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Future Directions in the Sociology of Non-Institutional Religion[1]

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Abstract

A shift is taking place in the religious field from collective, institutional, and tradition-bound religion to increasingly individual, non-institutional, and post-traditional religious forms. This article examines how the sociology of religion has responded to this empirical development, paying special attention to two issues to which Meerten Ter Borg has contributed, namely the typologization of the various modes of non-institutional religion and the foundation of non-institutional religion in human nature. I suggest that the sociology of non-institutional religion can advance, particularly if it adopts a substantial definition of religion, opens up for co-operation with cognitive scholars, and turns its attention to religious bricolage, the modes of belief, and the effect of the internet on non-institutional religion.

Keywords
non-institutional religion, post-traditional religion, biological foundation of religion, Meerten ter Borg, research agenda

1. This article is a revised and expanded version of a presentation entitled "The Concept of Non-institutional Religion" that I gave at the symposium *Implicit Religion, Non-institutional Religion and Beyond* in Leiden, the Netherlands on April 20th, 2012 at the occasion of the retirement of Prof. Dr. Meerten Ter Borg. Thanks are due to Edward Bailey, the members of the NOSTER Network Group on Alternative Spirituality, and the LOBOCOP members at the department for Cultural Sociology at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, for comments on an earlier version of this article.

Introduction

A hundred years ago, this year, two great books were published which did much to define the identity of the sociology of religion: *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Durkheim 1912), and *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Troeltsch 1931 [1912]). The issues treated in these classics—religion's relation to society and morality (Durkheim), and the variety of Christianity's institutional forms (Troeltsch)—still constitute important areas of research within the sociology of religion, situating the discipline between anthropology and church history. That is to say, since its inception the sociology of religion has been interested primarily in religion at the level of society rather than at the individual level, and in religion in its official and institutional forms rather than in its non-institutional, spontaneous, and liquid forms.

The over-emphases on the collective and the institutional within the sociology of religion cannot be blamed on Durkheim and Troeltsch, however, for both noted that a shift was taking place, in their own time, towards the individual and the non-institutional.[2] Durkheim prophesied the emergence of a "cult of the individual," and Troeltsch pointed out that, besides "Church Religion" and "Sect Religion," another individualized, undogmatic, tolerant, and experience-centred mode existed which he referred to as "Spiritual and Mystic Religion." Troeltsch considered this religious mode to be the "secret religion of the educated classes" (1931 [1912], 794) of his time, and a form of religion especially adapted to the conditions of modernity.

During the twentieth century, and especially since the 1960s, the shift identified by these giants has progressed with increasing speed. Indeed, a process of subjectivization is visible in two major developments within the religious field in the Western world.

First of all, clergy, tradition, and dogma have suffered a loss of authority within Christianity, leading to de-Christianization (people de-converting from Christianity), de-ecclesialization (people leaving the church, but staying Christians), and the growth of various subjectivized forms of Christianity, relying on individual experience and rational reflection rather than on religious authority. Such subjectivized Christianity can be found both inside and outside the churches. It encompasses firstly, both Steven Sutcliffe's "singular," tradition-confined seekers (2004, 475), Peter Berger's and Anton Zijderveld's doubt-praising and Kierkegaard-inspired

2. Responsible, instead, are the many theologians (i.e. representatives of collective and institutional religion) who have so strongly influenced the sociology of religion.

Protestantism (2009), and secondly the popular, individualist, and utilitarian faith mode identified as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" by Christian Smith and Melissa Denton (2005, 162–163), a mode which is predominant among American Christian teenagers, and probably among adults and non-Christians as well (Smith and Denton 2005, 166).[3]

Second, a non-institutional and detraditionalized religious field has emerged, referred to variously as "new age" (Hanegraaff 1996), "occulture" (Partridge 2004), "alternative spirituality" (Sutcliffe 2004), or the "holistic milieu" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). It can be characterized as detraditionalized (or post-traditional). because it takes place entirely outside the Christian tradition or at least freely combines Christian elements with non-Christian religion, alternative medicine, and alternative science. For this reason, the new field has been referred to as "post-Protestant" (Sutcliffe 2006) or "post-Christian" (Houtman and Aupers 2007). It has grown rapidly: from almost nothing in the 1960s, to a size where about 1–2% of the British population attended some activity of this sort during any given week in the early 2000s, according to Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 40). This non-institutional, post-Christian field is populated by religious *bricoleurs* whose subject-centred and de-traditionalized religious mode of "Individualreligiosität" (Ahn 2007) can be seen as a popularized and de-Christianized form of Troeltsch's Spiritual and Mystic Religion (cf. Campbell 1978).

