates "the widening of religious studies to include some kind of aesthetic."[165] A strongly contemporary feature of his approach—at least from the perspective of Design Culture studies—is that in aiming at making a contribution to theoretical understanding, Brown also keeps an eye on practice,[166] adding "But where it fails to take account of ideas that emerge from praxis, it fails even in academic terms. I have tried, therefore, to pay close attention to the practical and experiential side of the arts and their religious 'uses'."[167]

While Brown urges the (re-)connecting of these different ways of thinking by the exhortation "that matters of aesthetic and religious concern more frequently be pondered *in conjunction*—

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[159] Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*, 294.

[160] Beat Wyss, ed., *Mythologie der Aufklärung: Geheimlehren der Moderne,* Jahresring 40: Jahrbuch für Moderne Kunst, (München: Verlag Silke Schreibner, 1993). The introduction of this book was published in Hungarian as "A láthatatlan ikonológiája: A modern titkos tanai," trans. J. A. Tillmann, *Pannonhalmi Szemle* vol. XIII, no. 2. (2005): 59–73.

[161] Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 1.

[162] I will enter into more details in support of this claim later, in detailing my empirical research projects under Chapter 7, "Who Cares."

[163] See the subtitle of the book edited by Bernier: *Beyond Belief: Theoaesthetics or Just Old-Time Religion?* ed. Ronald R. Bernier (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

[164] James McCullough, "How Art Contributes to Faith," *Academia Letters*, Article 194. (January 2021): 1. https://doi.org/10.20935/AL194.

[165] Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), xi.

[166] Perhaps this is a result of Brown's involvement in the arts: Brown is a Professor of Theology and at the same time a practising author, poet and musician.

[167] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, xiv.

and not just by philosophers but also by religious thinkers and theologians,"[168] at the same time he reminds us that "all understanding or 'pondering' takes place within a context, and hence from a particular standpoint distinguished by its own presuppositions and expectations."[169] In reflecting on the nature of these differences, Brown describes the philosophical, religious and theological perspectives and approaches to aesthetics. As a theologian, Brown highlights that "theological reflection, however abstract and internally consistent, … is intimately connected with 'aesthetic ideas'," due to the fact that "the primary language of religion is markedly poetic, mythic, and otherwise aesthetic."[170] This recognition, Brown suggests, provides a new understanding, attitude, and perhaps a novel *modus operandi* for theologians to investigate the enriching interaction between the aesthetic and religion.

> *The theologian must engage in dialogue with the strictly academic scholar of religions and with the philosopher, since they provide the theologian with vital critical challenges, with a wide range of awareness, and with an extensive array of conceptual tools, all of which any reasonably adequate theology requires. In the end, however, it is the theologian as aesthetician—and the ongoing religious tradition which the theologian represents—that must judge the relative adequacy of any particular theological aesthetic. And it is theology itself that must discover the extent to which theological aesthetics can actually become a thriving and religiously fruitful enterprise.*[171]

The radical approach of *Radical Orthodoxy* meant a major step in acknowledging the need for and proclaiming the birth of a new theology. Milbank, Ward and Pickstock proclaimed the emergence of "a contemporary theological project made possible by the self-conscious superficiality of today's secularism," that regards "the nihilistic drift of postmodernism (which nonetheless has roots in the outset of modernity) as a supreme opportunity," and "in the face of the secular demise of truth, it seeks to reconfigure theological truth."[172] This approach is 'orthodox' in "the most straightforward sense of commitment to credal Christianity and the exemplarity of its patristic matrix" as well as "in the more specific sense of re-affirming a richer and more coherent Christianity;" and 'radical' in the sense of "a return to patristic and medieval roots, and especially to the Augustinian vision of all knowledge as divine illumination," in "seeking to deploy this recovered vision systematically to criticise modern society, culture, politics, art, science and philosophy with an unprecedented boldness," as well as in "realising that via such engagements we *do* have also to rethink the tradition."[173]

In the same year Richard Viladesau published *Theological Aesthetics*,[174] which begins with an argument by Mary Gerhart, claiming—similarly to the above—that "a sea of change is needed in the field of religious studies, one that must take place in the nexus of the field of theology, the

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[168] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 185.

[169] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics,* 185.

[170] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 193.

[171] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 194.

[172] Milbank et al., *Radical Orthodoxy*, 1.

[173] Milbank et al., *Radical Orthodoxy*, 2.

[174] Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

field of art, literature and religion, and the field of science and religion." In answering that call, Viladesau remarks that "within religious studies, there has been increasing scholarly engagement with religion as ideology and as spirituality, with a correlative interest in the aesthetic and communicative dimensions of religious practice and thought."[175]

In this study, he aims at complementing the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar[176] from a fundamental theological approach. Viladesau clarifies his understanding of theological aesthetics as "the practice of theology" which considers "God, religion, and theology in relation to sensible knowledge (sensation, imagination, and feeling), the beautiful, and the arts."[177] Viladesau sees the aesthetic experience as a source for theology, and at the same time theological aesthetics as a theory, which

> *Includes both narrative/metaphorical and metaphysical approaches ... comprises both an 'aesthetic theology' that interprets the objects of theology—God, faith, and theology itself—through the methods of aesthetic studies, and a more narrowly defined 'theological aesthetics' that interprets the objects of aesthetics—sensation, the beautiful, and art—from the properly theological starting point of religious conversion and in the light of theological methods.*[178]

In defining the latter, Viladesau states that "theological aesthetics" includes 1) a theological account of human knowledge on the level of feeling and imagination; 2) a theology of beauty; and 3) a theological reflection on art and on the individual arts.[179]

Jason A. Danner, in his quest to demonstrate the role of theology and art in the "postmodern desert," points to the ability of art as theological aesthetic experience in providing the beholder with an insight into what's beyond when he writes that "At the heart of the experience of the beautiful as revelation of transcendent reality is the realisation that one has been exposed to a reality beyond one's self."[180] At the same time, Danner reveals that the aesthetic experience in theological terms is in fact not a one-way experience, but rather a two-way communication:

> *In contrast to locating beauty in the eye of the beholder, where the appearance of beauty is the result of a correspondence between the subject's idea of beauty and what the subject perceives as fitting that idea, the encounter with beauty is rather a case of the subject being seen by beauty.*[181]

This theological critique of modern and postmodern aesthetics a) highlights that the transcendent must be honoured as such in aesthetic assessment, and b) acknowledges that "for

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[175] Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, ix.

[176] "According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, if theological aesthetics is about anything it is about beauty, and if beauty is about anything in particular it is particularly about love, a love which Christ, the archetype of all forms, embodies and expresses perfectly and against which all created forms are to be measured and to find their ultimate *telos*"—writes David O. Taylor in "Beauty as Love: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics," *Transpositions*, (27.04.2012), http://www.transpositions.co.uk/beauty-as-love-hans-urs-von-balthasars-theological-aesthetics/, 24.01.2021.

[177] Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics,* 11.

[178] Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 23.

[179] Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 23–24.

[180] Jason A. Danner, "Theology and Art in the Postmodern Desert," in *Beyond Belief,* 55.

[181] Danner, "Theology and Art."

the desert while a place for wandering and despair, is also, as theologians who read their Bibles know, a locus of revelation."[182]

Although the methodology seems clear, nevertheless, finding an appropriate method of analysis is not always a given for researchers. At least, it leaves room for the restlessness of the mind, and freedom of thought to investigate the world. As Marilynne Robinson captures it:

> *Over the years of writing and teaching, I have tried to free myself of constraints I felt, limits to the range of exploration I could make, to the kind of intuition I could credit. I realised gradually that my own religion, and religion in general, could and should disrupt these constraints, which amount to a small and narrow definition of what human beings are and how human life is to be understood.*[183]

We have seen a number of valuable scholarly attempts to find an appropriate way to think about and discuss the part of the world defined by the words religion, spirituality, and the arts together. Some of these attempts start from the field of theology—either with a clear view to remain inside the discipline (like Viladesau), or enriching it with an approach and a knowledge of the different fields of art (like Brown). Others have their roots in art history, with a wish to discuss art with an openness to religion that differs from the mainstream secular discourse of the art world.

William A. Dyrness opened a new chapter by publishing *Visual Faith* in 2001. In his view "Something is going on in Christian churches, and fascinating changes are taking place in the art world,"[184] which, he admits, is not uniform.

In addition to drawing attention to the impossibility of communicating universal truth, Dyrness indicates that both artists and audiences are ready for new, previously non-existent experiences. "They are prepared to see new combinations of things that may spark insight or even a fresh realisation of God's claim on their lives,"[185] he writes, before listing the new forms and developments which, in his view, may be of particular importance to the Christian involvement in art. These include, in his view, 1) the growing element of performance in contemporary art, 2) interactive character, 3) collaborative character (in more recent terminology, 'participation' and 'inclusion'), 4) a turn to the visual, and 5) the spiritual element. For the latter, he quotes Julian Schnabel, who claims

> *Duccio and Giotto were painting in a society in which there was actually belief in God. […] People had religious experiences in front of paintings. The painters were connecting people to something bigger than life, something bigger than their individual experiences. I think people still have religious experiences in front of paintings. The only difference today is that religion isn't organised or prescribed—it's consciousness. To get religion now is to become conscious, to feel those human feelings.*[186]

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[182] Danner, "Theology and Art," 60.

[183] Marilynne Robinson, "Freedom of Thought," *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

[184] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 155.

[185] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 122.

[186] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 134. The source for Schnabel's words is: Gerald Marzorati, "Julian Schnabel: Plate It as It Lays," *Art News*, 85, no. 4 (1985): 69.

One of the scholars who directly references Dyrness as a turning point, is Daniel A. Siedell.[187] In *God in the Gallery*—which is groundbreaking as an honest approach of an art historian with a clear engagement with religion and towards finding ways to address religion in connection to modern and contemporary arts—Siedell gives an account of his encounter with Dyrness' *Visual Faith* in 2004, which gave him the impetus to enter into dialogue. While Dyrness' book approaches the subject from the starting point of the church, and only lightly touches upon modern and contemporary art, Siedell's book begins "unapologetically in the world of contemporary art." In discussing God in the gallery, Siedell brings the analogy of the altar to the unknown gods Paul encounters on Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:23):

> *Altars to the unknown god are strewn about the historical landscape of modern and contemporary art. They are often remarkably beautiful, compelling and powerful. But they have been too often ignored or condemned out of hand. This book is the result of choosing the way of St. Paul: to take the cultural artefacts and to reveal and illuminate their insights into what they are only able to point to, not to name. But point they do, and they should be examined and celebrated as such.*[188]

Siedell sees the reason for the lack of actual understanding in the fact that the historical and philosophical conditions necessary for the evaluation of works are considered unnecessary.[189] Paraphrasing the former church historian, theologian, intellectual historian and academic president, Jaroslav Pelikan, Siedell sees museum art[190] as "a living tradition of the dead rather than a dead tradition of the living,[191] essentially a historical practice.

This is in line with Bishop arguing in *Radical Museology* on the use of contemporary as method instead of periodisation, and the re-politicised representation of history. She uses 1) presentism, 2) dialectical contemporaneity, and 3) multi-temporal rewritings instead of global inclusion, that is, a reinterpretation of historical knowledge.[192]

Interestingly, and perhaps precisely because of Siedell's aforementioned reasons, to my knowledge, only the Jesuit-run MOCRA in St Louis operates as an "interfaith museum of art that engages the religious and spiritual dimensions."[193]

While Siedell's books provide valuable thoughts to consider on the relations between religiosity and the art world, his 2010 study "Liturgical Aesthetics and Contemporary Artistic Practice" in *Beyond Belief,* edited by Ronald R. Bernier, is an attempt to address the subject in a unique, and strongly critical voice.

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[187] Siedell's introduction on his page at Academia gives a definition of his career approach: "I think about the connections and overlapping concerns of theology, aesthetics, and curatorial and artistic practices. I spent over a decade as a Chief Curator at the Sheldon Museum of Art (1996-2007); Assistant Professor of Modern Art at the University of Nebraska-Omaha (2007-2011), and since 2013, Senior Fellow of Modern Art History, Theory and Criticism at The King's College, New York City. I am currently pursuing a doctorate in theological & philosophical studies of Religion at Drew Theological School, Madison, New Jersey and work as an independent curator." https://drew.academia.edu/DanielSiedell, 24.01.2021.

[188] Siedell, *God in the Gallery*, 11.

[189] Siedell, *God in the Gallery*, 22.

[190] Elkins calls it the 'art world.'

[191] Siedell, *God in the Gallery*, 23.

[192] Bishop, *Radical Museology*.

[193] MOCRA operates as a part of Saint Louis University. See, https://www.slu.edu/mocra/index.php, 13.05.2021.

> *The recent interest in the contemporary art world in things spiritual, exemplified in numerous exhibitions on the subject might suggest a defiance of the intellectual framework of the Enlightenment that are part of a 'religious' turn in contemporary art criticism. But this is not the case. Despite the importance of a renewed and revitalised interest in the relationship between art and spirituality, criticism remains defined by Enlightenment categories.*[194]

Siedell proposes a religious point of view, and the inclusion of "liturgy" in the discourse on art and religion, with liturgy understood as the practice of religion, which, following Emmanuel Levinas, is also ethical. Siedell's conclusion, however, points further, towards the critical practice, claiming "We are liturgical creatures. Contemporary artistic practice recognises this. It is time that critical practice do the same."[195] The importance of liturgy also appears in Pickstock's new book, *Aspects of Truth*. In this proposal to launch a new religious metaphysics, she argues that

> *The notion that speculative metaphysics must be as much performed as theorised is extended beyond language and poetics into a consideration of liturgy, especially with regard to its links with integrated, 'synaesthetic' bodily sensation and spiritual formation.*[196]

Sensation as action in liturgical practice and its relation to art appears in the phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion's *The Crossing of the Visible*, as referenced in Siedell's study.[197] Siedell writes about the icon as "the visual, aesthetic manifestation of the porosity of being, of this 'between' the material and the spiritual, in which the material, the immanent, can indeed embody the spiritual, the transcendent."[198]

In discussing sensation, Marion discusses the problem of perspective. This is a central issue not only in visual arts (though it is very much present there, especially in case of the icon), but also in encountering the transcendent, the spiritual, in the practice of the liturgy. As Marion says in Chapter 1, "The Crossing of the Visible and the Invisible,"

> *In itself, perspective exercises a paradox. Even more than that, perspective and paradox are determined by similar characters: both indicate the visible entirely in its withdrawing, discretely but radically. The paradox attests to the visible, while at the same time opposing itself, or rather, while inverting itself; literally, it constitutes a counter-visible, a counter-seen, a counter-appearance that offers a spectacle to be seen the opposite of what, at first sight, one would expect to see. More than a surprising opinion, the paradox often points to a miracle—it makes visible that which one should not be able to see and which one is not able to see without astonishment.*[199]

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[194] Daniel A. Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics: Some Remarks on Developing a Critical Framework," in *Beyond Belief,* 15.

[195] Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics," 24.

[196] Catherine Pickstock, *Aspects of Truth: A New Religious Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), xiv.

[197] Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics," 20.

[198] Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics," 20.

[199] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 9.

Such an experience is not unknown in either art or religious practice. To connect the two worlds even more, Marion adds in the "Preface" of his book: "The question of painting does not pertain first or only to painters, much less only to aestheticians. It concerns visibility itself, and thus pertains to everything—to sensation in general."[200]

The 2016 book *Modern Art and Life of a Culture* by Jonathan Anderson[201] and Dyrness—claimed by the authors to be the "grandchild" of H. R. Rookmaaker's 1970 *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*[202]—is an attempt to 1) "trace some of the ways that religious life—within Christian traditions in particular—continued to influence and constructively shape the development of the modernist avant-garde, despite general impressions to the contrary" and 2) "investigate the ways that modernist artists were attempting to come to terms with (the meanings of) life in the age of modernity, which consistently pulled unresolved theological questions and concerns into the cultural foreground"[203] in critical, as well as in different geographical and historical contexts. In doing so, they refer to Berger and the secularisation theory, and recall the famous anecdote shared by Stanley Fish in 2005:

> *When Jacques Derrida died I was called by a reporter who wanted to know what would succeed high theory and the triumvirate of race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in the academy. I answered like a shot: religion. … Announce a course with 'religion' in the title, and you will have an overflow population. Announce a lecture or panel on 'religion in our time' and you will have to hire a larger hall.*[204]

Anderson and Dyrness suggest that in a postsecular context, the art world and religion have "quite a lot to do with each other, despite the profound confusions and conflicts that have often marked their relationship."[205] Accordingly, a "rereading" and "retheologising" of modernism is needed, since "religious traditions have had deep shaping influence on the social and imaginative development of many important modern artists and movements, despite whatever ambivalence artists may have felt toward those traditions."[206] Furthermore, "modernism is, in itself, a theologically meaningful project, whether or not religion played a conspicuous role in the biography of this or that artist."[207] Their justification for the latter statement stands on three points: 1) the essentially theological concerns included in modern art; 2) the similarity and resonance of modern art to problems also preoccupying modern theology; and 3) the fact that modern art can contribute to theological inquiry, "offering unique sites and modes of thinking

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[200] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 7.

[201] Anderson's keynote "Postsecularity and the Return of Religion in Contemporary Art Criticism" at the aforementioned 12th Annual Biola Arts Symposium, *Art in a Postsecular Age,* in 2017, is available and worth watching together with the other lectures at http://ccca.biola.edu/resources/2017/apr/14/ascha-conference/. 25.01.2021.

[202] H. R. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (Westmont IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970).

[203] Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness, *Modern art and the life of a culture: the religious impulses of modernism* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 10.

[204] Stanley Fish, "One University Under God?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 7, 2005), http://www.chronicle.com/article/One-University-Under-God-/45077/, 06.01.2017.

[205] Anderson and Dyrness, *Modern art and the life of a culture*, 34.

[206] Anderson and Dyrness, *Modern art and the life of a culture*, 41.

[207] Anderson and Dyrness, *Modern art and the life of a culture*, 41.

for encountering and wrestling with theological questions, intuitions and conceptualisations."[208] In the Afterword to the same book, Siedell raises the polemic question of "So what?"

> *Why should anyone care but a few artists, collectors and art educators who like 'modern art' and happen to be Christians or academics working in seminaries and Christian colleges who like to talk about 'theology and the arts' amongst themselves, in their own journals, at their own conferences? Why should it matter that modern art receives a much more nuanced, less polemical, and a more historically and theologically sophisticated treatment by a theologian and an artist than the Dutch art historian was willing or able to offer?*[209]

Siedell's answer to his own question is a justification of the authors: "treat modern art—and a particular slice at that—on its own terms, taking seriously what its adherents, practitioners—its believers—say and do on its behalf,"[210] and do "the historical, theoretical and theological work to clear the brush that obscures the view of modern art, allowing us to see freshly, and with clearer and more sober eyes, this God-haunted creative cultural tradition as a practice imbued with profound human integrity that deserves to be understood theologically, historically, theoretically and Christianly."[211]

Siedell admits that his standpoint "on the margins of *both* the theology-and-the-arts conversation and the contemporary art world" makes him call attention to the importance of writing about art. In turning that into action, he assumes what I can accept as a valid attitude to follow in the discourse on art related to religious and spiritual experience:

> *Whether or not the world needs 'Christian artists' as a response to the nihilism and 'death' of modern culture as Rookmaaker (and Francis Schaeffer) believed, I am coming to believe that the world just might need Christian artists and cultural critics who think theologically about their experience before works of art, who through their language, the words they use, give life to those works of art in which they believe and with which they have relationships, giving 'faith and perseverance' to those who read or hear their words.*[212]

3.6. Material Religion

"Before becoming a secular religion in the Enlightenment, the creation of art was imbricated within material culture: Its aesthetics were part of the material world"[213]—concludes Richard Woodfield in his study "*Kunstwissenschaft* versus *Ästhetik*: *The Historians' Revolt Against Aesthetics,*" which sheds new light on our investigation and on how art related to religious and

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[208] Anderson and Dyrness, *Modern art and the life of a culture*, 42.

[209] Daniel A. Siedell, "Afterword: So What?" in Anderson and Dyrness, *Modern art and the life of a culture*, 331.

[210] Siedell, "Afterword: So What?"

[211] Siedell, *Who's Afraid of Modern Art?* 331–332.

[212] Siedell, *Who's Afraid of Modern Art?* 334.

[213] Richard Woodfield, "*Kunstwissenschaft* versus *Ästhetik*: The Historians' Revolt Against Aesthetics," in Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen, and Tony O'Connor, eds., *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*, 19–33, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 33.

spiritual experience can be approached in a way closer to the method of Design Culture studies than earlier approaches such as in art history.

The material aspect (materiality) of religion and thus a like-minded investigation of art in relation to religion and spirituality, leads to fresh understandings of the field. S. Brent Plate coined the term 'material religion' based on his understanding of the power and determining role of bodily experiences. As he writes in the introduction of his personal website, "I've re-discovered the power of basic bodily experiences: eating bread together, looking at images, smelling spices, listening to music, and touching other bodies. These are sensually meaningful activities that gather communities of people, providing order and values for living and, more often than not, a little disorder. In short, I keep finding religion is about bodies, not beliefs."[214] As we can see, activities like "looking at images" are included in this definition among the "sensually meaningful," communal and value-creating activities of religion.

In the editorial statement of the journal Material Religion, launched in 2005, the editors—Birgit Meyer, Crispin Paine, Brent Plate, and David Morgan—define their quest "as a new project in the study of religious images, objects, spaces, and material practices."[215] Although the term itself was later referred to as a "fruitful tautology"[216] by Simon Coleman, claiming that "religion is inherently material in its very constitution,"[217] the importance of the approach represented by Material Religion lies in conducting the study of religion and related fields—besides the approaches through narratives, documents, institutions, and leading figures—with the aim "to consider religion through the lens of its material forms and their use in religious practice,"[218] and according to the "widespread discernment that religion is fundamentally material in practice and that a fruitful approach to studying this aspect of religion will be robustly interdisciplinary."[219] Such an approach questions and objects to the limitation of religious images and objects to historical or aesthetic artefacts, which thus fails to "account for their role in the living tradition of a community's life."[220] The term 'material religion' therefore refers not only to the works of art, but also to what the believers do with them. One of the greatest achievements of this approach is that it does not exclude those outside the academic world from the investigation, but as an inclusive approach encourages all to explore the material aspects of religion.

Morgan, one of the initiators of the journal, later extended the scope of 'material religion' in the opening remarks to the 2015 conference *Material Religion: Embodiment, Materiality, Technology,*[221] to include religious technology, too, as "operations that replace, supplement, or extend intentional effort, whether physical movement, feeling, or some form of cognition such

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[214] S. Brent Plate, Personal website, http://www.sbrentplate.net, 04.02.2021.

[215] Editorial statement, *Material Religion*, 1:1, 4–8 (2005): 5, DOI: 10.2752/174322005778054474.

[216] Simon Coleman, "Material religion a fruitful tautology?" *Material Religion*, 5:3, (2009), 359–360, DOI: 10.2752/175183409X12550007730101.

[217] Coleman, "Material religion a fruitful tautology?" 360.

[218] Editorial statement, *Material Religion* 2005, 5.

[219] Editorial statement, *Material Religion* 2005, 5.

[220] Editorial statement, *Material Religion* 2005, 7.

[221] See, https://materialreligions.blogspot.com/p/archived-news-and-events.html, 04.02.2021.

as meditation or memory."[222] Morgan claims his approach is not an attempt to "reduce religion to a mechanical exercise or an impersonal procedure, which the literature has classically used to define magic and sharply differentiate it from religion," which he sees unfortunate. He claims "It is necessary to realise that technologies are about more than cogs and gears and clanking machinery. Technologies are how people work, whether the routines are simple or complex. Technologies are means of bodily interface, the fit people work out with the world around them, including the worlds that are not visible or physical."[223]

Morgan developed the concept further in *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment*,[224] in which, although the book focuses more on "how images and other objects make enchantment happen,"[225] he argues—again in harmony with the inclusive concept of Design Culture studies—that the "power of images is better understood in terms of networks that include images and viewers and several other actors, both human and nonhuman."[226] He proposes that there is a "co-constitutive relationship" between belief and practice, which can aid in understanding the way enchantment works, and finds that "Enchantment seems to consist of the way in which things that human beings make return to them as something *not* humanly produced, something that is as real as they themselves. Even in instances when people realise that what they behold was manufactured, they still respond to the artefact as autonomous and alive."[227]

Within these networks of enchantment, the "focal object" and the "gaze" (the latter used in Durkheim's sense of the exclusive gaze, which operates as a visual version of taboo, in which seeing is comparable to touching) creates the ecology of the image, which in Morgan's definition consists of "those artefacts and forces with which it comes into connection—viewers, certainly, and image makers, but also the availability and chemistry of pigments, the trees, lumber industry, and market that provide the panels on which images are made. … This assemblage of human and nonhuman actors is the matrix for understanding any given image."[228]

Focal objects, in Morgan's understanding, "engage viewers in the network of relations that construct a visual field, or the ecology of an image,"[229] and the consideration of this ecology "is critical if we are willing to recognise that objects, people, and places, in addition to images, are not limned by static boundaries, but exist over time, changing, ageing, being redefined and repurposed, reinventing themselves or being reinvented in the countless interactions and uses that form the restless shape of things."[230]

This diverse utility of enchantment as Morgan phrases it is a sobering project beginning with the assumption that human beings don't simply build the world around them, but rather are part

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[222] David Morgan, "Opening Remarks for the international conference on Material Religion: Embodiment, Materiality, Technology," Duke University, September 10–12, 2015, 5–6, https://www.academia.edu/36245032/Opening_Remarks_for_the_Material_Religion_conference_copy, 24.03.2018.

[223] Morgan, "Opening Remarks," 6.

[224] David Morgan, *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment*, (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[225] Morgan, *Images at Work*, 1.

[226] Morgan, *Images at Work*, 4.

[227] Morgan, *Images at Work*, 20.

[228] Morgan, *Images at Work*, 51.

[229] Morgan, *Images at Work*, 90.

[230] Morgan, *Images at Work,* 90.

of a much larger process. “The world builds us and we build it, or rather the life-world that feels and appears to us as the *real* world,” he writes. What is critical to understand, though, is “that enchantment is the result of networks, not merely aberrant projections or wish fulfilment, the unilateral action of human agents.”[231] Morgan proposes that the role of enchantment is “making a home.” “The result is a sense of belonging, the real work of enchantment,” he adds.[232]

3.7. Sacred Design

As theological thinking and discourse can offer new, enriching experiences in relation to art, so can the comprehensive direction most often denoted in the international literature under the term “sacred design,” offer a valid opportunity for further thought. From the perspective of Design Culture studies, such a combination is obvious, as explained in Chapters 2 and 4.

Sacred design, in the way I use the term in this dissertation, differs from the practice of designing contemporary liturgical artefacts to be used in churches—which is an important and valid field, though doesn’t answer most of today’s major and urgent challenges that, in my understanding, constitute fundamental directions for design.

The concept was introduced by Tony Fry, design theorist and philosopher.[233] The 2010 and the ultimate 2017 editions of *Design Philosophy Papers* co-edited by Fry are fully devoted to the concept. In the former issue, co-editor Anne-Marie Willis shares a series of questions from the programme that call for studies, highlighting a number of ideas that are worth further consideration:

> *How can the sacred be thought beyond existing ways in which it is engaged by design? How do we think the sacred in relation to contemporary beliefs, symbols, needs, economic and social structures? Should we understand those fundamental things that sustain us in body and mind as sacred? What can we discover from past or existing traditions and beliefs that could inform the designation of the sacred for today and the future? In what ways could the sacred be understood as designed?*[234]

Willis states that the sacred, which “always operates communally,”[235] is “a powerful idea, an idea with efficacy, a means, perhaps, of valuing, protecting, conserving, enhancing that which sustains or that which has sustaining power. Historically, that which was sacred, was given special status—it was something that could not be defiled or destroyed,”[236] and the question is “[h]ow, in a secular society could such a status be re-invented?”[237]

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[231] Morgan, *Images at Work*, 169.

[232] Morgan, *Images at Work*, 178.

[233] Fry, an internationally recognised design theorist, educator, and author, who has been active at universities for several decades, is the founder and director of *Studio at the Edge of the World*. See, https://www.thestudioattheedgeoftheworld.com, 13.05.2021.

[234] Anne-Marie Willis, “Sacred Design Now,” *Design Philosophy Papers*, 8:1, 1–6, (2010): 1. http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/144871310X13968744282638, 13.10.2017.

[235] Willis, “Sacred Design Now,” 3.

[236] Willis, “Sacred Design Now,” 3.

[237] Willis, “Sacred Design Now,” 3.

Fry, in his study "Returning, Sacred Design III,"[238] indicates that—in the concepts of the *anthropocene* coined in 2000 by Paul J. Crutzen, and as a reflection of this, the concept of the *capitalocene* introduced by Jason W. Moore in 2017,[239] which more accurately identify the problems and the dystopian and worrying situation, the crisis of our existence, than the discourses of the secular or even the disenchanted,—"industrialised western people exist, at best, in inoperative communities—marked by the loss of myth and the sacred (as community)."[240] Furthermore, "the global population exists in a deepening of 'the crises' of the unsustainable,"[241] and "a massive disjuncture exists between the exponential growth of the problems and the ability to respond to them."[242] Fry cites global warming as an example, and introduces the concept of *sustainment* instead of sustainability. In his view, a new myth is needed, *futuring*, "a mythology that demands a new order of imagination."[243] "Its measure is care as futuring enacted"[244]—he adds, nevertheless, "Sustainment is an unending task, and will ever more be so."[245]

Although with a different motivation, a similar approach is offered by Zabala's 2017 book, *Why Only Art Can Save Us?* In the title, Zabala paraphrases Martin Heidegger's sentence in his legendary 1966 interview in *Der Spiegel*—"Now only a God can save us"[246]—by replacing God with the word art. Zabala sees art as revealing a lack of a sense of emergency when he writes:

> *If as we will see, there are a number of artists whose works demand our intervention rather than simple aesthetic contemplation, it's not because they lack classically artistic sensibility but rather because the lack of a sense of emergency in framed democracies demands a new artistic shock. […] [C]ontemporary art of emergency responds to the »lack of a sense of emergency« that we are all framed within.*[247]

With his need for a radical artistic shock, Zabala draws attention to the raison d'être of art beyond its classical frameworks. Also related to this, and beyond the religious overtones evident from Fry's sentences,[248] Willis clarifies the clear connection with the sacred—and design—when she argues, "Perhaps the sacred inhabits this gap between knowing and doing, and could thus be a powerful counterforce to *akrasia*."[249]

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238 Tony Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," *Design Philosophy Papers*, 8:1, (2010): 25–34, http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/144871310X13968744282755, 13.10.2017.

239 Jason W Moore, "Confronting the Popular Anthropocene: Toward an Ecology of Hope," *New Geographies* 9 (2017): 186–191.

240 Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 25.

241 Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III."

242 Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 26.

243 Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 31.

244 Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 32.

245 Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 33.

246 "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten." Republished in *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 23, 30. Jahrgang, (31. Mai 1976), 193–219. https://docs.google.com/file/d/0ByBmdFWIrZRhVEM0V0RDTU9yNGs/edit?pli=1, 08.02.2018.

247 Zabala, *Why Only Art Can Save Us*, 5–6.

248 See the word "care" in the Scripture: "Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God." (1 Peter 5:2; NLT)

249 Willis, "Sacred Design Now," 5.

In addition to knowing and doing (as essential features of design), the inclusion of akrasia—the weakness or lack of will when one acts as a prisoner of an invisible, unbearable force, despite her/his better vision—also places the issue in a moral perspective: into that which is characteristic of both Christianity (and most religious and moral systems), inclusive design, as well as design that is sensitive and active socio-environmentally (as well as in terms of sustainability). As summarised by Szentpéteri:

> *The archaic models of creating order […] due to their neurotic nature, were fundamentally exclusionary, operated by segregation, demarcation, and thresholds. However, according to the order-building model of inclusive design culture, order must be created within and together with the world, not separated from the world.*[250]

3.8. Discourses in Hungary

In comparison to the richness of the international discourses outlined above, the general reception and discourse in Hungary is, to put it mildly, stuttering and contradictory. On the one hand, there are (and there have been) smaller and larger exhibitions of works of sacred art in dialogue with their times, as well as outstandingly exciting events—like the series of *Asztali beszélgetések* (Table Talks) led by Ádám Galambos.[251] On the other hand, the professional reception is barely noticeable and, even if it appears, it presents markedly different positions. It is very perceptible that the established, "historical churches,"[252] especially those of Christianity, think of sacred art in Hungary as limited to liturgical art and art closely related to religiosity (either based on a figurative, narrative approach, or based on the religiosity of the artist). This is also apparent in the dominant historical focus of the *Ars Sacra Festival*,[253] the largest such event, organised annually since 2007, in the selection of works and curatorial concepts of major exhibitions, like the *Kortárs Keresztény Ikonográfiai Biennálé* (Biennial of Contemporary Christian Iconography),[254] organised since 2002, and in the conservative approach of the *Magyar Művészeti Akadémia* (Hungarian Academy of Arts, MMA),[255] founded in 2011.

The most extensive recent publications dealing with the subject have been the 2014/2 issue of the journal *Magyar Művészet* (Hungarian Art, MM),[256] published by MMA, and the 2016 anthology *Vallás és művészet* (Religion and Art),[257] though the latter had unfortunately only slightly touched upon modern and contemporary visual art.

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[250] In original: "A rendteremtés archaikus modelljei (…) neurotikus jellegüknél fogva alapvetően kirekesztőek voltak, az elkülönítés, az elhatárolás s a küszöbelvek működtették azokat. A befogadó designkultúra rendteremtő modellje szerint azonban a rendet a világban és a világgal kell megalkotni, s nem a világtól elkülöníteni azt." Márton Szentpéteri, *Design és kultúra: Befogadó designkultúra*, (Budapest: Építészfórum, 2010).

[251] *Asztali beszélgetések,* YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/user/asztalibeszelgetesek, 13.05.2021.

[252] Although there is no state religion in Hungary, there are four so-called "historical religions:" Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Judaism.

[253] See the Ars Sacra Festival website, https://www.ars-sacra.hu, 18.01.2022.

[254] See the Kecskeméti Katona József Múzeum website, https://muzeum.kecskemet.hu/biennale/, 18.01.2022.

[255] See the Hungarian Academy of Arts (Magyar Művészeti Akadémia) website, https://www.mma.hu/en/web/en, 18.01.2022.

[256] *Magyar Művészet* vol II, no. 2 (June 2014).

[257] Enikő Sepsi, Irén Lovász, Gabriella Kiss, Judit Faludy, eds., *Vallás és művészet* (Budapest: Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church & L'Harmattan, 2016).

In the 2014/2 issue of *Magyar Művészet,* Katalin Dávid proposes by way of clarification to define the sacred as a concept with a theological rather than an aesthetic interpretation in Judeo–Christian culture. Thus—in a narrower sense—Dávid sees sacred art as works connected with God through religion (liturgy, liturgical art, religious education, private devotion)—emphasising that in this case the sacred has nothing to do with artistic reality.[258]

In the same issue, Ferenc Buji states that "sacred art cannot be identified with religious art in general at all," because religious art is "individual art," whereas in sacred art the artist is an instrument of sacred culture, who often renounces her/his individuality in the service of universality. According to Buji, sacred art is only possible within sacred culture, and that has ceased to exist in Europe with the end of Medieval art (i.e., secularisation) or, as Buji writes, with the "post-sacred or profane" work of art.[259]

Ákos Cseke, in his more subtly-spirited study towards the end of the issue, makes a sensible distinction between "ecclesiastical program art" in the narrower sense, and art "the forms of which reflect the timeless content of the sacred" in the broader sense. In his opinion, sacred art —referring to Burckhardt—can only be that which is "both sacred and artistic in the noblest sense of the word." In summary, he claims that

> *Art may perhaps fulfil its function if, to the best of its knowledge and intent, it is what it is: that is, art. In this case, sooner or later, it will inevitably affect all stages of being, that is, the sphere of the sacred too. Yet, this is not its criterion, but rather a more or less inevitable consequence of one's own existence and functioning.*[260]

Along with the theoretical positions denying the existence of today's sacred works of art, as well as those looking at them in a more nuanced way, it is not surprising that we mostly encounter works related to spiritual experience in Hungarian galleries, museums and university lecture halls, similar to Elkins' paradigm of art and organised religion being as far apart as they have ever been, having gone separate ways, and with their separation having become entrenched.[261]

What is perhaps all the more surprising is that, travelling back in time, we are confronted with different, and in many respects significantly more modern, approaches. Dr. Antal Somogyi, a former theology teacher and art historian from Győr, saw art related to (institutional or organised) religion as inseparable from progress and social inclusion (i.e., design culture) in 1927. What's more, he even defines the role of art as that of a leader, or pioneer:

> *Ecclesiastical art must be up-to-date, if only because when a new artistic direction triumphs, there will be no worthy artist left who would cling to the old direction. But the art of the church cannot lag behind the art of the age for other, internal reasons*

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[258] Katalin Dávid, "Szakralitás a művészetben," *Magyar Művészet,* vol II, no. 2 (2014): 3–12.

[259] Ferenc Buji, "Ars sacra," *Magyar Művészet,* vol II, no. 2 (2014): 24–32. The author's outburst against "increasingly minimalist" works of art, linking them to "snobbery" on the recipients' side and "artistic and psychological exhibitionism" on the artists' side, would deserve a separate analysis, which I do not wish undertake within the framework of this dissertation.

[260] In original: "A művészet talán akkor tölti be funkcióját, ha legjobb tudása és szándéka szerint az, ami, vagyis művészet. Ebben az esetben előbb-utóbb óhatatlanul érinteni fogja a létezés minden fokát, vagyis a szakralitás szféráját is, ez azonban nem kritériuma, hanem inkább többé-kevésbé elkerülhetetlen következménye saját létének és működésének." Ákos Cseke, "Sacred Art," *Magyar Művészet,* vol II, no. 2, 109–116, (2014) 116.

[261] Elkins concludes "As a rule ambitious, successful contemporary fine art is thoroughly nonreligious. Most religious art—I'm saying this bluntly here because it needs to be said — is just bad art." Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 20.

either. […] On the one hand, the spread of civilisation by means of the dizzying proportions of the development of transport, press, etc., levels and unifies the world of thought and feeling of the whole society at a progressive pace, with a psychological need in its new direction, and on the other hand, art will always be at the forefront of development.[262]

A similar inclusive view appears in the writing of Elek Barta, ethnographer, claiming "These concepts have now included everything that can be taken into account at all in the study of the relationship between the landscape, the natural and artificial material worlds located in the space that surrounds man, and religion."[263]

What seems inevitable is a re-establishing and widening of the discourse in Hungary, perhaps even re-connecting with the international discourses. Such re-connection and re-establishment can happen by the discovery, acceptance, and inclusion of multiple modalities, disciplines and inter-disciplines, the recognition of the rich plurality that art in the broadest sense and the discourse on art can offer to help us understand our current state, the existing and expected emergencies, as well as find appropriate attitudes and possible ways out.

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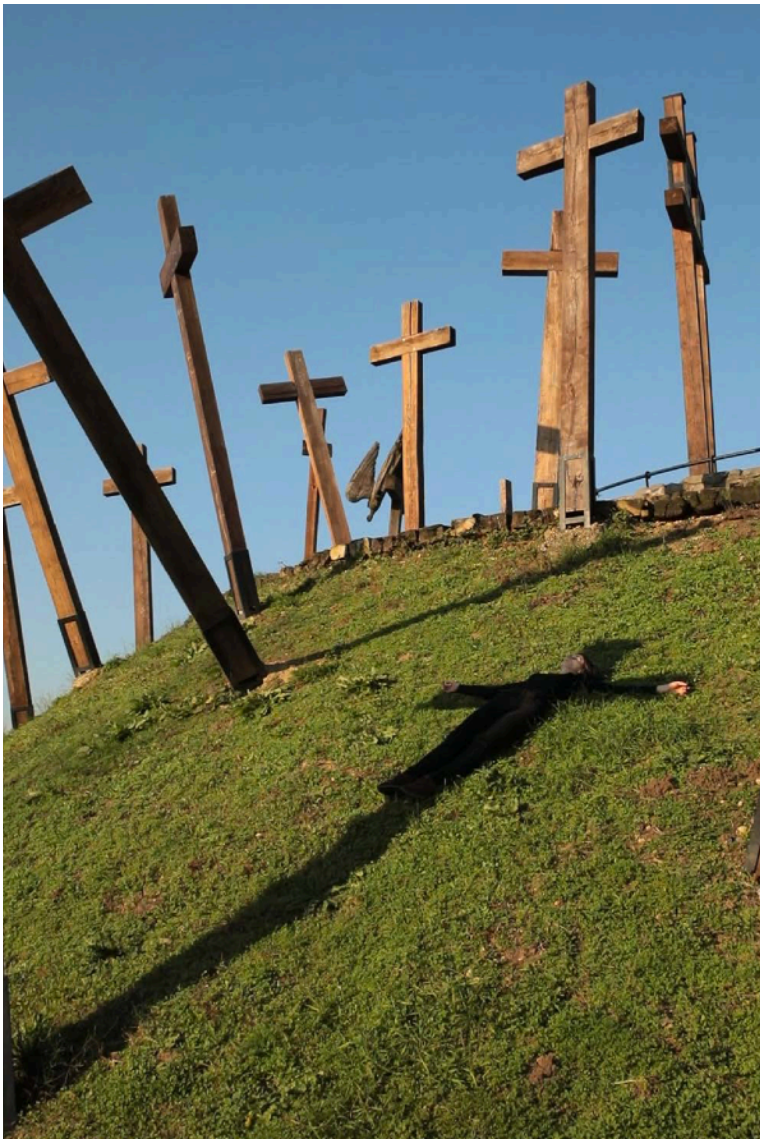
[262] In original: "Az egyházi művészetnek korszerűnek kell lennie már csak azért is, mert ha egy új művészeti irány diadalra jut, nem marad valamirevaló művész, aki a régi irányhoz ragaszkodnék. De nem maradhat el az egyház művészete a kor művészetétől egyéb, belső okok miatt sem. … egyrészt a civilizáció terjedése a szédítő arányokban fejlődő közlekedés, sajtó stb. révén haladványszerű tempóban nivellálja és egységesíti az egész társadalom gondolat- és érzésvilágát, mégpedig lélektani szükséggel az új irányában, másrészt a művészet mindig a fejlődés élén fog haladni." Dr. Antal Somogyi, *Vallás és modern művészet* (Budapest: Szenti István-Társulat, 1927), 59.

