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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This English translation has not been published in printed form/Cette traduction anglaise n'a pas été publiée sous forme imprimée.

- 1 Observing that sacredness belongs to a bygone world, Paul Ricoeur (1974: 71) wrote that "sacredness is archaic". It might therefore appear somewhat foolhardy to engage *Questions de Communication* in a debate that is enclosed in the past, and one that is even out of time. Discussion would be over, and the subject buttoned up – time for us to move on. Yet sacredness is still surprisingly topical. A few years ago it was even on display in the temple of modern and avant-garde creation of the Pompidou Centre in Paris<sup>1</sup>:

"Sacredness, whatever anyone may say about it, is still alive and well, if we are to go by the places and moments that are still qualified as being sacred, from New York to Beijing. The ever-youthful monster – with a woman's bust, a lion's body and an eagle's wings – is still ready to attack. By not daring to face up to it, many of our contemporaries have struck it off their agendas and, to leave them free to go about their own business, go about saying that it is a sphinx that has had its day. This is an unwise attitude to adopt – the past has a habit of catching up with us." (Debray, 2011: 12)

- 2 Sacredness is not tied to an era or a place, nor is it a remnant of the proclaimed death of God or a reminiscence of a century of secularisation; it is indeed an ever-constant notion that has never ceased to be alive, keeping itself up to date by its very permanence.

## The empowerment of sacredness

- 3 We do, however, need to defend the pertinence of sacredness, since we live in a desacralised world, a world plunged in a space that lacks powerful symbols and is above all commercial – it either instrumentalises people as consumers (Stiegler, 2005), or imposes science and technology as the dominant modes of existing in the world: “Our modernity has become what it is by moving away from the sacred cosmos” (Ricoeur, 1974: 70). It is a sign of the times – the hold religion has on western society has probably never been so weak. But thinking that the notion of sacredness has lost any of its intensity with the dilution of what is religious and falling attendance at services and places of worship and prayer would mean indefectibly associating sacredness with religion.
- 4 The nodal issue to consider is, initially, whether sacredness may reasonably have an existence, and even some kind of viability, outside religion, in which some people are tempted to enclose it. A good many authors have defended the idea that sacredness, by constituting the very essence of religion, as both its centre and its point of escape, is subordinate to it. In a word, that sacredness proceeds from religion. One of the chapters in the interesting dialogue between Philippe Breton and David Le Breton in their work entitled *Le Silence and la Parole* (2009) reveals this divide in the manner of approaching sacredness. For David Le Breton, sacredness is situated beyond the sphere of religiousness. He holds that it is the initial, almost primordial, emotion pushing mankind to refer to God or the gods, or to feel a sense of transcendence in the presence of a being or an event without referring to it as a deity. “Sacredness reflects a feeling of transcendence when faced with the world – a dazzling mountain view, the sea, the face of a child, the beauty of a text or a gesture, love. That constitutes sacredness: it is raw material, matter that has not yet been worked” (Breton, Le Breton, 2009: 76-77). This is the first sliding away or detachment, the first signs of the emancipation of sacredness from religiousness, in a context of its own.
- 5 For his part, Philippe Breton holds that sacredness cannot claim any anteriority since it is from the outset produced within the sphere of religion and its institutions. This view is however open to objections of several kinds. Although sacredness is a fully participant element of religion, there are no grounds for stating that it is a constituent – or even exclusive – element on a par with Revelation, monotheism, the clergy, dogma or Scripture. While these elements are the foundation of religion, actual sacredness is without a doubt anterior to the idea of a single god. The notion of religion, what Régis Debray describes as an “ethnocentric trompe-l’œil”, acts like a veil that prevents us from seeing the depth of the epistemological field of sacredness, far beyond the space occupied by religion. What we broadly refer to as religion appeared at the earliest in about the third or second millennium before the Common Era, whereas traces of rituals surrounding prehistoric burial places attest to a much more ancient expression of sacredness. This has existed or *manifested itself* (*infra* Ricoeur, Eliade), if this term is preferable, ever since mankind has felt an attraction to, if not a belief in, a supernatural dimension, ever since mankind began to superpose a spiritual world and a visible world, seeking to forge a link between the real and the immaterial. Wanting to entirely contain (in both senses of the word – both *surround* and *hold*) sacredness in religion would be tantamount to disregarding – or worse, denying – that other forms of spirituality have been in existence for longer than religions, and that it is in their nature to express