Sociologists of religion, as well as colleagues in bordering disciplines, have been quick to recognize and investigate the new, non-institutional religious life. Many fine works have been produced by folklorists (e.g., Magliocco 2004), scholars of religion (e.g., Partridge 2004; Day 2011), anthropologists (e.g., Rubow 2000), sociologists of religion (e.g., Smith and Denton 2005), and media scholars (e.g., Clark 2003).

However, two factors have stood in the way of the integration of these research initiatives into an integrated and self-conscious programme of research into non-institutional religion: that the work on non-institutional religion has been carried out in largely unconnected disciplinary and national contexts, and that most studies have had an ethnographic nature,

3. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is characterized by the following five propositions: "1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die" (Smith and Denton 2005, 162–163).

aiming to describe and understand only a small portion of the non-institutional religious field. Even when these works go beyond a mere charting of the field and identify key categories and processes, their scope remains limited. Within the sociology of religion many a theoretical treatise has been devoted to non-institutional religion, but these have rarely treated the *structure* and *dynamics* of non-institutional religion, focusing instead on *why* we observe a process of deinstitutionalization in the first place.[4] What we still need is a research programme on non-institutional religion that combines the theoretical ambition of the sociology of religion with a focus on the constitution and dynamics of non-institutional religion itself, rather than on (only) the socio-historical conditions of its emergence.

While we wait for a strong, field-defining monograph, this article has the more modest aim of sketching some strong points in the existing literature on non-institutional religion, and of indicating a number of key issues that deserve more attention. I will proceed to do this in four stages. In the first section, I clarify what I mean by the "non-institutional religious field," defining in turn the terms institution, religion, and field. The second and third sections are devoted to two theoretical issues of great importance for the sociology of non-institutional religion, namely the various modes of non-institutional religion and the foundation of non-institutional religion in human nature. Both issues have enjoyed Meerten Ter Borg's attention, and I shall emphasize both Ter Borg's contribution and the points in his position that can be developed further or should be complemented. In the fourth and final section, I point out some *lacunae* in our knowledge about the structure and dynamics of the non-institutional religious field, encouraging more research on religious *bricolage*, the modes of belief, and the effect of the internet on non-institutional religion.

The definition of the non-institutional religious field

I agree with Jonathan Turner (1987) that, if scientific theorising is to have any analytical value, a fundamental prerequisite is clear definitions of core concepts and categories. I think also, contrary to much "afterological"[5] methodology, that the same holds true for empirical investigations, includ-

4. Strong theories on secularization include Chaves (1994), Dobbelaere (2004), and Bruce (2011a). Heelas and Woodhead (2005) have taken us one step further with their convincing proposal that a "subjective turn" is the common factor behind both the decline of institutional Christianity and the rise of non-institutional religion ("spirituality").

5. Jacqueline Mraz coined the term "afterological studies" to refer to postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism etc. (cf. Sahlins 1999, 416).

ing qualitative studies. Before proceeding, it is therefore necessary to stipulate the meaning of the terms "(non)-institutional," "religion," and "field."

In the social sciences the concept "institution" (and its derivatives, "institutional" and "institutionalization," etc.) can refer to (at least) two different things. In the most straightforward meaning of the word, an institution is a *formal organization*. When I refer in this article to "institutional religion," I mean religion which is institutional in this sense, i.e. religion that takes place within a formal organization such as the Roman Catholic Church. Non-institutional religion, by contrast, is *religion found outside formal organizations*.

In a second meaning of the term, which is associated especially with Arnold Gehlen (1940), institution refers to a taken-for-granted programme for action. Institutions in this sense are the cultural counterparts of biological instincts insofar as they work automatically and non-reflexively, but they can of course be changed or substituted in a way that instincts cannot. For Gehlen, institutionalization hence does not mean the instantiation of culture (including religion) into formal organizations, but the routinization or automation of certain action programmes. Deinstitutionalization, by contrast, is the process by which formerly automized action programmes become de-automized and the object of conscious evaluation and reflection.