[263] In original: "Ezen fogalmak körébe immár bekerült minden, ami a táj, az embert körülvevő tér és a térben elhelyezkedő természeti és mesterséges tárgyi világ és a vallás kapcsolatának kutatása során egyáltalán számításba jöhet." Elek Bartha, "A szakrális tér néprajza," in *A szakrális építészet ma hazánkban*, ed. Zoltán Lőrincz, (Szombathely: Berzsenyi Dániel Tanárképző Főiskola, 1995), 11.



Boglárka Éva Zellei: “Without Title, Muhi” (2020). Still from the video work.

To be human is to be placed, to exist in relation to physical structures, both to shape them and to be shaped by them.

—Tim Gorringe[264]

[264] Tim Gorringe, "Preface," *Theology in built environments: exploring religion, architecture, and design*, ed. Sigurd Bergmann, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 7.

4. Theoretical Framework

Clarifying ‘art,’ as we have seen, is no easier than ‘contemporary’ or ‘sacred,’ and their combination becomes especially problematic. Although several modes of discourse have been introduced, there remains a question as to how we can approach and talk meaningfully about them.

4.1. Why Design Culture studies?

Design Culture studies as a framework for investigation in my research project stems from meeting the discipline during my doctoral studies, as the discipline was experimentally and in a pioneering way introduced to MOME and the Doctoral School by Márton Szentpéteri. I recognised its potential to offer an open and inclusive, interdisciplinary and actively developing discipline to investigate, analyse, and explain the importance of the heterogeneous field of my research. I also assumed that—in addition to providing a wider, more adaptive and mobile, less rigid and conservative approach—the use of this contemporary methodology in research in Hungary might also result in more effectively catching up with the international scholarly dialogue and a better understanding of how important this subject is.

The aesthetic approach to art and the definition of art (and how we see the artist), as well as the religion of art promoting pure art, is a romantic formation of the nineteenth century, which can partly be traced back earlier, to the Renaissance appreciation of the artist, and the transformation of the role of art with the disappearance of what is understood under the term *Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen* (art without names of artists, such as Medieval altarpieces or codices, where the name of the carpenter, the sculptor, the painter, the guilder, the scriptor or the illuminator is unknown, the work of art is not signed and credited, and the personality of the maker is of secondary or negligible importance to the work of art itself). By the twentieth century, the existence of pure art, its independence from the market, and its ability to fundamentally change the world all became questioned—especially with the increasing level of mediation, replicability and commercialisation.

The field and role of art came to operate and be experienced differently. In *Visual Faith*,[265] Dyrness traces this back partly to technical-technological reasons and partly to the intense institutionalisation of the art scene. Looking at it from today’s perspective, I would enrich and supplement this claim with the idea of the spread and broadening horizon of design, as well as design becoming a dominant factor in shaping the world as a product and at the same time an agent of the *total aestheticisation*, also known under the name *design capitalism*.

Art and design in the everyday are often misunderstood, mixed up and misused, both understood as mythologies of creating things of aesthetic, difficult-to-define, but somehow appreciated value. That is why Dyrness finds that “This may explain why everyone even remotely associated with art or design is called an artist”[266]—a painter or sculptor, as much as a

[265] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*.

[266] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 17.

designer of eyewear, a food stylist or a hairdresser, I might add. I have already addressed the connection and commonalities or the common set of art and design; I will later attempt to differentiate and clarify their different roles and characters.

The study of art and design has also changed, with the expansion of the media and genres studied by art history. I found this field of studies, also originating in the nineteenth century, highly restrictive and limited during my university studies, and sought to broaden the field of investigation itself. By the end of the twentieth century, Visual Culture studies, which, as Julier claims, "has emerged from Art History through its incorporation of Cultural Studies," "challenges and widens the field of investigation previously occupied by Art History," and whose "proponents turned away from traditional interests in formal analysis, provenance, and patronage to embrace a more anthropological attitude to the visual in society." Although "its central concern was the investigation of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed," Julier adds, "nonetheless, despite this apparent openness, … the methods of Visual Culture have limited use for developing an understanding of the cultural role of contemporary design in society."[267]

This limited usability was extended by Victor Margolin's earlier (2002) concept of "design as culture," where he claims " that design refers to both an activity and the product; hence, design as culture has relations to disciplines that study human action such as sociology and anthropology and to those that study objects such as art history or material culture."[268] Margolin proposes four basic themes for the cultural approach to design studies: 1) design practice, 2) design products, 3) design discourse, and 4) metadiscourse (which is the reflexive study of design studies itself).

Taking the latter on, Julier and Munch differentiate Design Culture from Design Studies as a field of studies which is "more outward looking and permeable in its disciplinary borders,"[269] and accordingly, "has grown at the same time that conceptions of what design is and could be have developed dramatically", and "moved beyond solely regarding design as concerned with singularities, be these spatial, material or visual or the serial reproduction of objects. Design, these days," they claim, "also includes the orchestration of networks of multiple things, people and actions."[270]

One of the flexibilities this approach offers is that it can be viewed as an approach towards objects, as a discipline, and as practice. The first approach enables the researcher to become "the curious traveller, engaged in multi-linear micro-journeys"[271] when researching the material or visual objects, not staying on the surface only, but rather moving inwards, to where "different constellations of people, interests and objects take place,"[272] interlock with other cultures, and at the same time attempt "to reach into multiple domains of everyday practice through its varied materialisations,"[273] staying in synchronicity with the 'unfinished,' dynamically changing

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[267] Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture," 64.

[268] Victor Margolin, "The Multiple Tasks of Design Studies," 244–260, in *The Politics of the Artificial: Essays on Design and Design Studies*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 252.

[269] Julier and Munch, "Introducing Design Culture," 1.

[270] Julier and Munch, "Introducing Design Culture," 2.

[271] Julier and Munch, "Introducing Design Culture," 3.

[272] Julier and Munch, "Introducing Design Culture," 4.

[273] Julier and Munch, "Introducing Design Culture," 5.

environment investigated, and thus making a discipline unstable by nature. The second approach offers the application of multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, as well as trans- or cross-disciplinary modes, whereas the third "may involve a set of consciously enacted actions in establishing shared understandings and values."[274] With this they point at the shift to broader narratives offered by Design Culture studies, as well as its openness to not only provide solutions, but also challenge assumptions and call to action, and "envisage a cross-disciplinary sensibility where new ontological and epistemological states surface,… to broaden, deepen and even re-conceptualise our understandings of design and society."[275]

In the same book, Ben Highmore claims, by using the introduction and propagation of the duvet in Britain as an example, that "The potential of 'design culture' for understanding our world is not premised on the centrality of design in the world. Design culture's critical productivity is not premised on its ability to understand and explain 'design'. Its critical cargo is of value inasmuch as it can help us understand our world,"[276] and recognise the importance of design as "an active agent in producing this world, of 'worlding' this world: of shaping its meanings, its practices and its qualia."[277]

Such a complex and at the same time open and inclusive approach, as I see it, can be achieved by the use of Design Culture studies as framework, which, borrowing Julier's interpretation, as "part of the flows of global culture … expresses an attitude, a value, and a desire to improve things,"[278] and therefore is more accurate, up-to-date, and effective in support of my research than previous approaches, especially, since Julier claims, it "Forces one to move beyond the enervated position of the detached or alienated observer overwhelmed by images," requires an investigation "relationally to other artefacts, processes, and systems," and "as a generative mode that produces new sensibilities, attitudes, approaches, and intellectual processes … it promises a critical and knowing pathway toward the amelioration of this runaway world."[279]

This is nothing else but what Márton Szentpéteri calls *order out of chaos* (ordo ab chao), which—according to Victor Papanek's definition of design quoted by Szentpéteri—is a "conscious and at the same time intuitive endeavour to create meaningful order."[280]

4.2. Art / Design

The notion of art and its relation to design introduced earlier has already raised and hopefully resolved certain difficulties, while producing some more. The distinction between art and design should not be based on, say, aesthetic qualities or pure functionality, since both can be experienced and enjoyed on aesthetic grounds as well as used or applied functionally. The

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[274] Guy Julier and Anders V. Munch, "Epilogue: Towards design culture as practice," *Design Culture: Objects and Approaches*, eds. Guy Julier, Anders V. Munch, Mads Nygaard Folkmann, Hans-Christian Jensen and Niels Peter Skou, 227–230, (London–New York–Oxford–New Delhi–Sydney: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019), 227–228.

[275] Julier and Munch, "Epilogue: Towards design culture as practice," 230.

[276] Ben Highmore, "Taste and attunement: Design culture as world making," *Design Culture: Objects and Approaches*, 38.

[277] Highmore, "Taste and attunement," 38.

[278] Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture," 70.

[279] Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture," 76.

[280] In original: "tudatos és egyszersmind intuitív törekvés az értelemteli rend megteremtésére." Szentpéteri, *Design és kultúra*, 9.

difference lies rather in the subtle difference between the two ways of thinking, approaching, and their nature.

Compared to design as detailed above and in section 3.7, art, which Jean-Marie Schaeffer in his famous critique of the speculative theory of art, *Art of the Modern Age*, claims Romanticism has brought to life[281] and at the same time sacralised as the restorative reaction to the Enlightenment, has been seen from Romanticism to Modernism as an *ontological revelation,* an aesthetic knowledge that spares us from the inauthentic and alienated existence which is our daily experience. The speculative theory of art, developed by Romanticism in response to the rationalist ontological crises provoked by Kantian criticism, postulates an identity of essence between art and philosophy. Retrieved and developed by the grand philosophers of the German idealist tradition, from Hegel to Heidegger, this idea, which equips art with a function of compensation, permeated gradually through the world of art and played a central role in the logic of artistic modernism.

Martin Heidegger, though using a different term, explicitly brought renewed attention to the concept of *aletheia* by relating it to the notion of disclosure or, as he later specified, *unconcealment* of truth, the way things appear as entities in the world. Heidegger suggests it is not accidental that the Greeks expressed the essence of truth by this privative expression. Being-in-untruth makes up an essential characteristic of Being-in-the-world, and it takes resolution to adhere to the way of truth.

Schaeffer, however, seeks to return to "the multiple and changing reality of the arts and art works,"[282]—thus differentiating art from speculative thought. His argument for disconnecting art and philosophy is of a restorative nature, based on his claim that the category of art did not exist before Romanticism.[283]

Although it is not explicitly apparent in Schaeffer's wording, I cannot help but sense the relation of his argument to the question of the disclosure or return of enchantment, the unmagicking and re-magicking of the world. It is my conviction that a primary capacity of art—and perhaps this is in connection with art's lack of focus on functionality—is its special ability to see the betweenness of the world, see behind the veil, reach insights and understandings vital for the sustainment and the future of the world—as well as to present and share them with those whose skills, knowledge and capacities can turn these understandings into practical solutions. On this view, art is transcendent, which echoes Siedell's earlier thought.

Design, on the other hand, is immanent, bound to the earthly, the material, the solution-focused, the profit-oriented—as a natural consequence of its relation to economical and political powers, hence the name design capitalism. It is not surprising that the counterpoint to Schaeffer's term, ontological revelation, appears as *ontological veiling* in connection with technology in a conference paper by Hector Rodriguez, who states that the term means "a situation where the essential nature of the medium is systematically concealed, under pressure from pervasive economic and cultural forces."[284]

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[281] Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 137.

[282] Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 13.

[283] Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 137.

[284] Hector Rodriguez, "Algorithmic culture and the ontology of media art," Conference paper, *Digital Media Summit Forum*, Nanjing University of the Arts, 2016, Abstract, https://scholars.cityu.edu.hk/en/publications/algorithmic-culture-and-the-ontology-of-media-art(234541a2-cf35-4ca3-b670-4c546cb2aea8).html, 30.01.2022. I thank Ákos Schneider for bringing this paper to my attention.

Following Heidegger's distinction between works of art that rescue us from emergency (as means of cultural politics as conservers of the status quo that conceal emergencies) and those that are rescuers into emergency (as disruptive events that thrust us into emergencies), Zabala's emergency aesthetics[285] nevertheless takes another turn in the question, by arguing that works of art are not simply means of elevating consumerism or contemplating beauty, but rather points of departure to change the world. As he claims, "When philosophers turn to art today it seems to be because they have lost hope in politics, religion, and philosophy."[286]

[285] Zabala, *Why Only Art Can Save Us*.

[286] Zabala, "Turning to Art's Demands."

Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession (2002). Still from the video documenting the happening.

In the past, the densest or richest location of baptised art has been the Liturgy. The sacred use of the arts in the liturgical setting has provided inspiration for artists engaged in producing artworks for contexts outside the Liturgy, for consumption beyond the limits of the visible Church. In the modern West, the Muses have largely fled the liturgical amphitheatre, which instead is given over to banal language, poor quality popular music, and, in new and re-designed churches, a nugatory or sometimes totally absent visual art.

—Aidan Nichols[287]

Nothing entitles us to believe that there is less value in contemporary art than before.

— Mátyás Varga[288]

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[287] Aidan Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics*, (Aldershot, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 149.

[288] In original: "Semmi sem jogosít fel bennünket arra, hogy azt higgyük, a kortárs művészetben kevesebb érték van, mint a korábbiakban." M. Varga, *Nyitott rítusok*, 66.

5. Delighting Diversity

The lament on the Muses having fled the liturgical amphitheatre, as Aidan Nichols, a Dominican friar, claims, and the supportive argument by Mátyás Varga, then a Benedictine monk, on the existing value of contemporary art—both of them knowledgable scholars and sensitive supporters of art—supplement one another in terms of arguing for the possible place of contemporary art, one that speaks a relevant and timely language—independent of the setting.

Nevertheless, the public as well as the professional discourse raise widely different opinions regarding very different contemporary works of art. Such dilemmas can be understandable at first sight. How could one identify works of art with different subjects, visuality, concepts, philosophies, or artistic attitudes as belonging to the same category? Would Maurizio Cattelan's asteroid-hit wax figure of Pope John Paul (*La Nona Ora*, 1999),[289] his taxidermised horse pierced by an INRI sign (*Untitled*, 2009)[290] or León Ferrari's crucifix with a fighter jet nailed to the cross (*La civilización occidental y christiana,* 1965)[291] fit in the same category as Tamás Kárpáti's painting that shows a cross and a figure emerging from billowing golden smoke (*Missa,* 2012),[292]—even though all of these works bear obvious references to symbols of Christianity? Could Mark Wallinger's *Ecce Homo* (1999),[293] a shirtless figure of Christ, cast from marbleised resin, with hands tied behind the back and crowned with golden barbed wires, and Andres Serrano's *Immersion (Piss Christ)* (1987), a Crucifix immersed in the artist's blood and urine, and photographed in glowing light[294]—both of which directly reference Christ—fall in the same category? And what about Gerhard Richter's *Kölner Domfenster* (2007),[295] a stained glass window with a pixelated effect, consisting of over ten thousand small colour squares, installed in a Gothic opening in the Cologne Cathedral, compared to Ferenc Varga's the *Christ Pantocrator, Mary, Elijah and Angels* (2018),[296] a figurative secco executed with a historical technique and style, painted onto the wall of the chapel of the Cloister of the Discalced Carmelite Sisters in Magyarszék—both created for Catholic church interiors, liturgical environments?

One could classify these works 1) by subject (whether or not directly referencing religiosity, e.g., Biblical characters or the life of saints); 2) by the form of the commission (commissioned for liturgical / ecclesiastical or art world use, be it commercial or not); 3) the intended use or the place / environment of installation (whether created to be installed and exhibited in a church, an

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289 See https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Maurizio_Cattelan/2/la-nona-ora/15420, 23.04.2021.

290 See https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Maurizio_Cattelan/2/untitled/19610, 23.04.2021.

291 See https://postwar.hausderkunst.de/en/artworks-artists/artworks/la-civilizacion-occidental-y-cristiana-the-western-christian-civilization, 23.04.2021.

292 See https://mmakademia.hu/alkotas/-/record/MMAA66097, 23.04.2021.

293 See https://www.stpauls.co.uk/eccehomo, 23.04.2021.

294 See http://andresserrano.org/series/immersions.php, 23.04.2021.

295 See https://www.gerhard-richter.com/en/art/other/glass-and-mirrors-105/cologne-cathedral-window-14890, 23.04.2021.

296 See http://www.karmelita.hu/karmelhegyi-boldogasszony-founnepe-2018/, 23.04.2021.

institution of the art world, a commercial or a private space; to be used for liturgy, private worship, religious or aesthetic admiration, spiritual or commercial reasons); 4) as well as on the basis of stylistic features, the abstract or figural nature of the work, the lack or the essential nature of narrative—and we could continue the points well-known from art history or criticism. But, since these are highly obvious, that would not add too many novel and valuable points to the discussion of the subject.

We can seemingly experience a friction between these artists and works, but in reality, there is no contradiction in their essential attitude—neither in the practicing religiosity of the artists (Serrano being religious, just as Varga), nor in the appearance of their works (Serrano's *Immersion* and Kárpáti's *Missa* being highly resemblant at first sight). There is, however, a striking contrast in their reception—certain works are celebrated or rejected by certain groups and opinions, and vice versa. (See, for example, the controversies around Serrano's work. Politicians and conservative groups repeatedly accused the work of being blasphemous and vulgar, and the work was excluded and even damaged at exhibitions. At the same time, Sister Wendy Becket openly supported the work, considering it a strong way of saying what we, humans, have done to Christ.) What position should we take in this debate? How can we manage classification, if the categories used either fail or provide room for further controversies?

5.1. Alternative Classification

The solution offered by Elkins in his previously cited book proposes five approaches to art, and five explanations to address the relations of religion and contemporary art: 1) the end of religious art; 2) the creation of new faiths; 3) art that is critical of religion; 4) how artists try to burn away religion; and 5) unconscious religion.

As examples, Elkins takes five of his students, and their works: Kim, a Korean student with lithographs of God's hand and the happy fish (the end of religious art); Rehema and her beadwork pre-historic shaped Venus (the creation of new faiths); Brian and his colourful, large-sized Cibachrome Elvis crucifixion images (art that is critical of religion); Ria and her ceramic house with the fourteen erased stations of the cross (how artists try to burn away religion); and Joel with his hundreds of pictures of odd-looking heart-like objects (unconscious religion).

Elkins provides a detailed explanation—with many apt contemporary and historic references—to help us better understand his train of thought, the works, and the attitudes of the artists. In the chapter "Some Words to Describe Spiritual Art," he summarises his ideas, also "proposing some ideas and words that can help give voice to art like Joel's and Ria's,"[297] since, as he claims, "Rehema's NRM (New Religious Movement)-inspired art already has a flourishing vocabulary, and Kim's religious work and Brian's anti religious work have all of religious discourse on which to draw."[298]

This categorisation represented an obvious call for me to look for matching works, oeuvres and artists from the universe of art and artists from Hungary (works from my proxemics). Such a search could result in examples of 1) Varga's earlier mentioned *Christ Pantocrator, Mary,*

[297] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 105.

[298] Elkins, *On the Strange Place,* 105.

Elijah and Angels (2018),[299] a large figurative secco made with a traditional method and following traditional style and iconography—as the end of religious art; 2) the complex oeuvre of Olga Kocsi (aka Holy Olga)[300] or Abigél Wirth[301]—as the creation of new faiths; 3) Tamás Vass' photographic winged altarpiece (1998),[302] a large size diploma work following classic iconography, but applying a fashion-photographer's glossy visual approach—as art that is critical of religion; 4) Lőrinc Borsos' *Kill Your Idols* exhibition (2019),[303] a dark, complex, deeply critical and at the same time constructive and hopeful approach to speak about religion and its paraphernalia—as how artists try to burn away religion; and 5) Éva Kun's *Piros vérrel virágozik* (Blooms with Red Blood, 2015),[304] a smaller, partly gilded ceramic image resembling and reflecting upon the road-side crucifixes of folk art—as unconscious religion. The list is incomplete, as it could be extended with many more artists and works of art. Yet, perhaps it is worth switching Elkins' characters into tangible, local ones, as it proves the classification also works in another corner of the art world.

If we believed that this gave us the final and reconciling answer we were looking for, the ever-challenging Elkinsean universe would prove us wrong. On his personal website, Elkins comments on his approach of using the above categories to describe the relations of religion and art:

> *Five stories about art students whose work engages religion. They are all based on students I had, with the names and some details changed. They are a spectrum from sincere work that aims to express a major religion's central beliefs, to insincere work that is critical of anything resembling faith. […] This book hasn't solved any of the issues it raises, but it has given me an idea of how academia might speak in a broader and more inclusive sense."*[305]

One and a half decades later Elkins adds an interesting comment on how he would refocus his work: now focusing on the first and the fourth approaches,[306] the categories of the end of religious art and artists trying to burn away religion. This represents a clear message of his re-evaluated position. Transferring it to the artists I named as examples from the art world in Hungary, these would be Ferenc Varga and Lőrinc Borsos—an interesting pairing, hardly imaginable in the same curatorial concept, at the same exhibition.

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[299] See http://www.karmelita.hu/karmelhegyi-boldogasszony-founnepe-2018/, 23.04.2021.

[300] See https://www.facebook.com/Holy0lga/, 23.04.2021.

[301] Especially Wirth's series "I Want To Believe." See, Abigél Wirth's website, the page of the project, https://wirthabigail.com/portfolio/i_want_to_believe/, 31.01.2022.

[302] The work is not documented online. I remembered having seen the diploma exhibition where it was exhibited (at MIF, the predecessor of MOME, in 1998). My memory was confirmed in personal correspondence with the artist on 10.08.2020.; and images of the work were kindly provided by the artist, Tamás Vass, via e-mail on 26.04.2021.

[303] See https://borsoslorinc.com/works/kill-your-idols, 23.04.2021.

[304] See https://muzeum.kecskemet.hu/biennale-tortenete-es-a-gyujtemeny/kun-eva-piros-verrel-viragozik-2015-2/, 23.04.2021.

[305] James Elkins' personal website, the page on his 2004 book: https://jameselkins.com/strange-place-of-religion-in-contemporary-art/, 23.04.2021.

[306] "Together I think the five define the field of possibilities in contemporary art—although if I were to rewrite the book now, I would put much more stress on the first and fourth, instead of treating them as five potentially equal cases." James Elkins' personal website, the page on his 2004 book: https://jameselkins.com/strange-place-of-religion-in-contemporary-art/, 23.04.2021.

Varga follows a unique path. His career as an artist began—following graduate studies at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, and doctoral studies at the Kyoto University of the Arts—with conceptual, and sometimes post conceptual works of art. His doctoral thesis *Szoborfaragásról a technokultúra és a tömegmédia korában*: *Tézis a szobrászatról a szobrászat antitézisének idején* (On Carving Sculptures in the Age of Techno Culture and Mass Media: Thesis on Sculpture in the Time of the Antithesis of Sculpture)[307] provides a solid point in understanding his initial views. His works, like the bust self-portrait of *Szobor koncepció nélkül* (Sculpture without Concept, 2000), the life-size full-body self portrait *Sikertelen kísérlet a szoborfaragásra hívó késztetés megtagadására* (Unsuccessful Attempt to Deny the Urge to Sculpt, 2000) carved meticulously out of granite, then dressed up in the artist's clothes, to finally be demolished by the artist, or the slow image of *Százezer falevél* (One Hundred Thousand Tree Leaves, 2001), a life-size, 13 by 10 meters Japanese ink drawing of a ginkgo tree prepared in-situ over eleven months, clearly indicate the engagement of the artist towards maximising his efforts in creating works of art, which he follows following the motto paraphrasing the Japanese philosopher, Nishitani Keiji: "The sculptor carves a sculpture as much as [he carves] a sculptor."[308]

After returning to Hungary, he started to work in education, teaching sculpture at the Faculty of Music and Arts at the University of Pécs (PTE), where, in a cross-university cooperation, he co-lead the Christian Sacred Art Specialisation together with Csaba Hegyi. Nevertheless, he did not give up his intention to devote his entire life and work as an artist to serve the kingdom of God.[309] When the chance came, he left academia, and moved into the barn of the Convent of the Discalced Carmelite Sisters in Magyarszék. There, for four years (2014 to 2018)—following a specific interpretation of Paul's call ("Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17), understanding the activity of making art as prayer—he engaged in ceaseless carving, painting, as well as the necessary design and preparation activities: remodelling the interior of the chapel of the convent, carving a three-dimensional image of *Hodogetria*, a model well-known from icon painting, out of wood, as well as a new *ambo* and *mensa* from onyx, and painting the above-mentioned large secco covering the east wall of the chapel. Varga worked in the most traditional way possible: he prepared most of the natural pigments by hand, ground and applied them to the wall partly by using brushes he had made using the hair of fallen wild animals, like martens, found by the road side, having been hit by cars.

After finishing the work, Varga returned to his home in Kisújbánya, and claims he ultimately broke with the art world.[310] He confirms, that he sees his own earlier oeuvre as pointless, and although he respects artists active within the art world, he believes all art should strive to create images of Christ, the saints, the Divine, and to serve liturgy. His claim is very much in line with

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[307] Ferenc Varga, *Szoborfaragásról a technokultúra és a tömegmédia korában: Tézis a szobrászatról a szobrászat antitézisének idején*, Doctoral Dissertation, (Kyoto: Kyoto University of Arts, 2004).

[308] In original: "A szobrász szobrot farag, és ő olyan, mint a szobrász." Translated from Japanese original by the artist. F. Varga, *Szoborfaragásról a technokultúra és a tömegmédia korában*, 6.

[309] From memory of a personal conversation with the artist in Magyarszék, 11.02.2018.

[310] Although, from time to time, Varga accepts invitations to exhibit. Recently, he took part in the group exhibition *"Rejtettség_Felsejlés"* ("Hiddenness_Appearance") at the Dome Lapidary, Pécs (September 6–October 31, 2021), with photographic documents of his above mentioned works in Magyarszék.

Siedell's view on the importance of liturgy, the practice of religion, in art.[311] And, Varga, by the act of carving or painting, which he refers to as prayer in action, is a committed practitioner.

Liturgy and religion also play an important role in the oeuvre of Lőrinc Borsos—the *interpersona* of Lilla Lőrincz and János Borsos—although from a critical perspective, in line with the distinction classified by Elkins as "burning away religion." As Borsos said in an interview:

> *If we mention these two words, Christian and art, together, then an ideological aspect is created, which can mean very strong censorship, and has no good effect on work. Together, the two words represent an ideology, create a kind of showcase situation: the work does not reach the (quality of a) work of art, rather it becomes propagandistic. As an artist, this is how I see it. It took a few years for us to do this, and we faced several problems. 'Christian art' is didactic, it wants to speak to everyone, but in the meantime it doesn't speak to anyone, trying to avoid hurting someone, it loses its power. Although by the imagery it represents the community from which it originates, no Christian community can represent the whole of Christianity, at most it represents only one particular school of a particular trend, and this diverts it from the inner desire of Christianity. Art can only come into being if the artist is released and not burdened with this heavy load of 'Christian art.' […] The position that applies to us is critical. In order to find one's own position, one must first break down everything. In times of concussions, when one has the opportunity to face oneself and balance things, most of the visible superstructures are lost. But if one has no critique of him/herself, of his/her own medium, then his/her works cannot transcend the question of representation.*[312]

When we look at their thoroughly documented oeuvre,[313] the works and the exhibitions prove this attitude: the critical nature is evident in their art. Their works and exhibitions—*You Are All High Priests* (2019)[314] reflecting upon Feuerbach's idea of self-deification, the monopolisation of transcendence by religion, and the split of human consciousness; *Hope The Fire Will Do The Work* (2019)[315] pointing at the absurdity of moral judgements; *Kill Your Idols* (2019)[316]

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[311] "Religion is not merely or simply 'believed,' as if it is the sum total of our intellectual thoughts about it; it is practiced." Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics," 16.

[312] In original: "Ha együtt említjük ezt a két szót, hogy keresztény és művészet, akkor létrejön egy ideológiai szempont, ami nagyon erős cenzúrát jelenthet, és ez nincs jó hatással az alkotásra. A két szó együtt egy ideológia reprezentációját jelenti, amivel egyfajta kirakat-szituáció jön létre: nem jut el a műalkotásig a munka, inkább propagandisztikussá válik. Alkotóként ezt látom. Volt néhány év, amíg mi is ezt csináltuk, és több problémával is szembesültünk. A 'keresztény művészet' didaktikus, mindenkihez akar szólni, de közben senkihez sem szól, elveszíti az erejét, nehogy valakit megbántson. Képileg ugyan képviseli a közösséget, ahonnan származik, de egyik keresztény közösség sem tudja a kereszténység egészét képviselni, legfeljebb csak egy irányzat egy adott iskoláját, és ez eltérít a kereszténység belső vágyától. Csak az tud művészet létrejönni, ha elengedik az alkotót, és nem aggatják rá ezt a súlyos terhet, hogy „keresztény művészet". (...) A számunkra érvényes álláspont a kritikai. Ahhoz hogy az ember megtalálja a saját álláspontját, először le kell bontani mindent. Megrázkódtatások idején, amikor az embernek van lehetősége szembenézni önmagával és mérlegre tenni a dolgokat, a látható felépítmények zöme odaveszik. De ha nincs az embernek kritikája önmagával, a saját közegével szemben, akkor a művei nem tudnak túllendülni a reprezentáció kérdésén." Zoltán Körösvölgyi, "Meglátni magunkat a fénylő feketében: Beszélgetés Borsos Lőrinccel," *Mértékadó,* (October 24–30, 2016): 2–3.

[313] See https://borsoslorinc.com. 29.04.2021.

[314] See https://borsoslorinc.com/works/you-are-all-high-priests, 29.04.2021.

[315] See https://borsoslorinc.com/works/hope-the-fire-will-do-the-work, 29.04.2021.

[316] See https://borsoslorinc.com/works/kill-your-idols, 29.04.2021.

confronting the idols made for themselves; or the earlier ones, *nonentity* (2016)[317] based on a quote from G. K. Chesterton ("God will make man see things, if it is only against the black background of nonentity"[318]), or *Paradise Lost* (2014),[319] an organic part of the artist's private mythology—all serve as evidence of this critical, though deeply engaged and thoroughly self-reflective approach.

In 2021 they published their imaginary online meta-diary, *Nevük légió* (Their Name is Legion, 2021),[320] which can serve as a key to interpret the oeuvre. With the title a direct Biblical reference—Jesus restoring a demon-possessed man (Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30)—the work examines the artist's identity through a loose recollection of dreams, psychedelic experiences, quotes, concepts, ideas and memories of their "religious period" (2003 to 2010). Those seven years they spent in different charismatic Christian denominations, and pushed their art into the background. Only when moving away from these communities did they begin to work again in art, under the name and identity Lőrinc Borsos, and it took another seven years to begin to unravel their experiences. The online meta-diary—consisting of words, texts, quotes, still and animated gif-images, memes, embedded documentary and music videos, as well as their own works of art—operates as part of this decipherment process, analysing the contradictory or very similar relationship between the roles of believer and artist.

5.2. Broadening the Spectrum

These two approaches couldn't be more different at first sight: one links straight back to the service of liturgy and thus religion, whereas the other is a striking critique of religion and a radical attempt to create works that preserve the essence though burn the unnecessary layers added on. Yet, there is common ground between them: the direct engagement with faith, spiritual experience and artistic practice.

Were we to take this as a redefined fundament, we could discover several modes, artists, oeuvres, and works with this basis related to spiritual experience. In this way, fully in agreement with Elkins' reformed choice I believe the spectrum is much more colourful and complex—multiple styles, approaches, genres and qualities of artists, different institutional and curatorial views, as well as different modes of encounters are present in today's art.

One end of this spectrum, art directly linked to religion and serving as an integral part of liturgy, is represented—among others—by Ferenc Varga's oeuvre since 2014, with an obvious and direct link to practicing religiosity and liturgical use.

We can also speak of art in church environments without liturgical use yet unquestionably present as art. Examples range from Gerhard Richter's *Kölner Domfenster* (2007)—a radical rethinking of the Medieval Gothic stained-glass cathedral window, with more than ten thousand small squares of glass, based on Richter's 1974 painting, *4096 Farben* (4096 Colours), creating a pixelated effect and at the same time adhering to the concept of the enchanting light as imagined by Abbot Suger, the originator of what we know as Gothic art, in the twelfth century—through James Turrel's light art installation in the interior of the burial chapel of the *Kapelle*

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[317] See https://borsoslorinc.com/works/nonentity, 29.04.2021.

[318] G. K. Chesterton, "Introduction to the Book of Job," The Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton website (https://www.chesterton.org), https://bit.ly/32Ym8BN, 29.04.2021.

[319] See https://borsoslorinc.com/works/paradise-lost, 29.04.2021.

[320] See http://tranzitblog.hu/nevuk-legio-transzrealizmus_06/, 22.01.2022.

Dorotheenstädtischer Friedhof (Dorotheenstädtischer Cemetery Chapel, Berlin, 2015), to exhibitions in Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln[321] since 1987.

Though the promotional text on the website of the latter includes the statement "Sankt Peter ist Liturgie" (St Peter is liturgy)—in addition to the claims of "Sankt Peter ist Kunst. Sankt Peter ist Musik. Sankt Peter ist aktuell. Sankt Peter ist lebendig."("St. Peter is art, music, actual and lively")—it only refers to the liturgical events of the church. This is separate from the Kunst-Station, where past exhibitions included works by Antoni Tàpies, James Brown, Joseph Beuys, Keith Haring, Arnulf Rainer, Christian Boltanski, Eduardo Chillida, Francis Bacon, Martin Creed, Jannis Kounellis, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Barbara Kruger, Damien Hirst, Bruce Nauman, Andy Warhol, Ian McKeever, Olafur Eliasson, and Riko Ueda. Lately, visitors could see Richter's *Grauer Spiegel* (Grey Mirror, 2018)—a large piece of coloured glass offering an interplay of image, space and viewer, and at the same time serving as a placeholder work replacing and referring to Rubens' *Crucifixion of Peter* (1638–40) while it is being restored—as well as the intangible work of Berndnaut Smilde's *Nimbus Sankt Peter* (2014)—an artificially created indoor cloud, only visible for a very short time in the church interior. These works are not linked directly to religiosity in the practising or liturgical sense, yet, in the given environment of organised religion, they can contribute to enriching spiritual experiences of the transcendent, the invisible, the unthinkable.

Another group of works can be classified as religious art in the art world—either as traditional, figurative works directly referencing religious subjects, or more abstract non-figurative ones. Several great exhibitions have provided seriously founded overviews of this field—including those that initiated my own research, like *Tér és imádság* (Space and Prayer, 2007) and *Az ikontól az installációig* (From the Icon to the Installation, 2008), both at the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma, *Messiások* (Messiahs, 2009) and *Istenem* (My God, 2011) both in MODEM, Debrecen, as well as *Úrhajó* (Lordship, 2011) at Műcsarnok, Budapest, *Csend* (Silence, 2019), *Vendég+látás* (Guest+Appearance, 2020) and *Láthatatlan spektrumok* (Invisible Spectra, 2021), all at the Pannonhalma Archabbey, or lately the space and locus specific installative group of works created by students of the Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem (Hungarian University of Fine Arts, MKE) in-situ during the 2021 *Arcus Temporum Festival,* which appear as re-interpreted stations of the cross.[322]

Internationally, a long list of related examples have occurred, including the earlier mentioned *Seeing Salvation* at the National Gallery, London (2000), *Himmelschwer* (Sky Heavy, 2003) at the Landesmuseum Joanneum in Graz, Austria, *100 Artists See God* at ICA, London, UK (2004–2005), *Traces du Sacré* (Traces of the Sacred) at Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2008), *Medium Religion* at ZKM (Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany, 2009), *The Problem of God* at Kunstsammlung, Düsseldorf (2015–16), and the APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale in Malta (2017–2018).

Events of a smaller scale enrich the above lists, including exhibitions of my own curatorial practice, with *puritanus—pure art* (2017) and *Fragmentum—Contemporary Sacred Photography* (2019) both at Hegyvidék Gallery, Budapest, in the framework of the Ars Sacra Festival of the given years, as well as *Latorlépés* (Thief Step) with Boglárka Éva Zellei's works at TOBE Gallery, Budapest (2020) among them.

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[321] See https://www.sankt-peter-koeln.de/wp/, 29.04.2021.

[322] One of the participating students wrote in detail of the project. See, Réka Schell, "Tükör által homályosan," *műút*, 16.12.2021., http://www.muut.hu/archivum/37694, 31.01.2022.

There are works of art related to religion and spirituality in the permanent collections of museums, including contemporary collections. Examples include from Keith Haring's *Altarpiece* (1990)[323]—a triptych with the characteristic Haringian figures outlined as obvious references to scenes and forms known from Christianity, like a cross, a heart, a madonna with child composition, angels, the fall and ascension of man, all covered with white gold leaf patina; works by Zoltán Érmezei, Tamás Konok and Péter Türk in the collection of Ludwig Museum Budapest (LUMU),[324] and those by Emese Benczúr, Gábor Erdélyi and Erik Mátrai at the Hungarian National Gallery (Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, MNG), Budapest.

In the past decade, the Ludwig Museum Budapest has been active in introducing the oeuvre of the above mentioned Hungarian artists, whose works are strongly related to religious/spiritual experience. Zoltán Érmezei's (2016), Péter Türk's (2018) and Tamás Konok's (2021) retrospective exhibitions all provided deep insights. Érmezei's (1955–1991) corpuses show a direct analogy to the crucifixion and the descent from the cross. Death was a central subject in his oeuvre, starting with an early classified ad, informing of Érmezei's death (1975)—thus declaring the birth of Érmezei as an artist—to the video documentation of the artist's exhibition in 1990, when he cast a corpse modelled after his own body, which was hung on the wall of the gallery in a performative act, creating a direct reference to crucifixion. Türk's (1943–2015) early neo-avantgarde art took a major turn after his 1989 experience of God, creating an enormous oeuvre of works aiming at "bringing to light a transcendental world that was endless and in hiding, yet awaited and desired to be known."[325] Konok's (1930–2020) last exhibition, *Vers l'infini* (To Infinity) was originally planned as an oeuvre exhibition. Following the delays caused by the COVID–19 pandemic, as well as the artist's death in 2020, it turned into a retrospective exhibition. The title of the exhibition reflects Konok's interest in the transcendent, which dominated the last three decades of his life.[326] This is apparent in his works "reduced to the ultimate, showing order beyond material reality, in which his striving for spiritual purity, his openness to the transcendent, is manifested."[327] The above hints reflect that Érmezei, Türk and Konok, though canonised as part of the art world (and slowly also in the studies of art history), thought and worked in a context wider than the usual framework of visual or fine arts, involving inclusive and participative, as well as immersive practices related to philosophical and theological thought, the transcendent, religion, and spirituality.

The influence of the pioneering work of Miklós Erdély (1928–1986) is obvious on the depth and the direction of their quest, whereas the complex performative nature of Erdély's work can be recognised in Lőrinc Borsos's works. Erdély's difficult-to-classify oeuvre places him among

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[323] See https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/work/altarpiece, 24.01.2022.

[324] See https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/exhibition/zoltan-ermezei-oeuvre-look-backforward, https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/news/all-not-visible-peter-turk-1943-2015-retrospective, and https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/news/vers-linfini-tamas-konoks-oeuvre-exhibition-1930-2020, respectively. 30.04.2021.

[325] "All Is Not Visible—Péter Türk (1943–2015) Retrospective," Ludwig Museum, 20 April 2018, https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/news/all-not-visible-peter-turk-1943-2015-retrospective, 30.04.2021.

[326] Konok claims, "Over the last thirty years, I have become more and more attracted to the transcendent sense of life that exists independently of experience for its timeless display that is incomprehensible to the intellect. I gave my series of images the title 'Sine loco et anno' (Without Space and Time)." In Hungarian original: "Az utolsó harminc évben egyre erősebben vonzódtam a tapasztalattól függetlenül létező transzcendens életérzés felé az értelemmel fel nem fogható időtlen megjelenítésére. Képsorozataimnak a 'Sine loco et anno' (tér és idő nélkül) címet adtam." Konok's website, https://konok.hu/konok-tamas/, 30.04.2021.