themselves and develop on the fringes of religiousness. Thus sacredness exists prior to, different from, and elsewhere than in religion, which is a legal and political term designating the institutionalisation or the officialised nature of a spiritual practice. Far from reserving for itself any exclusivity with regard to what is sacred, religion is merely its administrative arm, the codification system which defines it and manages it in clearly defined historic and spatial circumstances.

- 6 If sacredness both precedes and extends beyond religion in terms of time and space, it is therefore possible to admit the possibility of non-religious or para-religious experiences of sacredness which are no less sacred than those in a religious context. Such experiences may be strongly marked by a sentiment of efficacy, but they do not involve a revealed deity. *Hyper-modern, hyper-industrial* (Stiegler, 2004) Western society, at the same time superlative and lacking in markers (Lipovetsky, Charles, 2004), constantly suspected or deliberately accused of losing its values (and implicitly its moral foundations), shows the scope of this displacement of sacredness within the space of barely a few decades, in an age where reference is freely made to secularisation and the end or the disappearance of religions, but not of beliefs or of transcendence, in all its new or reworked forms: “What basically masks Weber’s blinding expression ‘the disenchantment of the world’ is the fact that any disenchantment in one imagined field – such as politics and its present-day utopias – gives rise to the re-enchantment of another field; in our case, this is our heritage, our memories and our identities, whether they be ethnic or religious” (Debray, 2006: 17-18). When the Churches lent their weight to socio-political systems, under theocratic regimes or, in France, before the separation of Church and State in 1905, the religious institution made sacredness *the norm* by giving it both its form and its content. With the disappearance of this monopoly over sacredness, social life re-appropriated the notion, applying it to other totally human, social objects (Rivière, Piette, 1990). Thus the scope of the extension of the sphere of sacredness is prepared in society in general, and in the sphere of communication in particular. Each era forges its own version of what is sacred according to its *climate* and its trajectory, as if, spiritual sensitivity also abhorring a vacuum, one form of sacredness must necessarily take the place of a preceding form. Not only may sacredness be revealed in the religious sphere, in terms of privation; it may also match its contrary and uphold the oxymoron of a “profane sacredness” (Debray, 2006) or a “lay sacredness” (Poulat, 2006).
- 7 If we take this characteristic so resolutely out of the sphere of religion in order to consider it in its own light rather than in the shadow of anything else, it is necessary to redefine the relationship of researchers with the object of their research and the construction of that relationship. By making sacredness proceed from religion, and from religion alone, researchers interested in the subject see the construction of the object of their study escape them to a large extent, if not totally, since it is initially questioned and delimited elsewhere than in the laboratory, and in other ways: religious texts, exegesis, words used in an ecclesial context, etc. Under these conditions, researchers take hold of a notion rather than receiving it from the outside; the notion is already determined and defined, and sometimes even comes with warnings for its use. If it is true that the sacred nature of a thing, in terms of morphology, cannot come from an outside – for instance, divine – source, then the notion of sacredness cannot be imposed on researchers from outside either – in this case by a religious institution already fully armed with its principles and its logic. Sacredness is not a given quality which has *always been there*. Before any other consideration, it is the mark of humanness, the mark of mankind, in the

anthropological sense, finding its sovereignty in the face of the institutional word, which invests a particular object, place, practice, person, etc with sacredness as soon as the place and the means of mediating experiences are recognised, in a form of transcendence: “It is man, and man alone, who constitutes the measure of the sacredness of beings and things, because he is the agent of their possible sacralisation” (Meslin, 1988: 94). A thing is sacred not because of its specific nature or its essence, because it is always of the same nature as the other realities of the world. It does not contain anything absolute, but it presents a value in the use that may be made of it for a specific purpose.