Though terminologically confusing, it is highly relevant for the sociology of non-institutional religion to identify the institutions (in Gehlen's sense) of non-institutional religion (in the organizational sense). Such institutions include the notions that one should seek a "spirituality" that is authentic *for me*, and that all kinds of sources may be disembedded and recombined in the process, both of which ideas are held without any reflection or questioning by many non-institutional religionists (cf. Hammer 2010; Houtman, Aupers, and de Koster 2011, Ch. 3).

Since the sociology of non-institutional religion seeks to identify religion in various unexpected places outside religious institutions, it needs furthermore a sound definition of religion so we know what we are looking for. Broad, functionalistic definitions of religion like Clifford Geertz's (1966, 4) can be useful for highlighting similarities between religion and *religion-like* phenomena, such as film (Lyden 2003), fan culture (Jindra 1994), football (Ter Borg 1998), and commitments (Bailey 1997). The potential weakness of such an approach, however, is to equate all that is meaningful, social, or important to people with religion, thereby overlooking real differences and losing the opportunity to distinguish between the

specifically religious and the generally social or cultural. For the sake of analytical clarity, I suggest the sociological study of non-institutional religion should avoid the functionalistic approach.

We also cannot use a colloquial or nominalist "definition" which takes non-institutional religion to be simply those practices which participants themselves identify as "religious." A nominalist approach would fail to capture much, for most religionists prefer to identify non-institutional religion as spirituality, magic, gnosis, or even science. It might also include too much, if it misinterprets such metaphorical expressions as "football is my religion."

The preferable starting point must therefore be a stipulative and substantive definition of religion. Strongly inspired by Steve Bruce,[6] I suggest we understand religion as *activity (i.e. cognition, communication, and action) which assumes the existence of transempirical realities (e.g., otherworlds, Heaven), supernatural entities with power to act (e.g., gods, spirits), and/or impersonal processes or principles possessed of moral purpose (e.g., karma, ma'at)*. Exactly because such a definition contains no reference to the forms (e.g., the presence of a canon) and functions (e.g., securing or disrupting social cohesion) that are commonly associated with institutional religion, it is particularly suitable for identifying religion in unexpected places (outside of institutions), in unexpected guises (also, when parading as non-religion), and in unexpected modes (such as the casual and playful).

I have used the term "field" to refer to the religious field in general, to the non-institutional religious field in particular, and to "sub-fields" within it (e.g., the detraditionalized, post-Christian religious field), but I have not yet made clear what I mean by field. Let me remedy that now. By "field" I do not mean a *champ* in Bourdieu's sense (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97), although analyses of power and of the distribution of capital are of course key concerns of the sociology of non-institutional religion. Rather, I use "field" to refer to the *extension* (in Frege's sense) of a category, as opposed to its *intension* or stipulative definition. Where "non-institutional religion" has a double reference, namely to the extension of the category (i.e. to non-institutional religion in the actual world) and to the intension of the category (i.e. to the contents of my definition of it), the "non-institutional religious field" refers always to the sum of non-institutional religion in the world. In other words, the non-institutional religious field,

6. Bruce defines religion as "beliefs, actions and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose" (2011b, 112).

as an "activity field," is constituted by all those instances of *real* activity that correspond to our *ideal* definition of non-institutional religion.

The constitution of the non-institutional religious field

Having now demarcated the non-institutional religious field, it is time to look more closely at what we find inside it. In this section, I review a number of typologies of contemporary religious modes and identify four modes that are found within the non-institutional religious field. Let me begin with Charles Glock's and Robert Wuthnow's "small" typology of "departures" from "conventional religion," i.e. from official and institutional church religion.[7] Analysing the transformation of the American religious field in the late 1970s, Glock and Wuthnow observed three such departures, namely *nominal religion* (with continued cultural identification, but little or no belief and practice),[8] various forms of *alternative religion* (with heterodoxy and heteropraxis), and complete *non-religion* (Glock and Wuthnow, 1979).[9]

Ter Borg (2004) has offered a more detailed typology of modern religious forms. Besides "autochthonous" (home-grown) and "allochthonous" (immigrant) "official religions," Ter Borg identifies a number of "non-official" or "wild" forms of religion. That these forms of religion are "wild" means that they have "no institutionalized bond to official religious groups or traditions" (2004, 116). There are four types: *Alternative religions* are the sects and new religious movements. They are non-official and non-mainstream, but just as institutionalized and recognizable as religions, as are the official religions (Ter Borg 2004, 113–114). *Sub-dogmatic religiosity* is not linked to any specific religious institution or tradition. It is the reli-

7. The terminology is problematic because it suggests an original situation in which everyone belonged to conventional religion, a situation that never existed.