[327] See "Vers l'Infini. Tamás Konok's Oeuvre Exhibition (1930–2020)." Ludwig Museum, January 12 to April 11, 2021, https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/news/vers-linfini-tamas-konoks-oeuvre-exhibition-1930-2020, 30.04.2021.

the most important figures of art and philosophy in Hungary. As J. A. Tillman claims, "Perhaps immeasurable is the impact he, through his friends, disciples and students, has had on various corners of the spiritual life of the country."[328] Tillmann writes of Erdély's work *A kalcedoni zsinat emlékére* (In Memory of the Council of Chalcedon, 1980), claiming that Erdély's interest in the religious dimension deepened in the last decade of his life. With his late works, Tillmann claims, "Erdély surpassed the typically modern separation of the sacred and the arts and created a new kind of fusion—yet, without any aspirations meeting the foam of the postmodern leaning towards different beliefs."[329]

Though with a much more delicate and silent tone of voice, similarly deep reflections of religion and spirituality can be traced in the works of Erik Mátrai and Gábor Erdélyi. Mátrai[330] works with a more direct set of references to religiosity in his installation and video works, as well as in painting, whereas Erdélyi's references are more subtle in seeking the limits of painting. *Színeváltozás* (Transfiguration—Change of Colours, 2002)[331] with a double meaning indicated in the title, is an experiment with hardly visible, slight tone changes, exploring the possibility to achieve maximal impact with minimal gestures, though the work is based on a performative act of wrapping/covering the painted canvas with very light layers of white silk, as an act of healing. *Lélek tartja* (Held by Soul, 2019)[332] on the other hand, in addition to the obvious connotation provided by the title, attempts to (re)create the minimal though still strong connection between a thing and its frame.

The incorporation of textual elements in visuality—in addition to figurative works—is present in Zoltán Ádám's recent paintings.[333] Just like the figures—saints, crosses, crucifix, palm tree—the text in his work also has a direct reference to religion, since Ádám quotes the Bible, the Psalms as integral parts of his paintings. As Mihály Maljusin claims,

> *Zoltán Ádám's latest paintings are rooted in the past, where the image and the word was still at their common origin, where the heavenly and the earthly have not yet become separate, and have not fallen to pieces. This unity is restored by the artist when he brings text and image, Cranach and Rublev, to a common denominator, suggesting not only ecumenical but also intermedial sensitivity.*[334]

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328 In original: "Alighanem felmérhetetlen az a hatás, amit barátain, tanítványain és hallgatóin keresztül a honi szellemi élet különféle szegleteire gyakorolt." J. A. Tillmann, "Erdély Miklós és A kalcedoni zsinat emlékére," http://www.c3.hu/~tillmann/irasok/muveszet/erdely.html, 30.04.2021.

329 In original: "Erdély nem egy kései művével meghaladta a szakrális és a művészeti jellegzetesen modern szétválasztottságát, és újfajta fúziójukat teremtette meg. Méghozzá anélkül, hogy törekvései találkoztak volna a posztmodern különféle hitek felé hajló habhullámaival." Tillmann, "Erdély Miklós és A kalcedoni zsinat emlékére."

330 See Erik Mátrai's website, http://www.erikmatrai.com, 31.01.2022. Interestingly, Mátrai was found, and encouraged to study art by Váli in 1997. See, "Éveim története," in Dezső Váli's personal website, https://deske.hu/iras/html/hobbi.htm, 30.04.2021.

331 See https://www.instagram.com/p/B7ObMOABSEc/, 30.04.2021.

332 See https://www.instagram.com/p/B3BulQNhg7-/, 07.05.2021.

333 See Ádám's last exhibition "Hívlak nappal, de nem válaszolsz" (Zsolt, 22,3) ("I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer," Psalm 22:3), K. Petrys Gallery, A38, March 11–28, 2020, http://www.petrys.hu/hu/kiallitasok/2020/hivlak-nappal-de-nem-valaszolsz-zsolt-22-3 and https://www.a38.hu/hu/program/adam-zoltan-hivlak-nappal-de-nem-valaszolsz-idoszaki-kiallitas, 30.04.2021.

334 In original: "Ádám Zoltán legújabb képei a régmúltban gyökereznek, ott ahol a kép és a szó még közös eredőjüknél voltak, az égi és a földi még nem váltak külön egymástól, nem hullottak darabjaikra. Ezt az egységet állítja helyre a szerző, amikor szöveget és képet, Cranachot és Rubljovot hozza közös nevezőre, ami nem csupán ökumenikus, de intermediális érzékenységet is sugall." See, http://www.petrys.hu/hu/kiallitasok/2020/hivlak-nappal-de-nem-valaszolsz-zsolt-22-3, 30.04.2021.

Emese Benczúr's entire oeuvre is also built around incorporating textual elements, though in her case shorter, slogan-like words, phrases, and sentences into her installations. Benczúr's works—due to their often activist wording—can also be linked to Barbara Kruger's art, though in Benczúr's case the craftsmanship, the sensitive selection of the materials used, is also centrally important. *In/Visible* (2012) and *Un/Touchable* (2012), both created using LED-lights, or *Ragyogj!* (Shine, 2017), originally created for and installed at the *Ige/Idők* (Grammar/Grace, 2017) exhibition in the Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, MNM), commemorating the 500th anniversary of Reformation. The latter work, a curtain of golden coloured chains with the text appearing in silver on it, created an immersive and *somaesthetic,* bodily and sensorial experience as a closure of the exhibition, since visitors had to pass through it while leaving the exhibition. Benczúr also confirms the possible relation between the central role of the textual elements in her works and her Protestant upbringing, the first encounters with the short textual messages:

> *I didn't think about it at first, but family tradition, the sight of liturgical embroidery or gilding in the Lutheran church in Angyalföld (a district of Budapest), where my grandfather served as a pastor are all part of it. I experienced things closely, which the members of the congregation could only see from far away. As a child, I received a Bible from him (i.e. Benczúr's grandfather), in which I highlighted the passages that were important to me by writing them on small notes. That Bible I still have, but the notes are unfortunately lost. The text, for me, carries a tangible, concrete message, and has been central to my work from the beginning.*[335]

Such visual prayers are not lone examples: during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting curfew, András Mohácsi has started a new series of paintings referencing the *tallit*, the prayer shawl worn by religious Jews. Mohácsi painted details of their stripes, and named each work after a psalm. The works were exhibited during fall 2020 in Budapest, and created an immersive and timely experience. As I then noted: "by looking at the pictures in the exhibition, we, too, can wrap ourselves in prayer. We can see what we might not otherwise notice: like the blessing in quarantine."[336]

An interesting group consists of works seeking to find their place—as art in spaces of organised religion and/or as art related to or attempting to re/create liturgical acts in spaces outside those of organised religions. These works can be regarded as being separate from strictly liturgical or ecclesiastical art, as well as from art world art appearing in churches which behave as galleries; rather, they usually appear in experimental and often performative forms.

Examples include Mark Wallinger's *Ecce Homo* (1999), which, in spite of the fact of having an openly religious connotation as a statue of Christ, has been exhibited in public space (Trafalgar Square, London, 1999), gallery space (*The Others* exhibition, König Galerie, Berlin,

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335 In original: "Kezdetben nem gondoltam erre, de biztosan benne van a családi hagyomány, a templomi hímzések látványa vagy az aranyozások az angyalföldi evangélikus templomban, ahol a nagyapám lelkészként szolgált. A hívek számára távolról látható dolgokat közelről tapasztalhattam meg. Tőle kaptam gyerekkoromban egy Bibliát, amelybe kis cetlikre írva kiemeltem a számomra fontos szövegrészeket. A Biblia máig megvan, a cédulák viszont sajnos elvesztek. A szöveg számomra kézzelfogható, konkrét üzenetet hordoz, és a kezdetektől központi szerepet kapott a munkáiban." Zoltán Körösvölgyi, "Ragyogó szavak, határtalan képek: Találkozás Benczúr Emese képzőművésszel, " *Mértékadó*, (October 15–21, 2018): 2–3.

336 In original: "A tárlat képeit szemlélve mi magunk is beburkolózhatunk az imádságba. Megláthatjuk, amit másképp talán nem vennénk észre: például az áldást a karanténban." Zoltán Körösvölgyi, "Áldott karantén," *Élet és Irodalom*, LXIV: 39, (25 September 2020): 22.

2016), as well as a space of organised religion (St. Paul's Cathedral, London, 2017), and thus shows the interoperability of the territories perceived to be strongly separated and delimited.

A similar curious attempt is by Enrique Martinez Celaya, whose works—practically interpretable in both the art world and in religious environments— have been on show both in galleries and in church spaces. (*The Boy with Horse* was installed at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, New York, 2010; and *The Tower of Snow* at the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia, 2011.)[337]

An extreme approach is apparent in the art of Francis Alÿs. In 2002 he created two performative works: *When Faith Moves Mountains*[338] was an act of deromanticising land art as well as of proving to the participants (and perhaps the beholders) the power of faith and acting together; with five hundred participants and shovels they moved a mountain (if only minimally) in Peru, whereas *The Modern Procession* was an attempt to imply a religiously-based procession in a public space by carrying well-known works of art. (The "holy images" carried included Pablo Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*, Alberto Giacometti's *Standing Woman*, as well as artist Kiki Smith personally as a representative of contemporary art.) Though the act was communicated as "Both festive and ceremonial, the procession makes the museum's historic transition both visible and public, linking the two boroughs in a spectacular and memorable way,"[339] nevertheless, I cannot disregard the sarcastic nature of revaluing the relations of religion and art—by works of art replacing statues of saints, and the pseudoreligious act of carrying these new deities from the 'temple of art' to the streets with pride.

Dezső Váli's photographic stations of the cross work is an outstanding piece both in his oeuvre and due to the nature of the work. Váli is known as a painter[340] with a homogeneous painterly oeuvre and long periods of works seeking to answer a well-defined set of painterly problems.[341] He is also famous for a quote about attempting to achieve the good work of art, when "for the length of a flash of lightening it shows the edge of God's robe."[342] He is, however, also active as photographer, mostly documentary. Yet, perhaps the most successful of his works is a photography-based one, *Koldus keresztút – B/1989/44* (Beggar Stations of the Cross—B/1989/44), which consists of fourteen black-and-white photographs found in (selected from) the collection of the late Museum of the Workers' Movement (Munkásmozgalmi Múzeum) in 1989. Váli cropped the photos to identically sized squares (20 by 20 cm each), and added to them a number and a title (the title of the given station of the cross) by handwriting. The subject of the stations of the cross is not new with Váli, but recurs in his oeuvre following his 1970 visit to Vence's Rosary Chapel designed by Henri Matisse, where Váli was not satisfied with Matisse's stations of the cross, and started to experiment on the topic. (There are

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[337] See, https://www.martinezcelaya.com, 29.04.2021.

[338] See, https://francisalys.com/when-faith-moves-mountains/, 29.04.2021.

[339] See the description of the performance on Public Art Fund, collaborator of the event, in their website: https://www.publicartfund.org/exhibitions/view/the-modern-procession/, 29.04.2021.

[340] Also for having the longest operating Hungarian weblog. See https://deske.hu, operative since 2000, currently hosted by the National Széchenyi Library (OSZK) as part of the national cultural heritage. 29.04.2021.

[341] 1959–1969: study years; 1969–1983: abstract; 1984–1987: Jewish cemeteries; since 1987: atelier. See, https://deske.hu/festmenyek, 29.04.2021.

[342] In original: "egy igazán jó mű villámvillanás idejére megmutatja Isten köpenye szegélyét." "Klasszis. Egy óra közös reggeli egy újabb értékteremtő emberel," *Klasszik Rádió*, documented in writing at Dezső Váli's website. https://deske.hu/iras/html-2020/radio-klasszik-2020.htm, 29.04.2021.

several versions of this subject in his oeuvre since 1970, including the non-photographic series, named *Újságpapír-keresztút – B/1988/16* (Newspaper Stations of the Cross—B/1988/16).[343] The medium and the approach, however, was novel in his oeuvre. Without recording the names of the original photographers, Váli wanted to point at the universality of the once world-changing event through the poor of our days. The special characteristic of this work is that, although the stations of the cross series usually follow one scheme, which allows the viewer to grasp from the first three stations what the following ones will look like, in this case the level of the approach, the associations, and the abstraction changes at each station. This solution forces the viewer to a more disciplined attention.

The existing copies of this work are found in public and private collections, including one version with the artist, which he is willing to provide on loan for temporary exhibitions.[344] A specific feature of Váli's works is that his works are documented with large, high-resolution professional photo documentation on his website. Having recognised the opportunity, Zsófia Ádám, a student of art and design theory at MOME, in the course of her project work *A stáció mint a vallási tárgykultúra része* (The Stations of the Cross as Part of the Religious Culture of Objects, 2019), printed these fourteen works from the files available on the artist's website, and as a research experiment, changed the traditional stations of the cross series to Váli's series in the Roman Catholic Church of her home village of Perbeník, Slovakia. Ádám documented the process of the transition and the reflections of the mostly senior churchgoers, who turned out to be open and interested in the encounter with the new stations of the cross.[345]

Some of the earlier discussed examples already reflect a certain sensitivity to contemporary social and/or political issues, but *artivism* appears in works related to religious or spiritual experience, too. Perhaps the widest known example as artist is Banksy, especially with his works related to Bethlehem, like *The Alternativity* (2017)[346] a collaborative work between Banksy and director Danny Boyle in the form of staging a Nativity play with the participation of local Palestinian children. Banksy, however, also created adjoining works, including graffitis, an image depicting the Holy Family being stopped by the Israeli concrete wall surrounding Bethlehem, as well as an activist website promoting and helping people worldwide to set up walled-off Nativity scenes, raising awareness of the current political situation and relating it to the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus. The artist, who is strongly connected to Bethlehem, having started the venture of The Walled Off Hotel,[347] later created a small installation named *Scar of Bethlehem* (2019). This modified nativity scene showing "Jesus's manger by Israel's separation barrier, which appears to have been pierced by a blast, creating the shape of a star"[348] was installed in The Walled Off Hotel in Advent 2019.

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343 This earlier version was donated to the students' chapel at the Benedictine High School at the Pannonhalma Archabbey, the interior of which was designed by Tamás Czigány, architect.

344 Personal experience: I received this work as loan for my curatorial work of the *Fragmentum—Contemporary Sacred Photography* exhibition (Hegyvidék Gallery, Budapest, 2019).

345 Information on the project and what was learnt by Zsófia Ádám's kind personal sharing, in 2019.

346 The work is documented in the BBC television documentary *The Alternativity* (2017) available at https://youtu.be/9JzgVzUaPU4, 30.04.2021.

347 See, http://walledoffhotel.com, 30.04.2021.

348 "Banksy 'nativity scene' appears in Bethlehem hotel," *BBC News*, 21 December 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50881270, 30.04.2021.

Perhaps the largest, difficult-to-categorise and enigmatic work in this series, placed at the edge of architecture, installation, and light art, is James Turrell's *Roden Crater*, a vast project started in 1977, when Turrell acquired this dormant volcano in Arizona. Similar to, but larger than Turrell's *Celestial Vault* (The Hague, 1996)[349]—a monumental earthwork resembling the shape of a crater, Roden Crater offers an immersive experience to look at the sky. Defined by the artist as "a gateway to observe light, time, and space," Turrell intends the work to "set up a situation to which I take you and let you see," and promises: "It becomes your experience."[350]

These very broad range of approaches and genres can be connected with one phenomenon: the experience—as already suggested by Otto in the form of the numinous, the experience of encountering the sacred—which is highly suitable to moving beyond the limits of art, and entering into the inclusive world and wide horizon of design culture.

5.3. Stepping Forward: Re-Interpreting the Icon

The act of experience can also provide a chance to cross the threshold in yet another direction: towards domains accessible beyond human sensation. "The more the invisible is increased, the more the visible is deepened"—claims Jean-Luc Marion with a paradoxical statement, that can serve as a motto of this idea.[351] The acts of looking and experiencing, the gaze and the experience, the ability of the artist to show what lies beyond the obvious and the visible, seems to be of outstanding importance in the entirety of the above mentioned categories of art. Aidan Nichols suggests a special attitude of seeing is needed:

> *Art requires and releases an askesis or discipline of vision so that we learn how to look with a purity of insight into the heart of human life. Such looking shifts our whole way of reading the significance of the world. In its wake we find our own existence reshaped from the experience of what we have seen.*[352]

The act of looking and seeing, a central question in the flood of images of our days, appears in a number of great scholarly works. Elkins' *How to Use Your Eyes*[353] is a handbook helping us to open our eyes to things we usually do not recognise or attend to—from the pavement and the periodic table, to paintings and ultimately at nothing. Elkins' recent major oeuvre, *Visual Worlds: Looking, Images, Visual Disciplines*, co-authored by Erna Fiorentini,[354] also deals with the notion of image, vision and gaze. The recent scholarly work, *How Do I Look? Theology in the Age of the Selfie* by Dominic White[355] discusses the crisis of the gaze, and attempts to guide us through the story of looking and seeing. During the online launch event of his book, speaking of the intimacy of vision, White noted the related thoughts of Fabrice Hadjadj, French philosopher, who claims "To truly look at the Creator is to look at the creatures in the most

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[349] The Hague, website, https://denhaag.com/en/james-turrell-celestial-vault, 31.01.2022.

[350] Roden Crater, website, https://rodencrater.com/about/, 31.01.2022.

[351] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*., 5.

[352] Aidan Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate: Theology and Image in the Christian Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016 [1980]), 100.

[353] James Elkins, *How to Use Your Eyes* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2000).

[354] James Elkins and Emma Fiorentini, *Visual Worlds: Looking, Images, Visual Disciplines* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[355] Dominic White, *How Do I Look?: Theology in the Age of the Selfie* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

intimate way; and to truly look at the creatures is to look at the Creator who from all eternity has chosen them and placed them in our path."[356]

This mutual intimate gaze is what is present in the icon as a form of interactive experience of the transcendent and being itself at the same time. Thus the perspective afforded by art can open up, address, and visualise things we otherwise cannot see, though we ought to confront them. Interestingly, a book of fiction provides a strangely suitable solution to this issue of seeing. In *The Gift of Asher Lev,* Chaim Potok writes of the contradiction between God seeing the created world as being good and humans seeing it shattered. He resolves it by claiming that God does not blink, while the human seeing shows the world broken. Potok suggests art should help reveal the goodness of the world, support religion in enabling people see behind the blinks: "An artist … must see the world whole, he must somehow learn to see during the blinks, he must see where no one else can see, he must see the connections, the betweennesses in the world."[357]

The question of seeing has been a central issue in art for centuries. In Western art—from the Renaissance attempts of changing the perspective to that of the beholder, to the Impressionist attempts of revolutionising the way we look at paintings (by using the optical mixing of colour) —there are many examples. Yet, with art being classified as an activity relevant to the connoisseur only, including painters and "educated" viewers, the original role of the image seems to be forgotten. Marion warns us that this is a much wider concern: "The question of painting does not pertain first or only to painters, much less to aestheticians. It concerns visibility itself, and thus pertains to everything—to sensation in general."[358]

This sensation, however, he warns, is not that of an empty gesture for itself, rather it is an issue of vital importance, and a very special phenomenon at the same time. In saying this, the central idea to Marion is perspective, which can serve as a key notion in addressing the relationship of art and the transcendent, religious and spiritual experience.

> *In itself, perspective exercises a paradox. Even more than that, perspective and paradox are determined by similar characters: both indicate the visible entirely in its withdrawing, discreetly but radically. The paradox attests to the visible, while at the same time opposing itself, or rather, while inverting itself; literally, it constitutes a counter-visible, a counter-seen, a counter-appearance that offers a spectacle to be seen the opposite of what, at first sight, one would expect to see. More than a surprising opinion, the paradox often points to a miracle—it makes visible that which one should not be able to see and which one is not able to see without astonishment.*[359]

This way of thinking about perspective as a means of creating the possibility to show the invisible and thus provide the possibility for humans to connect with it is what has been and is present in the phenomenon of the icon, an image and a work of art enabling the communication between the believer and the believed, the faithful and the object of faith, the human and the

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[356] In original: "Se tourner vraiment vers le Créateur, c'est se tourner vers les créatures de la façon la plus intime, et se tourner vraiment vers les créatures, c'est se tourner vers le Créateur qui de toute éternité les a choisies et placées sur notre chemin." in "Fabrice Hadjadj: Comment parler de Dieu aujourd'hui?" *Réussir ma vie*, https://www.reussirmavie.net/Fabrice-Hadjadj-comment-parler-de-Dieu-aujourd-hui_a1745.html, 21.04.2021.

[357] Chaim Potok, *The Gift of Asher Lev* (New York: Random House, 1990).

[358] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 7.

[359] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 9.

Divine. At the same time, it also enables us as viewers, humans, to encounter our own being, raise questions and reflect.

Icons are capable of enabling this communication, from the classic ones to those created in our days. Yet, they are not alone in this pursuit; besides more or less straightforward reinterpretations—like those painted by Nikola Sarić before 2019, for example[360]—there are others offering a more indirect, more abstract approach. From Kasimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1913) to Sean Scully's *Black Square* (2020), a century of art can be recognised as attempts to create works establishing the above noted counter-visible.

In the artist's attempt to launch suprematism, the *Black Square* by Malevich was first exhibited (together with thirty-eight further works) at *The Last Exhibition of Futurist Painting 0.10 (Zero-Ten)* in Petrograd in December 1915. A photographic record shows the arrangement of the paintings at the exhibition: the *Black Square* was installed in the upper corner, a position traditionally occupied by the icon in Orthodox believers' homes. The gesture might have served as the artist's attempt to emphasise the spiritual qualities of his signature painting, reflect negative or *apophatic* theology, a theological thinking and religious practice attempting to approach God by negation.[361] Another interpretation, in my view, is the idea of radical *kenosis*, a notion referring in Christian theology to the self-emptying of Jesus and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will—this perspective is offered more recently in theoretical discourse (see, Armstrong, Berger, Betz, Elkins, Koestlé-Cate, Marion, Milbank, Nichols, Perez, Pickstock, Taylor, Zabala). Elkins quotes Thierry De Duve's *Look, One Hundred Years of Contemporary Art*:

> *"The best modern art," he says, "has endeavoured to redefine the essentially religious terms of humanism on belief-less bases," and he cites Kasimir Malevich's abstract painting Black Square on White Ground as an "inoculation" of the Russian icon "with a vaccine capable of preserving its human meaning" for a period when the faith in God could no longer sustain human meaning.*[362]

Although Elkins does not wish to subscribe to these views entirely, he cites De Duve's assertion that "only the beholder's gaze can bring back life,"[363] which is another recurrence of the earlier mentioned path of the image, and especially that of the icon, enabling the communication and the chance of the miracle being realised and made visible by means of the given work of art. Although the possibility of such a position and interpretation can be imagined in our days, nevertheless, in 1915 some viewers interpreted it as provocative blasphemy—which is also a recurring phenomenon in terms of art attempting to critically engage with subjects related to religion.

Malevich's groundbreaking work has had a major effect on art, on abstraction, and on looking at what's beyond. Black as an ultimate attempt at abstraction in painting has also appeared in Ad Reinhardt's 1960s black paintings,[364] in *Vantablack* licensed exclusively to Anish Kapoor and

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[360] See Nikola Sarić's website, https://www.nikolasaric.de/?lang=en, 29.01.2022.

[361] Karen Armstrong discusses the recovery of apophatic theology in *The Case for God* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2009).

[362] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 25.

[363] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 25.

[364] See, for example, Abstract Painting (1963), The Museum of Modern Art, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78976, 24.01.2022.

his studio for art purposes, and in Lőrinc Borsos' 2016 reaction *Fuck Kapoor Black* (installation, 2016).[365] The black square itself has also returned: as a direct reference in Gábor Kerekes' *Over Roswell-2 / Malevits Land* (2005),[366] and in a multiplied form, one century later, in another emblematic and thematically closer work of art: the *Memorial For the Victims of Organised Religions* (2006) by Wolfgang Tillmans, installed at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, and in Scully's *Black Square* (2020). David Carrier compares the black square shape in the latter to a window[367]—opening onto another world, as in Caspar David Friedrich's and Henri Matisse's paintings (as well as in Vilhelm Hammershøi's works, I add). In that sense, I see that it is also a window to a world invisible to human sight, just like the liturgical icon offering a window to the world of the sacred). Carrier offers a more up-to-date explanation, a reference to the curfew following the COVID-19 pandemic, claiming, «"Black Square« is an appropriate response to springtime 2020 because it offers abstractly a deeply felt response to our present ways of living."[368] (In that sense, Scully's work is closely related to Mohácsi's tallit-paintings, which he painted as a direct response to the curfew, the isolation, the solitude of the painter in the studio, and the lack of personal encounters with his students.)

Tillmans' work, however, which consists of forty-eight dark squares arranged as a Minimalist grid, has one more reference to Malevich's work, namely in the installation, as it was exhibited on two walls meeting in a corner. In an interview, the artist—who has since edited an issue of *Aperture* magazine on the subject of spirituality—confirmed this relation, saying "The piece doesn't depict religion in the same way that a picture of, say, a mosque would, but it still tackles the idea that all religions have a claim to the absolute."[369] This attempt to address and communicate with the absolute by means of the gaze—explored by the artist's special sight—is also asserted by Theodora Vischer in "A Matter of Seeing," published on occasion of Tillmans' 2017 exhibition at the Fondation Beyeler in Basel, where she claims

> *Tillmans' specific way of seeing, expressed in his photographic images from the 1990s, is marked by commitment and curiosity towards the visible world. In his artistic engagement with the condition of the medium, the gaze becomes sharpened and opens up to an abstract pictorial reality that one is not otherwise aware of and that is not further defined.*[370]

The maximal level of abstraction, though, in terms of seeing—and also the most direct way of experiencing—was, to my knowledge, achieved in Ferenc Varga's earlier work, *Kő kontaktlencse* (Stone Contact Lens, 2000). The artist, during his doctoral studies in Japan, picked two small black pebbles from the bank of Katsura River, and with slow and meticulous work sanded two contact lenses out of them, which he then placed onto his own eyes—to create

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365 See http://borsoslorinc.com/works/nonentity, 24.01.2022.

366 See Kerekes' website, http://w3.enternet.hu/kgj/over%20roswell%20-%202.html, 24.01.2022.

367 David Carrier, "When a Square Is Not Just a Square," *Hyperallergic*, 04.04.2020, https://hyperallergic.com/551687/when-a-square-is-not-just-a-square-sean-scully/, 28.01.2022.

368 Carrier, "When a Square Is Not Just a Square."

369 Dominic Eichler, "Look, again," *Frieze*, 01 Oct 2008, https://www.frieze.com/article/look-again-0, 07.05.2021.

370 Theodora Vischer, "A Matter of Seeing," *Fondation Beyeler*, https://www.fondationbeyeler.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Presse/Medienmitteilungen_E/E_Tillmans_Dossier_N.pdf, 07.05.2021.

the closest possible contact between the human and the material, to be able to see matter from as close as possible. In his doctoral thesis, Varga describes and comments on his experience:

> *When I put it in my eyes, wherever I looked, I saw the same blackness everywhere. I closed the window of my eyeball with a hard black stone slab. The inner, transparent material of my eyeball was a completely dark but transparent material. What is the point of this being completely dark but transparent? Does it make sense to call darkness transparent if nothing is seen in the dark? My eyes saw nothing, yet it made the closest possible contact with the stone. I would love to say that I saw the inner darkness of the stone up close. I cannot say such a thing, for seeing requires light; the darkness cannot be seen. Still, I claim my gaze has been there between my retina and the stone contact lens. It got stuck in my eyeball, clinging to the inner surface of the stone. Already in this earlier work of mine, I wanted to place the gaze inside the stone. Even then, it was obvious to me that the gaze was not the same as the concept of vision in the optical sense.*[371]

In summary, whereas seeing, the gaze, and experiencing, as well as exceeding their limits, can be regarded as central issues in the above works of art, they also serve as initiators of external and internal experiencing, which Brian Eno has framed in his writing on the late Jean-Michel Basquiat:

> *Stop thinking about art works as objects, and start thinking about them as triggers for experiences (Roy Ascott's phrase). That solves a lot of problems: we don't have to argue about whether photographs are art, or whether performances are art, or whether Carl Andre's bricks or Andres Serranos's piss or Little Richard's 'Long Tall Sally' are art, because we say, 'Art is something that happens, a process, not a quality, and all sorts of things can make it happen.' Then suppose that what makes a work of art 'good' for you is not some thing that is already 'inside' it, but something that happens inside you—so the value of the work lies in the degree to which it can help you have the kind of experience that you call art.*[372]

This phenomenon and quality of "something that happens" returns in theory and practice too —from András Visky's claim that the real work of art stands out from all art born as a natural reaction to the vacuum caused by the lack of God by pointing at itself as an idol,[373] to the

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[371] In original: "Amikor a szemembe helyeztem, akárhová is néztem, mindenütt ugyanazt a feketeséget láttam. Kemény, fekete kőlappal zártam le a szemgolyóm ablakát. A szemgolyóm belső, átlátszó anyaga teljesen sötét, de átlátszó anyag volt. Mi értelme van ennek, hogy teljesen sötét, de átlátszó? Van értelme átlátszónak nevezni a sötétséget, ha a sötétben nem látszik semmi? A szemem nem látott semmit, mégis a lehető legközelebbi kontaktust hozta létre a kővel. Szívesen mondanám, hogy én egészen közelről láttam a kő belső sötétségét. Ilyet viszont nem mondhatok, hiszen a látáshoz fény kell; a sötétséget nem lehet látni. A tekintetemről mégis váltig azt állítom, hogy ott volt a retinám és a kő kontaktlencse között. Bennrekedt a szemgolyómban, rátapadt a kő belső felszínére. A tekintetet már ebben a korábbi művemben is a kő belsejébe kívántam helyezni. Már ekkor is nyilvánvaló volt a számomra, hogy a tekintet nem azonos az optikai értelemben vett látásfogalommal." F. Varga, *Szoborfaragásról a technokultúra és a tömegmédia korában*, 23.

[372] Brian Eno, "Miraculous cures and the canonisation of Basquiat," (1993/4), in Brian Eno, *A Year with Swollen Appendices: Brian Eno's Diary*, 364–369, (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996), 368.

[373] See, András Visky, "A csaknem-Istenről és a valóságossá válásról (Beszéd a második parancsolatról)," in *tízparancsolat?* eds. István Dávid and István Vitus-Bulbuk (Kolozsvár: Exit Kiadó, 2016), 32–40.

complex eventful art by Lőrinc Borsos, where the only colour used is "blaek … a glossy black enamel paint" as their "main identification element."[374]

Makoto Fujimura places the issue in a different perspective by sketching up a journey of "making as knowing," differentiating the artist from being only *homo sapiens* by extending the definition with that of *homo faber*, man the maker, which, he claims, is "what uniquely defines our role in Creation. We are *Imago Dei*, created to be creative, and we are by nature creative makers."[375]

Such an approach offers a corresponding understanding of interpretation using the perspective of Design Culture studies—leading the makers and beholders alike from the experiences to the inclusive events of connecting knowing and doing. This understanding, however, might lead us beyond the frameworks of art, to the broader spectrum of the inclusive design culture, with the design and making of "official" and "private" liturgical objects. The latter, as part of the vernacular culture, can be interpreted as "folk" art, as well as labelled as "kitsch,"[376]—but that requires further investigation in another research project.

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374 "The expression is of an Old English origin, which was used to denote glossy 'good' black as opposed to a matte 'bad black' called 'Swart.'" Lőrinc Borsos quotes Michael Pastoreau's *Black: The History of a Colour* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) in providing this definition in their online portfolio. See, http://borsoslorinc.com/content/1-home/BL_portfolio.pdf, 13.05.2021.

375 Makoto Fujimura, *Art + Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 14.

376 An excellent collection of kitsch, including works related to religiosity and spirituality, can be seen at the Romanian Kitsch Museum (https://kitschmuseum.ro). However, if we approve the approach introduced, we should not underestimate the value of such endeavours—not only for their role as "gateway drugs" to art, but also for the straightforward representation of their makers, beholders, users, and admirers. Ed Simon claims, "kitsch is a conflicted term," (Ed Simon, "In Defense of Kitsch," *JSTOR Daily* [July 29, 2020], https://daily.jstor.org/in-defense-of-kitsch/, 29.01.2022.) which Clement Greenberg sees as what "emerges from the Industrial Revolution, as the direct product of a capitalist commodification that cares nothing for aesthetics beyond profit." (Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* [1939]: 34–49). (The text is available in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1961/1989], 3–21, https://cpb-us-e2.wpmucdn.com/sites.uci.edu/dist/d/1838/files/2015/01/Greenberg-Clement-Avant-Garde-and-Kitsch-copy.pdf, 29.01.2022). On the other hand, it stands in contrast to what the disenchanted Protestant ethics would dictate, the purely functional aesthetics. Simon claims that in Northern America kitsch is closely associated with Catholicism, and accordingly "If the discourses of discernment that mock, belittle, and judge kitsch can be seen as denigrating certain aspects of Catholic theology, they must also be read alongside histories of racial and ethnic marginalisation." (Simon, "In Defense of Kitsch."). Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu claims that "Not only is kitsch in general regarded as confined to the post-French Revolution realm of modernity, but modernity itself seems to have found in kitsch the proper realm of the familiar and inauthentic—its temptation" and is thus closely connected to mass culture (Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu, "Ritual at the Birth of Kitsch," *The Comparatist* vol. 21 [May 1997]: 49–67). The latter claim can be read in connection / with reference to design culture.

Lőrinc Borsos: I Said You Are Gods I–II. (2019). Engraving, marble, 30 x 40 x 2 cm.

In twentieth-century Western culture, artworks have become the closest thing we have to sacred texts, and art almost seems a form of religion with its prophetic breed of creative artists perennially purveying new gospels and its priestly class of interpretive critics who explain them to a devotional public. Despite wide recognition that art has an important commercial aspect, art sustains its cultural image as an essentially sanctified domain of higher spiritual values, beyond the realm of material life and praxis. Its adored relics (however profane they strive to be) are sacredly enshrined in temple-like museums that we dutifully visit for spiritual edification, just as religious devotees have long frequented churches, mosques, synagogues, and other shrines of worship.

—Richard Shusterman[377]

[377] Richard Shusterman, "Art and Religion," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Fall, 2008, Vol. 42, No. 3, 1–18, (2008): 1–2.

6. The Manifold Temples of Art

In this section, I attempt to illustrate the richness that the use of Design Culture studies offers in interpreting contemporary sacred art. To this end, I follow two main threads: the recent debates about the museum as institution, and a complex contextualisation raised and exemplified by a work of art, Mark Wallinger's *Ecce Homo* (1999). Both threads stem from or lead to the same question: where and how should the encounter with contemporary sacred art take place? This question was one of my initial research questions at the beginning of my doctoral studies, which is reflected in the original title of my doctoral research project: *A művészet temploma, a templom művészete* (The Temple of Art, and the Art of the Temple).

6.1. Different Approaches

In addition to the concept of art as religion, the idea of the museum as a temple of art has also appeared in the Western world several times since the Enlightenment, even as an almost commonplace statement. I have already addressed the question whether art today is a substitute for or an optimal medium of religion. But what about the locus of encounter, the optimal place to meet works of art offering a religious or spiritual experience?

In *Religion for Atheists*,[378] Alain de Botton notes the ability of religion to absorb art, architecture and music towards pragmatic goals as an advantage for non-believers. In one article, he scolds museums precisely because of their inability to fulfil this pragmatic function:

> *You often hear it said that "museums of art are our new churches": in other words, in a secularising world, art has replaced religion as a touchstone of our reverence and devotion. It's an intriguing idea, part of the broader ambition that culture should replace scripture, but in practice art museums often abdicate much of their potential to function as new churches (places of consolation, meaning, sanctuary, redemption) through the way they handle the collections entrusted to them. While exposing us to objects of genuine importance, they nevertheless seem unable to frame them in a way that links them powerfully to our inner needs.*[379]

De Botton contrasts objects of modern art that he considers meaningless with works of Christian art because, in his view, the latter show how to live, what to love, and what to fear. In de Botton's view, museums could become churches if they were able to teach their visitors in the same way. In a response to this hypothesis, Cole Matson emphasises that "Christian art, however, is effective in teaching these lessons because it is viewed as part of a community."[380]

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[378] Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists* (New York: Vintage, 2013).

[379] Alain de Botton, "Should art really be for its own sake alone?" *The Guardian*, 20 Jan 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jan/20/art-museums-churches, 06.02.2021.

[380] Cole Matson, "The Museum as Church: A Response to Alain de Botton," *Transpositions,* 2012, http://www.transpositions.co.uk/the-museum-as-church-a-response-to-alain-de-botton/, 06.02.2021.

Emphasising the importance of community, Matson points out that "churches are not self-improvement centres for the individual believer."[381][382]

This instrumentality of the setting in which art is placed cannot be avoided. In addition to the question of where, are the related issues of how, following what practice, such encounters happen. Certain churches become museums, or rather galleries, showcasing art claimed to be made by exclusively non-believing artists. Others let contemporary art be exhibited in them, whereas there is only one institution operated by a religious organisation which explicitly acts as a museum and gallery for contemporary art.

The first type is exemplified by Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln,[383] which claims to have been "mediating between art and church, art and religion, art and faith"[384] since 1987. The Jesuit-led institution was initiated by Friedhelm Mennekes, and is currently managed by Guido Schlimbach, and Christian Nitz. Kunst-Station Köln claim that their "aesthetic concept … combines spiritual and artistic life and feelings," and "presents its exhibitions with the same care and sensitivity as church services are celebrated in Sankt Peter."[385] The list of exhibitors since 1987 is impressive,[386] and the institution meets the criteria of the founder, Mennekes, who —as reported by Schlimbach—wanted only "the best art" to be on display. Mennekes, however —in line with what Elkins says—also believed that religious artists cannot make such art, since they are supposed to be too religiously formed to separate themselves from it when they make art.[387]

There are plenty of good examples for the second type: churches showcasing (or being) works that reflect the real problems of today, not simply as museums of the past, but making the religious community face today's challenges of life. Some of these are architectural approaches, like Peter Zumthor's chapels or John Pawson's church buildings and interiors—including the reconstructed interior of St. Martin's Basilica in Pannonhalma. Others are works of art exhibited in operating churches, like the Belgian photographer Laurent Van Der Stockt's disturbing photographs shot during the siege of Mosul, Syria, and installed on the walls of the Cathedral of Our Lady in Bayeaux, France, on places—the triphorium, or the cross-vaulted roof—where

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[381] Matson, "The Museum as Church."

[382] Matson's writing is found on *Transpositions* (http://www.transpositions.co.uk) published by the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts (ITIA), a research institute seeking to 'bringing together the study and practice of theology and the arts' at the University of St Andrews, (the Divinity School, St Mary's College), in Scotland, since 2010. For their credo, see "Theology, Imagination, and the Arts—ITIA" at http://itia.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk, 06.02.2021.

[383] Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln—Zentrum für zeitgenössische Kunst und Musik, managed by Guido Schlimbach, Christian Nitz.

[384] In original: "Seit bald fünfundzwanzig Jahren vermittelt die Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln zwischen Kunst und Kirche, Kunst und Religion, Kunst und Glaube." In Kirche der Jesuiten Sankt Peter Köln, website, https://www.sankt-peter-koeln.de/wp/kunst-station/geschichte/, 06.02.2021.

[385] In original: "mit einem architektonischen und ästhetischen Konzept, das spirituelles und künstlerisches Leben und Empfinden miteinander verbindet … Mit gleicher Sorgfalt und Sensibilität, mit der in Sankt Peter Gottesdienste gefeiert werden, präsentiert die Kunst-Station ihre Ausstellungen." In Kirche der Jesuiten Sankt Peter Köln, website, https://www.sankt-peter-koeln.de/wp/kunst-station/geschichte/, 06.02.2021.

[386] See https://www.sankt-peter-koeln.de/wp/kunst-station/idee-2/, 13.05.2021.

[387] I thank Pavlína Marie Kašparová, Dominican sister and artist for sharing this with me. Kašparová received this answer from Guido Schlimbach personally, when inquiring about the possibility to exhibit—and being refused on the above mentioned basis.

biblical-themed frescoes are usually seen.[388] Bill Viola's surprising video altarpieces, the 2014 *Martyrs*[389] or the 2016 *Mary*[390] at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and Fred George and Andrew Wakeford's 2016 *The Wall of Life Jackets and Their Stories*[391] with the installation of discarded life jackets and barbed wire in the interior of Johanniskirche in Saarbrücken, Germany, are further examples.

The third approach is interestingly also a Jesuit-operated one: the Museum of Contemporary Religious Art (MOCRA), operates in a once abandoned chapel of Saint Louis University (SLU), which is claimed to be "the first museum to bring an interfaith focus to contemporary art."[392] MOCRA has its origins in the doctoral dissertation of the founding director, Terrence E. Dempsey, *The pursuit of the spirit: the re-emergence of spiritual and religious concerns in American art of the 1980s*.[393] Dempsey joined SLU in 1990, and in 1993 he proposed to repurpose the Fusz Memorial Chapel as a museum. The proposal was approved, and since 1993 MOCRA has hosted numerous exhibitions—from Georges Rouault's etchings, Keith Haring's *Altarpiece*, Andy Warhol's *Silver Clouds,* to lesser known artists and thematic/collective exhibitions open to a wide range of approaches, religions, and spiritualities.