- 8 On the contrary, the great lability of sacredness and the changing diversity of the signifiers with which it is invested oppose attempts to bring about its substantialisation; one of these – and certainly not the least, according to Georges Bataille (1970) – is Christianity. Bataille believes that this characteristic is not a substantial reality that can stand the test of time but rather, in more abstract terms, a very special instant found at random during research. Starting out from this de-substantialisation, Bataille traces a path which researchers in information and communication sciences (ICS) could adopt. “Such a separation of sacredness and transcendent substance suddenly opens up a whole new field [...] for the agitation which has taken hold of the living human mind. Because if the sphere of sacredness is accessible, there can be no question of this spirit not reaching beyond the boundaries” (*ibid.*: 563). It is up to the ICS to reach beyond the boundaries formerly reserved for religions and to make use of their entitlement to observe, both within and beyond the movements of secularisation, how sacredness is changing in order to take on new significant forms and figurative characteristics, becoming materialised and entering the arena of communication. We shall take care, subsequently, to define the term *figurative*, which inspires this dossier, under the title of “figures of sacredness”. A few more details are nevertheless required.
- 9 Very early on, authors from different horizons such as Georges Bataille considered sacredness without necessarily basing it on religion, while others such as the anthropologist of religions Michel Meslin allowed a glimpse of the possibility of its extension beyond the sphere of religion without exploring these new paths. Even Mircea Eliade (1969: 12) in *La Nostalgie des Origines* noted that there are a “certain number of phenomena apparently not of a religious nature in which we may detect the trace of new, original overlaps of sacredness”.
- 10 At the opposite end of the scale to this epistemological prudence, authors such as the ethnologist and writer Michel Leiris (1938) at an equally early stage admitted as an evidence that sacredness could exist elsewhere than in the sphere of religion and set to work to note its manifestations, sometimes in an extremely personal and objective manner, in social, secular life. Between these two intellectual postures, on the one hand an extension of the sphere of sacredness mainly considered as an unexperimented eventuality, and on the other the observation that sacredness does indeed spread into the profane social world, very few analyses have been carried out on the dynamic of sacredness, taking it out of the sphere of religion and circulating it.
- 11 We feel, however, that what is at stake is essential since this displacement is not without consequences or effects, both epistemological for the observer and semantic for the notion itself. Rendering the displacement of sacredness intelligible calls for a prior renewal of methodological tools, as these can no longer be borrowed from anthropology alone. “When we learn to observe sacredness outside established religions, the meaning of what is sacred, or more exactly the meaning of the experience of what is sacred, is

multiple” (Jeffrey, 1998: 25). Denis Jeffrey adds that it “is important, in the post-modern perspective, to develop theoretical tools” (*ibid.*).

- 12 The work of providing methodological tools for following the complex evolution of sacredness has never yet been carried out truly systematically in the same way as Albert Piette (2003) was able to do for secular religions in order to consider them outside the anthropology of established religions. The “theory of displacement in the experience of sacredness” (Lemieux, Milot, 1986) which emerged in Canada in the mid-1980s was one of the first attempts to define a theoretical framework in order to report on the experience of sacredness outside the boundaries of established religion.
- 13 In fact, the proposed methodological approach does not truly break with the religious nature of sacredness in as much as, in order to follow its trace, displacement theory supposes an extensive definition of religion and begins by translating in terms of religiousness the activities of everyday life (gardening, sport, entertainment, etc) in which sacredness might be found. Although it is not bound up in monotheism, sacredness nevertheless continues to be perceived and interpreted against a background of religiousness, and the new secular forms of religiousness have taken the place of the established religions.