8. The term nominal religion/Christianity is unlucky (and controversial) because it seems to imply an opposition to a more "real" Christianity. Especially in a country like Britain, where "Christian nominalists" far outnumber church members and active church-goers, the term and its connotations of deviancy seem misplaced. That it is nevertheless possible to use "Christian nominalism" in an entirely neutral sense to refer simply to all self-identified, but "non-practising Christians," is demonstrated by Day (2011).

9. Arguably, Glock and Wuthnow mapped only the religious forms of the dominant Christian or Judeo-Christian cultural field. To capture also non-Christian, immigrant religion, it is necessary to expand their model with a number of independent cultural or ethnic fields besides the Judeo-Christian one. These ethnic fields are more than just alternatives from the point of view of the Christian majority. They each possess their own set of conventional, alternative, and nominal religious forms.

gion of the unaffiliated spiritual *bricoleurs* who disembed beliefs and practices and recombine them on an *ad hoc* basis (Ter Borg 2004, 114–115). *Optional religiosity* is even less distinct. It is the vague belief in some higher power, a belief which usually has no impact on social life, but can be activated at crucial moments, such as marrying and dying. Ter Borg estimates that about half the Dutch population falls into this category (2004, 115). Finally, Ter Borg counts *implicit religion*, i.e. rituals, effervescence, charisma, etc. embedded in non-religious traditions or institutions, as a form of wild religion (2004, 116).

The two typologies considered so far do not capture the fact that also observant church members tend to combine their orthopraxis with religious beliefs and practices outside the control of church authorities. In other words: that the religious life of such people typically includes also an unofficial dimension, variously referred to as folk religion (e.g., Bowman 2004), popular religion (e.g., Possamai 2009), and common religion (Towler 1974). Examples of such popular religion include the consultation of folk healers, belief in ghosts, and the devotion of uncodified, local saints.

The notion that one can distinguish between an official and an unofficial aspect of a religion is, however, currently being challenged by American and Latin American sociologists and Catholicism scholars, including Meredith McGuire (2008), Robert Orsi (2003), and Cristián Parker (1996). These scholars point out that (Latin) American Catholics consider the official and unofficial aspects of their religious life to be parts of one and the same religious tradition. This might well be so, but the situation is different in Protestant Northern Europe where much unofficial religion has become detraditionalized and even consciously anti-Christian. (Protestant America seems to fall somewhere between these extremes).

It seems therefore that we need to distinguish between two ideal-typical forms of popular religion: a *traditionalized* form, which religionists consider part of a particular religious tradition, and a *post-traditional* form, synonymous with the sub-dogmatic religiosity identified by Ter Borg and the non-institutional and detraditionalized religious field identified in the introduction to this contribution.

We can now map the various ideal typical forms of institutional and non-institutional religion onto a simple continuum, from the more to the less institutionalized. First we have the various institutional religions, whether they are autochthonous or allochthnonous, mainstream or alternative. Then follow the forms of non-institutional religion that are connected to a particular religious tradition. Within this category we can dis-

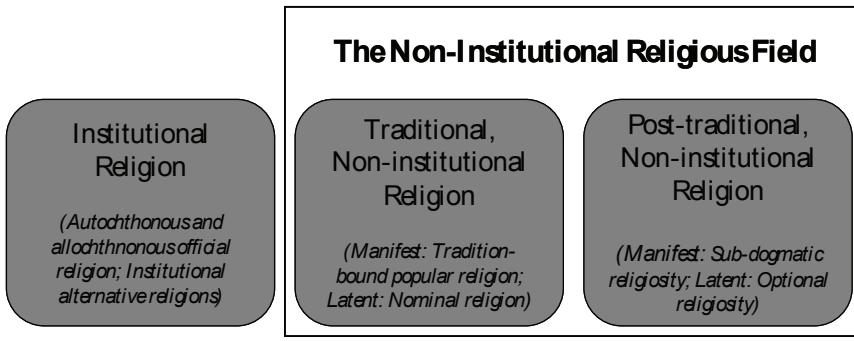

Figure 1. A Continuum From Institutional to Non-institutional Religion.