6.2. An Extended View

But what if we extend our scope of inquiry? Mark Wallinger's *Ecce Homo* (1999), installed first as an opening work of art for the Fourth Plinth Project[394] at Trafalgar Square, London, served as a novel and paradigmatic example, especially due to its placement. The life-size sculpture of Christ with hands tied behind his back and crowned with golden barbed wire, standing in front of the National Gallery; a contemporary figurative work of art of an identifiably religious subject exposed in front of a secular museum, having stepped out of it, seeking to connect with the passers-by, locals and tourists alike, created a striking phenomenon.

The question inevitably arises: what might the Londoners who first noticed this relatively small, though striking change have thought? And what about the tourists? Was it taken for granted, as if it had always been there? Was it considered to be an advanced guerrilla marketing tool from the museum? Wallinger's work opened up a wide discourse on what to expect from a work of art placed in the public, how to approach the return of the sacred to the secular sphere.

Wallinger's work of art was later exhibited in several institutions of the art world. In a completely different medium, among works of art selected according to a curatorial concept, it opened different fields of interpretation in a completely different situation. During Easter in

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[388] See Michel Puech, "Les syriens du photographe Laurent Van der Stockt en la cathédrale de Bayeux," *A l'œil*, http://www.a-l-oeil.info/blog/2014/10/09/les-syriens-du-photographe-laurent-van-der-stockt-en-la-cathedrale-de-bayeux/, 13.05.2021.

[389] See https://www.stpauls.co.uk/history-collections/the-collections/arts-programme/bill-viola, 13.05.2021.

[390] See https://www.stpauls.co.uk/news-press/latest-news/bill-violas-major-new-work-for-st-pauls-cathedral-2, 13.05.2021.

[391] See https://www.ekir.de/www/service/life-jackets-20184.php, 13.05.2021.

[392] See MOCRA website, https://www.slu.edu/mocra/about/index.php, 06.02.2021.

[393] Terrence E. Dempsey, *The pursuit of the spirit: the re-emergence of spiritual and religious concerns in American art of the 1980s*, Thesis (Ph.D.), Graduate Theological Union, 1991, https://grace.gtu.edu/record=b1183523, 06.02.2021.

[394] See Dead Donkey, "The fourth plinth at London's Trafalgar Square and its artworks," *Medium*, (Feb 10, 2019), https://medium.com/@deaddonkey/the-fourth-plinth-at-londons-trafalgar-square-and-its-artworks-16ceb729752e, 13.05.2021.

2017, the statue was once again on public display in London: for six weeks, it stood at the top of the stairs to St Paul's Cathedral, not too far from its first appearance at Trafalgar Square.

In this project organised in collaboration with Amnesty International, *Ecce Homo* was once again freely viewed—but this time in front of a church, not an art institution. The choice of time and place was not random, and the partnership also made clear the politicisation and timeliness of the message, referring to "the plight of people around the world who are imprisoned and whose lives are threatened for speaking the truth, for what they believe."[395]

One year after the first installation of Wallinger's work, the National Gallery opened the landmark exhibition, *Seeing Salvation*. This exhibition is discussed in detail in a chapter of Graham Howes' book, *The Art of the Sacred*,[396] as well as in his study, "Transactional Responses to Religious Objects."[397] The visitor-recipient experience of the exhibition was monitored, documented, and analysed with exceptional thoroughness. At this exhibition, the museum showed their own portraits of Christ, as well as ones on loan, from the third century to the days of the exhibition. The institutional-curatorial goal was to show how the figure of Christ appeared in Western tradition and how the power of the religious figure could be examined within that tradition, confronting visitors who are expected to be mostly non-religious or non-Christian, with the idea that "when representing an historical event—the life and death of Jesus—they (the artists) were not just offering a record of the past, but a continuing truth; we the spectators have to become eye-witnesses to an event that matters to us now."[398]

The success of the exhibition exceeded expectations. It attracted more than five thousand visitors a day for four and a half months, breaking the records of the previous two decades in Britain. As a sociologist interested in religious aesthetics, Howes explored the secret of this success by using empirical research. On-site visitor interviews and a questionnaire survey were conducted, interviews with professionals were recorded, and letters of appreciation or denigration were analysed. The research also captured quite specific experiences, such as the visitor feedback which Howes called the "sense of presence,"[399] that "it was like going into a cathedral, and the atmosphere among the other people was quite astonishing—we were full of awe, sorrow and reverence."[400] The effect in this case is therefore twofold. On the one hand, the translation of the sacred works previously used in part or for some time in the ecclesiastical liturgy into a secular environment, with this change of context resulting in their *museumification*, which is not at all unusual and exceptional in Western culture. On the other hand, with the special concept and communication of the exhibition, the involvement of an audience unfamiliar to the museum environment, a certain degree of sacralisation took place.

A more recent event raised further questions. In the late evening of April 15 2019, I was shocked by the news that Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris had caught fire and a part of it had

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[395] See the page referring to the project on the website of St. Pauls Cathedral: https://www.stpauls.co.uk/eccehomo, 13.04.2020.

[396] See Chapter 3, "Seeing Salvation," in Howes *The Art of the Sacred*, 45–58.

[397] Graham Howes, "Transactional Responses to Religious Objects," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives,* eds. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 93–98.

[398] Neil McGregor, "Introduction," *The Image of Christ: The catalogue of the exhibition Seeing Salvation*, ed. Gabriele Finaldi (London, National Gallery, 2000), 7.

[399] Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 53.

[400] Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 68.

collapsed. The next day I talked to a French student about the case, and we outlined several scenarios. Can it be rebuilt? If so, how should that happen? Should it be as it was before the fire? Should they use the original technology or the contemporary type? Who should pay the bill: the Roman Catholic Church or the secular state from taxpayers' money? What seems more significant: the twelve to fourteen million visitors who visit the cathedral as an attraction for tourists, or the two thousand holy masses a year?[401] Simplifying the question: what do we consider Notre-Dame to be—a church or a museum? Which role can we see as decisive for its future?

In each of the three examples—Ecce Homo, Seeing Salvation, and Notre Dame— functional, experiential, and transactional issues are in tension. Is the church a museum? Is the museum a temple of art? Can the reverence evoked by works of art be similar to religious reverence? With the title of Daniel Siedell's book, I ask, does God have a place in the gallery?[402] And continuing and reversing the idea also raised in his book, I ask the question: is there a place for contemporary art in the church?

6.3. Further Concerns

Before attempting to answer these questions, it is worth clarifying these terms—and the message, the evaluation, the consideration they include. The word 'church' here refers to the places of institutionalised religiosity intended for the practice of Christian religion, built and consecrated for this purpose, a home to liturgical events. Depending on the linguistic context, the concept has different underlying and cultural meanings: it may refer to a) the physical place (as in *temple*, from the Latin term for consecrated ground), b) the affiliation (as in *church* or *Kirche*, from *kyriakon doma,* the house of the Lord, that is, the earthly appearance of heavenly Jerusalem)[403], or (c) the structure together with the community (as in *iglesia* or *église*, from the Greek word for assembly).[404] In the Western world, the role of the church has changed over time in many ways—and at this point I am not referring to the abandoned, demolished, or desacralised churches with a new, profane function (e.g., apartment, shop, pub, disco, youth leisure center, etc.),[405] nor do I think of church buildings that have been transformed into exhibition halls or galleries, and thus "resurrected" by art, and called "temples of creativity".[406] Today's Western churches provide functional spaces for cultural and community events that are more or less related to religion and religiosity, in addition to religious acts, but also often function as tourist attractions, museums, and in many cases as (architectural) works of art.

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[401] See "14 million visitors a year: That you need to know about Notre-Dame Cathedral," *The Local* (15 April 2019), https://www.thelocal.fr/20190415/14-million-visitors-a-year, 07.05.2020.

[402] Siedell, *God in the Gallery*.

[403] "Where the sacred manifests itself in space, *the real unveils itself*, the world comes into existence." Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane,* 63.

[404] See Zoltán Körösvölgyi, "The Sustainable Church: A New Way to Look at the Place of Worship," *Periodica Polytechnica Architecture* 48(2), 94, (2017): 93–100. https://doi.org/10.3311/PPar.11574

[405] Especially since a reverse direction is also apparent: profane buildings converted into churches. The examples range from a one-time shooting range (Reformed church in Szigetszentmiklós, Hungary) and former bowling-and-pizzeria club (Reformed church in Győrújbarát, Hungary) to large ex-shopping malls (Baptist church in Lakeland, FL, USA).

[406] I have borrowed the term from Alice Bucknell, "10 art galleries in resurrected churches," *The Spaces*, https://thespaces.com/art-galleries-in-churches/, 07.05.2020.

Concerning 'religion,' in this respect I prefer to use S. Brent Plate's most apt definition of art and religion, and their spaces: "The word 'religion,' like the words 'culture,' and 'history,' is a heuristic term, a generic category that scholarly, political, and social forces establish to help understand the world."[407] Plate claims that religion is simply "a category of human life alongside economy, politics, family, and so on."[408] It is worth paying attention to how the aspects of Design Culture studies appear in such a claim.

By the term 'museum,' primarily I understand the institutions that preserve, exhibit, and research (characteristically fine) art. I do not wish to forget, however, about the official definition of the museum, especially in light of the related debates. The 2007 definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) describes the museum as "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."[409]

Nowadays, this seems to have expanded, according to the provisional wording of ICOM, to include the concepts of democratisation, critical dialogue, inclusiveness, and polyphony.[410] The debate over the definition of the museum is not new. As we can read in the Introduction to ICOM's publication, *Defining museums of the 21st century: Plural Experiences*, "the debate over key concepts and definitions for the museum field has been within the scope of ICOM since its early years."[411]

The authors point out that "in its early iterations, the ICOM definition married 'museum' and 'collection,' and by 1951 the museum had become a 'permanent [administrative] establishment' within the definition. However, this notion of 'permanence' is questioned by a number of the papers in this volume which speak to local realities."[412] Institutionality, the provision of experience, seems clear, as does social service seems to expand with the dialogue, the openness and transparency, the communality, and the pursuit of the non-profit, learning about the past, perpetuating the present, and exploring the future. Bálint Veres enriches the spectrum by claiming that the museum, which was "once considered a church, later a school, then a stage" can as cultural displays "be conceived as physical sites of intersubjectivity and models of human environment relationship, in other words: social and ecological agoras."[413] Bishop's idea

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[407] S. Brent Plate, "The Museumification of Religion: Human Evolution and the Display of Ritual," in *Religion in Museums*, 45.

[408] Plate, "The Museumification of Religion," 46.

[409] Bruno Brulon Soares, Karen Brown, Olga Nazor, "Introduction," in *Defining museums of the 21st century: plural experiences*, eds. Bruno Brulon Soares, Karen Brown, Olga Nazor (Paris: ICOFOM, 2018), 27.

[410] "Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing." This wording appeared as a definition proposed for approval in Paris, July 2019. At the Extraordinary General Assembly in Kyoto, September 2019, however, the decision was postponed. See, https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/, 13.05.2020.

[411] Brulon Soares, Brown, Nazor, "Introduction," 27.

[412] Brulon Soares, Brown, Nazor, "Introduction," 32.

[413] Bálint Veres, "Tactile Tactics in 21st Century Cultural Displays," *Pragmatism Today* vol. 10, issue 2, 100–109 (Winter 2019): 100.

explained in *Radical Museology*, published a few years earlier,[414] also seems to be reflected in this line of thought: the use of the contemporary as a method instead of the contemporary as periodisation, the importance of a re-politicised representation of history, the multitemporal rewritings. Following this principle, we can continue with clarifying with the questions of where and how to experience the work of art.

Wallinger's Christ was an epoch-maker, having opened a new system of relations by placing his work in the public, in the open city space; in a non-museum, and in non-religious dialogue, that is, in public discourse, even as a mediator. The undressed, silent figure of Christ exposed to gaze and community—as the story once and for all—is just one of us humans. It is more than a sculpture, as it simultaneously recalls the story of Christ, its present human and social aspects, and raises the question of what we expect of it, a work of art in the public domain. Perhaps the most detailed and earliest account, on the basis of which, in addition to the artist's brief statements, we can form as direct a picture as possible, is Adrian Searle's writing from the day after the work was set up. It concludes:

> *It would be a mistake to regard Ecce Homo as a purely, provocatively religious sculpture. Perhaps we shouldn't see it as a sculpture at all. It raises questions about symbolic value, place and placement, private belief and public statement and affirmation, at the occasion of the millennium. […] We must remember, the figure is only half the work. It is the figure in a setting that counts, and the way it becomes a lightning conductor to argument, debate, feelings. Like all of Wallinger's work, we might see Ecce Homo less as an object, or a self-contained artwork, and more as a site, a kind of metaphoric place where ideas and object collide. Wallinger's work has always dealt with a range of big issues: class, money, power, nationalism, and now religion. But it is about all those other, earlier preoccupations too, as we shall find when the bastions of English Heritage start to defend the empty plinth, their last redoubt.*[415]

The place and the placement of *Ecce Homo* played an important role in the history of the work—within the complex and refined net of its mechanism of actions. In addition to its initial placement the work appeared in the art world—as an exhibit at the 2016 exhibition *The Others*, at König Galerie, Berlin, curated by Elmgreen & Dragset[416]—where its placement among other works of art with a similar subject and provocative nature opened entirely new fields of interpretation. In 2017 Ecce Homo returned to London, where its placement on the stairs of St Paul's Cathedral—what's more, in harmony with the original context of the Passion, during Easter—opened yet another opportunity for a new encounter and interpretation.

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414 Bishop, *Radical Museology*.

415 Adrian Searle, "The day I met the son of God", *The Guardian*, 22 July 1999, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/1999/jul/22/art.artsfeatures, 13.04.2020.

416 See the page of the exhibition at the website of König Galerie: https://www.koeniggalerie.com/exhibitions/5909/the-others-curated-by-elmgreen-dragset/. 09.05.2020.

The secular reading of the biblical story,[417] which resonates sharply with today's reality, was also confirmed by Rev. Mark Oakley, Chancellor of St Paul's at the time.[418] The task of the work of art, similar to Oakley's view—and in harmony with those stated in the already mentioned 2019 not-yet-official museum definition of ICOM, which differs from the current scope of collecting–preserving–researching–sharing the tangible and intangible heritage for educational and recreational purposes—points beyond the space bounded by the walls. According to András Visky's definition:

> *The real work of art […] unveils not only the hypocrisy of the world, the human relations, and the social order, but also itself. In the real work of art, one always recognises the will to end and eliminate oneself: it sends us away and turns our gaze to the ethical challenges of life. It delights, but also awakens and sends us out into the city to notice the homeless, the outcast and the crippled. I'm not the goal, the work of art says, I'm just an event of self-knowledge, self-recognition.*[419]

The environment of experience plays an important role in the creation of the encounter with art—be it a museum exhibition space, a church or even a public space. In this respect, for the individual, the person meeting the work of art, the space without psychological or sociocultural meaning will become a place, that is, differentiated, honoured, and "sacred."[420]

This demarcation and privilege is also manifested in Siedell's writing, who argues in favour of a moderate institutional theory in defining the concept of art, which "recognises the important role that the museum space plays in determining meaning and meditating a history, tradition, and theory of what occurs in that space."[421] At the same time, although Siedell acknowledges this in relation to contemporary (secular) artistic practice in the case of the church environment, he still claims that the "church, with its liturgical practice, is most definitely not the place to incorporate art that forces the worshipper to 'ask tough questions,' 'challenge previously held beliefs,' and so on. Those are absolutely important practices, but not in the liturgy."[422]

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[417] Kate Allan, director of Amnesty International involved in the project, said: "The story of Christ—arrested, tortured and executed for peacefully expressing his opinions and for challenging the authorities of the time—still resonates around the world today. The sculpture is a strikingly vulnerable figure and is representative of the type of cases that we at Amnesty still work on today—the oppressed individual caused to suffer simply for their beliefs." See the page referring to the project on the website of St. Pauls Cathedral: https://www.stpauls.co.uk/eccehomo. 13.04.2020.

[418] "Wallinger's work reminds us that if we are to respect humanity then we must 're-spect,' that is 'take another look' to see what we are missing or choosing to ignore. … We are also provoked into asking who we have become as people and societies—and who our victims will always be. … At the same trial of Jesus according to St John's gospel, Pontius Pilate asks Jesus 'What is truth?' It is a pertinent question for our own times and, in respect of those who suffer for their conscience or their identity, one which this work won't allow us to ignore." See the page referring to the project on the website of St. Pauls Cathedral: https://www.stpauls.co.uk/eccehomo. 13.04.2020.

[419] In original: "A valódi műalkotás … nemcsak a világ, az emberi viszonyok, a társadalmi berendezkedés álságosságáról rántja le a leplet, hanem önmagáról is. A valódi műalkotásban mindig fölismerhető az önmaga megszűnésének és megszüntetésének az akarata: elküld magától és az élet etikai kihívásai felé fordítja a tekintetünket. Gyönyörködtet, de fel is ébreszt és kiküld a városterekre észrevenni az otthontalanokat, a kitaszítottakat és megnyomorítottakat. Nem én vagyok a cél, mondja a műalkotás, én csak egy önismereti, önfelismerési esemény vagyok." Visky, "A csaknem-Istenről és a valóságossá válásról," 35.

[420] Andrea Dúll writes after David Seamon's 1979 finding: "A place becomes sacred when in the human there is a shift from the position of being outside to experiencing the position of being inside." In original: "Egy hely akkor lesz szent, amikor az emberben a térre vonatkozóan megtörténik a váltás a kívüllét pozíciója helyett a belüllét pozíciójának átélésére." Andrea Dúll, "»Vannak vidékek legbelül«: Környezetpszichológiai szakralitás a helyhasználatban," 227–238, *Helikon Irodalom- és Kultúratudományi Szemle* 1–2 (2010): 227.

[421] Siedell, *God in the Gallery,* 29.

[422] Siedell, *God in the Gallery,* 147.

6.4. The Role of Liturgy

The concept of liturgy is of paramount importance later in Siedell's vision of art.[423] It becomes quite an accurate concept in interpreting the differences in the placements of Ecce Homo, and in identifying the most valid one. As Siedell writes "religion is not merely or simply 'believed,' as if it is the sum total of our intellectual thoughts about it; it is *practiced*. From the Greek *leitourgos*, which means literally 'the work of people,' liturgy is religion's work."[424] It is a practice here, a series of actions that are essential in deciphering the meaning (of a work of art), the answer to 'What is the truth?' The ecclesiastical liturgy is bound in this respect, but there is also a liturgy of museum art reception defined in the same way and based on customary systems.[425] This statement, albeit in other words, has been made before. "Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach took the 'museum as temple' trope beyond its usual metaphorical use, describing the visitor experience in art museums as ritual, but not in direct relation to any lived religions" —writes James Clifton.[426]

Contrary to this finding, in his empirical research on the *Seeing Salvation* exhibition at the National Gallery, Howes encountered feedback that recorded visitor practices that deviated from the museum norm. For example, a gallery attendant reported on a pattern of behaviour which was identified by Howes to be mainly associated with a group of believing religious practitioners, and referred to as a 'pilgrim presence:' "we saw some people praying in front of images in the exhibition as they moved around."[427]

Let's face it, this form of behaviour is unusual in secular, but even in ecclesiastical museum settings. Of course, we need to be aware that the exhibition, in addition to the "traditional" or the so-called "educated" museum tourists, also moved target groups who do not regularly visit such an institution—and for them, a work of art can evoke a completely different type of reception. Among the reasons for the exhibition's success, Howes lists not only the museum's awareness and embeddedness, and the exhibited material, but also the free admission, the strong media background, and the powerful church support. In addition to this, Howes does not forget to mention that although many regarded the works on display as part of the religious heritage, based on their reactions, "modern secular audiences can engage with Christian art at an emotional as well as a purely aesthetic or historical level,"[428] and "in some circumstances religious art in an ostensibly secular setting such as the National Gallery can also serve as an effective vehicle for religious meaning."[429] And this experience raises the question of whether the "profane," museum-exhibition hall environment desacralises religious art or not. Howes concludes that one lesson is that

> *[I]n an overwhelmingly secular age (in which the sheer plausibility of religious perceptions of reality seems to be weakening among large numbers of people) it is still*

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[423] See, Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics."

[424] Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics," 16.

[425] Siedell's warning in this respect: "We are liturgical creatures. Contemporary artistic practice recognises this. It is time that critical practice do the same." Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics," 24.

[426] James Clifton, "Truly a worship experience? Christian art in secular museums," *Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 52, Museums: Crossing Boundaries (Autumn, 2007): 107.

[427] Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 54.

[428] Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 57.

[429] Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 57.

> *possible to pick up signals of transcendence—to gain a glimpse of the grace that is to be found in, with and beneath the empirical reality of our lives. The other is, more prosaically, that in a predominantly post-Christian culture like our own, it seems that the relationship between religion and the visual arts, and especially between aesthetic and religious experience, is not necessarily as tenuous or problematic as it is so often presumed to be.*[430]

It is worth noting that this exhibition was held a year after the first erection of Wallinger's Ecce Homo in Trafalgar Square, and it was therefore preceded by a critical, theoretical and public discussion about the statue. The exhibition also received strong media support.[431] The effect of *Seeing Salvation*, the participants' reflection on their own position as a recipient, was certainly influenced by the unexpected—borrowing an expression thanks to Andrea Dúll—non-specific benefit of the empirical research related to the exhibition, as well as by the fact that the theme of sacred art determined the public discourse prior to the exhibition.

6.5. Temples of Art

The now commonplace connecting of the two concepts of art and church, the term "temple of art" first appeared in the scholarly dialogue in Werner Hofmann's theory, in the context of nineteenth-century antecedents. Hofmann writes about an era that inaugurates the museum as a sanctuary and makes a museum out of the church at the same time, and extends the designation of the church and parts of the church to other arenas of artistic and scientific life,[432] and even to world exhibitions.[433] Hofmann's wording, however, reflects the concept that Franz Liszt had conceived already in 1835 in a proclamation published in *Gazette musicale* in Paris. The proclamation demands the establishment of a new museum of music, and in the wording "the Pantheon of music" is an obvious reference that such an institution be a place where the "the gods, demigods and heroes of music are seated,"[434] as we can read in a study by Veres discussing Liszt's idea.

We can also observe that the art exhibition spaces built at the end of the nineteenth century may even undisguisedly follow the spatial ordering of the church-building tradition of Western Christianity—which is inevitably a direct justification for the above term. The basilica-patterned floor plan of Műcsarnok (Kunsthalle) in Budapest (Albert Schikedanz, 1895–96) is a good

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[430] Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 58.

[431] Such as, among other things, a four-part television series on BBC, led by art historian Neil MacGregor, then the director of the museum. See *Seeing Salvation*, television documentary series, 2000.

[432] The "temples of art" expression appears with Hofmann, in addition to the museum, referring to the concert hall. We can even meet here the concept of the temple of science, too.

[433] Hofmann writes about it in the chapter "Menschheitsbilder" in Werner Hofmann, *Das Irdische Paradies: Motive und Ideen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Prestel, 1960), 66–85. The book also appeared in Hungarian: Werner Hofmann, *A földi paradicsom*, trans. Lujza Havas (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1987), where the above mentioned chapter "Az emberiség képei" is found between pages 67–85.

[434] Bálint Veres, "Liszt Ferenc és a művészet temploma," *Holmi* vol. 23, no. 10 (October 2011): 1234–1249.

example: two "side aisles" next to the "nave," ending in the sculpture hall, which, even if not in an exact east–west orientation, has a sanctuary-like shape ending in an apse.[435]

The relationship between the museum and the church in relation to art, as well as the changes in the place and practice of the reception of art, can also be examined in terms of their function and attitude. In addition to museums that specialise specifically on the collection and display of religious[436] and religion-related objects and works of art,[437] a significant portion of the collections of most general art museums consist of works of religious subjects. And, most probably, we would encounter works of art related to religion in these places as well as in the ecclesiastical art collections of the churches. An interesting exception, and in part reinforced by Elkins' position quoted at the beginning of this study, is that we can hardly find a museum focusing on contemporary religious art.[438]

So if we can come across religious works here and there, where is the border between the museum and the temple?—asks Jan Dolák.[439] The difference may perhaps lie primarily in the principles of collecting and presenting, and thus in the intended direction of reception and interpretation. According to Dolák, the beginning of the "premuseum" can be linked to the medieval church collections and the collections of "superfluous" objects, which are not directly necessary for the ceremonies:

> *The prehistorical shaman was not a collector of musical instruments in the same way a priest in the Notre-Dame Cathedral is not a collector of altars and baptismal fonts. All people have some furniture in their homes, but they are not automatically "collectors" of tables or chairs. No believer, kneeling in front of a painting of the Stations of the Cross, is interested in whether the painting was made by a local painter or a well-known artist. Any painting is sufficient for the believer's needs.*[440]

This is how from the British "anti-museologist" Kenneth Hudson's parable of "a tiger in a museum is not a tiger"[441] we could get to François Mairesse's paraphrase, "a sacred object in a

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[435] It is certainly no coincidence how much the church-like space of the Műcsarnok "Hall Square" gave way to its "templification" by the 2011 exhibition of the art group The Corporation (János Borsos, Erik Mátrai, Gergely Papp and Gábor Szenteleki) entitled Úrhajó (Lordship), during which the spaces of Műcsarnok were interpreted (or just re-interpreted) as nave, side aisles, transept, sanctuary. Transcripts of the important and typical objects of the church (holy water font, confessional, pulpit, etc.) were placed at the strategic points of the building, and regular performative events were organised in the exhibition space as part of the concept: weekly two receptions in the confessional, on Sundays alternative preachings, and as a finissage to the exhibition, an all-night audiovisual show called the Techno Synod. See, The Corporation, *Úrhajó/Lordship* (2011), pdf document. I thank János Borsos for his courtesy of sharing this document with me.

[436] Such as Religionskundliche Sammlung in Marburg, State Museum of the History of Religion in St Petersburg, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow, Museum of the Bible in Washington, Musée des Religions in Hammamet, Tunesia, the similarly named institution in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, The Museum of World Religions in Taiwan.

[437] Examples of the latter are the Museo de Arte Religioso in Peru, the Museum of Religious Art in Zadar, Croatia, or the Keresztény Múzeum (Christian Museum) in Esztergom, Hungary.

[438] In addition to the collection of the Vatican Museum named contemporary, which in reality is a twentieth-century collection, such a museum is the already mentioned Museum of Contemporary Religious Arts (MOCRA) operating within Saint Louis University.

[439] Jan Dolák, "Where is the Border between a Museum and a Temple?" in *Museology and the Sacred: Selected Papers*, eds. Ann Davis, François Mairesse, ICOFOM Study Series Vol. 47 (1–2), (2019): 209–211.

[440] Dolák, "Where is the Border between a Museum and a Temple?" 210.

[441] See *A Tiger in a Museum is not a Tiger: An anthology of the thoughts of Kenneth Hudson (1916–1999)*, (Den Haag: European Museum Academy, 2017).

museum is a sacred object in a museum, and not a sacred object."[442] For Dolák, "A museum object is thus perpetually 'out of natural context', something that 'passed away' and has been transformed or 'reincarnated' into a new life."[443] And if we want to, this is how we can get to its further extension that 'a work of art in the church is not a work of art'—which, in line with Siedell's position quoted earlier, states how little the environment and liturgy that define inclusion support or make possible the acceptance of a work of art as art. According to Dolák's reassuring claim, that "keeping things for sacred reasons has to be strictly distinguished from collecting things as holders of memory, expressions of the materialised world, expressions of musealisation, and so on."[444]

However, if we approach the issue not from the objects but from the institutional attitude, we can get a completely different result. In his 2019 study, Crispin Paine points to such similarities between the museum and religious institutions. Regarding museums as places of public interest with a distinctive role, Paine notes that "they especially boast their role in guarding 'the Real Thing,' and are sometimes almost scornful of institutions that tell history stories without that precious resource."[445] Paine points out the similarity specifically in the case of museums that profess a religion—from the most ancient centres of pilgrimage to the most modern theme parks. Museums are also seeing a change in their interest in religion and its objects compared to previous practices in which museums presented objects of religion as works of art or illustrations of culture. Paine points out that nowadays several museums take the religious meaning of their objects seriously. "Sometimes this results in the distinction between museum and temple or church almost breaking down, and we shall see examples of museums that are also shrines, and shrines that are nearly museums," adds Paine.[446]

The rapprochement, blurring and even collapsing of the boundaries of the museum and the temple/church stems from the common situation that both institutions are exposed to commodification, the shaping, extension and easing called "development" of the "consumer" (recipient, visitor, believer) experience. This commercialisation also partly justifies the practice of expanding the spectrum of services offered—yet, in many cases it is misunderstood, unjustified and impractical. The goal of both institutions is the "mission"—that is, the proclamation and dissemination of the religious or cultural message. The tools of this—after the proven success of marketing—are calls for action, testing, achieving conversion (switching interest to visit), increasing the return and the frequency of visits, establishing and improving brand loyalty, turning it into engagement, and the trial and use of the extended scope of services and products offered by the brand.

Quantitative indicators, such as the number of visitors and, where appropriate, the performance judged on the basis of ticket sales or donations, however, may not be the only expedient criteria, as these also involve the possibility of forgetting real experience and encounters, the transfer of values. With this, the institutions—by forgetting their essence—can lose their own face, uniqueness, image and relevance.

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[442] François Mairesse, "The sacred in the prism of museology," in *Museology and the Sacred,* 21.

[443] Dolák "Where is the Border?" 210.

[444] Dolák "Where is the Border?" 210.

[445] Crispin Paine, "Beyond museums: religion in other visitor attractions," 157–169, in *Museology and the Sacred,*158.

[446] Paine, "Beyond museums," 159.

By this I do not mean to say that there is no place for a sacred exhibition in a secular museum or a contemporary work of art in a church. At the same time, I believe that in the context of the above, it is of paramount importance to avoid a loss of focus, a spectacle without real content and a real encounter experience, and to avoid disbelief. A way out could be offered by applying the practice of service design in this field, which has been studied by Ted Matthews and service designers as "cultural intermediaries" between the two fields, could be a way out.[447] According to him, this system of effects is twofold:

> *[W]ith service design which creates the channels for experience to be had, it may be possible through the community to design and orchestrate rituals and ceremonies that are able to connect to myths that in turn create the channels for "sacred" or at the very least "special" experiences.*[448]

Already in 2009, in a study on the case of Santa Croce in Florence, Jeni Ryde drew attention to the conflict faced by a religious institution that preserves both tangible and intangible heritage, when the traditional historical role is influenced to such an extent by the current needs of international heritage tourism that it changes the function of many sacred sites.[449]

The coexistence of functions for religious practice and secular tourism also seems inevitable in terms of the economic sustainability of churches due to mass tourism and declining numbers of believers. This claim is valid for museums, too, as their function is expanded, becoming a multi-channel one. The mostly exclusively business-oriented, often purely finance-driven, visit- and revenue-maximisation efforts that label the "user experience" (UX) as "user friendly" and place it in focus, have in both institutional systems their opponents. As a museologist, for example, Dolák warns against this all-encompassing endeavour of museums:

> *The future of museums should not be in "embracing everything," including sacred buildings and places or interesting locations of a country. This is backward. Not every valuable thing can count as a museum item and not every valuable place and building is a museum. Any kind of protection does not automatically mean a process of musealisation.*[450]

According to the theory of the Polish cultural anthropologist Magdalena Kubecka, however, a museum should be an "everything place,"[451]—though not in the sense of the sixteenth-century cabinet of curiosities (or miracles in the German wording, *Wunderkammer*), which held, in addition to the works of art, a collection of unusual and rare objects, without any organising concept or, at most, with a selection for representational purposes—but in terms of maximising

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[447] See Ted Matthews, "Sacred Service: The Use of 'Sacred Theory' in Service Design," *Journal of Design, Business & Society*, 3:1, (2017): 67–97. https://doi.org/10.1386/dbs.3.1.67_1.

[448] Ted Matthews, "Sacred Services: How can knowledge from social science relating to the sacred inform the design of service experiences?" *Artifact*, 3:2, (2014): 6.7. https://doi.org/10.14434/artifact.v3i2.3973.

[449] See Jeni Ryde, "Church or museum? The case of Santa Croce, Florence, Italy," *The International Journal Of The Inclusive Museum*, 2(2) (2009): 39–50.

[450] Dolák "Where is the Border?" 211.

[451] Magdalena Kubecka, *Museum as an Everything Place*, (Chris Zombory's edited draft), 1. https://www.academia.edu/35967163/Museum_as_an_Everything_Place, 05.03.2020.

visitor actions rather than objects.[452] According to Kubecka's—who has an economic focus, and is not far from thinking about service design—in writing about the museum, but which also applies to the church and the temple:

> *It seems that to survive in today's market, museums cannot work simply as they worked for decades before. I claim that a museum becomes a kind of an "everything place." Museums need to be multipurpose and flexible. They take over some roles that other institutions—restaurants, theatres, schools—traditionally have played in the city. […] Museums with their hybridity and multiplication of functions become an "everything place."*[453]

Kubecka points out that this "everything place" is also important for policymakers and city authorities, though for another reason. In their eyes, these "everything places" play a fundamental role in creating the image of an attractive and culturally exciting city—on the level of cities, nationally and abroad, too. In addition to its effectiveness in representation, the "everything place" can play a prominent role in creating a community spirit as a "placemaker." In the end, museums as places of everything can change the character of a city or a particular neighbourhood.

The role of identity-shaping and place-making is undeniably important. At the same time, the striving to multiply and even maximise the functions, the wish to meet the needs of more or less all target groups in the city—including regular and casual visitors, locals and tourists, various age groups and attitudes—in tourism marketing is excessive and unsustainable. The nature of not seeing the danger of overtourism, the lack of knowing segmentation to smaller, even niche attitude target groups, and degrowth, is also reflected in the reading of Douglas Brent McBride, who introduces "the museum as mass medium." In his study, quoting Kathy Halbreich, director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, McBride adds that the museum is no longer a church or temple, "but a lively forum or town square."[454] To add a shovel to this, McBride compares the Center Pompidou in Paris to a shopping mall, saying strikingly, "it's a mall world after all." McBride sees the museum as a heterotopia in a Foucauldian sense, which he believes should blare the cacophony of diverse sounds these days. "This conflict laden cacophony contrasts with the universal histories narrated by modern museums," he claims, adding that "it will never yield the Utopian unanimity of a self-transparent society. But it is an essential condition for a democratic society, which museums as mass media can help create."[455]

However, the phenomenon of such a place- and community-making, politically committed model, indicated by the need to create tourist attractions often marked by the concept of

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[452] In connection with Kubecka's opinion, Márton Szentpéteri kindly drew my attention to its retrospective anachronism—since in that era there were no works of art in the modern sense yet—as well as to the need to apply an approach based on the concept of the respective age. I am grateful to him for bringing to my attention the writing of Hans Bredekamp, in which he describes the Kunstkammer as a form of cognition prior to seventeenth-century academies and as a playing field in which the player can be traced, forced between dams, and directed into a specific direction. See, Horst Bredekamp, "A Kunstkammer mint játéktér," trans. Péter Ujvári, *Café Babel* vol 4. no. 14. (1994): 105–112.

[453] Kubecka, *Museum as an Everything Place*.

[454] Douglas Brent McBride, "Modernism and the Museum Revisited," *New German Critique*, No. 99, Modernism after Postmodernity (Fall, 2006), 209.

[455] McBride, "Modernism and the Museum Revisited," 233.

starchitecture,[456] is not unknown either abroad or in Hungary. Churches disguised as sacred, museums designed and built in spite of lacking a collection, are now special phenomena of the tourism industry. Reflecting on this issue, Jayne Merkel, begins her study with the example of the partially built cultural complex on Mount Gaiás in Santiago de Compostela, also known as a major center for European and international pilgrimage tourism, designed by Peter Eisenman in 2011. As Merkel notes, this "gargantuan $125-million effort signals a new age of faith, a faith whose core belief is in the power of museum architecture to attract fame, fortune, and tourists."[457] In this new belief, as she writes, "The form not the content matters."[458] We can conclude that the example used can prove the uncertainty, unsustainability and fallacy of the idea.[459]

Helena Wangfelt Ström approaches the issue from the points of content and functionality.[460] Her conception is in certain respects related to Siedell's idea, the demarcation according to the liturgies. Wangfelt Ström examines what happens when religious objects become cultural heritage and suggests three models. The first kills the former identity of the sacred object (she names it 'euthanised sacredness'), transforming it into an object of purely aesthetic or historical significance. In the second case, which she calls 'hybrid,' the decision whether s/he sees a sacrament, an art object or a historical monument in the given object is made 'in the beholder's eye.' The third case is defined as 'a multi-tool for shifting needs,' determined by the objects' changing needs of usage. The three models cover different attitudes, but have one thing in common: as Wangfelt Ström emphasises, the point is to distinguish between cultural and cultural application.[461] That is, in the way of the experience and construction of art, of the work of art, and of the belief that defines the identity of the institution that declares itself to be the scene of encounter with the work of art.

This, in turn, leads to questions of faith again. According to Brazilian museologist Bruno Brulon Soares, the provocative assumption that certain museums can (even) be considered a religious space jeopardises the unwavering secular status of a given institution in the Western world. I would add that the same can be said, conversely, of many obscure self-identifying churches. According to Brulon Soares, the question that a secular museum must also ask is what is the "religion" behind a given museum (concept), what does that particular museum believe in.

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[456] The term created from merging the words "star" and "architecture" refers to the work of architects, who—due to their fame, or critical appraisal—became top brands, nearly idols,—and for that reason are commissioned to design buildings wished to be iconic, identity-building, and at the same time touristically attractive, from cities, governments, real estate developers. The term is known after Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum project in Bilbao, Spain, though Gehry debates such a connection.

[457] Jayne Merkel, "The Museum as Artifact," *The Wilson Quarterly* vol. 26, no. 1, 66–79 (Winter, 2002), 66.

[458] Merkel, "The Museum as Artifact."

[459] Copying the idea of the Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa (and all the other extensions of the Guggenheim museum brand) from the Basque/Eskaudi capital to the most important (religious) tourist destination in Galicia, the Camino de Santiago, which attracts about 300,000 pilgrims a year, dates back to the '90s. The concept, however, failed because of the underlying misconception that pilgrimage tourism could be extended to museum tourism. The project is unfinished, consuming many times the original budget, the pilgrims do not make the pilgrimage to the cultural building complex without the collection, but designed by a starchitect.

[460] Helena Wangfelt Ström, "How do Museums Affect Sacredness? Three Suggested Models," in *Museology and the Sacred,* 191–205.

[461] Wangfelt Ström, "How do Museums Affect Sacredness?" 191.

He sees the decolonisation of the museum's operation, for example, as a particularly magical act that may even have a religious effect in certain circumstances.[462]

In addition to the institution, the issue of its social identity, thinking and inclusion is also important. It is striking, for example, that it is precisely in Britain that we encounter progressive aspirations in this field that, perhaps best in line with Habermas' postsecularisation theory, are able to implement an acceptance-centred participatory attitude to embrace art and culture as a whole. Why is Ecce Homo right there in the public square or on the steps of the cathedral? Why was it there that the exhibition *Seeing Salvation* took place with such interest? Why might Bill Viola's video winged altarpieces get commissioned and exhibited into a church space there? Why can we see ballet, concert or theatrical performances in churches in Britain? Why is there a lively and real scientific and educational discourse about all this exactly in that culture?

6.6. Education as a Key

David Brown argues for the practice of generally introduced religious education as one possible solution to this issue. This is consistent with my earlier view that most problems in this field are based on the lack of understanding or misunderstanding that can be eliminated through education and dialogue. "Both France and the United States insist on the separation of religion and education, whereas in Britain religious education is compulsory in schools and all major universities have theology departments where the conceptual and experiential side of religion is taken seriously and not just its phenomenology (as in departments of religious studies). That, I think, makes a big difference in a number of key ways"—claims Brown, and adds: "In school, children are also encouraged to experience the worship of faiths other than their own, and so the practice of entering sympathetically into other belief systems without endorsement is a skill that ensures a less dogmatic approach (…) The result has also been greater readiness to connect religion and art."[463]

Having examined the spaces, situations and practices of encountering art—under the name of the temples of art today—we must conclude that regardless of institutional labels and classifications, we can have real encounters and experiences with art, be they well-known spaces of the art world (museums, galleries), churches, liturgical, public or virtual spaces.

"Human beings naturally prefer simple accounts of their world. But religion and art are complex phenomena, and it is those complexities that need to be engaged, not implausible absolutes on either side"—claims Brown,[464] and, accordingly, we must acknowledge, there are several conditions for this. We need courage, to echo Santiago Zabala, to venture into the complex thinking and understanding that art offers. This understanding, however, is also a matter of self-knowledge. It is important to allow personal experience and involvement to lead us to a deeper and fuller understanding of the world and ourselves, to help us rethink our situation, and to lead us back to "the realm of the heart, not the mind."[465]

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[462] Bruno Brulon Soares, "Every museum has a God, or God is in every museum?" in *Museology and the Sacred*, 57–72.

[463] David Brown, "How Real is the Conflict?" in *Re-Enchantment*, 255.

[464] Brown, "How Real is the Conflict?" 258.

[465] Samer Akkach, "The Presence of Absence: Sacred Design Now (2)", *Design Philosophy Papers Collection Six*, ed. Anne-Marie Willis, 63–70, (Ravensbourne, Qld.: Team D/E/S Publications, 2011): 69.

Eszter Júlia Kuzma: Altar of the Holy Generation (2021). Installation.

The mutual estrangement of art and religion is the proud legacy of modernity.

—Ronald R. Bernier[466]

[466] Ronald R. Bernier, "Introduction," in *Beyond Belief*, 1.

7. Who cares?

As indicated by the research framework of Design Culture studies, artefacts cannot be analysed independently of their makers, mediators, and recipients. In order to understand more about the latter, the social aspect, I conducted several empirical research projects during my doctoral studies, as well as in preparation for this doctoral dissertation.

As an employee in higher education, I began my research among students at two art universities, LFZE and MOME: running and co-teaching—as it turned out, experimental and pioneering—courses in the subject of my doctoral research between 2016 and 2020. In 2020 the research continued with a large-sample representative quantitative survey, and it concluded with a limited series of interviews with leading professionals working at major secular and religious museums and galleries. What I wanted to test and prove is whether my interest in contemporary sacred art and design is an isolated phenomenon or an existing and measurable interest on the part of the audience, the viewers, the beholders, the recipients; briefly: Who cares?

Let me note that in this section, a) according to the nature of empirical research, I treat the concepts at face value; b) according to the nature of a doctoral research project in theory concluded at a university of art and design, the application of terminology is changed to suit practice (education, empiric study, interview, etc.); and c) according to its scope and limits, although design culture has a broader scope, this research project focuses on visual arts and architecture. Fields of art like music, literature, or film are excluded for practical reasons, and not for theoretical considerations.

7.1. Initial Research in Education

This project took form as a university seminar during the Fall Term of the 2016-17 academic year. As mentioned earlier, the very existence of modern and contemporary sacred in the field of architecture (and art) is surprising for many, as we primarily think of old churches in connection with sacred buildings. This is no wonder: as a student, even during my art history studies, I only came across a few modern church buildings. I knew there were some, but I couldn't recall most of them.

For me, the breakthrough was the previously mentioned 2007 *Tér és imádság / Space and Prayer* exhibition in Pannonhalma,[467] where, through contemporary church buildings of three major monotheistic religions—the New Synagogue in Dresden (Wandel Hoefer Lorch + Hirsch, 1997), the Monastery of Our Lady in Nový Dvůr (John Pawson, 2004), and the Sherafudin White Mosque in Visoko (Zlatko Ugljen, 1969–1980)—visitors could learn about the changes in the architectural concepts of the respective religions, as well as how architects and clients

[467] *Tér és imádság: Az ima helye az ezredfordulón a zsidó, keresztény és iszlám vallásban* / Space and Prayer: Places for Christian, Jewish and Islamic Prayer at the Millennium, temporary exhibition at the Pannonhalma Abbey, 21.03.–11.11.2007., See, http://bences.hu/cikk/ter_es_imadsag.html. (17.02.2017.)

reacted to contemporary architecture. Borrowing Mandoki's term, my moment of "latching-on"[468] happened then and there.

When I started my doctoral research project a decade later, I wanted either confirmation or refutation of my initial question: whether or not the combination of the concepts of contemporary and sacred is of interest to young adults. In order to pursue this, I started the course *Modern and Contemporary Sacred Architecture* at LFZE in the first semester of the 2016/17 academic year. The course was intentionally conducted in the form of a free, interactive, participatory seminar. I proposed a wider choice of buildings to be discussed than could be covered in one semester, from which students selected which ones to discuss and in what order. The lessons also took place with the active participation of the students: each participant prepared a short presentation on a work which was then discussed by the group. Our basic principle was that there is no wrong answer, no wrong opinion, and at the same time, the clash of different views is natural and even desirable. It is important to note that the course was not aimed at training art historians, but primarily at broadening the horizons of music university students and secondarily at developing their presentation and discussion skills.

My original assumption was that the unusual choice of subject matter would arouse interest, and the buildings chosen for discussion would demonstrate that there are valuable, modern, and contemporary alternatives to historicist copies or unstylish and clumsy churches in modern and contemporary sacred architecture. In addition to arousing interest, my intention was to create openness on the issue.

My experiences confirmed my assumptions. The course was taken by nineteen students: sixteen participants in the Hungarian and three in the English language versions.[469] From the very beginning, the participants took an active part in compiling the themes, presenting the individual buildings, as well as sharing, defending and rethinking their views.

During the semester, we had fourteen lessons in each group. When compiling the initial choice of church buildings, I did not, nor could I strive for completeness in terms of geography, denomination, style and other aspects, but I wanted to arouse the participants' interest, reflect on contemporary possibilities, explore the answers of sacred architecture, and the roads leading to sacred architecture.

The final selection of architecture discussed included the House Church, Dura Europos, Syria (233–256 AD), the Simonopetra Monastery, Athos Peninsula, Greece (13th to 19th centuries), the Chapelle du Rosaire, Vence, France (Henri Matisse, 1951), the Chapel of Notre-Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, France (Le Corbusier, 1954), the Christ in the Desert Monastery, Abiquiu, New Mexico, USA (George Nakashima, 1964), the Kollegiumskirche St. Martin, Sarnen, Switzerland (Ernst Studer, 1966), the Pilgrimage Church of Neviges, Velbert, Germany (Gottfried Böhm, 1968), the Kapelle Sogn Benedetg, Sumvitg, Switzerland (Peter Zumthor, 1988), the Church on the Water, Shimakappu, Hokkaido, Japan (Tadao Ando, 1988), the Church of Light, Ibaragi, Osaka, Japan (Tadao Ando, 1989), the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Dunaújváros, Hungary (Tamás Nagy, 1995), the Church of the Assumption, Szászberek, Hungary (Gábor and Péter Gereben, 2002), the Padre Pio Pilgrimage Church, San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy (Renzo Piano, 2004), and the Abbey of Our Lady of Nový Dvůr, Toužim, Czech

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[468] See, Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, especially Part 2, Chapter 8: "The Phenomenology of Aesthesis: Aesthetic Latching-On and Latched-By," 67–71.

[469] LFZE has a wide range of international students, approximately a fifth of those enrolled, and accordingly, most classes and courses are offered in both Hungarian and English language versions.

Republic (John Pawson, 2004). The two early examples were consciously selected to highlight certain aspects (communality, small scale) that served as relevant comparisons for the modern and contemporary architecture discussed.

On the basis of the churches, chapels and monasteries discussed, we can clearly recognize the existence of progressive modern and contemporary sacred architecture over the past half-century. The integrated and complete design approach of Matisse's Rosary Chapel is a paradigmatic example, as he designed everything from architecture to glass windows, liturgical objects, and vestments with a holistic approach. Le Corbusier's chapel in Ronchamp has clearly created a new point of alignment in architecture—a good indication of the importance of the role of the client side, in addition to a complete and courageous detachment from its predecessors. Nakashima's New Mexico Benedictine Monastery, built in the 1960s, already followed a conscious, environmentally- and sustainability-minded approach, and still operates completely off-the-grid. Zumthor's chapel was also built of environmentally conscious, locally sourced materials. Its moderate size it also follows considerations of sustainability, and from an architectural point of view it has become an example of organicity. Ando's church buildings paved the way for completely new spatial experiences and functionality. The church designed by Tamás Nagy in Dunaújváros has opened a new chapter in relation to historical referentiality: not by historicising its style, but by grasping the essence of the medieval Saxon fortified churches in Transylvania, and uniting it with the liturgical and congregational needs of the contemporary Lutheran community. In addition to its indisputable architectural qualities, the Szászberek church designed by the Gerebens is also instructive due to the history of the church, as it was built from a single private donation to replace the church of the community that had been missing for half a century. Renzo Piano's huge pilgrimage church in southern Italy shows how, reconciling centuries of architectural traditions and state-of-the-art architectural solutions, one can create a space in which, despite its capacity of thousands, one cannot be lost. And with his monastery in the Czech Republic, Pawson set an example of a radically new architectural aesthetic that has since had a significant impact on both sacred and secular architecture. The study of the buildings also revealed that while logically following the traditions of church architecture in accordance with liturgical functions, they are able to communicate in their appearance and concept a reflection of the current worldview, including even the religious practice needs and church expectations of the young adults participating in the course.

In the open debates, I received unexpectedly honest comments, sometimes borrowed from the field of music, as a natural language for the participants. Regarding Zumthor's chapel, its personal nature ("personal, inner feelings, not the power of the church, rather relation with God"), and its closeness to nature ("part of creation") were mentioned, but also several musical analogies came up ("completeness, like Bach"; "like a dominant function that desires a tonic—or a truncated authentic short cut").[470] In connection with Le Corbusier's church in Ronchamp, its reference status ("every church we learned has a reference to this"), the freedom of artistic-architectural creation ("decipherment: the architect was free to design"),[471] and the unpredictability of his works were mentioned. In case of Ando's temples, their appearance as a (changing) part of nature ("nature as part of architecture—changing continuously—just like us")

[470] In original: "olyan mint egy domináns funkció, ami tonikára kívánkozik—avagy egy levágott autentikus zárlat."

[471] In original: "a megfejtés: az építész szabadon tervezhetett."

and the architect's trust in church visitors ("trust that visitors understand the building")[472] were discovered by the participants. Böhm's pilgrimage church in Neviges, with its crystal-like structure and size, recalled the idea of establishing a new holy mountain: "new mountain in town—a new holy place." Piano's Padre Pio church was said to be intimate ("not an Auchan") despite its size. In case of Nagy's Dunaújváros church, its anthropological character ("round shapes, comfort, protection"), in case of the Gerebens' church in Szászberek, the return to the basics of Dura Europos and the idea of excluding secular values were evoked, while in the case of Nakashima's monastery, in addition to the concepts of its homeliness, inclusive nature, and environmental alignment ("a cohesion with its environment"),[473] it was also mentioned that this desert monastery is "an oasis in the desert—like faith in life"[474] and that with this "life came back, God creates life."[475] Pawson's monastery in the Czech Republic was thought to have the character of the sufficient minimum,[476] ("no more is needed") and "less is more," as well as that it is an "embodied prayer" and that Pawson was "the Arvo Pärt of architecture."

At the end of the course, participants completed a short questionnaire with questions of a partly quantitative and partly qualitative nature, to gain more accurate information about the course than my own personal impressions. Although the number of respondents was low, due to the one hundred percent response rate, the data still provided a good basis for evaluation. The open questions helped in understanding the attitudes of the participants and the lessons of the course. Although the names of the respondents were not indicated in the questionnaires, the research could not be considered anonymous, but at most a secret one (since, for example, foreign students could be identified when indicating nationality). Using empirical research as a tool, my goal was partly theoretical and partly practice-oriented: to understand attitudes towards modern and contemporary sacred art, to see problems related to education, and to draw lessons for improvement.

The course was attended by sixteen Hungarian and three foreign students—exceeding my prior expectations. Their average age was 22.21 years, and the gender distribution was well-balanced (47.37% women, and 52.63% men). The average duration of their preliminary art history studies (at high school, or university) was 3.12 years. Although religiosity was not (and could not be) a prerequisite for attending the course, the majority of participants (78.95%) defined themselves as religious, which I assumed was due to the fact that the course name included the word "sacred," and their presence reflected their affinity and interest. Those who defined themselves as religious all identified themselves as Christians of various denomination (31.58% Roman Catholic, 31.58% Reformed, 10.53% unspecified Christian, 5.26% Orthodox).

A separate section in the questionnaire addressed feedback on education. Points indicated on a scale of one to ten how interested they were in the topic before and at the end of the course. This showed that their average initial interest (6.44/10) increased markedly by the end of the course (9.33/10). This means that the course managed to arouse their interest in modern and

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[472] In original: "bizalom, hogy a betérők értsék az épületet."

[473] In original: "kohézió a környezetével."

[474] In original: "oázis a sivatagban—mint a hit az életben."

[475] In original: "visszajött az élet, Isten életet teremt."

[476] See, also Pawson's definition: "The minimum could be defined as the perfection that an artefact achieves when it is no longer possible to improve it by subtraction. This is the quality that an object has when every component, every detail and every junction has been reduced or condensed to the essentials. It is the result of the omission of the inessentials." John Pawson, *Minimum* (London, 1996).

contemporary sacred architecture. Students were also able to indicate on a scale of one to ten how well the course met their expectations. The average value of 9.32 can also be regarded as high, especially if we consider the sub-data (thirteen gave a maximum value of 10, four gave 9, only one person gave 8, and one person rated his satisfaction with 3 points).

The really interesting points of the questionnaire, however, were found in the open answers. To the question of which building was the one that appealed to the students the most, there were much broader, more balanced answers than I had previously expected. A total of twelve buildings were marked as such, and only the Dura Europos house church, the Sarnen church by Studer, and the Neviges pilgrimage church by Böhm were not selected. The building that received the most votes, the Ronchamp chapel by Le Corbusier, was chosen by only five, and the second most voted, the Sumvitg chapel by Zumthor, by three only. The reasons given for the answers were illuminating.

Among the arguments for the most popular church (Ronchamp), the answer that it was "more than architecture," appeared. Others put it more broadly: "There were composers in my life whose music, for the first time, gave me the feeling that I experienced something of a high order that is not only not everyday, but could only and exclusively be created by that person; that such performance is unattainable for others, unrepeatable. In several cases it occurred when I was not yet at the level of studies that the aspects necessary for the proper evaluation of the compositions (…) could have been known to me. When I encountered Ronchamp, I felt similar."[477] The latter answer is well complemented by another one: "I would highlight the spirit of the place, the—in my view—perfectly improvised appearance of the building. It is always a reminder of the ideal of the 'human,' of participation in creation, of perfection and imperfection, of an inseparable bond with God."[478]

The arguments for Zumthor's chapel included "I felt close to it because it creates harmony with its surroundings. The wood paneling and wood beams simply make it close to people. In my opinion, it could not be possible to create a church more natural, because the wood is just as alive (and divine) as the human being/body. Energy thus flows freely, in interaction, and is not lost, as in a completely concrete building."[479] Or in a more concise summary, "Zumthor articulated the spirit of the place and the unity of the world with his building."[480] This claim is well complemented by a more personal tone of vision: "This small, pure, intimate space is enough for being in silence, just with God."

A question in which students could summarise their thoughts on modern and contemporary sacred architecture in three terms, and further specify the most important lessons of the course, resulted in highly colourful answers. From the abundant set of words related to the modern and

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[477] In original: "Voltak az életemben komponisták, akiknek zeneműveit hallgatva már az első alkalommal az az érzés öntött el, valami olyan magasrendű dolgot tapasztalok, amely nemcsak, hogy nem mindennapi, hanem megalkotásukra csak és kizárólag az adott személy képes, ez a teljesítmény mások számára elérhetetlen, reprodukálhatatlan. Több esetben történt mindez úgy, hogy messze nem tartottam a stúdiumok azon szintjén, hogy a kompozíciók megfelelő értékeléséhez (…) szükséges szempontok ismertek lettek volna előttem. Ronchamp megismerése során hasonlót éreztem."

[478] In original: "A hely szellemét emelném ki, az épület szerintem tökéletesen improvizatív megjelenését. Ez mindig emlékeztet az »ember« eszmeiségére, az alkotásban való részvételre, a tökéletességre és a tökéletlenségre, az Istennel való elszakíthatatlan kötelékre."

[479] In original: "Közel éreztem magamhoz, mert a környezetével összhangot teremt. A faborítás és a fa gerendák egyszerűen emberközelivé teszik. Véleményem szerint nem is lehetne ennél természetesebbre megalkotni egy templomot, hisz a fa épp oly élő (és isteni), mint az emberi szervezet/test. Az energia így szabadon, kölcsönhatásban áramlik, és nem vész el, mint például egy teljesen beton épületnél."

[480] In original: "Zumthor a hely szellemét és a világ egységét fogalmazta meg az épületével."

contemporary sacred architecture discussed, light, architecture, trust, contemporary, value, spaces, man, functional, opportunity, innovative, inclusive, play, tradition, bold, space, free, unique, nature, spirit, modern, openness, and God stand out. In addition to words with more tangible meanings related to perception and emotions, there are also more abstract concepts for values and attitudes. According to the answers, light and architecture play a key role in the contemporary church; and trust, value, contemporary character, man and nature, and functionality are important. In addition to tradition, boldness, innovation, freedom, openness and uniqueness also appear, all of which are associated with opportunity, inclusion and acceptability. It is important to pay attention to the appearance of space/spaces and place/spirit/nature, which clearly shows the prominent role of the concept of space formation and the importance of fitting into the environment, as well as naturalness (as part of the created world). On the other hand, the question of "space" versus "place," which appears in Debuyst's book—where he quotes Norberg-Schulz, and through him Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard—also appears here:

> *It is important to return, whatever the place, to its specific endowments, in contrast to the gradual 'loss' of places, which affects most of today's constructions. […] It seems that 'space' as a word—due to its use in the sciences—has taken on a largely quantitative and abstract meaning in the architectural language of the 20th century. As if it were a neutral continuum that can be measured and cut as desired according to functional needs, regardless of location.*[481] *[…] As we have seen, unlike 'space,' 'place' continues to signify mainly a concrete, qualitative reality that has specific and irreplaceable properties.*[482]

For the course participants, based on the questionnaire, the most important concepts describing sacred architecture were: sacred, create, architecture/architect, authentically, spirit, church, contemporary, get to know, place, special, space/spaces, man. Of these, 'sacred' as leitmotif of the course dominates, while the fundamental requirement of authenticity also plays a key role.

So what makes a contemporary piece of sacred architecture suitable today? "The problem of the sacred space is as old as the history of art and the cultural history of mankind. No matter how classic the question is, our contemporaries must answer and rethink this important question in both art history and church history," claims Zoltán Lőrincz in the Foreword of *A szakrális építészet ma hazánkban* (Sacred Architecture in Our Homeland Today).[483] The idea of rethinking, innovation and contemporaneity, similar to Lőrincz's wording, appeared in several

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[481] In Hungarian translation serving as the basis for my English translation: "Fontos visszatérnünk, bármilyen helyről is legyen szó, annak konkrét adottságaihoz, ellentétben a helyek fokozatos »elveszítésével«, amely a mai építkezések legnagyobb részét érinti. … Úgy tűnik, a 'tér' mint szó—a tudományokban használt jelentése hatására—a 20. század építészeti nyelvezetében nagyrészt mennyiségi és elvont értelmet kapott. Mintha egy semleges kontinuum lenne, amely a funkcionális igényeknek megfelelően tetszés szerint mérhető és vágható, függetlenül a hely adottságaitól." Frédéric Debuyst, *A hely szelleme a keresztény építészetben*, trans. Klára Szilágyi (Pannonhalma Bencés Kiadó, 2005), 13.

[482] In Hungarian: "Mint láttuk, a 'tér'-rel ellentétben a 'hely' továbbra is főként egy konkrét, minőségi valóságot jelöl, amely sajátos és semmi mással fel nem cserélhető tulajdonságokkal rendelkezik." Debuyst, *A hely szelleme*, 14.

[483] In original: "A szakrális tér problematikája egyidős a művészettörténettel és az emberiség művelődéstörténetével, bármennyire is klasszikus kérdésfelvetésről van szó, kortársainknak is választ kell adni, illetve újragondolni ezt a művészettörténetben és egyháztörténetben egyaránt lényeges kérdést." See, Zoltán Lőrincz, "Előszó," In *A szakrális építészet ma hazánkban*, 7.

respondents' answers. "You always have to dare to create something new"[484]—said a general summarising answer. There were answers where this idea was associated with discovery and opinion formation: "It was surprising to me that the Christian Church can still provide so much motivation and inspiration for architecture to be renewed within it. I confess, I had my doubts about that before"[485] one reads. Another participant summed it up as "I feel authenticity to be the most important: when we saw that an architect, even if not religious, digs deep into what he has to do, wonderful spaces … are created that authentically convey the teaching of God, authentically provide the necessary environment for the human soul."[486]

It was no surprise, either, to link the need for renewal to the age. "Sacred architecture should adapt to the needs and ages that change from time to time,"[487] reads one of the answers. Recognition of the autonomous vision of architects, on the other hand, was a gratifying discovery: "It was interesting to see how a certain artist/architect thinks of sacred space, how contemporary architecture is infused into such an ancient type of architecture as well as into religion, thus including the congregation and God itself into it, too."[488]

The idea of a 'genius loci' that is also central to Debuyst also came to the fore: "We can create a really good space by looking for the spirit of the place, not that we have to build a church 'like this' here now. Sometimes it is our own attachment that deepens the relationship and makes its function obvious to others."[489] According to another answer, which emphasises a broader interpretation of the formation of space, "The essence of modern sacred architecture is to open new, special and personal sacred spaces in the lives of believers through the person of the architect or creator."[490] This is complemented by the idea of homeliness: "Not only can a church be built in the average, ordinary way (not only in a three-nave, decorated with sacred images, with an organ, etc.), but also in a new, unique style. These buildings can so much restore the spirit of the place that one can feel at home in them."[491] Finally, the need for a historical outlook was also expressed: "In order to understand them, it is not enough to live in the present and know the problems of today, but also to know the art historical and local historical

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[484] In original: "Mindig merni kell újat alkotni!"

[485] In original: "Meglepő volt számomra, hogy a keresztény egyház még a mai napig is nyújthat annyi motivációt, ihletet az építészetnek, hogy megújítsa azt annak berkein belül. Bevallom, voltak efelől kétségeim korábban."

[486] In original: "A hitelességet érzem a legfontosabbnak—amikor azt láttuk, hogy egy építész, még ha nem is vallásos, a mélyére ás annak, amit csinálnia kell, akkor csodálatos terek, (…) jönnek létre, amelyek hitelesen közvetítik az Isten tanítását, hitelesen adják meg az ember lelke számára a szükséges környezetet."

[487] In original: "A szakrális építészet alkalmazkodjon az időről időre megváltozó szükségletekhez, korosztályokhoz."

[488] In original: "Érdekes volt látni, egy-egy művész/építész hogyan fogja fel a szakrális tér fogalmát, miként viszi bele a kortárs építészetet egy ennyire ősi épülettípusba, sőt, magába a vallásba, befogadva így a gyülekezetet és magát Istent."

[489] In original: "Azzal lehet igazán jó teret alkotni, ha a hely szellemét keressük, nem pedig azt, hogy nekünk most ide 'ilyen' templomot kell építenünk. Néha a saját kötődésünk az, ami elmélyíti a kapcsolatot, és másoknak is nyilvánvalóvá teszi a funkcióját."

[490] In original: "A modernkori szakrális építészet lényege az, hogy az építész avagy az alkotó személyén keresztül új, különleges és személyes szakrális terek nyíljanak meg a hívő emberek életében."

[491] In original: "Nemcsak az átlag, hétköznapi módon lehet templomot építeni (nemcsak háromhajós, szentképekkel díszített, orgonával ellátott, stb.), hanem újfajta, egyedi stílusban is. Ezek az épületek olyannyira visszaadhatják a hely szellemét, hogy az ember otthon érezheti magát bennük."

processes. If you have it, some of them can—in Béla Hamvas' concept—become an object of meditation."[492]

Based on the answers, I would like to highlight—in addition to space, functionality, authenticity, and modernity—the importance of the quality of the relationship between the client (whoever gives the commission) and the designer/architect. Part of this is to define the needs of the commission as precisely as possible (as happened before the last renovation of St. Martin's Basilica in Pannonhalma, completed in 2012[493]), and for the client to keep in mind at which point it is not advisable to have a say in the work. On the part of the designer, it is important that, in addition to taking into account the specific liturgical and community needs, they should not be afraid to include their individuality and creative character.

Although the participants pursued their studies in the field of music—and not in architecture, architectural history, or art history—they were not considered beginners in the history of art and architecture—with the exception of modern and contemporary sacred architecture and art. In addition to their participatory activity, the diversity of their answers to open-ended questions also exceeded my expectations, and confirmed my hypothesis that linking sacred and contemporary can evoke growing interest and thinking that can be transferred to other fields of art. That is why I consider the issue of the 'reformation' of education to be of paramount importance.

Students at certain secular universities can attend related courses—like the sacred architecture courses available at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME) for years,[494] or the Christian sacred art specialisation available at PTE since 2010,[495] but at the faculties of Theology the choice of courses in contemporary architecture, art, literature, drama, music, dance, film, etc. is limited. At the same time students in Bucharest, Romania can study sacred arts at Masters level, too.[496]

Lack of knowledge and misunderstandings due to ignorance do not promote the birth of truly contemporary, progressive, high-quality sacred architecture and art, as well as the positive experience that results from them. Until the client side realises that contemporary art and architecture is not anti-religious and anti-faith, and that copying empty, schematic historicising templates cannot be regarded as truly contemporary, as it does not speak to the present or the future; and until they realise that being a believer and an enthusiastic practitioner of religion would not necessarily amount to being a good architect, designer or artist, nothing will change. We can only hope that the exceptionally demanding contemporary sacred architectural works that appear sporadically in Hungary can lead the way. The sacred architecture of European/

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[492] In original: "„Megértésükhöz nem elég csak a mában élni és a ma problémáit ismerni, hanem ismerni kell a művészettörténeti, helyi történelmi folyamatokat is. Amennyiben ez megvan, némelyikük képes—Hamvas Béla fogalmával szólva—meditációs objektummá válni."

[493] For a detailed account, see, Gergely Hartmann, "Szerzetesek szolgálatában—a pannonhalmi bazilika felújításáról," *epiteszforum.hu*, May 3, 2012. http://epiteszforum.hu/szerzetesek-szolgalataban-a-pannonhalmi-bazilika-felujitasarol, 16.03.2017.

[494] See *Szakrális építészet—Liturgikus építészet napjainkban* with courses led by Zorán Vukoszávlyev PhD: *Szakrális terek építészete I. – Történeti liturgikus terek funkcióelemzése* and *Szakrális terek építészete II. – Kortárs tendenciák*, https://szakralis.wordpress.com/oktatas/, 25.02.2021.

[495] See *Keresztény szakrális művészet specializáció*, http://www.art.pte.hu/kepzomuveszeti_intezet/szakok_kepzesek/kereszteny_szakralis_muveszet_specializacio, 25.02.2021.

[496] See *Sacred Art in the Contemporary World, Masters Degree–Sacred Art Bachelors Degree.* (University of Bucharest, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, https://unibuc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/University-of-Bucharest-Brochure-20182.pdf, 44. 25.02.2021.

Western culture also faces a number of challenges in addition to conservation and renovation tasks: the creation of smaller churches, chapels and congregation spaces for the declining congregations; the creation of spaces that can be flexibly adapted to versatile ecclesiastical tasks; the creation of churches that provide opportunities, and the consideration of ecological aspects for the sustainability of congregations and churches.

All of this can only be a partial contribution to preserving the purpose of churches and help unite the quadrants of spirituality as social mortar, to quote Elkins' expression.[497] Education to achieve this, however, is an interesting task—and as I experienced, not just for me.

7.2. Education and Beyond

Wishing to continue and gain more information within education, as well as to focus more directly on students of art and design, I designed and carried out three university courses at MOME in the Spring Term of 2018, the Fall Term of 2018, and the Fall Term of 2019.

7.2.1. Contemporary Sacred Art

The first of these courses was entitled *Kortárs szakrális művészet / A művészet- és a designtörténet aktuális kérdései* (Contemporary Sacred Art / Actual Questions of Art and Design History).[498] The course was open to BA students studying different disciplines, and was aimed at covering the broad spectrum of contemporary sacred art and design through theories and practical examples. Just as in the previous case, there was strong interest: twenty-six students signed up for the course, and only three failed to complete it. The range of disciplines studied by participants included Architecture (six students), Animation (four students), Industrial Design (two students), Photography (two students), Graphic Design (two students), Ceramic Design (one student), Glass Design (one student), Metal Design (two students), Design and Art Theory (four students), Design Culture studies (two students). An interesting phenomenon was that besides students from within the university, a dozen other participants followed the course: students of Theology, Fine Art, and Music, as well as alumni of the university.

The series of lectures accompanied by open talks addressed the basic terms, theoretical approaches, sacred architecture, liturgical art, gallery art, scandalous/shocking art, sacred kitsch, sacred design, and artivism related to the sacred.

At the end of the course, participants were asked to reflect upon what was discussed during the course in the form and medium of their choice. Essays were accepted as well as other forms of art, by individual participants or pairs/groups. During the last lesson, an open debate provided the participants with the opportunity to reflect on each others' initial ideas, and possibly also connect, join, and form teams, if they wished.

The horizon of reflections was very wide: from essays and summaries of specific investigations in writing—on the presence of the sacred in the online world (Zsófia Ádám), in animated films (Brigitta Ádi), in toy and game design (Alíz Csák), in music video (on Ivan Olita's *Like a Prayer* by Vivien Kádi) as well as on the sacred in spaces and spirituality in Japanese architecture (Ágnes László), and on music in spiritual healing (Anna Becskeházi)—to tangible design and art projects—including experiments in typography (*Still See-King*, *Profane Butane*, and *Resurraction* by Bertalan Bessenyey), a shareable water flask for pilgrims

[497] "The »private matter« of faith is spirituality, and the »social mortar« is religion." Elkins, *On the Strange Place*, 25.

[498] The course ran under the codes 128-33-15-01 and 129-32-08-01 at the Institute for Theoretical Studies, MOME.

(*Pellegrino* by Nóra Csendes), an organically-styled hand-made rosary (Adrienn Matolják), and an educational game to serve as a tool to teach the Hebrew alphabet, principles of mathematics and gematria (*Gematrix* by Borbála Moravcsik), as well as projects in photography (Anna Kis-Kéry, and Albert Béla Tamás), image making (re-interpreted Madonna with Child compositions of selfie with pet by Annamária Kiss, and an abstract triptych by Anna Lengyel), experimental street-art (*Look Down at Us* by Anna Pongrácz), a one-hundred-windowed Advent Calendar interpretation with paintings of abstract landscapes (Anna Sümegh), and animation sketches (Kitti Teleki). Among the architectural proposals investigating the idea of the connection of space and faith, there was a project realised in Erdőbénye (*Kút/Fountain* by Szilárd Suba-Faluvégi), and two strikingly different proposals for a forest chapel: a design for a small, introspection-focused structure (Boglárka Bakró and Csenge Király) and one attempt to create a larger structure (Eszter Kaderják and Noémi Éva Sebestyén).

After the course was finished, the authors of the latter chapel idea showed an interest in realising their project in life. One project author (Noémi Éva Sebestyén) offered the financing from their earlier award (the HelloWood 2017 main prize of HUF 500,000); as the course leader I succeeded to get a free plot through my non-educational business contacts in a forest owned by the Town of Pannonhalma,[499] Hungary; and MOME also gave support through the Institute of Architecture.

In the summer of 2018—between school terms, and on an entirely voluntary basis—the project, named Forest Chapel Pannonhalma, was realised: long weeks of planning, organisation and preparation preceded the seven days of construction. The initial project owners were joined by others, partly from the course and partly from outside, and they succeeded in completing the project by late August.

The project was a one-of-a-kind for several reasons: it is architecture in its own time, as well as an outstanding example of contemporary sacred design (Fry). A gently radical, attentive, ethical and spiritual edifice, it was born out of a collaborative, participatory, voluntary community creation of, and carried out by, students. It is a source of pride, and most probably a memory for a lifetime, for everyone involved.

The objective set out by the project authors in investigating the relations of space and the sacred was to create a non-denominational structure that gently fits the natural environment, yet demarcates and encloses a space for prayer, meditation, rest, or whatever its human and non-human users (e.g., animals) wish. The design and the pre-production of the project was carried out by a small group of six students (Kázmér Domokos, Eszter Kaderják, Dorottya Kéry, Anna Pongrácz, and Noémi Éva Sebestyén, all BA students of Architecture at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, as well as Bíborka Kelemen, MA student of Graphic Arts at MKE), and was consulted on by two architects, teachers from the Institute of Architecture at MOME (Tamás Bene and Áron Vass-Eysen), whereas I took part in the management of the project. The construction on an open clearing on top of St Imre Hill, Pannonhalma, was carried out by altogether forty participants, mostly students, within the limited timeframe of seven days, from 20 to 26 August in 2018.

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[499] The choice of Pannonhalma is a lucky one: with the Benedictine Archabbey founded in 996 AD situated in Pannonhalma, it is one of the most important sacred sites in Hungary. It is also an exemplary center for connecting modern/contemporary thinking and art with the ancient Rule of St Benedict. The monastery operates a boarding secondary school for boys, one of the most prominent art festivals in Hungary, named Arcus Temporum, and houses outstanding art exhibitions every year. They also produce wine, mineral water, beer, herbs, chocolate, operate a restaurant, a visitor centre, a hostel for pilgrims, a gallery, and a café. The recently added elements of architecture (added in the past two decades) are of very high contemporary architectural quality.

The Forest Chapel was entirely constructed by hand. It is a large oval shape, open to the sky, gently blending into the environment of the forest. It is made out of seven layers of hand-bent, glued and screw-fixed planks, and stands on twelve hardly visible rusty steel supports. It floats above the ground, and under the canopy level. In the space enclosed by the structure, a blue and golden mosaic covers a concrete altar of gratitude, as set out by the project owners, to collect rainwater, and serve as a pond for birds.

What the Forest Chapel Pannonhalma project clearly showed is the students' (and other participants') openness to be involved in seeking, quoting Willis' words, "'something more,' something beyond mere appearance and functionality,"[500] and personally participating in the establishment of a research project investigating the relations of the sacred and space, as well as experiencing the power of the commonality of such a project. On the seventh and final day of construction, on Sunday evening, after the Forest Chapel was finished, but before sunset, the builders were joined by a number of supporters and, sitting on the beams of the structure, spoke of their gratitude for the successful completion of the project. The event was crowned by a participating/supporting family's wish to non-denominationally baptise their infant son, which took place immediately.

The afterlife of the Forest Chapel—besides the regular re-visits by the makers and builders, including birthdays and engagements—also made it a memorable event for all: it appeared in the portfolios of all students involved, received extremely good coverage in professional and public press, and was invited to be exhibited at the TÉR///ERŐ | 2. Nemzeti Építészeti Szalon / COVER///AGE | 2nd National Salon of Architecture, Műcsarnok/Kunsthalle, Budapest, Hungary, April 26 to August 25, 2019,[501] as well as at the Wood Icon 2019 event in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on October 15, 2019, where it received the City and Community Wood Award.[502]

In addition to the Forest Chapel, the afterlife of the course was also very rich. A one-day wrap-up program entitled *Szakrális design* (Sacred Design)[503] as part of Budapest Design Week 2018 showcased all projects proposed and realised within and after the course in the form of an exhibition, in presentations and subsequent open discussion. The interest towards the event was overwhelming: nearly two thousand people marked the social media page of the event as "interested," thus following the posts advertising the event, and approximately three hundred people attended the event itself at the Auditorium of the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, which was an unexpected and unprecedented success. The event received an invitation to be repeated—though on a smaller scale—in the town of Pannonhalma, which took place on March 28, 2019.[504] Interestingly, certain projects keep on returning to attention from time to time, as in a recent article in Hype and Hyper.[505]

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[500] Willis, "Sacred Design Now," 3.

[501] See the page of the exhibition at the website of the institution: http://www.mucsarnok.hu/exhibitions/exhibitions.php?mid=qbiexRy6mclpsrvpT23SEc. 27.02.2021.

[502] See the page of the Forest Chapel at the website of the BigSee Wood Award website: https://bigsee.eu/forest-chapel-by-ba-students-of-architecture-at-the-moholy-nagy-university-of-art-and-design-mome-hungary/. 27.02.2021.

[503] The social media page of the event is available at https://www.facebook.com/events/1284416355033777/. 27.02.2021.

[504] See the advertisement of the event at the website of the town of Pannonhalma, https://pannonhalma.hu/2019-03-28-kazinczy-ferenc-muvelodesi-haz-szakralis-design. 27.02.2021.

[505] See Noémi Viski, "Sacrality and Design Through the Eyes of Young Designers," *Hype and Hyper*, 2020.09.03., https://hypeandhyper.com/en/sacrality-and-design-through-the-eyes-of-young-designers/. 27.02.2021.

7.2.2. Contemporary Sacred Architecture / Church Re-Design

A direct effect and consequence of the success (public reception and internally perceived success) of the previously described and analysed university course, event(s), and especially of the Forest Chapel project, was the green light to further my research in the form of another, though slightly different course at MOME: the *Kortárs szakrális építészet—Templom re–design* (Contemporary Sacred Architecture—Church Re-Design) course hosted by the Institute of Architecture in the Fall semester of the academic year 2018–2019.[506] The course, which was realised in co-operation with architect Zsolt Péteri (then at 3H Architects), was aimed at taking on the previously proven method of connecting the experience of learning with theoretical and practical issues, mindsets, as well as forging a communal working environment, in harmony with the approach of design culture by providing a direct link to the potential users targeted by the project itself.

The project could be described as very simple at the beginning, but in the end it proved to be much more complex than imagined originally. The subject of the course was a small church of the Reformed Church located in a suburb of Budapest (in Solymár), and built in the mid-1980s. The congregation felt that the church building (the architecture and the construction quality) did not support the optimal functioning of the congregation, their sustainability, maintainability, and mission—and that is how the project was started: being hosted by the Institute of Architecture, and joined for the most part by students of Architecture (11 out of 14 participants, the remaining three being two students of Graphic Design and one of Design Management studies), though at very different levels of education (from BA1 to MA2).

The participating students had various expectations and motivations, from celebrating the real task and real, out-of-the-classroom environment ("seeking answers to real problems and aiming at resolving them in practice, too")[507] to realising the relevance of the sacred in the everyday ("the possibility of examining a strange mixture of sacredness and everyday life piqued my interest,"[508] "I chose this course because I believe that regardless of denominations, people, time and space, everything has to do with the sacred"[509]).[510]

The scope of the project was to be within the field of contemporary sacred design, integrating designerly practice and theoretical background, creating a learning environment for problem-based learning, building on previously gained knowledge, and combining that with application in practice. The methodology applied was defined in the first lesson by all members of the team: combining a complex design approach with a design thinking methodology.

The starting point was to investigate the (mal)functioning of the church building through personal interviews with the pastor and his family, the elders of the congregation, and a questionnaire filled out by members of the congregation, as well as personal observation. The results provided useful information for both the course and the congregation itself. It turned out

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[506] The course ran under the code 111–40–83K/001–10 at the Institute of Architecture of MOME.

[507] In original: "Valós problémákra keres válaszokat és célja gyakorlatban is megoldani őket."

[508] In original: "Szakralitás és mindennapiság furcsa egyvelegének vizsgálati lehetősége felkeltette az érdeklődésemet."

[509] In original: "Azért választottam ezt a kurzust, mert úgy gondolom, hogy felekezetektől, embertől, időtől és tértől függetlenül, mindennek köze van a szakralitáshoz."

[510] The answers were collected from a questionnaire completed by the participants at the end of the course, and were shared in the course-end presentation. See, *re-design*, presentation, December 9, 2018.

that besides problems with the infrastructure (architectural, technical issues) there were specific problems affecting those with small children, as well as youth, and the elderly.

Accordingly, the team of the course formed five working groups: organisation–operation–communication; exterior; interior and infrastructure; community spaces; and garden, and worked out proposals in these fields. Naturally, the teams shared their views, understandings, and ideas with the others, and thus a harmonised joint proposal was created. Never before, I believe, has a course-end presentation been held in a church, open to all members of the congregation, and especially not directly adjoining a service with Communion. On December 9, 2018 the entire team lined up to give a presentation to the community, covering the above mentioned problem and the proposals—from a new visual identity to a new exterior structure to help link the body of the church building and the congregation with the environment, a re-thinking of the church interior with technical developments (heating, lighting, solar-panel based energy usage), a complete rethinking of the adjoining parish and the garden to be transformed into serving the community of the congregation, as well as a timing/sequential breakdown to realise the proposals.

After the presentation, a second run of questionnaires were sent to the members of the congregation to collect their feedback, and based on that, a second, amended version of the plan was created and forwarded on January 31, 2019.

The findings of the project proved that the initial ideas of creating a learning environment that supports and serves the students' expectations and development, as well as the potential development of the church and community under investigation proved to be correct: both the participants and the recipients were (and are still) thankful for the project; some proposals—like the technical development of the church space, the installation of new heating and insulation, the use of the new visual identity and renewing the communication of the congregation, as well as turning the ground floor spaces belonging to the parish into a community space—have since been realised.[511]

Julianna Szücs, a participant, who at the same time also studied management at the Corvinus University of Budapest, investigated the entire process in her MA thesis *Design thinking a projektmenedzsmentben: Egy sikeresnek ítélt design thinking projekt sikerkritériumainak vizsgálata* (Design Thinking in Project Management: Investigation of Success Criteria of a Design Thinking Project Considered as Successful). In the Opponent Report I was asked to write, I praised her work:

> *The author […] does not consider objectification as her primary goal, but the formation of the process itself, the formation of identity, the formulation of the problem, the structuring of tasks, the formulation of solutions and, possibly, the non-specific, unplanned benefits. As she explains in the dissertation, in the project used as an example, the reflection of the members of the congregation on their personal attitudes, values, roles, and community identity, reflection, possible (re)activation could be a great benefit, while for the participants of the course it is the discovery of a new method of cooperation, the recognition of the strength of communal creation. It is gratifying that Julianna Szücs expanded and further developed the known models, and*

[511] The latter took place after the pastor of the congregation resigned, and a new pastor, who is single and therefore needs less living space, was elected in 2020.

that in the framework of this dissertation she reflected on herself as a researcher, and also outlined the possibilities of moving forward and continuing the research.[512]

What I could not foresee at the end of the course in December 2018 and January 2019, and also when writing the above Opponent Report in May 2019, was that the impact of the project in achieving "the reflection of the members of the congregation in their personal attitudes, values, roles, and community identity, reflection, possible (re)activation," surpassed the planned effects when the members of the congregation started to reactivate themselves by initiating a number of projects, including the above mentioned infrastructural developments of the church building, and as a result of that the long-time serving pastor of the congregation unexpectedly resigned in the summer of 2019, leaving the congregation in a crisis situation for a year, taking the congregation through a painful journey of "growing up" and achieving "adulthood" as a community, conducting a long series of clarifying talks within the congregation, inviting and electing a new pastor in harmony with these, and thus probably re-shaping the way the congregation works more drastically than planned and imagined. The new pastor was elected in 2020, and has since actively contributed to the reawakening of the life of this small congregation. As a result, the active membership and participation grew, and as funding was secured in 2022 the architectural reconstruction will also be concluded.