tinguish between a manifest form, tradition-bound popular religion, and a latent form, nominal religion. Finally we have the detraditionalized forms of non-institutional religion discussed by Ter Borg, in its manifest form as sub-dogmatic religiosity and in its latent form as optional religiosity. The subject matter of the sociology of non-institutional religion, the non-institutional religious field, is comprised by the two right-most categories in the diagram.

Spontaneous religion: the naturalness of (non-institutional) religion

We have seen that religion is increasingly prone to take a non-institutional rather than an institutional form in modern times, and that the sociology of religion has sought to explain this process as being a result of subjectivization. Subjectivization theory suffers from one weakness, however, for it fails to explain why people who have not been socialized into institutional religion would at all be attracted to religion in the first place. The religious impulse, which it simply assumes, needs to be substantiated. To do so adequately, we must combine a Weberian stream within the sociology of religion that sees religion as an expression of human beings' need for meaning, with a cognitive approach that sees religion as an expression of our predisposition for magical and animistic thinking. Despite the differences, both these theoretical schools perceive religion as something natural, that arises "spontaneously" from our human (biological and cognitive) nature, and is only subsequently moulded socially through processes of institutionalization, rationalization, and so on. Well-knowing that new religious expressions are always formulated within a cultural and social context, I shall in what follows consider "spontaneous religion" as an ideal type of natural religion that has not yet been subject to cultural and social

constraints.[10]

Meerten Ter Borg has addressed the question of religion's apparent naturalness, taking off from Thomas Luckmann's (1967) notion that the human being is an "*animal religiosum,*" a religious animal. This is not to be taken to mean that human beings are religious because some divine power really exists, reveals itself, or guarantees cosmic order. Bracketing out such questions with a stance of methodological agnosticism, Luckmann and Ter Borg argue purely sociologically: as Luckmann puts it, human beings are capable of "transcendence," i.e. they can transcend the here and now and can imagine past, future, ideal, and fictional states of being (1967). Ter Borg adds that this capability of transcendence leads humans to contemplate their own condition, their "finality" and "insignificance" (2008b, 129). Such reflection can give rise to a feeling of "*anomie*," or as Ter Borg prefers to call it, "ontological insecurity" (2008b, 129).

Ter Borg constructs this term as the opposite of Anthony Giddens' "ontological security," but he uses the term somewhat differently. Giddens (1984) optimistically assumes that people create a sense of ontological security through practical routines and communicative reinforcements of beliefs and values, and attributes no special role to religion in this process. Ter Borg adapts Giddens' term to an anthropology inspired by Gehlen (1940), for whom the human being is a "Mängelwesen," an incomplete animal whose instincts-less biological condition is one of chaos (and hence ontological *in*security). This biological condition must be tempered by socially constructed culture. Norms, rituals, and meaning-making of all kinds give humans instruments to live by and shield individuals and societies against ontological insecurity, but *religious* meaning-making, i.e. meaning-making that is claimed to be divinely sanctioned, does so most effectively. This is at least the case insofar as this divine entity appears real to the believer (Ter Borg, 2008b, 130–131). Though religion is both a likely reaction to ontological insecurity and a potent means to combat it, it does not arise by necessity.

Ter Borg argues, *contra* Luckmann, that it is too much to consider the human being an *animal religiosum*. Luckmann is right to say that the *capacity* for transcendence (and hence for religion) is an anthropological constant, but that allows us only to identify the human being as an "*animal transcendens*" (Ter Borg 2008c, 232). It does not follow logically (and nor

10. The term "spontaneous religion" is inspired in part by Hanegraaff's distinction between spontaneous and intellectual magic (1998, 269) and his notion of "spontaneous animism" (2003, 374).

can it be observed empirically) that humans necessarily must use their capacity for transcendence to make religion (Ter Borg 2008c, 235).