7.2.3. Contemporary Sacred Art—Reading Seminar

In the following academic year, Bálint Veres invited me to join him in co-teaching the course *Elméleti előadás olvasószemináriummal: A vallás, a művészet és a design* (Theoretical Lecture with Reading Seminar: Religion, art, and Design).[513] This invitation created an opportunity for me to summarise the findings of my doctoral research, utilise and share a part of my translations of important sources of the international discourse on the subject, thus deepening and broadening the field of debate among interested young Hungarian designers and theoreticians, extend my view by listening to lectures by my supervisor, and create a novel learning environment for all (participants and lecturers) by involving participating students in the process.

The lectures—read in a shared form by Veres and myself—covered a) a broad introduction to the theories of the subject (including religion at the university, terms, disenchantment/re-enchantment, contemporary sacred arts, kitsch and sacred design, contemporary culture and theology, everyday religiosity, religion as medium and media of religion), b) discussed the five approaches Elkins introduced in his book[514] as detailed earlier, c) demanded participants to read papers/chapters by a limited range of important scholars (Fish, Timothy Keller, André Leroi-

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[512] In original: "A szerző … nem a tárgyiasítást tekinti elsődleges célnak, hanem magának a folyamatnak a kialakítását, az identitás megformálását, a probléma megfogalmazását, annak feladattá strukturálását, a megoldások megfogalmazását, és—esetlegesen—magát az aspecifikus, nem tervezett hasznot is. Amint a dolgozatban kifejti, a példaként használt projektnél a gyülekezet tagjainak a személyes hozzáállásukon, értékítéletükön, szerepükön, továbbá közösségi identitásukon való elgondolkodása, az arra reflektálás, az esetleges (re)aktiválódás jelenthetett ilyen hasznot, míg a kurzuson résztvevőknek a módszer kipróbálása, a számukra új (együtt)működési módszer felfedezése, a közösségben alkotás erősségének felismerése lehetett ilyen. Örömteli, hogy Szücs Julianna az ismert modelleket kibővítette, továbbgondolta, valamint hogy e dolgozat keretében önmagára is reflektált kutatóként, és a továbblépés, a kutatás folytatásának lehetőségeit is felvázolta." Zoltán Körösvölgyi, *Opponent's Report*, Corvinus University of Budapest, May 30, 2019.

[513] The course ran under the codes M–AE–201–A and M–SZ–101–H at the Institute for Theoretical Studies of MOME.

[514] Elkins, *On the Strange Place*.

Gourhan, Elkins, Howes, Morgan, Mátyás Varga, Visky, Fry, Willis, Elisha McIntyre, Cobb, Ammerman, Groys, Weibel), and d) participate in practical exercises (like bringing in a work of art, a kitsch object and a craft object from the participant's personal environment regarded to have a relationship with religion or spirituality; work with those objects by rearranging them according to different principles—art/craft/kitsch/religiosity/etc. in the classroom; select a work of art and write a short essay on it; write an essay on a selected chapter of Mátyás Varga's book;[515] and interview someone on her/his relation/experiences regarding the relation of objects and the transcendent, based on a structured interview of ten questions, and interpret/present it to the team in the form and media of their choice.

The classes with the readings and lectures illustrated with slides and moving images provided a basis for the dialogue, whereas the exercises aimed at opening the participants' awareness to the possibility of linking objects (of art, craft, design, kitsch) and religiosity/spirituality in the disciplines of their studies, as well as in the broader scope of their lives and experiences.

As one could expect at an art and design university, the answers and reflections as hand-in works arrived in various forms and media, including plain textual documents, texts with various forms of illustrations, a drawn image, a gif-file, a photo series of objects, a glass object, a design of "sacred" post-it note stickers, a comic book, a book(let), a zine, a soundscape, a self-baked bread and the performative act of sharing and eating that together with the participants in the classroom, as well as an online game, where the answers could be read after completing certain tasks.

What this course demonstrated—besides the previously experienced openness to address issues of the sacred in education, as thirty-four students signed up and followed the course—was, a) regarding the content, that "nearly everything was new to me," the course represented something "in addition, above the existing things," that "it starts many interesting subjects in the future," and it served as an "inspiration to see things differently," as well as having provided an environment "to address personal questions in a safe space;"[516] and b) regarding the form of the course, that "there was too much to read," "it was practical, I'd have liked to repeat the object selection practice—the course influenced my views," "it was good that there were no expectations on the solutions," and that more practical exercises would be better, since "I had a different attitude if there were tasks, I felt less passive," and "it was inspiring to listen to others," and that the course "could be more intense, like in the form of a course week."[517]

In summary, based on the findings of these courses, seeing them as forms of artistic or designerly research or social design projects in education, these projects in education reaffirmed my previous assumption that education might play a crucial role in providing a view on the theories and practices of linking religion and spirituality with art and design, clarifying the misunderstandings, and offering an environment for personal and communal discoveries about the possibilities of further learning and an enriched scope of future art and design projects.

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[515] M. Varga, *Nyitott rítusok*.

[516] I recorded the answers by taking notes at the last lesson. In original: "szinte minden nóvum," "plusz a meglévő dolgok fölött," "sok érdekes témát megindít a jövőben," "sokrétűen kaptam dolgokat," – ld szakirodalom= inspiráció és másképp látni dolgokat," "személyes kérdések előtérbe kerülésének lehetősége a biztonságos térben."

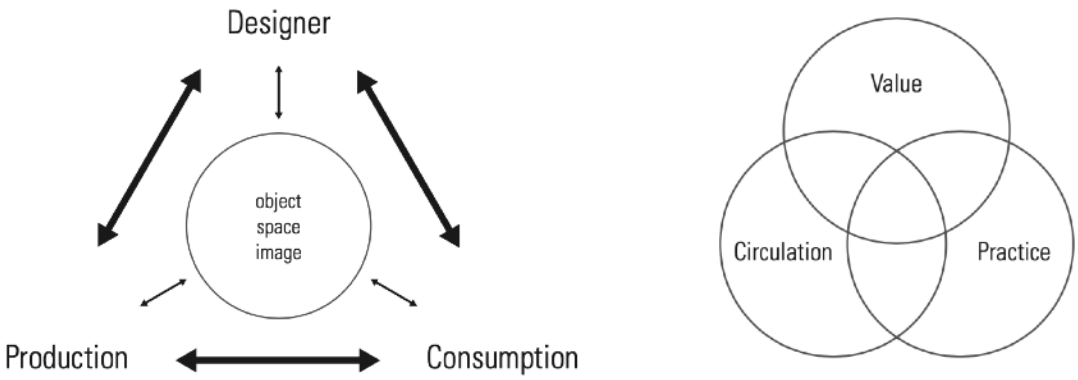
[517] The answers in original: "olvasnivaló sok volt," "gyakorlatias volt, szívesen újracsináltam volna a tárgyválogatást —ez befolyásolta a szemléletemet," "jó hogy nem volt elvárás a megoldásokra," "más volt a viszonyulásom ha volt feladat, kevésbé éreztem magam passzívnak," "inspiráló volt másokat meghallgatni," "lehetne sokkal intenzívebb, például kurzusheti is."

7.3. Researching the Investigated Territory Deeper

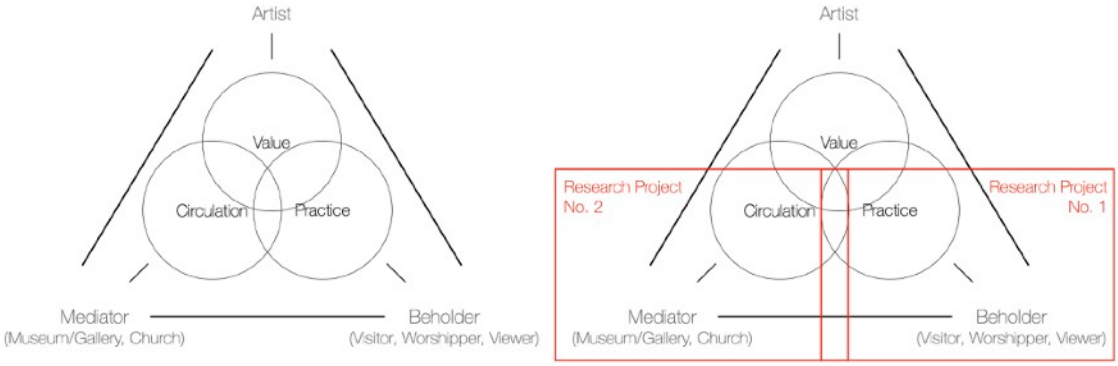
As described earlier, investigating the subject by applying the methodology and framework of Design Culture enables a contemporary, inclusive and comprehensive way of analysing why and how art related to religious/spiritual experience is present and not only created, but also mediated and perceived today.

Julier points out that Visual Culture already showed an "openness in terms of scope" by breaking from "good art" and "high vs popular art" distinctions.[518] Design Culture, he claims, "is a qualitative change in terms of how design is practiced, circulated, and perceived," and accordingly "it seems apt to regard design culture as a key result and expression of our times."[519]

His models of the Domains of Design Culture can be adapted to my research by modifying the triumvirates of "Designer / Production / Consumer" to "Artist / Mediator / Beholder," which better reflects the Value / Circulation / Practice domains defined by Julier in the fields investigated in my research. This model represents a fundamental change, claims Julier, since "design culture requires its observers to move beyond visual and material attributes to consider the multivarious and multilocational networks of its creation and manifestation."



Julier's models for Domains of Design Culture



Julier's model altered to this research—and the empirical research projects

[518] Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture," 72.

[519] Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture," 72.

Whereas the classic aspect of art history mostly focuses on the artist, the program, the commission, and the work of art itself, and while traditional surveys of "consumption" focus on the social role of goods in private reception in everyday life, a deeper analysis into understanding the complexity of the issue would require the investigation and understanding of the other two parties involved.

Accordingly, I applied two phases of empirical research, based on domains defined in this modified model, to my doctoral research project in the forms of 1) a quantitative research project focused on understanding the beholder's attitude, and 2) a qualitative research project to learn about the attitudes of those capable of shaping the mediation, the circulation of art received by people in their everyday lives.

7.3.1. Large-Sample Survey

This long-planned research—already present as a future project in my mid-term doctoral paper submitted in 2018[520]—was designed to receive a deeper understanding of the motives and attitudes of the general public in regard to contemporary art related to religious or spiritual experience.

It was a "lucky" coincidence to be able to carry out this quantitative research in April 2020, shortly after the lockdown due to the global COVID-19 pandemic was ordered in Hungary. Accordingly, and also in line with my special interest in new media, a radically increased online media consumption by the people stuck at home with home-office, home-schooling, and a complete lack of in-person experiences at any events offered a chance to raise questions especially related to this field.

This empirical research was carried out as quantitative research in the form of five closed-ended questions[521] raised via online omnibus survey.[522] The research was representative of the 18 years and older population in Hungary.[523] The number of respondents was 1,500. Since the data collection of the research took place in April 2020, the code name for the research was "Easter Research" (in Hungarian: *Húsvét-kutatás*). The data of the answers received for this project (as it was an omnibus survey, there were many more questions raised within the entire research) was evaluated exclusively in preparation for this dissertation. The research was conducted by Momentor Research in Budapest, Hungary.[524]

The research questions and the possible answers were as follows:

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[520] See: Zoltán Körösvölgyi, "Kutatási terv Körösvölgyi Zoltán *»A művészet temploma, a templom művészete«* munkacímű doktori kutatásához"—készült a komplex vizsgához", MOME, Doctoral School (May 25, 2018): 11.

[521] Closed-ended questions are questions that can be answered only by selecting an answer from a limited set of options. They provide limited insight, but can be analysed for quantitative data.

[522] The omnibus survey is a method of quantitative research usually applied in marketing research, where data on a wide scope of subjects is collected during the same interview. It is a shared cost model research enabling clients with limited budget to access large, representative sets of respondents. This survey was completed by respondents online.

[523] According to the Hungarian law, 18 years of age is the entry age of adulthood. Therefore this research reached a representative sample of the adult population in Hungary.

[524] I thank Gábor Duránszkai at Momentor Research and Consulting for his generous offer to make this research possible, for carrying out the research data collection, preparing the raw sheet big data analysis, his patience in answering my questions and his kind support in the analysis of the research findings.

	Questions in Hungarian	Possible Answers in Hungarian	English Translation of Questions	English Translation of Answers
1	**Találkozott-e már olyan, tetszőleges műfajú művészeti alkotással, amelyhez Önnek vagy valamelyik ismerősének vallásos/spirituális tapasztalata kapcsolódik?**	• igen • nem • nem tudok / nem akarok válaszolni	**Have you ever met a work of art of any kind that you or any of your acquaintances had a religious/spiritual experience with?**	• yes • no • I cannot / do not wish to answer
2	**Ön szerint a művészeti alkotással kapcsolatos spirituális/vallásos tapasztalás lehetséges-e kortárs művészeti alkotásnál is?**	• lehetséges kortárs műalkotás esetében • csak klasszikus műalkotás esetében lehetséges • mindkettőnél lehetséges • egyiknél sem lehetséges • nem tudok/nem akarok válaszolni	**Do you think that spiritual/religious experience related to a work of art is also possible in the case of a contemporary work of art?**	• it is possible in the case of a contemporary work of art • it is only possible in the case of a classic work of art • it is possible in both cases • it is not possible in either case • I cannot/do not wish to answer
3	**Ön szerint van-e helye a kortárs művészetnek az intézményesült vallásosságban, például templomban?**	• igen • nem • nem tudok / nem akarok válaszolni	**Do you think contemporary art has a place in organised religion, for example in churches?**	• yes • no • I cannot / do not wish to answer
4	**Ön szerint változott-e a járvány alatt az emberek spiritualitással/ intézményesült vallással való kapcsolata attól, hogy az intézményesült vallás hangsúlyosabban megjelent az online térben (a honlapokon, közösségi médiában)?**	• igen, de ettől függetlenül • igen, emiatt változott • nem, nem változott • nem tudok/nem akarok válaszolni	**Do you think that the relation of people to spirituality/organised religion has changed during the pandemic due to the stronger presence of organised religion in the online space (in web sites, and social media)?**	• yes, but independent of this • yes, it has changed for this reason • no, it has not changed • I cannot / do not wish to answer
5	**Tetszik-e Önnek a spiritualitás / intézményesült vallás intenzív megjelenése az online világban (a honlapokon, közösségi médiában)?**	• igen • nem • nem tudok / nem akarok válaszolni	**Do you like the intense presence of spirituality/ organised religion in the online space (in web sites, and social media)?**	• yes • no • I cannot / do not wish to answer

The first question was aimed at understanding whether the research target group or their acquaintances have had religious/spiritual experience with a work of art. The second one narrowed the previous question to contemporary works of art, and the third one to what the participants think of contemporary art in spaces and practices of organised religion. The fourth question aimed at understanding the direct effects of the changes in this field due to the pandemic and the resulting lockdown, whereas the fifth one asked their opinion about that indirectly, focusing on their consequences.

Although the questions were rather unusual in the setting of an omnibus research, which is mostly marketing research oriented and usually covers general, everyday issues of life, and were not of an easy nature (the avoidance to answer questions on religiosity was even higher than

what is experienced generally in case of confessions of financial status, for example), the research offered a number of clearly visible key findings.

An important and reassuring overall finding is that the general idea of the relation of religious/spiritual experience and art is not rejected in general—not even the age of respondents plays a role in that. Yet, the declared religiosity of respondents (those regularly or occasionally going to church) results in significant differences in case of most questions: people who declare themselves as being religious are more open to this phenomenon than those who declare themselves as atheists. The financial status of respondents also shows a difference: people from households with an income under the average seem to be more receptive towards the issues raised than those with higher than average income. Additionally, women are slightly more receptive than men. In the case of contemporary art, the pattern, however, differs: those from Budapest and Central Hungary, as well as those with higher education and regularly going to church, are more open. The online presence of religion/spirituality is mostly preferred by religious women with higher education and lower than average income.

Certainly, the online nature of the research might have affected the results: those without online access, mostly people of higher age, lower income, living in rural settings (a very strong but slowly disappearing segment of churchgoers) were less represented than those with online access and as such being generally more open to the world.

Positive answers to the first question ("Have you ever met a work of art of any kind that you or any of your acquaintances had a religious/spiritual experience with?") showed that people with higher education (25.6% vs 13.3% of people with elementary education), living in Budapest (24.1%) and Central Hungary (21.8%), having an under average household income, as well as regularly (49.5%) or occasionally (28.8%) going to church have such experiences. The fact that a significant majority of religious people share this opinion is strongly supportive of the assumptions of this project, as it affirms the role of art in creating religious/spiritual experience, and thus the importance of art in such a setting.

When this question is turned to contemporary art in the second question of the survey ("Do you think that spiritual/religious experience related to a work of art is also possible in the case of a contemporary work of art?"), the answers overall show ambiguity: half of the respondents couldn't or wished not to answer, a third of them wished not to take a position, whereas for the rest the answer was an absolute yes. In this question it seems that neither age nor gender correlates significantly with a particular answer. What makes a difference is the degree of education (higher education 25.4% positive response vs elementary education 10.4%), residence (Budapest 22.6% and Central Hungary 19.9%), income (the highest category of household net income 25.9%), and religiosity (regular churchgoers 35.9%). Contemporary art is divisive in this respect, but it has a well-identifiable and targetable audience.

Answers to question three ("Do you think contemporary art has a place in organised religion, for example in churches?") showed a very interesting pattern. Young people seem to be more rejective (33.5% saying no), whereas, just as in the previous question, people with higher education (48.2%), living in Budapest (38.1%), of the highest net household income category (41.8%), and regularly going to church (51.5%) were receptive. If a marketing specialist would need to give advice on this question, the answer would be a straightforward no—or at most a very careful introduction.

Answers to question four ("Do you think that the relation of people with spirituality/organised religion has changed during the pandemic, due to the stronger presence of organised religion in

the online space—in web sites, and social media?") show that religious people think so. Answers to this question also showed that the pandemic, the lockdown and the increased online presence of religion increased the number of people declaring themselves as religious but not going to church.

Question five ("Do you like the intense presence of spirituality/organised religion in the online space—in web sites, and social media?") was also divisive. Religious people accepted it (regular churchgoers 47.2% and occasional churchgoers 38.3% answering yes) besides the obvious strong rejection of atheists (68.7% saying no).

The demography of the respondents offers valuable and interesting insights. As mentioned above, the committed religiosity of the respondents—though generally experienced to be a difficult subject to investigate due to the generally high avoidance of answering such a question—shows a high correlation between those frequently going to church and having a higher level of education (9% vs 1.7% claiming to have elementary education only), and age (one-third of those professing to be atheists are over 60 years old—which is higher than their proportion in the society). The markers of financial status also show a striking picture: the monthly household income of the majority of regular or infrequent churchgoers is under the average, and they profess to be unable or hardly able to make a living on that basis, whereas 31.9% of those professing to be atheists have a higher than average income—that is: churchgoing is still strongly a practice of the overeducated though financially underprivileged.[525]

In summary, this quantitative research project showed that there is a general openness towards religious/spiritual experience with art, as well as a more segmented, niche acceptance in the case of contemporary art. At the same time the presence of contemporary art in religious settings (the church environment) is a divisive issue: only a minority of people assert that it is acceptable, and a large share cannot decide whether such works of art should be there or not, with the latter including churchgoers. The conclusion to draw is that these people would definitely need guidance in this question, especially from the representatives of organised religion.

With these results in hand I considered that the empirical research should be continued with a qualitative phase, turning to those who might have an effect on such "guidance," and thus shape opinions.

7.3.2. Qualitative Interviews with Professionals

This research project was preceded not only by the above discussed quantitative research, but also a long series of interviews, personal conversations and correspondence with artists—including Viktória Balogh, Antal Bánhegyesy, Emese Benczúr, Dávid Bíró, Kati Bódi, Lőrinc Borsos, Anna Carlson, Olivier Christinat, Robin Alysha Clemens, Gábor Erdélyi, Györgyi Hegedűs, Bálint Hirling, Pavlina Marie Kašparová, Bíborka Kelemen, Gábor Kiss, Tamás László Kovács (+), István Losonczy, Fanni Luzsicza, Erik Mátrai, Gergely Paál, Ildikó Papp, Róbert Pasitka, Benedek Regős, Samuel Robbins, Gianna Scavo, Ferenc Svindt, Ábel Szalontai,

[525] Such a situation is not a surprising phenomenon in Hungary, as many professions requiring a higher level education — like working in education, health or the social sphere — is paid below average. For instance, "In 2019, the gross salary of those teaching at universities ranges from approximately HUF 222,000 to 588,000 per month, depending on their position. This is approximately EUR 682 to 1,805 with an exchange rate of 325.7." (In original: "2019-ben az egyetemen dolgozók tanári fizetése hozzávetőlegesen havi bruttó 222 000 és 588 000 Forint között mozog oktatói munkakörtől függően. Ez 682 és 1805 euró között van 325,7-del váltva.") European Commission, EACEA National Policies Platform, Eurydice, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/conditions-service-academic-staff-working-higher-education-31_hu, 25.01.2021.) With the 15% raise introduced in late 2021 and the significant change of exchange rates, using the current official figures (HUF 255,000 to 676,000) and exchange rates (358.11 as of 31.01.2022.) it means EUR 712 to 1,888 per month, gross, before taxation.)

Géza Szőcs, Miklós Szüts, Zoltán Vadászi, Ferenc Varga, Dezső Váli, Antal Vásárhelyi, Beáta Veszely, Dóra Votin, Boglárka Éva Zellei, and Bea Zoltai; gallery owners and managers—Judit Kallós, Tamás Kieselbach, Lajos Kovács, Péter Pintér, Árpád Tóth, and Judit Virág; museum directors and cultural leaders of institutions—László Köntös, and Benedek Varga; as well as scholars—Sándor Békési, Jérôme Cottin, William Dyrness, and András Visky. Some of these discussions are documented in published interviews,[526] others provided indirect records through exhibitions and projects curated by myself.[527]

Based on the output of the large-sample quantitative research detailed above, however, I felt the need to extend it, and approach decision makers and opinion shapers representing leading secular and religious museums and galleries in Hungary. I contacted ten professionals in early January 2021, a relatively silent period of the year. Half of them work at secular institutions, the other half at religious ones. All the institutions exhibit art, either on temporary or on a permanent basis. Among the institutions with permanent collections, some of them collect art, others ecclesiastical/liturgical objects. Most of the professionals approached have an academic background in Art History, but Museology, Economics, Philosophy, Theology, Humanities, and Management Studies are also present in their academic backgrounds. Some of them hold general management positions, others have specific management duties.

My letter included a very short summary of the quantitative research findings, as well as five questions which, in the form of a structured interview by email correspondence, allow a fair comparison of the answers and an easier deduction of consequences. The questions raised were:

	Questions Raised in Hungarian	English Translation of Questions
1	Hogyan látja Ön a kortárs művészet és a vallásos/spirituális tapasztalás viszonyának kérdését?	How do you see the question of the relations of contemporary art and religious/spiritual experience?
2	Létezik-e Ön szerint kortárs szakrális művészet?	Do you think contemporary sacred art exists?
3	Van-e helye vallásos/spirituális tapasztaláshoz kapcsolódó műalkotásnak a művészeti világ tereiben (múzeumban, kiállítóteremben, galériában), illetve az intézményesült vallás tereiben (templomban)?	Do you think that works of art related to religious/spiritual experience have a place in the spaces of the art world (museum, gallery), and the spaces of organised religion (churches)?
4	E kérdésben a hivatalosnak tekinthető intézményi álláspont és az Ön személyes véleménye megegyezik-e?	In this respect, do the official institutional opinion and your personal opinion agree?
5	Ön szerint van-e ebben a tárgykörben követendő, példamutató hazai/nemzetközi minta? Ha igen, mi az?	Do you think there are any exemplary samples or patterns in Hungary or internationally? If yes, what is it?

Out of the ten professionals I approached, five answered my call. Out of the five answers I received, three came from institutions operated by religious organisations, and two from secular ones. One professional, though answering my questions, did not consent to be named (marked as Respondent A—as Anonymous—in this dissertation). The following passages are based on

[526] See List of Publications.

[527] See Selected Curatorial Works and Awards.

the answers I received by e-mail communication, with a confirmation that they could be included in my research.[528]

The respondents unanimously agreed that—in their views—contemporary sacred art exists. However, their opinions regarding its definition, as well as the relation of contemporary art and religious/spiritual experience were different. László Köntös, Director of the Reformed Collections in Pápa and Pannonia Reformata museum/gallery, found the question difficult to answer, since, as he wrote, the concept of "religious/spiritual experience" itself is rather indeterminate. Köntös claims that while there is no organic connection between the religious experience tied to traditional religiosity and contemporary art, there is such a connection between the existentialist interpretation of religious experience and contemporary art.

Krisztina Szipőcs, Deputy Director and Head Curator at Ludwig Museum, Budapest—as a professional with an academic background in Art History—attempted to define the fields first. The two, Szipőcs answered, are separate categories: contemporary art embraces the works, the artists and also the institutions, while religious/spiritual experience (faith) is related to a given person, her inner experiences, convictions, understandings. This definition is close to that given by Köntös as the "existentialist interpretation of religious experience." In this way, according to Szipőcs, on the one hand we can speak about religious (believing) artists, who may visualise their faith in their works or not, while on the other hand there is also religious or liturgical art, where the artist does not need to believe to make an illustration of a Biblical scene or a film of a religious subject. Szipőcs claims that there is no doubt that the situation changed with secularisation: "The art of the West is created under the banners of liberty, creativity and progress for more than one hundred years ago, and faith is not top ranked for people either." That is why, Szipőcs believes, spiritual experience appears less frequently in art, since it does not play a major role for most people:

> *In my view contemporary art embraces works of art that represent the subjects, ideas, experience that defines their own era. Accordingly, faith is pushed into the background in visual arts, film and music, and instead secular, profane subjects entered—like for example the representation of the human psyche in place of that of the spiritual experience. In summary, the changes of the worldview and values affect art, which nowadays mostly deals with secular subjects (or itself).*

Dr. Béla László Harmati, Head of the Lutheran Central Museum in Budapest thinks that arts and artists have always been drawn to experience and express spirituality, though in different measures in different ages. Artists who create works with religious subjects today testify to "the complexities, ambiguities, disruptions and fragmentations that have characterised much modern and postmodern experience, and also, of course, much traditional and contemporary religious experience"[529]—he answers, quoting Howes.

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[528] The correspondence of the structured questions and the answers happened by e-mail in early January 2021. The language of correspondence was Hungarian; the translations are mine. My questions were sent out on January 4, 2021, the answers were received between January 4 and 7, 2021. I closed this part of the research on January 13 with four answers received and confirmed for publishing with names in my doctoral research, one received and published as anonymous, five being unanswered. I am only using names and institutions of respondents who gave their consent to making their answers public in this form. Letters from the original correspondence were archived. Though the number of answers and thus the sample size are limited, the professional quality of respondents, in my opinion, do provide a solid basis for finding patterns or trends among the answers.

[529] Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 151.

Respondent A (anonymous) defines "sacred art" as art which either depicts the scripture, or in which the thinking of a believer is embodied, as well as what a non-believer wishes to communicate about the sacred, for example through Christian iconography. There are examples of all three, Respondent A answered, and neither of them can be identified as invalid. Respondent A listed a number of examples, including Ilona Lovas, textile artist, who does not work with sacred iconography or liturgical elements, yet her works make her belief in humanity and the Saviour obvious; Erika Illés, a sculptor whose divisive works, which follow no academic canon, enliven figures of religion and represent the dialogue between belief in the Saviour and the exiguity of humans; Ferenc Varga, a sculptor whose works convey a spiritual charge; Tamás Olescher, a painter whose works are always centered around the Holy Spirit, but due to their naivety are always illustrations or instruments of everyday religious life; Andrea Huszár, a sculptor who communicates a spiritual message without using Christian iconography (to avoid making her works illustrative) in a way that keeps belief, humanity and quality together.

For Köntös, the existence of contemporary sacred art is a question of worldview, with no "objective" answers being possible. The real question, he finds, is whether the concept of the sacred is a valid category to interpret reality or not. For him it does, and, accordingly, contemporary sacred art exists.

Harmati also claims that there are contemporary sacred works of art. Most artists, he adds, have created religious or sacred-inspired works.

Focusing the question on contemporary art, Szipőcs agrees with Köntös, Harmati and Respondent A. Contemporary sacred art, Szipőcs says, exists, since there are believing artists who have an inner urge and demand to express their faith, religious views or related, often abstract, notions somehow in their art. "Perhaps sacred art can become real experience for non-believers at this higher, more abstract level"—Szipőcs says, and adds: "It seems there is a need to showcase contemporary sacred art, since there are a number of successful events and festivals on this subject."

Köntös confirms that art does have a place in the institutions of the art world totally independent of their conceptual background or worldview. Thinking about whether there is a place for art in connection with religious/spiritual experience in the art world, he continues, would again assume the existence of one normative or "objective" worldview, according to which certain works of art are different because they are connected to 'religious/spiritual experience.' Art, Köntös says, can also appear in the spaces of organised religion, though in a limited way: since a work of art is an interpretation, and although its subject may be religious, it might still exemplify the institutional interpretation of the sacred.

Harmati is of a similar view: though he believes art related to religious/spiritual experience does have a place in both churches and galleries, the characteristics of the specific work itself and the space in which it is exhibited are decisive.

Szipőcs agrees that art related to religious/spiritual experience does have a place in the institutions of both the art world—as long as the quality of these works meet that expected from other works of art—and organised religion. "It would be reasonable to show works by contemporary artists in religious spaces, especially those designed by contemporary architects," she says, "since luckily even the building represents the thinking and the views of the era.

Respondent A raised the question of the difficulty of placing works of art connected to liturgy in a secular institution like a museum. This is especially true in the case of modern/

contemporary works, since historical pre-20th century works are removed from their original medium and are exhibited in historical context. Nevertheless, Respondent A also shares Szipőcs's view that art related to religious/spiritual experience does have a place in secular museums, should those works be of suitable quality, yet, this should happen on an inclusive basis, and should not be managed schematically. Respondent A warns of the importance of human and moral behaviour, which does not relate to the religiosity of a given person—thinking of pharisees or demagogic squabbling on materialistic or spiritual grounds.

A radical view is shared by Dr. Zsuzsanna Toronyi, Director of the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives in Budapest, which, due to its coherence, is described here in its entirety. Toronyi approached the relations of contemporary art and religious/spiritual experience from the perspective of modern Judaism, which, as Toronyi claims, was formed in the nineteenth-century together with Jewish art and identity, which does not necessarily seek answers in the spiritual, but is based on Jewish teaching. Toronyi points out that the concept of "hiddur mitzvah" is a highly important part of Jewish tradition—meaning that the fulfilment of all religious duties (mitzvah) is more complete if that is done with more devotion (kavanah). There is one school (interpretation) that emphasises the aesthetic quality, the fine execution of things carried out with due dedication. Another important notion, Toronyi adds, is what can be described as continuous commentary, that is, the conscious reinterpretation of ancient teachings in every age. Wedding these two concepts, Toronyi claims, means that today's sacred art can only be contemporary (in its instruments, materials, methods, etc); otherwise, it is blasphemy. In Hebrew, everything is either past (Biblical age) or future tense (eschatological, the age of redemption), and there is only one important present tense statement, that The Eternal One who gives the Torah is blessed. This is a continuous presence, which means that all generations receive the teaching at all times, to interpret it in a contemporary way. Those who do not think or create in a contemporary way, Toronyi highlights, but instead keep their eyes on the past, or copy nineteenth-century ceremonial objects, deny this permanent connection, which is blasphemy, not worthy for a decent Jew.

Accordingly, Toronyi says, contemporary sacred art exists—though not necessarily where we would assume. If a contemporary work of art does meet a certain standard to be present in an institution of the art world, then it should have a place in the museum or the gallery. The "danger" of the museums operated as institutions of organised religion, according to Toronyi, is that sometimes "substandard epigones want to fire their otherwise worthless creations with religious glaze."

Speaking about the presence of contemporary art objects in the spaces of organised religion, like churches, Toronyi says that in line with her previous opinion, if the given object or space is not inherited from the ancestors and is not valuable for that reason, then only those works created with religious dedication, impeccable professional execution and contemporary language should be made—otherwise a blasphemous idol is made.

Rather than give official institutional opinions, all four professionals, independent of the secular or religious background of their museums, refer to the collections and programs housed in their institutions as containing contemporary sacred art, which, as Szipőcs says, "make it visible that we do provide room for such works and events."

Good local and international examples include—in Szipőcs's view—the art of Ilona Lovas, Péter Türk, Bill Viola, Mark Rothko, Tamás Nagy, Tadao Ando, or Arvo Pärt; Respondent A added Zoltán Érmezei, as well as works by Pipilotti Rist and Olafur Eliasson exhibited at the

Venice Biennale in churches,where the context created by the venue, the real dialogue, and the abstract charge made them of outstanding quality.

Köntös and Harmati mentioned the contemporary exhibitions in the museums they manage. Harmati and Toronyi also referred to art (in/of) the church environment, too: Harmati adding János Aknay's Red Christ installed in the Lutheran Evangelical church of Balatonboglár to the list, and Toronyi bringing up the renewal of the Pannonhalma Benedictine community and basilica as the best local example, as well as the interior of the New Synagogue in Mainz in the international field.

In summary, all professional respondents confirmed that contemporary art can relate to religious/spiritual experience, and that contemporary sacred art exists and has a place both in spaces of the art world and religion, though with certain conditions in the latter. Accordingly, the need for guidance regarding contemporary art and religious/spiritual experience seems to find common ground in both secular and religious cultural institutions exhibiting and collecting art.

Toronyi's radical opinion on contemporaneity was a surprising and highly promising phenomenon for me, as well as the fact that Toronyi alone mentioned the importance (and the ongoing practice) of contemporary art being included in religious higher level education.

Based on the general level of willingness to respond, I must acknowledge that religious institutions are more open to discussion than secular ones.

7.3.3. Summary of Research Findings

The above research projects clearly indicate—in support of my initial opinion—that in our days, there is openness and interest towards art related to religious and spiritual experience among audiences and professionals (practitioners and theorists) alike. Furthermore, they reinforced for me that a fruitful broadening of horizons can only sprout from dialogue—be it a sharing of ideas and/or an inclusive, participative investigation carried out in interaction. Education, as well as art and design projects, can be very useful forms of carrying that out.

Judit Flóra Schuller: Glockenspiel (2019). Installation.

Perhaps now, with religious literacy an increasing necessity for civic life in an age of globalisation, voluntary and involuntary immigration, and new instances of diversity, the arts might help find the ways renewed connections can be made. And, perhaps ultimately, critics will start paying more attention.

—S. Brent Plate[530]

[530] Plate 2017.

8. Ways Out

My original objectives were to learn and apply the views, methods, and models of design to understand the field of contemporary sacred art and the problems therein; to bridge the existing gaps, as well as overcome *akrasia,*[531] if not to restitute an ideal state, at least to open a window on the forever expanding horizons by outlining the possible ways of improvement I found. Accordingly, I attempt to summarise the roads that might offer ways out, as well as possible threads for further research, practice, and studies.

8.1. The Divine Digital

"The media-world is the shelter where the vast majority of those of us who live in the West dwell and from which we draw the material out of which we make sense of our lives,"[532]—writes Kelton Cobb. Its importance permeates practically all arenas of life, including religion and art alike.

Boris Groys and Peter Weibel, in their study "Religion as a Medium" in the 2009 exhibition catalog *Medium Religion*, state that *opinion*, whether it is scientific or religious, "circulates in the same media and in the same way." As they write, "In both cases, opinion comes to us in the form of news disseminated by mass media. Sometimes we read about a new apparition of the Mother of God; sometimes we read that the earth is getting warmer."[533]

As audience members, we cannot put either to the test directly. In the *market of opinions*, to use Groys' and Weibel's wording, the value of an opinion depends on how much we can accept and believe it. In this respect, according to the two authors, religions are doing well, as they have well-introduced brands. "Whatever else people might say, Christ, Muhammad, and the Buddha are genuine superstars the likes of which not even Plato or René Descartes can compare, to say nothing of today's philosophers."[534]

Continuing their argument, they claim that works of art, in addition to the religious opinion expressed in profane space, represent *opinionlessness* in the sacred space, the possibility of experiencing the unknowable divine, thus offering us the experience of the possibility of our own mediality as human beings. To illustrate this, the co-authors choose two works of art: Malevich's *Black Square* (1913)—discussed earlier—and the scene from Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia* (1983) in which the protagonist, the writer Andrei Gorchakov played by Oleg

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[531] "The Greek word '*akrasia*' is usually said to translate literally as 'lack of self-control,' but it has come to be used as a general term for the phenomenon known as weakness of will, or incontinence, the disposition to act contrary to one's own considered judgment about what it is best to do." Helen Steward's definition, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online, DOI 10.4324/9780415249126-V003-1, https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/akrasia/v-1, 24.01.2022.

[532] Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*, 72.

[533] Boris Groys, Peter Weibel, "Religion as Medium," *Medium Religion: Faith. Geopolitics. Art.* eds. Boris Groys, Peter Weibel (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2011), 7.

[534] Groys, Weibel, "Religion as Medium."

Jankovsky, while performing a ritual among the ruins of a spa "finds himself subject to a state of the total lack of opinion."[535]

These two works also illustrate that the arrival of the media, as used in the everyday, did not come with the technical inventions of electronics and digitisation only. It was rather their quantity, the speed of their spread, and the possibility of facilitating user interaction that put them at the forefront of our thinking today. The voice, the living word, the rite, which made it possible to communicate across time and space are all media. Writing, through materialisation, lifted this limitation and even began to break down the monopoly of knowledge. Printing provided wider reproducibility and distribution. Electronic media, the explicit media of distance —radio and television—allowed an ever-widening range of spatiality and temporality, even simultaneity, and the Internet made it possible to transmit freely at any time on demand, as well as to share opinions and interact.

It is no coincidence that in recent decades, the Internet, and within that primarily video, has become the primary medium for sharing opinions, including religious opinions (whether institutional or independent). Think of tele-evangelist programs previously broadcasted exclusively on television being extended to streaming over the Internet, the so-called online, on-demand masses and worship services, or even militant Islamic propaganda video messages.

The father of media theory, Marshall McLuhan, in reference to the point that the personal and social consequences of any medium stem from the extension of ourselves by technology, argued that the medium is the message itself.[536] Groys sees this reversed nearly half a century later, claiming "the message has become the medium—a certain religious message has become the digital code."[537]

Central to Groys' argument is the invisibility of the digital code; it needs to be visualised, turned into an image, and even be dramatised, to allow perception. In this respect, the medium no longer appears only as a messenger (i.e., an angel), but more than that, as a means of making the invisible visible. Groys argues

> *The act of visualising invisible digital data is thus analogous to the appearance of the invisible inside the topography of the visible world (biblically speaking, signs and wonders) that generate the religious rituals. In this respect, the digital image functions as a Byzantine icon—as a visible representation of invisible digital data. The digital code seems to guarantee the identity of different images that function as visualisations of this code. The identity is established here not at the level of spirit, essence, or meaning, but on the material and technical level. Thus, it is in this way that the promise of literal repetition seems to acquire a solid foundation—the digital file is, after all, supposed to be something more material and tangible than the invisible God. However, the digital file does remain invisible, hidden. What this signifies is that its self-identity remains a matter of belief.*[538]

Similarly, Weibel argues for the performativity of the written word and religion as a medium, claiming

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[535] Groys, Weibel, "Religion as Medium," 8.

[536] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1964), 7.

[537] Boris Groys, "Religion in the Age of Digital Reproduction," in *Medium Religion*, 27.

[538] Groys, "Religion in the Age of Digital Reproduction," 28–29.