For Weber, Luckmann, and Ter Borg it is the human need for existential *meaning* that constitutes the anthropological factor behind the social phenomenon of religion. I think it is correct to assume that such a "meaning drive" exists, and that one of the potential and likely consequences of this cognitive mechanism is the emergence of spontaneous religion. But other mechanisms or dispositions play a role as well, some of which have been pointed out by cognitive scholars of religion, updating the fundamental insights of Tylor and Frazer.[11] These cognitive scholars have demonstrated that humans are natural animists, ascribing agency to artefacts (e.g., blaming the computer) and natural phenomena (e.g., seeing faces in the clouds), and spontaneous magicians, attributing causal power to thoughts and rituals and causal connections to things on the basis of similarity (e.g., burning a photo to hurt a person) or contagion (e.g., burning a lock of hair to hurt a person).[12] Even when we do not really believe that the computer has lost our data on purpose, and when we are too embarrassed to admit our hope that crossed fingers will actually help, we still engage in animist and magical cognition and action. Furthermore, people report a variety of spontaneously religious experiences such as synchronicity, lucid dreaming, and near-death experiences (cf. Cardeña, Lynn, and Krippner 2000), providing yet another set of "building-blocks" (Taves 2009) for non-institutional religion.

As much as the very emergence of spontaneous religion is co-determined by universal cognitive dispositions, the form it subsequently takes is shaped by social and cultural factors. At times and places where institutional religion exerts strong social control, new religious impulses are likely to be absorbed or suppressed by the dominant, institutional religion. Such conditions existed, for instance, in most of Northern Europe and North America between 1850 and 1950 (McGuire 2008, 41; Ter Borg 2008a, 53). When institutional religion is weak, however, as has been the situation in the West since the 1960s, spontaneous religion can turn into all

11. Some important recent works in the cognitive study of religion are Guthrie (1993), Boyer (2002), Whitehouse (2004), and Sørensen (2007).

12. I should make it clear that I consider magic to be an essential part of religion, indeed the part that has to do with the attribution of supernatural efficacy to thought or actions. The Catholic Eucharist, by this definition, is a splendid example of magic, combining (a) magic based on similarity and supernatural efficacy attributed to speech (turning wine into blood) and (b) magic based on contagion (transferring the power of the god to the devotees through consumption).

sorts of things. It can add weight to the non-institutional religious circuit and begin processes of consolidation and routinization of its own, as we see with the revitalization of magic and animism in the guise of new age and neo-paganism. Or spontaneous religion can draw institutional religion back towards a position of "cognitively optimal" religion. According to Harvey Whitehouse (2004), the "doctrinal mode" of Western church religion involves fundamentally unnatural thinking and therefore requires strong socialization and frequent repetition of teachings to remain intact and successfully transmit its teachings. If these social reinforcement mechanisms weaken, people will tend to fall back on a more cognitively optimal, but theologically incorrect, mode of belief. That is exactly what has been happening within Christianity with Moralistic Therapeutic Deism stamping out orthodox theism. This shows that it is important to study and theorize spontaneous religion, not only because it is the most natural and fundamental form of religion and because it supplies many of the building blocks of non-institutional religion, but also because it constitutes an important part of the socio-cognitive dynamics of institutional religion.

Future directions in the sociology of non-institutional religion

In the two previous sections I have presented some of Ter Borg's thoughts on non-institutional religion, discussed his position up against those of others, and added some observations of my own. I do not expect that I have convinced all my sociological readers to adopt a substantive definition of religion and to start co-operating with the cognitivists. And I reckon that my typology of modes of non-institutional religion will not be equally useful for all studies and purposes. But that does not matter. As long as I have poked, provoked, and stirred a bit I am satisfied, and I hope that others will be inspired to contribute further to our understanding of the constitution and foundation of non-institutional religion. Let me now finish off by pointing out three further issues that deserve the attention of the sociology of non-institutional religion, namely religious *bricolage*, modes of belief, and the internet.

Sociologists of religion have so far been satisfied to state *that* non-institutional religion is characterized by religious *bricolage*, but we still do not know *how* it works exactly, what kinds of sources can be used as building blocks, and what types of *bricolage* there are. It is well-known that spontaneous religion and dis-embedded elements from institutional religion are used as building blocks for religious bricolage, but a wide range of other "special things" (Taves 2009) can be used as well. A particularly important

group of special things is constituted by revered fictional books and films (e.g., Possamai 2005; 2012). Though fandom itself is not religion, it can be a source for religious *bricolage*, as in the case of Jediism which has arisen as a convergence of New Age religion and *Star Wars* fandom (Davidsen 2011).

Religious *bricolage* can take place in various ways and on various levels. A first distinction can be made between *combinatory bricolage*, i.e. an individual's parallel engagement in different practices and traditions, and *integrationist bricolage*, where the bits and pieces are blended into a new whole. Integrationist bricolage can be analysed both on a conceptual level and on the level of ideology or local tradition. On the conceptual level, Olav Hammer (2001; 2008) has demonstrated how similar concepts can be equated through the process of "synomynization" (e.g., *prana*, *ki*, and the *odic* force are all "the same"), and how a concept can be reinterpreted or "domesticated" when dis-embedded from one context and re-embedded into another (e.g., reincarnation, which became a positive concept in the West). I have myself analysed the "identity *bricolage*" of contemporary, self-identified Elves as an example of "conceptual blending" (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002; cf. Davidsen, in preparation).

On the level of ideology, we can distinguish between different forms of "syncretism" depending on the relative input strength of the combined traditions. There exist at least three types, namely historical harmonization, ideological framing, and what Egil Asprem has called "programmatic syncretism" (2007), the last two corresponding to domestication and synonymization on the scale of ideology. While truly systematic ideological *bricolage* is possible only within institutional religion, "syncretic" religious organizations like the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn have made a large number of synonymizations and domestications on the conceptual level available also for non-institutional religious *bricoleurs*.

A second issue that deserves closer scrutiny is the different *modes* that non-institutional religious action and cognition can take. Non-institutional religion is often casual, playful, or even ironic, rather than serious and formal. Part of the field consists of "entertainment cults" (Possamai 2007) and "invented religions" (Cusack 2010). It can seem difficult to draw the line between religion and non-religion under such circumstances, especially when many non-institutional religious actors also turn out to have no firm beliefs, but only "hunches" (cf. McCutcheon 2012). These conditions are no different from institutional religion, however, and what McCutcheon calls religious hunches are nothing but the (immediate) beliefs that form

the core of religion and upon which religious action is based (cf. Luhrmann 1989, 318). The public credal assertions that most people consider "beliefs" actually have more the character of rationalizations and legitimizations. The distinction between immediate belief and after-the-fact rationalization is crucial, especially because many non-institutional religious ideas and practices possess less symbolic capital than institutional religion, and many religionists will therefore be embarrassed about their engagement and tend to tell the sociologist, say, that they only read horoscopes for entertainment, or do not really think they can communicate with their deceased mother. We should be equally careful not to "under-interpret" such defensive assertions as unbelief and not to "over-interpret" credal assertions of such ironical groups as the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster as belief. That said, it is worth investigating whether the binary distinction between belief and unbelief that I draw up here can be developed into a typology of "belief modes," ranging from "play" to "conviction," a typology that might also enable the study of how and when individuals slide from one mode to the other.

Finally, the internet deserves special attention. Since the mid-1990s, the internet has played a crucial role in the mobilization of non-institutional religion—leading, for instance, to the ten-doubling of the number of neo-pagans during the 1990s (Lewis 2007) and to the rise of a "long tail" of small and specialized groups and networks, enabling a hitherto unknown variety of forms of non-institutional religious life. It has had many other effects as well, that we are only now beginning to understand. In a groundbreaking study, Douglas Cowen (2005) pointed out that the internet can lead both to homogenization, because people plagiarize each other's websites, and to creative "open access religions," in which new traditions are built in a co-operative, Wikipedia-like way.

How do we go about pursuing these issues? Quantitative studies and advanced statistics will obviously not do, but neither will interviews, for it is not people's rationalization of their religious activity that we are after, but the patterns of that activity itself. There is only one way to get at that, and that is field-work. Since we want to shed light on theoretical issues (religious *bricolage*, the difference between play and religion, the impact of the internet, and many more) our field-work needs furthermore to be armed to the teeth with theory. This should not only be sociological (and anthropological) theory. The sociology of non-institutional religion has much to gain by engaging also (critically) with the cognitive study of religion. We do not have to take over the cognitive approach completely, of

course, but should use it as one "domesticated" building block, among others, in our own theoretical bricolage.

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