> *What the technical media promise is comparable to what religion has always held in prospect: the overcoming of time and space and the promise of eternal life. After drawing and writing, media such as photography, the telegraph, the telephone, film, radio, TV, video, computer, and the Internet, as well as all the other inventions over the last 150 years, are essentially the technical redemption of the religious promise, the proof of its feasibility in terms of the apparatus.*[539]

Media—be it live speech, action, writing, stone, wood, metal, paint, or even digital representation—are essential as mediators of art. To describe the initiatives that appear in addition to the "institutionalised," widely accepted traditional media, there is the concept of *multimedia*—signifying works that use and involve several different media—and *intermedia,* created as a term by the artist Dick Higgins in 1965. Intermedia, as envisioned by Higgins, were new artistic phenomena that attempted "to cross the boundaries of recognised media or to fuse the boundaries of art with media that had not previously been considered art forms."[540] Of the two concepts, multimedia is most common in the everyday world, but the acceptance of intermedia in the art world is indicated by the fact that there are intermedia departments in many educational institutions. The one at MKE describes its activities similarly to the international wording.[541]

In terms of its general nature, multimedia is not a new phenomenon: ancient Greek drama, medieval mystery games and pageants, or even opera are good examples of its earlier appearance. By the twentieth century, however, it reached its full development and distinctiveness with film, television, the Internet, and, most recently, access on mobile devices. Yet, it is important to look beyond a merely device-centric approach. Already for McLuhan, the medium—even as a new technology—could be interpreted as an extension of our bodies, thoughts, and existence. This approach, taken as a holistic program, is discriminatory: detached from the superficial, purely technological, and connecting to deeper, thoughtful, philosophical, or even spiritual experience. Intermedia can be seen as such—an endeavour to create truly new media.

Nam June Paik, a visionary artist interconnecting mass media and new technologies, a creator of video art, and a prominent representative of the Fluxus movement, exemplifies this endeavour. The works of the Korean-born American artist were initially performative in nature, based on collaboration between representatives of different disciplines. Later he developed installations using TV screens. As a pioneer of video art, he created video-based installations suitable for networking and spatial experiences. A peculiar coincidence from the perspective of our study is that—according to the narratives—Paik's first video work was made in 1963 by recording the also pioneering visit of Pope Paul VI to New York, and screening it in a café later that day.[542]

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[539] Peter Weibel, "Religion as a Medium—the Media of Religion," in *Medium Religion*, 41.

[540] Ken Friedman, Lily Díaz, "Intermedia, Multimedia and Media." in *Adaptation and Convergence of Media: 'High Culture Intermediality Versus Popular Culture Intermediality*, eds. Lily Díaz, Magda Dragu, Leena Eilittä, (Espoo: Aalto Arts Books, 2018), 30.

[541] The page of the Intermedia Department on the website of MKE reads: "In the framework of the Intermedia Program, art education and training is extended to artistic forms and techniques which first emerged in the visual arts of the 20th century (photo-kinetic and electronic arts, multimedia, installation, new techniques of communication, environment and action art)." http://www.mke.hu/en/node/33653, 21.03.2021.

[542] The work is undocumented and lost, thus its provability is questionable. It could even be a legend. Still, the connection makes it worth mentioning even as fiction.

Since then, the genre of intermedia has regularly led artists to experiment—even on topics related to religiosity. An example from Hungary is the 2011 exhibition of the art group named The Corporation (with members János Borsos, Erik Mátrai, Gergely Papp and Gábor Szenteleki). The exhibition entitled *Úrhajó (Lordship)* occupied the entire exhibition space of the Műcsarnok / Kunsthalle Budapest, and was a paraphrase of the scene as a church—as discussed earlier. The project description explains "By the 'templeisation,' we reinterpreted the spaces of the Műcsarnok (as nave, aisles, transept and sanctuary). The sanctuary was oriented to the east on the floor plan. At strategic points of the building, we placed objects symbolizing important and typical artefacts of churches—such as a stoup basin, confessional, pulpit, organ, altar, altarpiece, donation box, etc."[543] The *Holy Water Basin* appearing as an endlessly looped video on an LCD screen, the installation art of the *Confession Booth*, the *Censer* made of a prepared smoke machine, and the hydraulic *Pulpit* equipped with a stroboscope—which had a special role in the actions of both the *Preaching Paraphrases* and the *Techno Synod*—are all examples of experimental intermedia crossing boundaries. Performativity was announced programmatically by the artists, who stated "Our concept was to organise regular performative events related to the installations during the exhibition: reception hours in the confessional twice a week, alternate Sunday preaching lectures, an irregular whipping action, and last but not least, an all night audiovisual show called Techno Synod, as the closing event of the exhibition."[544]

In the oeuvre of Mátrai, one of the members of the above group, the connections to religiosity and new media, as well as to intermediality, is evident in many of his later works.[545] In addition to the thematic connection, the initially unusual-looking treatments of the subject, as well as their strongly immersive nature are indisputably all present in his works from the first decade of the 2000s—the 2002 video work *Teremtés* (The Creation), the 2005 video and sound installation *A Vörös-tenger kettéválasztása* (The Parting of the Red Sea), the 2005 small size video icon *Jézus színeváltozása* (The Transfiguration of Jesus), the large site-specific installation of *Orb 02* installed inside Chiesa di San Lio, in Venice, Italy, as well as the 2011 *Kenyér és hal szaporítás* (Multiplication of Loaves and Fish) installation, or the 2019 light installation entitled *Ellipszis* (Ellipse) exhibited at the Sesztina Gallery in Debrecen.

One of the most important figures of the international scene, an engaged disciple of Paik's, the American video artist Bill Viola has been making video art since 1973. Given the deep spirituality of his immersive, sometimes over-size image- and sound-based video art, it is perhaps easier to understand that three of his works are exhibited in a church setting.[546] The large, single-channel loop video and audio installation, *The Messenger*, was originally installed

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[543] In original: "A »templomosítás« során átértelmeztük a Műcsarnok tereit (főhajó, mellékhajók, kereszthajó és szentély). A szentélyt az alaprajzon keleti irányba tájoltuk. Az épület stratégiai pontjain a templomok fontos és tipikus tárgyi tartozékainak jelzésszerű átiratait – mint szenteltvíztartó, gyóntatószék, szószék, orgona, oltár, szentkép, persely stb. – helyeztük el." The Corporation, *Úrhajó / Lordship.*

[544] In original: "Koncepciónk része volt az installációkhoz kapcsolódó rendszeres performatív eseményeket rendezni a kiállítás alatt: hetente kétszeri fogadóóra a gyóntatószékben, vasárnapi alternatív igehirdetési előadások, egy rendhagyó ostorozási akció, nem utolsó sorban pedig a kiállítás finisszázsaként megrendezett Techno Zsinat elnevezésű egész estés audiovizuális show." The Corporation, *Úrhajó / Lordship.*

[545] See Erik Mátrai's website. http://www.erikmatrai.com. 26.02.2020.

[546] Though not restricted to church settings, since Viola's video works—with their previously mentioned reproducible nature—can appear in multiple locations at the same time.

in 1996 in Durham Cathedral.[547] The 2014 polyptich, *Martyrs—Earth, Air, Fire, Water*, and the 2016 triptych *Mary* are both installed in St Paul's Cathedral, London.[548]

These video altarpieces of moving images, though appearing in the form of classic winged altarpieces, convey to the viewer the basic experiences of existence, birth and death, ethereality, immersion and emergence, touch and embrace, joy and sorrow. These fundamental, deeply human and solemnly uplifting experiences are presented in a surprising and yet completely natural manner within the moving-image-centered content consumption of our world.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the (then) Dominican friar Gergely Paál—without prior knowledge of Viola's video altarpieces, but with a background in theatre, film and theology—attempted to connect new media to liturgical art to share stories of importance in a contemporary voice. An example is his multi-channel video installed in the form of a triptych at the exhibition *"mit anderem Augen"* ("with other eyes") at Worms Cathedral during Lent in 2019.[549]

At the exhibition *Fragmentum*, a program of the Ars Sacra Festival 2019 in Hegyvidék Gallery, Budapest,[550] Paál's continuously looped work of more than twenty-minutes was on show together with a print by the Dominican sister Pavlína Marie Kašparová, who—after studies in textile design and art history—completes her PhD in Cambridge in 2022, partly using the toolkit of artistic research. Kašparová, active in studies of theology as well as in the visual arts,[551] introduced her large light and sound installation video collage *Ora Pro Nobis* (Pray For Us) in the interior of the Basilica of St Lawrence and Zdislava (Bazilika svatého Vavřince a svaté Zdislavy) in the town of Jablonné v Podještědí, Czechia, in the summer of 2019.[552] In that work focusing on the beauty of femininity and human dignity, Kašparová attempted to facilitate the encounter and connection of the recipient and the work of art with a holistic form. Kašparová's doctoral research at the Anglia Ruskin University and the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge, investigates *Art as a Living Theology,* as the title of her doctoral research in theory suggests. As a doctoral work in practice, Kašparová's research appears in the form of a video-based work of art, *Women of the Book: Exploring Religious Femininity*, a collaboration with Muhja Saif Al-Hadi, Lea Taragin-Zeller, and Mirjam Magyar, female researchers of different Abrahamic religions.[553]

The inclusion of sound in visual and fine arts is not a new phenomenon. It was present before the concept of intermedia was created,such as in the Dada performances or the happenings and performances of the second half of the twentieth century. Yet, Csaba Hajnóczy's doctoral thesis,*Acoustic Ecology, Soundscape, Acoustic Communication, and Ecological Sound Art: New*

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[547] Since then, it was featured in several exhibitions, including the 2009 exhibition *Messiások* (Messiahs) at MODEM, in Debrecen, Hungary.

[548] See, the page of "Cathedral Art" in the website of St Paul's Cathedral. https://www.stpauls.co.uk/history-collections/the-collections/arts-programme. 26.02.2020.

[549] See Ausstellung im Wormser Dom. "Mit anderen Augen" 8.3.–14.4.2019. Bistum Mainz. https://bistummainz.de/kunst-gebaeude-geschichte/aktuell/nachrichten/nachricht/Ausstellung-im-Wormser-Dom/. 08.05.2020.

[550] See the page of the exhibition Fragmentum, at the website of Hegyvidék Gallery. https://hegyvidekgaleria.hu/programok/fragmentum/. 08.05.2020.

[551] See Pavlína Kašparová's personal website, https://www.creativenun.com, 31.01.2022.

[552] Pavlína Kašparová, *Ora Pro Nobis*, video documentation, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tdi9vCG4500. 26.02.2020.

[553] See *Women of the Book*, video documentation, Pavlína Kašparová's personal website, https://marie451.wixsite.com/pictures/women-of-the-book, 24.03.2021.

Aspects of Thinking about Sound,[554] defended in February 2020, can be seen as a progressive development, just like the practical output of Hajnóczy's doctoral research, the soundscape sound and video installation, *From the Sea to the River to the Sea*. This immersive environment, recorded in the Holy Land, Palestine and Israel, was created from environmental sounds related to water and the obvious scriptural experiences of the place. The titles of the individual sections of the work—Introduction, Holy Waters, River Jordan, Jacob's Well, By Water, Who Dominates the Water, The Sea of Salt, Rain—also clearly indicate that.[555]

A special, but in 2021 by no means unusual, solution is the online opening of an exhibition. However, it is still unusual for the exhibition itself to be designed and seen entirely online, as a virtual space experience—and not as an online adaptation of a real space exhibition, like an image gallery, a post or a description on a website. The international exhibition *Technologies of the Sacred*, organised by Display—Association for Research and Collective Practice in Czechia, allowed the viewer to explore and experience digital, partly three-dimensional, partly cinematic and sound installation works of art in a virtual space. According to the curators,

> *The task of the research exhibition […] is to rethink the boundaries between technology and religion or mysticism. The disenchanted world of the modern era is but a continuation of sacral tendencies by other means—magical thinking is camouflaged as technical rationality, which needs the sphere of the sacred as its hidden source of secular majesty. This approach allows us to both reformulate our relationship to what technology essentially is, and to craft new cultural practices for an age when the world as we know it is irretrievably falling apart. What is it that we should be mourning, and what songs of praise should we be singing to the world to come?*[556]

The exhibition—the opening of which was, naturally, an interactive online Zoom-session—offered the visitors an experience novel in the art world. One of the exhibitors, András Cséfalvay, a Slovakian citizen though of Hungarian ethnicity, has been active as an artist and composer, as well as in education. Cséfalvay has been creating and exhibiting intermedia and digital works of art since 2008.[557] His doctoral thesis—*Contemporary Science and Contemporary Art: Transmission, Deviation and Dispute*[558]—defended at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava in 2015, is partly also in line with his work exhibited at the above show in 2020, though with a focus on the interrelations of art and science. His works, nevertheless, explicitly indicate Cséfalvay's engagement with mythologies, exploring the distant past, as well as religion.

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[554] See Csaba Hajnóczy, *Akusztikai ökológia, soundscape, akusztikai kommunikáció és ökológiai hangművészet: A hangról való gondolkodás új aspektusai,* doctoral dissertation, MOME, https://corvina.mome.hu/dsr/access/f53a1d51-f19f-4264-80b8-f847157a366a. 24.03.2021.

[555] See Csaba Hajnóczy, *A tengertől a folyóig a tengerig*, available at https://corvina.mome.hu/dsr/access/5044c304-683e-4b66-88e6-86d16d961b04 24.03.2021. See also, "Hajnóczy Csaba zenekutató, médiaművész doktori védése," at the website of MOME, https://mome.hu/hu/esemeny/168/hajnoczy-csaba-zenekutato-mediamuvesz-doktori-vedese 26.02.2020.

[556] See "Technologies of the Sacred," Display—Association for Research and Collective Practice, website with virtual exhibition, https://sacred.display.cz. 07.05.2020.

[557] See András Cséfalvay's website, http://www.andrascsefalvay.com, 24.03.2021.

[558] See András Cséfalvay, *Contemporary Science and Contemporary Art: Transmission, Deviation and Dispute*, doctoral thesis, http://www.andrascsefalvay.com/artd.pdf, 24.03.2021.

Digital art also appears in the commercial part of the art world—a local example being MyMuseum, founded by Tünde Török and Veronika Szendrő in 2017. Since late 2021, MyMuseum Gallery with tangible works operates in Három Holló Café,[559] while MyMuseum Online remains entirely digital.[560] Szendrő, who runs the latter, is a practicing artist and a doctoral student at the Doctoral School of PTE, where she researches "Neurotheology in the Practice of Multimedia Art."[561] With her conceptual works, Szendrő attempts to find the roots of transcendence by examining different religions and spiritual rituals, researching the cognitive capacities of the human brain and the process of perception while experiencing sacred phenomena. Her previous works are video installations (*Personal Prayer*, 2017; *Initiation*, 2019; *At the End of the Beginning's End*, 2019–2020; *ASMR Series—The Seven Deadly Sins*, 2019–2020), whereas in the current ones Szendrő also experiments with the encounter of digital and traditional media. A good example is *Mandylion* (2021) a digital video work of visual elements appearing in the form of a mandala and changing according to the functionality of a kaleidoscope, which is viewed through a horizontal mandorla shape within a triangular frame gilded like a traditional icon.

The contemporaneity of the subject is evident for Generation Z, too, as demonstrated at the 2021 collective exhibition *Spiritual Inflation,*[562] where young artists "sought the answer to what extent the various religious and other transcendental symbols suffer from an overly material society overwhelmed by the present information."[563] It is interesting to see the similarity of the radical approach, yet the striking difference in the issues relevant in 2021 compared to the earlier mentioned 2011 *Lordship* exhibition. The installation *The Altar of the Holy Generation* by Eszter Júlia Kuzma—a triptych with a hand-drawn projected and changing (dissolving and appearing) gridline in the central panel, and meticulously painted Ecstasy pills on the two side panels, as well as stroboscope light effect and artificial fog created by a fogger—reflects on how rave culture with its strong visual effects, monotonous electronic music, and the use of synthetic drugs, induce the feeling of "getting away from reality" in a "not everyday" space with "not everyday" sound. The event is collective, yet, the experience is strongly individual.[564] Kuzma's straightforward concept description leaves no chance to misinterpret her work. She says "electronic music appears in my artwork as the church of the contemporary rave culture that exists today, and the generation who likes it and reacts to this kind of »religion«."[565]

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[559] See https://mymuseumartgallery.com, 14.01.2022.

[560] See https://mymuseum.art, 14.01.2022.

[561] In the Spring Term of the academic year 2021/2022 Szendrő continues her doctoral research at Yale Divinity School.

[562] *Spirituális infláció*. An exhibition of works by Kinga-Noémi Ács, Richárd Horváth, Eszter Júlia Kuzma, and Melitta Flóra Puskás. Curated by Miriam Sékou Coulibaly, and Ágnes Keszegh. Patyolat // PRÓBAüzem, Budapest, September 17 to October 16, 2021.

[563] In Hungarian original: "[A] kiállítás készítői arra keresték a választ, hogy a különböző vallási és egyéb transzcendentális szimbólumok milyen mértékű amortizációt szenvednek el a jelen információval túlterhelt, túlságosan is materiális társadalmában." Bence Kovács, "Nézőpontok—Spirituális infláció," *Képző*, November 25, 2021, https://www.kepzo.art/spiritualis-inflacio, 13.01.2022.

[564] Perhaps the most extreme such example in my experience is the "silent disco," an event where the participants wear headphones excluding external sound, and can dance to music only they can hear. The experience is slightly grotesque to the external viewer, as if the participants danced to nothing.

[565] Eszter Júlia Kuzma, "Holy Generation," *Behance*, https://www.behance.net/gallery/73785999/Holy-Generation, 13.01.2022.

What we can see is that the digital world, as a contemporary form and medium for art, is ready and capable, even suitable, for carrying religious or spiritual messages. As Siedell claims, "Much contemporary artistic presence … not only senses the presence of the religious, but is also sensitive to the liturgical and sacramental dimension of human life and work."[566] Following the holistic view of the discipline of inclusive design culture,[567] I see embracing the field and medium of digital in art as a necessary, obvious, and inevitable step. While we can read about the distance between (contemporary) art and religion in countless places, in contemporary artistic tendencies we can experience that the relationship between new media and art is not far apart and, in fact, sometimes shows a very close and progressive picture.

8.2. Seeking by Photography

"Both religion and art require belief for them to work,"[568] claims Siedell, giving the example of the Eucharist and the painting. To make the Eucharist efficacious, he says, the recipient needs to believe that the wine and the wafer is the blood and body of Christ. Similarly, the beholder of a painting must believe that the paint smeared on the canvas means something.

The same is true for photographic images. As viewers, we need to believe the photographer, her/his intention, as well as what we see, mean something. Doing and thinking so, we might arrive at the idea of the similarity of religion and art again. For me, researching the difficult to unveil and variously understood relations of religion, spiritual experience, and art for years—and probably for many of my friends and fellows—this is not a surprise. In the age of postsecularisation, it shouldn't be for anyone.

In the past years, we have seen works, projects and exhibitions of several photographers in Hungary, where photography served as a medium to research the operation, instruments, institutions, and reception of religion, beliefs, faith, and spirituality. Fine examples include Gyöngyi Hegedűs, whose poetry and photographic art (photos, videos, poetry) appears in several online and offline publications, including *Új Forrás*, *Tiszatáj Online*, *Irodalmi Jelen*, *Képírás*, *Napút Online*, and exhibitions, including *puritanus—pure art* and *Fragmentum—Contemporary Sacred Photography*; Boglárka Éva Zellei's series *Furnishing the Sacred*, *Seekers*, and *Path Between Souls*,[569] Fanni Luzsicza's ن and *Pax et Bonum,*[570] Éva Szombat's *If Even Jesus Smiles on the* Cross,[571] Benedek Regős' *Objects of Gratitude*,[572] or Antal Bánhegyesy's *Orthodoxia.*[573] Further ones include Eszter Asszonyi's currently developing diploma project investigating reflexive spirituality in the rites of women, or the works of Péter Németh Sz., and Ákos Stiller—besides those of Zellei and Szombat—exhibited at the

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[566] Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics," 23.

[567] Szentpéteri, *Design és kultúra.*

[568] Siedell, "Liturgical Aesthetics," 11.

[569] See http://www.boglarkazellei.com/furnishing-the-sacred, http://www.boglarkazellei.com/seekers, and http://www.boglarkazellei.com/path-between-souls, respectively. 24.03.2021.

[570] See https://fanniluzsicza.webnode.hu/munkam/az-osz-szinei/ and https://fanniluzsicza.webnode.hu/munkam/a-dzsungelen-keresztul/, respectively. 24.03.2021.

[571] See http://www.evaszombat.com/If-Even-Jesus-Smiles-on-the-Cross, 24.03.2021.

[572] See http://www.benedekregos.hu/works/#objects-of-gratitude, 24.03.2021.

[573] See http://www.banhegyesy.com/index.php. 24.03.2021.

Vendég+Látás (Guest+Appearance) group exhibition in Pannonhalma in 2020.[574] All these are projects are based on lengthy research: investigating religion, religiosity, spirituality, as well as experiencing, living, and practising it—even their relations to broader social phenomena, or the aesthetics of the everyday—by applying a partly documentary, partly re-searching, but in most cases, a participative artistic and artistic research methodology.

Eileen D. Crowley addressed the role of photography as a spiritual practice in forming and practising belief already in 2014.[575] In her writing, she reminds us that photography, in addition to being a "disposable consumer commodity in an instant-gratification society"[576] (i.e., with images photographed by mobile phone, instantly posted in social media, remaining mostly unnoticed, and soon forgotten by their owners), the mediated work and the sharing of it as an act and practice is utterly everyday, normal, and forms a natural part of the participative culture[577] of our days.

The question of photography and belief, however, appears beyond the everyday, too. As guest editor of *Aperture Magazine #237: Spirituality* published in December 2019, the photographer Wolfgang Tillmans explains his choice of subject, saying "I immediately knew that it should be spirituality … because I strongly sense that the political shifts in Western society in the last ten years stem from a lack of meaning in the capitalist world."[578] The questions raised and discussed in the issue investigate human relations as a form of spiritual engagement, as well as the intertwining of spirituality and solidarity, which is not an unknown pairing since Fry coined the term sacred design.[579]

A few pages later in the same publication, Martin Hägglund, the Swedish philosopher and literary theorist, asks Tillmans whether he sees the (re)creation of the social connection, a possible reading of his oeuvre, part of his task as a photographer. Tillmans answers that he sees photography as an expression of "how we look at things," which in his opinion should be nonjudgemental.[580] (This claim is surprisingly in harmony with the earlier mentioned claims of "opinionlessness" by Groys and Weibel.)

The key concept for Tillmans is *fragility*,[581] which the idealised images of capitalism and commercial pop culture (or, borrowing Márton Szentpéteri's expression, the *total aestheticisation*[582]) almost entirely reject. Tillmans claims that the result is the terror of perfect

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[574] See https://pannonhalmifoapatsag.hu/vendeglatas-fotokiallitas/. 24.03.2021.

[575] Eileen D. Crowley, "'Using New Eyes': Photography as a Spiritual Practice for Faith Formation and Worship," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* vol. 53, no. 1 (Spring 2014, March): 30–40.

[576] Crowley, "'Using New Eyes,'" 30.

[577] The term of participative culture appeared in 2009 in writings by Henry Jenkins. See Henry Jenkins with Ravi Rurushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton and Alice J. Robison, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009).

[578] "Editors' Note," *Aperture Magazine* 237 (Winter 2019): 23.

[579] Fry highlights the commonalities of the sacred and design—"understood futurally and ethically (rather than historically and religiously)." Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 33.

[580] "Spirituality is Solidarity: Wolfgang Tillmans and Martin Hägglund in Conversation," *Aperture,* 237: 36.

[581] Tillmans used 'fragile' as his *nom d'artist* in the 1980s. It was also the title of his solo exhibition on view in several locations in 2018 and 2019.

[582] See Márton Szentpéteri, "Design vagy iparművészet? Fogalomtörténeti vázlat," *Korunk*, 2017/10: 39–45.

images leaving people alone with the feeling of their fragility, as if it were something bad, instead of highlighting their strength in connecting to their fragility.[583]

Possibly this growing awareness of humanity's sense of fragility is strengthened by the wide understanding of the sharpening climate crisis, the global pandemic, the returning waves of economic crises, the increase of social inequalities, the deterioration of the circumstances of life on Earth, the unsustainable forms of life, as well as the lack of a foreseeable promising future. This, however, might prove to be insufficient both in society and globally. To gain real experience of our fragility, we might need an even more radical approach, one that might also connect to spirituality.

The above outlined beautification, or to add one more fitting expression to Szentpéteri's above cited one, *i-sation*,[584] the term Possamai coined, leads to a sea of formuleic and decorative photographic images, but lacking meaning above their visual appeal—whereas photography, I argue, is a suitable vehicle to investigate, learn about, and understand the world we live in.

In addition to the participative method investigated by Crowley, where she uses the case studies of Lutheran Evangelical groups using photography as spiritual practice in processes that led to group spiritual reflection for faith formation and worship in forms of a) a photography club; b) a "Photography as Spiritual Practice" mini course in a parish; and c) a six-month parish project of communal art-making of liturgical media art for one church's Easter Vigil readings), as well as the early examples of Benedictine monk photographers (the early twentieth-century activity of Gergely Palatin OSB,[585] and the mid twentieth-century work by Dr. Tamás Rados OSB,[586] both in Pannonhalma, Hungary), photography can appear as art. As Charlotte Cotton notes, "We are at an exceptional time for photography as the art world embraces the photograph as never before, and photographers consider the art gallery or the book the natural home for their work."[587]

A recent phenomenon in international and Hungarian photo art is the turn towards investigating religiosity and spirituality—clearly marked by the rising number of photographers active in the field, the appearance of publications (like the earlier mentioned issue of Aperture Magazine), and exhibitions (as the also earlier cited Guest + Appearance exhibition in Pannonhalma in 2020).

Interestingly, the presence of women among photographers investigating religion and spirituality is striking—both internationally and in Hungary. The commonalities in their oeuvres is evident in 1) their investigating religion, religiosity, spirituality, practices, and identities; 2) women as main (and not side) subjects of the investigation—though not exclusively; 3) the unusual, surprising or shocking perspectives applied; 4) their personal quests to clarify (their own) relations with organised religion, and seek the spirituality they miss therein; 5) their artistic sensitivity and attention to detail.

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[583] "Spirituality is Solidarity," 37.

[584] Possamai, *The i-zation*.

[585] In hommage to Gergely Palatin's photographic work, the Benedictine Secondary School in Pannonhalma held the Palatin Gergely-fotópályázat (Gergely Palatin Photo Award) open for students, last time in 2018. See https://www.phbences.hu/hirek/palatin-gergely-fotopalyazat-2018, 24.03.2021.

[586] See Klára Romoda, "Dr. Rados Tamás pannonhalmi irodalomtanár: Egy 'másik" fényképező szerzetes," *Fotóművészet* vol. XLVI, no. 1–2. (2013), available online at http://www.fotomuveszet.net/korabbi_szamok/200312/dr_rados_tamas_pannonhalmi_irodalomtanar?PHPSESSID=85230b2aef70a262de7279ef8d4d4272, 24.03.2021.

[587] Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 7.

My contention is that this phenomenon is rooted in three core concepts: the importance of the perspective, the relevance of these photographs in revealing the invisible,[588] and in offering *herspectives,* a concept I propose as a collective term to denote the phenomenon—not in opposition to the long-time-ruling male gaze, as evident in most of the history of art, not in a feminist discourse, not by gender-stereotyping, and not in the sense of the 'female gaze' influencing the construction of masculinity—but rather emphasising the sensibility, the ability to recognise and share new and enriching lessons in the world, where meaning seems to evaporate, and where the young image-making and image-consuming generation has a burning need to face honest experience.

The list of female photographers investigating religion and spirituality ranges from the twentieth-century pioneering work of the Spanish Cristina Garcia Rodero[589] photographing Christian religiosity, and the Italian-Senegalese Maïmouna Guerresi[590] investigating the spirituality and ancestry of African, Asian and European cultures by mirroring her own situatedness of living between two cultures and imagining a global community that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries, to the radical art approaches of the Iranian Shirin Neshat[591] and the Yemeni Boushra Yahya Almutawakel,[592] and the fresh perspective of the Jordanian Tanya Habjouqua, especially in her project, *The Un/Holy Land*, ongoing since 2013.[593]

Let me highlight the work of two international artists. The American photographer, Lauren Pond, researches American religiosity through beliefs, culture and experience by moving in the communities investigated, sees photography as more than a means of documentation, as an opportunity to share experiences and create new understandings. In her earlier projects, she worked with believing bikers,[594] Mennonite youth and their education in faith,[595] the spiritual life of the lonesome wanderers of roads in connection with the mobile chapels of the trucker mission Transport For Christ and their mobile churches erected at truck stops,[596] the spreading of paganism, which is estimated to have approximately one million followers in the United States, in prisons,[597] and those seeking and practising new ways, frameworks and forms of faith.[598] With her latest project, *Test of Faith,*[599] available also in print,[600] Pond returned to the world of charismatic Pentecostal, serpent-handling pastors, whom she has followed earlier.

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[588] By paraphrasing an earlier part of the same book by Marion, it can be claimed as "the question of *photography* does not pertain first or only to *photographers*, much less to aestheticians. It concerns visibility itself, and thus pertains to everything—to sensation in general." Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 7.

[589] See Garcia Rodero's page within the website of Magnum Photos, https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/cristina-garcia-rodero/, 24.03.2021.

[590] See https://www.maimounaguerresi.com, 24.03.2021.

[591] See Neshat's page at the website of *The Collector*, https://www.thecollector.com/shirin-neshat-artist/, 24.03.2021.

[592] See https://www.boushraart.com, 24.03.2021.

[593] See http://tanyahabjouqa.com/the-unholy-land, 24.03.2021.

[594] Born Again Bikers, https://www.laurenpondphoto.com/stories/born-bikers/, 24.03.2021.

[595] Faith Builders, https://www.laurenpondphoto.com/stories/faith-builders/, 24.03.2021.

[596] A Less Lonely Road, https://www.laurenpondphoto.com/stories/less-lonely-road/,24.03.2021.

[597] Paganism in Prison, https://www.laurenpondphoto.com/stories/paganism-prison/, 24.03.2021.

[598] Belief, Unbound, https://www.laurenpondphoto.com/stories/belief-unbound/, 24.03.2021.

[599] Test of Faith, https://www.laurenpondphoto.com/stories/test-faith/, 24.03.2021.

[600] Lauren Pond, *Test of Faith: Signs, Serpents, Salvation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

Similarly insightful are the photographs of the young Amsterdam-based photographer, Robin Alysha Clemens, who—just like Pond—researches subcultures, and aims at capturing the presence of communality, the identity of belonging. Clemens' images are characterised by a dramatic nature—in the sense of the theatre or rather the motion pictures. Her strongly contrasting dark and light photographs recall the technique of *chiaroscuro,* well-known since the Renaissance, and sometimes even George de la Tour's Baroque paintings. She uses light available at the location and captures mostly spontaneous scenes. This technique enables her to focus on the subject and the pictoriality at the same time, seeing light as an emphatic tool of imaging.

In her series *"Yo soy otro tú, tú eres otro yo"* (I am another you, you are another I)[601] photographed in Mexico, where different religious traditions and beliefs intermingle and transform, from native Mayan and Aztec traditions to Catholicism imported by the Spanish conquerors, the African and other Latin American beliefs of the slaves, as well as North American cultural influences, Clemens researched Mexicans and their faith. Looking at the diversity of contemporary Mexican spirituality, unfamiliar yet sometimes surprisingly similar practices are revealed. Instead of altars, icons, and other religious symbols belonging to the world of material culture, she focuses on portraits of the people behind the systems of belief: subjects of exorcism with prayer, consecrated oil and the Bible; a portrait of a *brujo* witch master working with both black and white magic; a young woman with tattoos on her arm recommended for Santa Muerte and a cross tattooed upside down in honour of Satan; a traditional healer from the Seri tribe; a spiritual healer woman; a young Catholic poet who sees the unity of different cultures as the basis of his art; worshippers holding statues of St. Judas Taddeus, saint of the hopeless and desperate, and a Catholic priest blessing them with holy water; a man kneeling in prayer at the basilica erected to commemorate the first apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a building which replaced the former Aztec Tonantzin Shrine and therefore of paramount importance to the Mexican Indian population; a *granicero* healer in his cave; and young Nazarenes praying together.

In Clemens' works, we cannot detect that these are posed photographs: the situations, the people in the pictures, the dramatic light appear before us as natural, self-identical images. This impression is reinforced by Clemens' statement that she sees her photographic work as an anthropological tool in the study of cultures, identities, traditions, and the symbols associated with them. In a reflection of Tillmans' words cited earlier, she claims that she seeks to portray people as individuals, not as caricatures of the ideologies they represent.[602]

In addition to the two international examples, two examples from Hungary, though mentioned earlier, deserve more attention. Boglárka Éva Zellei has been researching religiosity and spirituality with photography for years. Her currently ongoing projects continue this quest. In her recent series, *Ösvény a lelkek közt* (Path Amidst Souls) an ongoing artistic research series started in 2020, Zellei researches the Pilis Mountains, north of Budapest, which is a natural environment strongly imbued with the spiritual life of several religions.[603] Through pilgrimages,

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[601] See https://robinalysha.com/Yo-soy-otro-tu-tu-eres-otro-yo, 24.03.2021.

[602] Heming Liu, "Women Crush Wednesday: Robin Alysha Clemens," *Musée—Vanguard of Photography Culture*, April 15, 2020, (https://museemagazine.com/culture/2020/4/15/women-crush-wednesday-robin-alysha-clemens), 24.03.2021.

[603] The series is—partly—available at Zellei's website. See, http://www.boglarkazellei.com/path-between-souls, 25.03.2021.

a series of walks, and, naturally, through photography, Zellei seeks to discover the connections between God, nature, and the human being. The work is based on Zellei's own experiences. As she notes, "The spiritual process of seeking oneness with nature meets a community with people on a similar path. This is often made possible by sacred places embedded in nature. Through their abandoned traces, we can connect with those before us, and observe the transforming work of nature on human structures. By encountering the unknown, I strive to experience oneness."[604] Images of the landscape, phenomena of nature, and self portraits accompany the paths of this artistic pilgrimage.

Zellei's other current series include, *Cím nélkül* (Untitled), a strongly personal project ongoing since 2015, with self-portraits, images of sculptures of penitent thieves found as mostly vernacular liturgical art, as well as modernist church buildings erected during the communist rule of the country before 1990.[605] With the honest and sometimes shocking confession of these images of an investigating nature, Zellei doesn't wish to hide her search for identity, her relations to organised religion and society. As she notes, "I am a young Christian creative woman from Central and Eastern Europe. In this series spanning the years, I gather the impressions that I receive as a believer in my own cultural environment since my early twenties, and shape my identity. Spirituality determines my personal life and my connection to society alike. I display the dialogue of the two spheres through images. My self-portraits reflect on the visual memories of Christian culture or speak in a symbolic way about this complex identity. At the same time, I also display the historical and cultural features of my environment in the churches built before and immediately after the change of regime, in sculptures that are perceptible to me."[606]

Coincidentally, Eszter Asszonyi's current project also connects to the Pilis Mountains, though with a partly different interest and subject of research. As a graduating student of photography at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest, through her MA degree photographic series entitled *Középső világ* (Middle World), and her MA thesis *"Földanya, hallom a hangod" —A reflexív spiritualitás és újpogány mozgalmak a mai Magyarországon* ("Mother Earth, I Can Hear Your Voice"—Reflexive Spirituality and Neo-Pagan Movements in Hungary Today), she researches the peculiar phenomenon of the coexistence, interrelations, and sometimes merger of Christianity and Neo-Pagan movements among women. Although sometimes Asszonyi photographs the same trees, sanctuaries, and pilgrims as Zellei, her work focuses more on the phenomenon itself, raising questions—partly to herself—of why and how Neo-Pagan rites and spirituality replace the spiritual need unfulfilled in organised religion, namely in Christianity. Asszonyi uses the methodology of sociology and cultural anthropology as a solid scholarly foundation to her research, in addition to collecting personal experiences by moving into,

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[604] In original: "A természettel való egység keresésének lelki folyamata találkozik a hasonló úton járó emberekkel vállalt közösséggel. Ennek sokszor a természetbe ágyazott szakrális helyek adnak teret. Otthagyott nyomaik által kapcsolódhatunk az előttünk járókkal és szemlélhetjük a természet átformáló munkáját az emberi építményeken. Az ismeretlennel való találkozás által törekszem az egység megtapasztalása felé." Boglárka Éva Zellei, *MMA konzultáció 2021–1* (MMA Consultation 2021–1), 25.03.2021., pdf-document, 2, courtesy of the artist.

[605] See http://www.boglarkazellei.com/cim-nelkul-untitled, 26.03.2021.

[606] In original: "Fiatal közép-kelet európai keresztény alkotó nő vagyok. Ebben az éveken átívelő sorozatban összegyűjtöm azokat a benyomásokat, amelyek hívőként saját kulturális környezetben érnek a húszas éveim eleje óta, és identitásomat formálják. A spiritualitás meghatározza személyes életemet, és a társadalommal való kapcsolódásomat egyaránt, a két szféra párbeszédét jelenítem meg a képeken keresztül. Önarcképeim a keresztény kultúra vizuális emlékeire reflektálnak vagy szimbolikus módon beszélnek erről az összetett identitásról. Ezzel párhuzamosan környezetem történelmi és kulturális sajátosságait is megjelenítem a rendszerváltás előtti és közvetlenül utána épült templomokban, számomra érzékletes szobrokban." Zellei, *MMA konzultáció 2021–1*, 19.

coexisting and co-practising the rituals with the subjects of her work, and photographing these actions with the consent of the participants. It seems also evident that this research cannot be separated from her own questions and quest as a young practising Christian.

Asszonyi shares some of her insights through her study, "Virágmandala, Szűz Mária, gyógyító kristályok: reflexív spiritualitás és női rítusok a mai Magyarországon" (Flower Mandala, Virgin Mary, Healing Crystals: Reflexive Spirituality and Women's Rites in Hungary Today) published in 2020:

> *For the century ahead, researchers predict the flourishing of small religions. Although the number of those who profess Neo-Pagan beliefs is still negligible compared to followers of historical religions, there are those who believe that paganism has become a "world religion" over the past half century. It is a non-unified, non-dogmatic, not always institutionalised religion whose branches are undoubtedly related to each other and to spiritual movements—in their tones, external forms, and rites. One of the aftermaths of the spread of the prenatal feast may be that there will already be members of the next generation who encounter Neo-Paganism as a belief exercised by their parents, rather than choosing it as an adult from the existing spiritual-religious offerings, as is currently the case. And the new generation that is now growing up and for whom it is important to save our planet and live in harmony with nature is likely to identify more easily with a belief system of which these values are an integral part. So, for the future of Neo-Pagan female rites and reflexive spirituality, we can only be sure of one thing: that the "shaman princesses" already live among us.*[607]

The questions of why we look at these pictures, why we find them interesting, and why they are relevant and effective as forms of art easily arise. The answer, on the one hand, no matter how trivial it sounds, is simply because these are photographs: images communicated and communicating through a medium and language that humanity has widely learned to "read," understand, accept, and hold authentic by the twenty-first-century. On the other hand, we can witness situations and life stories in these images, we can look behind walls to see things that, captured in this form, can touch us and burn into our memory, precisely because of this language.

Besides, as a result of this authenticity and effectiveness, as viewers of these photographs, we can more easily be immersed in the situations presented to us, and gain an illusion of participation. Together with Clemens, Zellei, or Asszonyi, we can start thinking about how we

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[607] In original: "Az előttünk álló évszázadra a kutatók a kis vallások felvirágzását jósolják. Bár az újpogány hiedelmeket vallók száma egyelőre elenyésző a történelmi vallások követőihez képest, mégis vannak, akik úgy vélekednek, hogy a pogányság 'világvallássá' vált az elmúlt fél évszázad során. Egy olyan nem egységes, nem dogmatikus, nem minden esetben intézményesült vallássá, amelynek ágazatai egymással és a spirituális mozgalmakkal—tanaikban, külső formáikban, rítusaikban—kétségtelenül rokonságot mutatnak. A születés előtti áldó ünnep elterjedésének egyik utóhatása lehet, hogy a következő generáció tagjai között már lesznek olyanok, akik az újpogánysággal a szülők által gyakorolt hitként találkoznak, nem ők választják azt maguknak felnőttként a meglévő spirituális-vallási kínálatból—ahogy ez jelenleg megfigyelhető. Az az új generáció pedig, amely most van felnövőben, és akinek fontos a bolygónk megmentése és a természettel összhangban élés, vélhetően könnyebben azonosul majd egy olyan hiedelemrendszerrel, amelynek ezen értékek a szerves részei. Az újpogány női rítusok és a reflexív spiritualitás jövőjét illetően tehát egy dologban lehetünk csak biztosak: abban, hogy a 'sámánhercegnők' már köztünk élnek." Eszter Asszonyi, "Virágmandala, Szűz Mária, gyógyító kristályok: reflexív spiritualitás és női rítusok a mai Magyarországon," *Helikon Irodalom- és Kultúratudományi Szemle* LXVI, no. 3 (2020): 371.

stand with respect to our inherited or recently acquired belief system, our identity. Are we aware of it? Do we consider it as important as the people photographed?

If we have to argue for photography as a valid form of art, we could say that although we understand the dilemma of the artist's position, and the role of the photographer, which is a recurring question, photography—in addition to being a means of functionally documenting the individual (person, action, phenomenon, etc.)—can also show the general in the individual interestingly and authentically, bring examples and practices of centuries-old stories and millennial mythologies into tangible proximity, extract readings that permeate time and space, and thus transfer the belief in religion to the work of art. Photography has a place in religion, in the places of worship, as well as in the artistic representation of spiritual experience, in the spaces of art.

8.3. Creating Experiences in the Gallery

The first major exhibition I curated as part of my doctoral research was *puritanus—tiszta művészet* (puritanus—pure art), an exhibition of contemporary sacred art at Hegyvidék Gallery, Budapest, organised within the framework of the Ars Sacra Festival 2017.[608] The idea came indirectly from readings and experiences, and directly from lectures of a Design/Art and Ethics course at the Doctoral School of the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. From Epictetus to Mies van der Rohe, a series of influences can be traced in the concept of the exhibition: artistic attempts to achieve wholeness with minimal intervention, balancing on the border between nothing and something.

Works by sixteen Hungarian artists of different age groups, artistic approaches and genres (painting, graphics, installation, sculpture, photography and video) were featured. The programs accompanying the exhibition offered various opportunities for visitors and artists to interact, far beyond the usual opening of a contemporary art exhibition. These included guided tours, youth programs, and multi-genre events.

The closing event was an attempt at an unusual and unique performative act in such an environment: creating commensality, a table community with exhibiting artists, random visitors, and gallery staff. On a late September evening, we set a large table in the middle of the gallery space, offered home-baked bread and wine, and shared a table with those who came. In an hour or two, the bread and wine ran out, and after a deep and meaningful conversation about art, creed, relations to works of art, creation, religion, and God, the participants went home and the exhibition was closed.

The phenomenon of *commensality*, also known as *table community*, is a widely known and researched practice. Both food and company are basic human needs—regardless of culture, geography or period, we like to eat in the company of others, typically at a table (*mensa*). Although the phenomenon has mostly been studied in the social sciences in terms of religion and rites, more recently, other scientific approaches have emerged—including sociology, cultural anthropology, and environmental psychology.

Claude Fischler explores today's problems on this subject,[609] but a number of other perspectives—the relationship of the table community to social relations, the effects of changes

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[608] See https://issuu.com/hegyvidekgaleria/docs/puritanus_katalogus_2017, 13.05.2021.

[609] Claude Fischler, "Commensality, society and culture," *Social Science Information—50th anniversary issue*, Vol. 50 (2011), 528–548.

in nutrition, the relationship with social activism, the relationship with identity—also appear in a volume edited by Susanne Kerner, Cynthia Chou, and Morten Warmind, which already in its subtitle indicates the spectrum of action from the everyday to festive occasions.[610]

Commensality was a widespread practice in Antiquity. We can read about it in the Symposium by Plato, but we can also read about how this custom was radically changed by Jesus' new concept of commensality. Paul Louis Metzger finds that "One of the many qualities that people admire about Jesus was his open posture toward people who were often excluded from the table,"[611] and John Dominic Crossan in his biography of Jesus devotes an entire chapter to the subject.[612]

The closing commensal event of the exhibition had a more positive effect than expected through the unusual initiative for both artists and visitors, the open, non-discriminatory invitation, and the sharing of bread and wine, which can also be interpreted as a ritual reference. Artists who, in the unfortunately deeply divided Hungarian society of today, would not otherwise talk to each other, exhibit together, or would not otherwise have the chance to get to know each other's works or views on art due to their own, very different cultural, political, religious beliefs or social circles, by sharing bread and wine could prove that it was not only their works that were capable of developing a dialogue when exhibited on the walls of the same gallery space.

The act of open commensality being realised in the context of a contemporary art exhibition clearly offers more than the usual hospitality on the opening occasions, when after the opening speech and the accompanying music, guests rush to the buffet table for the customary glasses and bites before leaving. Sitting around a table, we can take time to eat and talk together, break bread and silence, and cross our own constructed boundaries.

According to American theologian Randall Frederick, the table community offers a healing interaction: "To the very end, the Gospel of Mark and the rest of the Gospels show a pattern of behaviour that Jesus is trying to bring restoration to all peoples through the intimacy of a meal and that there is a healing interaction taking place whenever and wherever food is taking place."[613]

This healing interaction is what we were able to experience as a result of the performative actions of the contemporary art exhibition and related events, including the closing table community. Even though that this was an isolated, one-off event, it is my hope and mission to continue my research and attempt to create similar border crossing events. Both art and the exhibition hall offer a good arena for this research.

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[610] Susanne Kerner, Cynthia Chou, Morten Warmind, eds., *Commensality from everyday food to feast* (London–New Delhi–New York–Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[611] Paul Louis Metzger, "Jesus' Open Posture and "The Open Table," *Patheos*, April 11, 2014, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/uncommongodcommongood/2014/04/jesus-open-posture-and-the-open-table/. (08.02.2018.)

[612] See, "From Fasting to Feasting," in John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1994), 51–54.

[613] Frederick Randall, "Table Fellowship as Expressed in the Gospel of Mark," *Theology & The City*, March 13, 2013. https://theologyandthecity.com/2013/03/03/3-march-13-table-fellowship-as-expressed-in-the-gospel-of-mark/. 08.02.2018.

8.4. Sacred Design Beyond Theory

When someone mentions design and religion together, the most common reaction is surprise and curiosity, often followed by disbelief. There may be several reasons for this phenomenon. In the Global North, religion is generally seen as outdated, distant, powerless, boring, and irrelevant, and an ineffective way to answer current global issues, whereas design is considered fresh, contemporary, powerful, interesting, and widely applicable. This is not a surprising phenomenon in the secularised world, where religion is generally considered to be private; it is not a strange concept in the world of the prevailing total aestheticisation, which flaunts its attractive goods and brands with pride—attributing these to design.

On the other hand, with religion in the private and design in the public sphere, our general state of mind and action as humanity fails to give proper, sustaining reactions to current emergencies, and so perhaps it is time for us to rethink our frozen standpoint. The findings of the Pew Research Center with their predicted pattern of "the secularising West and the rapidly growing rest" reinforces this: religion continues to grow when emergencies arise, such as in economically and socially insecure places like much of sub-Saharan Africa, and it declines where they are stable.[614]

The emergencies marking our era, addressed earlier in scholarly discourse, appear today as commonplaces, even though doubted by some. Such emergencies include the change, and sometimes even the lack, of seasons, the growing frequency of extreme weather events, the danger of rising sea levels, the lack of healthy drinking water, drought, famine, the predictable threat of massive population re-arrangements, and so forth, as unfortunate daily experiences. To describe the problem, the Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen started to use and popularise the term "Anthropocene" to mark our current geological epoch, in which the global effects of human activities can be clearly noticed.[615] The Anthropocene, however, is not the only concept describing the problem. The phenomenon of humanity breaking the rules, wishing to take the lead and control, and thus spoiling the perfectly created, unspoiled world is well-known from religion. What might seem surprising for some is the reflection of the same understanding in Pope Francis' second encyclical subtitled "On Care for Our Common Home:" criticising consumerism, warning us of the environmental consequences, and calling humanity to take "swift and unified global action." "Nothing in this world is indifferent to us," it reads, making the attitude clear.[616]

I found that design and religion, in spite of the seeming differences, have a set of commonalities: shared values, goals, attitudes, and modes of action. Both are communal and inclusive, both are participative, both—though for different reasons—focus on doing good, serving the community, and sustaining the world, both are system and structure focused, and both wish to connect experiencing, knowing, and doing.

My presumption is that design and religion can learn from and support each other in achieving urgent social and global agendas related to sustainability, justice, and peace, with the meaning of "shalom," meaning harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity and welfare of individuals

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[614] Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050." April 2, 2015, https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050. 04.06.2020.

[615] Paul J. Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind," *Nature* 415 (2002): 23. https://doi.org/10.1038/415023a.

[616] Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis On Care of our Common Home* (The Holy See: Libreria Editirice Vaticana, 2015), 1, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, 07.04.2021.

or groups of individuals, rather than "Pax Romana," a system of relative and hegemonic peace achieved by power and politics. Being religious, in my understanding, means having an ethical duty to help preserve the created world, as well as finding one's role as a member of the community in that work, while design, design thinking, and designerly ways of knowing and doing can assist in finding the tools to achieve that goal.

We might believe that speaking of design and religion together is an entirely new concept. Religiosity, just like design, is a systemic principle, a modus operandi. Design is not only a way of creating spectacles and attractive artefacts, and as such, it has been operating in religious organisations for centuries—even if it has not been named as such. For example the *Regula Benedicti* written by Benedict of Nursia in 516 AD and used by Benedictine communities ever since, is a designed social/communal system. The reason for the longevity of its usability is that it was designed to serve as a guide for individual, autonomous communities, finding a good balance of institutionalism and individualism, obligation and freedom of interpretation, application, action and spirituality.

On the other hand, non-confessional (or not primarily confessional) religiosity as a systematised way of life served as a guiding principle for the community regarded as the "ur-institution" of modern design education, Bauhaus. Johannes Itten, a devotee of *Mazdaznan*,[617] is mostly known for his colour theory. He was, however, more like a spiritual leader of Bauhaus; in the early years, Itten introduced the religious principles and practices he followed into the everyday practices of the school. A recent study by Pádraic E. Moore, which is one of the fortunate results of the rich discourse on the recent occasion of the 100th anniversary of Bauhaus, investigates this topic in more detail. The study highlights that although several Mazdaznan principles were questionable, the effect of Itten's activity persists: "Although Itten's unorthodox teaching methods were criticised during the interwar years, the passing of time has seen many of the ideas and exercises he applied being integrated into mainstream art pedagogy. Several elements from Itten's *Vorkurs* program remain at the foundations of modern art and design instruction."[618] These seemingly distant though related historic examples indicate that religiosity and design do have shared domains, which need to be further investigated.

Our current situation seems unparalleled, and therefore might need to be investigated using new approaches, new tools, and new disciplines. Julier's definition of design allows an insightful approach to dig into global design capitalism, the culture of our current everyday. Design is "more than just the creation of visual artefacts to be used or 'read.' It is also about the structuring of systems of encounter within the visual and material world."[619] Design Culture, on the other hand, is a mobilising tool, as "it forces one to move beyond the enervated position of the detached or alienated observer overwhelmed by images."[620]

Can design help us in a broader sense than merely in the visual and material world? Is it enough to change the objects of study from the profane to the sacred, and start analysing the multiple interactions of religious organisations, liturgical artists, and believers, substituting for

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[617] A lesser-known but still active neo-Zoroastrian religion founded at the end of the nineteenth Century by Otoman Zar-Adusht Ha'nish (born Otto Hanish, 1844–1936).

[618] Pádraic E. Moore, "A Mystic Milieu—Johannes Itten and Mazdaznan at Bauhaus Weimar," *bauhaus imaginista* Edition 1: Corresponding with, Japan (2018), http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/articles/2210/a-mystic-milieu, 04.06.2020.

[619] Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture," 67.

[620] Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture," 76.

the categories of designers, production, and consumption? It was a relief to understand that there has been further discourse on the connection of design and the sacred. Fry introduced the term 'sacred design' in 1995, and in 2010 an entire issue of *Design Philosophy Papers* discussed this topic. In the editorial of the latter, Willis highlights the communal aspect of the sacred,[621] while Fry points at the problem of the lack of functioning communities, and marks it as a problem of living in "a deepening of 'the crises' of the unsustainable."[622] These crises, he argues, are fundamentally caused by the lack of action, and are related to a lack of vision of the future. Fry finds that the sacred, which "cannot be reduced to a binary moral order of: sacred and profane, good and evil, sustainment and the unsustainable … is an action that strives to reach for a *future* while resisting all that negates *futures* (the unsustainable in dominance in the present)."[623]

The key issue for Fry is "futuring," which fundamentally requires "care as futuring enacted."[624] In order to take action in addition to developing theory, Fry's initiative, *The Studio at the Edge of the World,* is to unfold the idea of sustainment.[625] Care, another key concept for Fry, is where he suggests that thinking on design and the sacred can connect:

> *Sustainment has myriad faces, and sustainability has an incalculable number of ways to bring these faces before "us" (us here being the proto-community of care). This cannot happen without design (nor without those who deem themselves "designers" and members of the "change community" that itself is but one element of the "community of care"). Such design is sacred—but sacred understood futurally and ethically (rather than historically and religiously).*[626]

The idea of care as action is in surprising synchronicity with the notion of "spirituality as solidarity," claimed as a key concept in the earlier cited conversation between Tillmans and Hägglund.[627] The question—besides understanding the emergencies—is how we can convert our awareness, understanding, and theories into actions. Willis suggests that the sacred might inhabit "the gap between knowing and doing, and could thus be a powerful counterforce to *akrasia*."[628] The inclusion of "akrasia"—a lack of self-control or a state of acting against one's better judgment, caused by being captivated by an invisible power—besides knowing and doing, places the question into an ethical perspective, which, besides religion, characterises design that is sensitive and responsive to society and environment.

Ted Matthews, service designer, outlines a possible solution by investigating how the knowledge of social science related to the sacred can enrich the design of service experience; how practices, methods, and elements well-known from religious practice can be used to improve the user experience. Matthews describes a new service design approach that marries

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[621] Willis, "Sacred Design Now," 3.

[622] Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 25.

[623] Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 31.

[624] Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III," 32.

[625] The Studio at the Edge of the World focuses "on developing transformative activities, organising events connecting to the projects, and making writings on design available." http://www.thestudioattheedgeoftheworld.com, 13.05.2021.

[626] Fry, "Returning: Sacred Design III,", 33.

[627] See *Aperture* 237, 2019, partly also available online at https://aperture.org/editorial/wolfgang-tillmans-spirituality-solidarity/, 13.05.2021.

[628] Willis, "Sacred Design Now," 5.

material from sacred theory and the tools of service design with the aim of designing sacred service experiences. Matthews extends Willis' understanding when he points to the potential of combining the knowledge of the two fields. The mutual point is striving to grasp the intangible in communal forms by means of myths and time-based, sequential, and repeatable rites and objectifications. While in 2017 Matthews argued that "service designers can act as cultural intermediaries,"[629] in 2014 he had a more careful position about transferring his theory into practice:

> *But is it possible to design the sacred? This is arguably not the case directly, but as with service design which creates the channels for experience to be had, it may be possible through the community to design and orchestrate rituals and ceremonies that are able to connect to myths that in turn create the channels for "sacred" or at the very least "special."*[630]

Communality, sustainment, future, structuring, knowing and doing, connecting, mobilising, care—there is a set of terms in the shared domain which is taking shape in front of our eyes, but how does it work in practice?

A poster from the Diocese of Manchester, Church of England, asks, "Is it enough to pray for a better society?" Another poster from the same campaign asks "Our message is as relevant today as it's ever been, but are we?"[631] Fortunately, there is a long list of positive examples. Some of these directly link religion, religious institutions and design, while others only suggest such a relation, if at all. The two posters characteristically envision the problem of activation and (internal and external) communication.

In an earlier study, I contended that "sustainability needs more than solar panels neatly arranged on the church roof."[632] This statement marks the need to address the problem of understanding the core issues, rather than merely scratching the surface, and to make an appropriate reaction through complex, sustaining, and futuring solutions to problems. There are several good tools, applicable principles, and practices available, many of them offered by design, design thinking, design disciplines, and practices.

Most of these can be realised with more engagement in understanding the complex system of the world, clear thinking, and community action, rather than a high budget. One of the best earlier examples of sustainability addressed in the medium of architecture is the already mentioned Benedictine monastery of Christ in the Desert in Abuquiu, New Mexico. Founded in 1964 and built from locally sourced materials, led by chief architect George Nakashima, the monastery lies in the depth of Chama Canyon. Sustainability is reflected not only in using solar energy and a commitment to sustainable stewardship, but also in the operation of the monastery, the system of independence, and the ability to meet a sustainable level of development. In slightly more than half a century, Christ in the Desert became independent, and already has two

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[629] Matthews, "Sacred Service," 6.7.

[630] Matthews, Sacred Services," 6.7.

[631] Cited in: Emily Gosling, "Branding Spirituality: A Look at Aligning Modern Day Design Processes With Ancient Faiths," *AIGA Eye on Design*, January 29, 2018, https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/branding-spirituality-a-look-at-aligning-modern-day-design-processes-with-ancient-faiths/, 04.06.2020.

[632] Körösvölgyi, "The Sustainable Church," 94.

dependent monasteries in Mexico, and a more recent foundation in Dallas, Texas, with mostly Vietnamese monks.[633]

A different approach, though with a similar desire to understand and serve the contemporary way of life and make the operation of a religious community sustainable, is the cutting edge "flexible church" concept by Beck Architecture. The concept builds on the changing needs of space a religious community can have. Besides a limited number of major occasions with a large group of worshippers (e.g. Easter or Christmas), a contemporary community needs a larger number of smaller rooms to suit the needs of the everyday: to house different age groups, occasions, and activities. The idea of the flexible space is well-known from conference centres and hotels, but has not yet been adapted to church use until now.[634]

The problem of low or nonexistent budgets—whether due to the decrease, or the new foundation of a community—to finance a desired development, is a frequently applied excuse. A good counter-example for communities with limited financial resources appears in the photo series by Zellei, who researched immersions of Neo-Protestant communities in Hungary in her MA degree series.[635] In one photograph, a cheap inflatable plastic paddling pool in the backyard of the church is seen in use as an immersion pool at the Free Christian Congregation in Szigetszentmiklós, Hungary.

Emergency architecture responds to natural disasters and humanitarian crises. In this field, temporary housing and medical facilities are usually mentioned. The Japanese architect, Shigeru Ban, however, has also erected paper and cardboard churches in Kobe, Japan, and Christchurch, New Zealand.[636] Ban's churches are not only environmentally friendly, quickly constructible, and removable, but are also of high architectural and aesthetic value.[637] A different approach to emergency religious architecture was taken by the chapel converted from a shipping container in Montegallo, Italy, after the earthquake in 2016.[638] This chapel is characterised by its low cost, simplicity, as well as its easy and quick construction and removability once it becomes superfluous.

In the same year, two young American architecture students, Lucas Boyd and Chad Greenlee, from the Yale School of Architecture, exhibited their "pop-up places of worship" concept at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, and the Laka Competition.[639] The problem they found is that refugee camps normally offer housing, medical, and educational units for those in need, but lack facilities serving spiritual needs. Their concept aimed at providing an easy-to-construct, flexible solution to erect Christian, Islamic, or Judaic places of worship, made from cheap and accessible materials and following simple patterns so as to allow practically anybody to build them, thus making the creation of these places of worship a real participative practice.

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[633] For details, see https://christdesert.org. 04.06.2020.

[634] For details, see https://futurechurchbeck.wordpress.com. 04.06.2020.

[635] See http://boglarkazellei.com/furnishing-the-sacred. 04.06.2020.

[636] See http://www.shigerubanarchitects.com/works/1995_paper-church/index.html and http://www.shigerubanarchitects.com/works/2013_cardboard-cathedral/index.html. 04.06.2020.

[637] For a complete listing of Shigeru Ban's "Disaster Relief Projects," see, http://www.shigerubanarchitects.com/works.html. 04.06.2020

[638] Luisa Chimenz "Sacred Design. Immaterial Values, Material Culture." *Design Journal* 20 (sup1), S3436–47, (2017): S3440, https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.13528472017.

[639] For details, see https://lakareacts.com/winners/pop-places-worship/. 04.06.2020.

Perhaps the most unique example was the edifice of St. Michael's Eritrean Orthodox church in the once illegal refugee camp, a shantytown called the "Jungle," in Calais, France, near the ferry station to Great Britain. The church, which the authorities later demolished together with the entire camp, was built by refugees using waste wood and agricultural plastic foil. Following a traditional architectural form, it represented a highly engaged, community-based, low cost, participative architectural practice—as well as a striking counter-example to what was widely communicated in the media and politics about the refugee crisis of 2015.[640] (The church is also documented in Richard Mosse's celebrated photographic art project "Incoming.")[641]

Good practices also appear as design practices in church environments and in religious practice. Among the projects making such direct links, an outstanding successful example is the latest reconstruction of St. Martin's Basilica in the Archabbey of Pannonhalma, in Hungary.[642] The task was to rejuvenate the thirteenth century Gothic church of the monastery, following several intervening reconstructions. In order to make the entire residential community of Benedictine monks feel the project their own, the reconstruction was carried out as an inclusive design project (naturally, respecting the theological and liturgical aspects). The two years of preparation was led by a group of monks representing the entire population of the monastery, the so-called Basilica Workshop, who received assistance from an external professional change management specialist. Throughout the process of the preparation of the architectural briefing, as well as during the reconstruction works themselves, continuous communication was carried out with the members of the community. The results are clearly visible: the reconstructed basilica represents an undoubted architectural quality, designed by the renowned British architect John Pawson,[643] yet the entire community has been happy to use the church ever since —seeing it as their real spiritual home, in the sense of environmental psychology, when the perception of being outside transforms to that of being inside.

A recent and socially sensitive example from a religious organisation was from 2018 until the quarantine resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the series of weekly recurring *Open Dinners* at the Józsefváros Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hungary, operating in the poorest though central part of the capital.[644] One of the only socially sensitive projects initiated by Márta Bolba, pastor of the community, it had a simple and communal structure: like the commensality practiced by Jesus as an act of inclusion, every Wednesday at 6 pm food and community was offered at the laid tables in the garden or the community room of the church. Cooking was done by many—including the pastor, community members, local Roma women, a homeless woman, as well as an African refugee mother. The invited speakers or performers, just like the guests at the tables, varied every week. Some came for the meal, others for the non-judgmental, receptive community. A recently released documentary film, *The Pastor*

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[640] More images of the church are available in "Inside the Calais Migrants' Church—in pictures," *The Guardian*, August 4, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2015/aug/04/inside-the-calais-migrants-church-in-pictures, 04.06.2020. On the topic of the archeological findings of the camp and the church, see, Charlotte Higgins, "Lore of the Jungle: unearthing treasures from the Calais camp," *The Guardian*, May 16, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/may/16/calais-jungle-archaeological-dig-pitt-rivers-oxford 2019. 04.06.2020.

[641] See http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/incoming#home. 07.04.2021.

[642] See https://pannonhalmifoapatsag.hu/bazilika-altemplom/. 07.04.2021.

[643] See the project on the architect's website: http://www.johnpawson.com/works/archabbey-of-pannonhalma. 07.04.2021.

[644] The website of the congregation is available at https://jozsefvaros.lutheran.hu. 07.04.2021.

of Mandák House[645] records Bolba's work of helping those in need, fighting populist and political Christianity by pointing at Biblical values, and following the principles of the Gospel.

A similar, socially focused, art and craft based, and faith-backed project runs under the brand name *Made in Pata-Rât* in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.[646] The project is operative since 2015. It started at a garbage dump outside the city, where a local Roma community was forced to move in 2010. Members of a Philadelphia-based nonprofit missionary organisation, Karen Joy Visky, an American textile artist, and her husband, Zsolt Visky, a slam-poet and carpenter, joined a Dutch missionary organisation previously operating at the site. Five days a week they worked in the workshop with the children and teenagers, teaching the crafts of working with textiles and wood, marketing the products, reusing the revenue, and meanwhile listening to and talking with the kids, providing them with a daily warm dish, as well as acceptance and guidance in earthly and spiritual matters. Their aim, to assist the integration of the participants in society, is exemplary in connecting the material and the spiritual world in an utterly contemporary setting. In 2020 they moved the workshop to the city center of Cluj to an atelier they share with other groups of independent designers and artists to support the integration of the Roma youth working with them—one of them already employed officially by the initiative. In the above examples, communality, sustainment, futuring, structuring, knowing-and-doing, connecting, mobilising, and care can all be experienced.

My initial hypothesis that design and religion can learn from and support each other in achieving urgent social and global agendas, such as maintaining, sustaining, and futuring, as well as building and reinforcing communities, seem to be supported by the research, the projects, and the consequent findings. Although there is a general and widely communicated belief that religiosity is in decline in the Global North, an intense and probably growing, or at least more apparent, interest toward the sacred and design was experienced throughout the work. The question whether this results from spirituality as a substitute or as a new form of religiosity replacing organised religion but preserving the interest toward the difficult or impossible to explain questions, or from experiencing religiosity in a more interesting context, may serve as a subject of further research.

What seems clear is that the sacred needs design and design needs the sacred; the former to appear likeable again, and the latter to be ethical and to highlight the potential in communal creation.

8.5. Beyond The Classroom

Education, pointing towards and providing a platform for experiencing the commonalities, values, goals, attitudes, and modes of action that religion, spirituality and design share, has a central and highlighted role in achieving the above outlined cooperation. This is especially so, since education provides a supportive environment to reflect the communal, inclusive and participative nature of the above fields, their pursuit of doing good, serving the community, sustaining the world and our common future. Education can help the separated fields and

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[645] For more information about the documentary, see http://www.verzio.org/en/2019/films/the-pastor-of-mandak-house. Their social media page is available at https://www.facebook.com/ThepastorofMandakHouse/, while the film was recently, on occasion of Easter 2021, made available to watch at https://dafilms.com/film/10788-the-pastor-of-mandak-house. 07.04.2021.

[646] The social media page of the project is available at https://www.facebook.com/madeinpatarat/, while a recently published interview is available in Hungarian at https://youtu.be/jnbdlc8ct_s. 07.04.2021.

disciplines reconnect, discover commonalities, and achieve a fruitful cooperation outside the frameworks of education itself. The next generations being defined under the term of "the future" (of the church, education, society, etc.[647]) is misunderstood: they, together with the rest of our ageing societies, are part of the present who should participate in defining the future—hopefully a promising one. "After all,"—as Matthew Wizinsky finds—"the future does not exist; it's being produced right now."[648]

Education also offers a perfect testing ground for transforming new theories into practice. Related attempts of investigating how similarly design students in different parts of the world think of creating and working, served as a late reinforcement for my research. In summarizing his experiences, Wizinsky concludes of the AIGA Design Educators Community that

> *Design students I encounter today are increasingly discontent with the environmental degradation, corporate and political corruption, and yawning global disparity that constitute business as usual. These students give credence to the notion that designing products, garments, and services requires adapting to and working within existing models of production and consumption. While they may recognise complicity in the negative impacts of designing for and in these unsustainable models, they also have no cohesive vision for alternatives. Sadly, these concerns typically manifest with a sense of resignation or even paralysis: What can we do?*[649]

Wizinsky not only outlines the problem, but also arrives at a possible ways forward—similar to what I had previously envisioned in the earlier mentioned courses—by raising questions about the possible continuation of design and design education:

> *How can designers today frame, model, and test future scenarios of design practice that operate beyond the destructive short-term logics of capitalism? What new roles could design and designers play in a different political economy? How might we use design methods to imagine and materially instantiate everyday life in a post-capitalist society, including how design itself might operate in that society?*[650]

In his 2017 paper, Fry argues that design education might be a key to change. In his paper, he clearly indicates his dissatisfaction with the current situation of design education:

> *Current design education, in all incarnations, is a quiet disaster zone (within the wider disaster of higher education) dominantly based on inducting graduates into the labor market. It is an inferior form of education dominated by "how-to" instrumentalism. […] In response to this disaster, another direction is needed, this based on recognising contemporary worldly imperatives.*[651]

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647 Depending on who the speaker is, which structure the speaker represents (e.g., church, political organisations), or educational institutions.

648 Matthew Wizinsky, "Design after Capitalism," *AIGA Design Educators Community,* June 5, 2019, https://educators.aiga.org/design-after-capitalism, 04.06.2020.

649 Wizinsky, "Design after Capitalism."

650 Wizinsky, "Design after Capitalism."

651 Tony Fry, "Design after Design," *Design Philosophy Papers* 15 (2), 99–102, (2017): 101, https://doi.org/10.1080/14487136.2017.1392093.

The "new kind of curriculum based on: (i) process (over object) as socio-politically engaged process (not just design process); and (ii) remaking (over the new)" and being conducted as "continuous rather than divided into years," as Fry suggests, are sound ideas to consider. Fry lists as examples[652] several ideas which are in harmony with the efforts and practices outlined in my earlier detailed research projects in education, including situated problem research placement, intercultural literacy and philosophy of design, a project-centered approach, social learning as part of the new paradigm, and even "counter-courses," namely, learning events initiated, designed and led by students.

Due to the inclusive nature of Design Culture studies, it is imperative to pay attention to conflicts between religions and civilisations, at times resulting in clashes like the inquisition, warfare, or the ban and destruction of images, their design elements. That, however, would require a radically different approach to education, especially at universities, such as a recognition of design as a "third culture" besides science and the humanities, in the sense of a third approach to generate knowledge, and so a re-thinking of design as third knowledge culture,[653] or as a third culture epistemology, in T. J. Cline's terms.[654] Fry's 2017 paper, "Design after Design," already indicates the acknowledgment of this approach, claiming that "Notwithstanding its economic function, design, in total, has never been less important as a means of affirmative change than it is now—at the very time it needs to be more important as an agent contributing to this change,"[655] yet "Current design education, in all incarnations, is a quiet disaster zone (within the wider disaster of higher education) dominantly based on inducting graduates into the labor market."[656]

The critique of the university is not a new phenomenon, since Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*[657] had already addressed the problems of liberal education, "the professoriat being proletarianised as a body," and the "production of knowledge within the University …[is] uncertain."[658] Fry's opinion paper nevertheless does not stop at the level of complaints, since he lists several proposals, including "re(at)traction" and the need of "a new type of curriculum."[659] Moving forward, following his earlier initiative of *The Studio at the Edge of the World,*[660] with a broader focus on sustainment, Fry's new venture, *The Urmadic,* focuses directly on "new learning, … the need for a new learning horizon, new nomadic modes of learning and action in areas of concern not delimited by existing disciplines."[661]

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652 Fry, "Design after Design."

653 See, Claudia Mareis, "Re-thinking Design as Third Knowledge Culture," *Governing through Design*, a collaborative research project by the FHNW Academy of Art and Design, the University of Basel, and Concordia University Montréal, online, https://governingthrough.design/research/re-thinking-design-as-third-knowledge-culture/, 30.01.2022.

654 T. J. Cline, "Re-visioning Design Education: A Third Culture Epistemology," *ARCC Conference Repository*, https://doi.org/10.17831/rep:arcc%y179, 30.01.2022.

655 Fry, "Design after design," 99.

656 Fry, "Design after design," 101.

657 Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

658 Readings, *The University in Ruins,* 1.

659 Fry, "Design after Design," 1.

660 See *The Studio at the Edge of the World*, website, https://www.thestudioattheedgeoftheworld.com, 30.01.2022.

661 *The Urmadic*, website, https://www.theurmadic.org, 30.01.2022.

Kázmér Domokos, Eszter Kaderják, Dorottya Kéry, Anna Pongrácz, Noémi Éva Sebestyén, and Bíborka Kelemen: Forest Chapel, Pannonhalma (2018). Community-built work. The 14 x 7 m oval shape is made of wood and iron, while the central altar is made of concrete and covered by glass mosaic.

I see this time as a reckoning. I think of what Jesus tells Peter in Luke 22:31, that the devil wants him to be sifted like wheat. To enter into crisis is to be sifted. Your categories and ways of thinking get shaken up; your priorities and lifestyles are challenged. You cross a threshold, either by your own choice or by necessity, because there are crises, like the one we're going through, that you can't avoid.

The question is whether you're going to come through this crisis and if so, how. The basic rule of a crisis is that you don't come out of it the same. If you get through it, you come out better or worse, but never the same.

We are living a time of trial. The Bible talks of passing through fire to describe such trials, like a kiln testing the potter's handiwork (Sirach 27:5). The fact is that we are all tested in life. It's how we grow.

—Pope Francis[662]

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662 Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, "Prologue," *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 4–5.

9. Conclusion

The journey of my doctoral research has been—and after my doctoral studies will most probably be, if God Almighty will help me—an interesting and enjoyable voyage into gaining new experiences, establishing new relationships, and perhaps friendships, too.

Although I must reckon that my research—due to its topicality, perspective, and methodology as detailed at the beginning of this dissertation—can be regarded as unusual, leaning sometimes too much on practice, I hope that with the focus of the inclusive nature of Design Culture studies it is acceptable as an experiment in gathering a richer collection of experiences by means of applying a wide variety of research tools, methods, and practices—ranging from reading to action-based practices including education, curating, and creating further environments to learn.

My contention is that that today's art related to religion and spiritual experience offers a series of important lessons. It can help us discover how art can learn ethics from religion, as well as how religion can learn modes of reconnecting with the worshippers and the sacred from art and design. The recognition and utilisation of the commonalities between the two fields—including communality, the importance of solidarity, the clear focus on a common future and achieving that by means of caring for each other and our common home—can help us in achieving that. What seems essential for us is reconnecting knowing and doing, filling the gap of akrasia, linking thinking with acting, converting ideas into practice and action, enriching knowledge with lessons from practice, and recognising the comprehensive nature of our world. This can only be done by exchanging and generating thoughts through activities including education, networking, and working together in an inclusive and participative way.

Submitting and defending my thesis is definitely not the end of the road, but rather one, though important, station. I will do my part in accomplishing the above outlined tasks—in education, publication, curatorial projects, and partnerships alike.

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Declaration of Authenticity

I, undersigned, Zoltán Körösvölgyi (place and date of birth: Budapest, 2/9/1967; mother's name: Judit Győrey; ID card no: 884192TA), doctoral candidate in the field of Art Theory (Design Theory) / Design Culture (PhD) at the Doctoral School of the Moholy-Nagy University of Arts, declare that my doctoral dissertation *Art, Religion, and Spirituality in the Design Culture of the Postsecular Age* is my own work, and was created by using the sources indicated therein. Any parts thereof taken from another source, either verbatim or with the same though reworded content, has been clearly marked. Furthermore, I declare that I submit this dissertation as my own intellectual work, exclusively to the above mentioned university.

Budapest, February 16, 2022

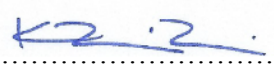
……

Signature

Eredetiségi nyilatkozat

Alulírott, Körösvölgyi Zoltán (szül. hely, idő: Budapest, 1967.09.02., anyja neve: Győrey Judit, szem. ig. szám: 884192TA), a Moholy-Nagy Művészeti Egyetem Doktori Iskola művészetelmélet (designelmélet) / designkultúra-tudomány PhD–szakos doktorjelöltje kijelentem, hogy *Művészet, vallás és spiritualitás a posztszekuláris kor designkultúrájában* című doktori értekezésem saját művem, abban a megadott forrásokat használtam fel. Minden olyan részt, amelyet szó szerint vagy azonos tartalommal, de átfogalmazva más forrásból átvettem, egyértelműen, a forrás megadásával megjelöltem. Kijelentem továbbá, hogy a disszertációt saját szellemi alkotásomként, kizárólag a fenti egyetemhez nyújtom be.

Budapest, 2022. február 16.



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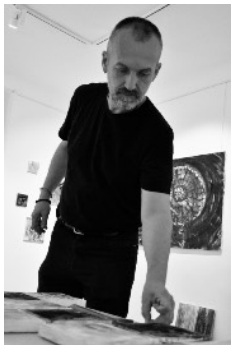
Aláírás

About the Author



Zoltán Körösvölgyi (b. 1967) is an art historian, communication and education professional, as well as a sailing coach with wide experience in marketing communication, branding, marketing, cultural company management, and university education. He is an experienced speaker, translator, curator, and journalist in both Hungarian and English.

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Work Experience in Education

2013 –	Lecturer (since 2018; previously: Instructor), Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest, Hungary
2017–2019	Instructor, Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest, Hungary
2009–2012	Instructor, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, Institute for the Theory of Art and Media Studies, Budapest , Hungary
1989–1990	English Teacher, Concord Language School, Budapest, Hungary
1988–1989	English Teacher, Vörösmarty Mihály Grammar School, Budapest, Hungary

Work Experience: Other

2021–	Sailing Coach, MVM SE, Balatonfüred, Hungary
2010–2014	CEO and Chairman of the Board, Budapest Film, Budapest, Hungary
2007–2010	Editor-in-Chief, Yacht Life Magazine, Budapest, Hungary
2005–2007	Marketing Director, Sió-Eckes (Eckes-granini), Siófok, Hungary
2003–2005	Creative Director, Artwerk Advertising, Budapest, Hungary
2001–2003	Creative Director, Roxer 2.0 Advertising, Budaörs, Hungary
2000	Creative Director, Akció Advertising, Budapest, Hungary
1999	Associate Creative Director, BBDO Budapest, Hungary
1996–1999	Senior Copywriter, McCann-Erickson Budapest, Hungary
1995–1996	Copywriter, Bates Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising, Budapest, Hungary
1993–1995	Interpreter–Translator, MATÁV, Budapest, Hungary
1991–1993	Art Historian, Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, Budapest, Hungary

Education

2016–2020	PhD Studies in Art Theory (Design Theory) / Design Culture Studies, Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Doctoral School, Budapest, Hungary
1992	MA in Art History, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Art History, Budapest, Hungary
1987–1992	University Studies in Art History and English, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, Budapest, Hungary

Opponent's Statements

2021

"Tibor Klöpfler-Topor, Térélmény, brutalizmus és techno: Az építészet és a zene kapcsolata technológiai megközelítésből, Media Design BA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2021.

2020

"Vivien Fanni Kádi, A poszthumán elméleti irányzatok művészetben való manifesztációja, Design Culture BA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2020.

"Sára Eszter Török, *Üvegmuráliák szakrális terekben. Ablakok meditációt segítő szerepe,* Metal Design MA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2020.

2019

"Antal Bánhegyesy, A román ortodox egyház, a román állam és a nemzeti öntudat kapcsolata, Photography MA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2019.

"Julianna Szücs, Design thinking a projektmenedzsmentben Egy sikeresnek ítélt design thinking projekt sikerkritériumainak vizsgálata, Management and Organisation MSc Thesis." Corvinus University, Budapest. 2019.

"Zoltán Vadászi, 1/0, Photography MA Master Work." Kaposvár University, Rippl-Rónai Art Faculty, Kaposvár. 2019.

2018

"Noémi Árki, Fénykép és memória. A kollektív emlékezet és az ikonikussá váló fényképek kölcsönhatása, Photography MA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2018.

"Orsolya Urbán, Női fotóművészek önarcképei a családábrázolásban. Családábrázoló fotográfiák Dita Pepe és Elinor Carucci munkáiban, Photography MA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2018.

"Borbála Vértesi, Craft Fiction. Lelet Ukróniából, Fashion and Textile Design MA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2018.

2017

"Bence Sándor Földesi, A keresztény kommunikáció kihívásai a késő modern médiakörnyezetben, Media Design MA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2017.

"Attila Kozó, A pláza a mi templomunk. A fogyasztói társadalom hite, Photography MA Thesis." Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2017.

“Boglárka Éva Zellei, A vizualitás szerepe a vallásgyakorlatban és kommunikációban, Photography MA Thesis.” Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest. 2017.

Selected Curatorial Works and Awards

2020

Zellei Boglárka: Latorlépés. (Boglárka Zellei: Thief Step.) Exhibition in the framework of “Átlátás #3” / Overview #3, a series of FFS / Young Photographers’ Association. Curator: Zoltán Körösvölgyi. TOBE Gallery, Budapest, Hungary. February 2–22, 2020.

2019

Fragmentum: Photography Beyond Perception. Contemporary Sacred Photography Exhibition. Curator: Zoltán Körösvölgyi. Cambridge University Festival of Ideas. Blackfriars Priory, Cambridge, UK. October 25–27, 2019.

City and Community Wood Award. Received for the Pannonhalma Forest Chapel Project. Wood Icon 2019, Ljubljana, Slovenia. October 15, 2019.

Fragmentum. Contemporary Sacred Photography Exhibition. Curator: Zoltán Körösvölgyi. Ars Sacra Festival 2019. Hegyvidék Gallery, Budapest, Hungary. September 12 – October 3, 2019.

2018

Sacred Design. Exhibition/Presentation/Debate. Curator: Zoltán Körösvölgyi. Design Week Budapest 2018. Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest, Hungary. October 10, 2018.

Erdei kápolna. (Forest Chapel.) Community Project with students. St. Imre Hill, Pannonhalma, Hungary. August 20–26, 2018.

Svindt Ferenc: (CARE) Opera Pauperum. Application for the curatorial call of the Hungarian National Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale. Curator: Zoltán Körösvölgyi. Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary. July 6–7, 2018.

Luzsicza Fanni: Conceptum. Exhibition. Curator: Zoltán Körösvölgyi. Buda Reformed Church, Budapest, Hungary. January 25 – March 14, 2018.

2017

Puritanus: Tiszta művészet. (Puritanus: Pure Art.) Contemporary Sacred Art Exhibition. Curator: Zoltán Körösvölgyi. Ars Sacra Festival 2017. Hegyvidék Gallery, Budapest, Hungary. September 7–22, 2017.

Selected Lectures and Conferences

2021

Herspectives: Female Photographers and Faith Today. 11th Conference of Junior Theologians and Doctoral Students, National Association of Doctoral Students. Department of Theology, Reformed Theological University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary. Online. March 5, 2021.

2020

New Media in Religious Art Today. National Association of Doctoral Students—10th Jubilee Theology Conference of Junior Theologians and Doctoral Students. Eszterházy Károly University, Eger, Hungary. February 28–29, 2020.

2019

On Photography and the Limits of Perception and Memory. Cambridge University, Festival of Ideas. Blackfriars Priory, Cambridge, UK. October 25, 2019.

Új médiumok a vallásos művészetben. Kedd Délutáni Zenetudomány. Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest, Hungary. October 15, 2019.

Kortárs szakrális design. 10th Partium Christian University Days. Partium Christian University, Oradea, Romania. May 8, 2019.

From Design in Religion to Sacred in Design. Ninth International Conference on Religion & Spirituality in Society Conference. University of Granada, Granada, Spain. April 25–26, 2019.

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