## In favour of a “reversed front” approach

- 14 Let us consider for a moment the hypothesis of sacredness proceeding exclusively from religion, including the new forms of secular religiousness, with no real possibility of extracting it. In this case, either its study is reduced to the perimeter of religiousness, which would be tantamount to a theology in which the human and social sciences (HSS) have no real place, or it attempts to test the operability of sacredness outside the perimeter of religiousness but falls beneath a shadow which conditions the view and limits the object. Altered and perhaps even damaged forms of sacredness, lodged in the folds of social life, like as many elements presenting themselves as necessary common characteristics and factual similarities with the sacredness of religiousness, which remains, in the final analysis, the only true reference for measuring the degree of sacredness of anything.
- 15 This approach, based on homology and, *in fine*, on homologation with the paragon of the religiousness of sacredness, hinders rather than enlightens the analysis of the phenomenon. It contains its own limits since, just as something to be compared can be confused or even correspond exactly with the thing it is being compared with, this metaphorical play *de facto* sets up an essential separation between the model for the religious aspect of sacredness and the person, object or place noted for their resemblances, at the risk of not recognising their forms or their specific meanings. The result of attempting to become immersed in contemporary society and holding to the mimetic labelling of sacredness and religiousness is that it is never possible to discover any more than snippets or parts of a *quasi-sacredness*. There is then an overpowering feeling that the only changes possible are those in the register of inevitable incompleteness and differentness, with no hope of ever encountering *sacredness* in its original form anywhere other than in religion itself.
- 16 Thus we believe we are condemned to recognise it only differentially, rather than essentially. The temptation of finding some kind of legitimacy in referring to sacredness

would then consist of instituting or converting its possible spheres of expression such as sport, science, politics, music, etc into secular religions or into “quasi-religions”<sup>2</sup>, to use the expression coined by Paul Tillich (1963), thereby prolonging the pretence of the *almost*, the atrocity of which Roland Barthes emphasises in *La Chambre Claire* (1980), with reference to the disappointment it creates. In a different register, Christian Bromberger (1996) has also faced up to the question of the relationship between his research topic, the ethnological observations of football passions and the typical ideal of religious ritual. Seeking to adopt a fair distance, he reaches the conclusion that there is necessarily a *significant gap*: “In the final analysis, it is not so much a matter of recognising the general similarities and convergences but rather the transfers, processes of appropriation, inversions, distancing, ruptures, in a word a system of significant gaps which tells us something about the specific nature of the phenomenon under our consideration” (*ibid.*: 317). This necessary detachment from a model changes the way of considering sacredness and the forms of sacredness which we attempt to discover in their context in the world. It cannot be reduced to a deteriorated form in as much as, detached from the reference point of overweening religiousness, its evaluation is no longer based on a logic that is gradual (in relation to religious sacredness) but rather on one that is based on category: a thing is sacred *because of its own qualities* and no longer *in relation to* religiousness.

- 17 Extracting sacredness from the religious gangue in which it has been imprisoned for several centuries constitutes a postulate and calls for a clear-cut posture in order to gain independence from religiousness. However, after such a long period of accretion, even if the separation is pronounced epistemologically, the ascendance of religiousness still works to maintain its position in the approach to sacredness, at least in a residual form. That is why its true emancipation from the reference point or from the religious reference consists of adopting Albert Piette’s reversed front approach: turning its position around, considering it in first position, with religion relegated to second place. To avoid his work on forms of secular religiousness being limited by the narrow path of the permanent analogy with religiousness, Albert Piette (2003) has freed himself from religion-based approach, i.e. an approach consisting of finding something religious in the secular or of considering the secular as if it were something religious. What he calls the “incongruous viewpoint” is in fact a reversal of the epistemological viewpoint. Instead of starting out from a definition of religion in order to then detect in the secular the presence or emergence of elements which are characteristic of religiousness, he takes as his starting point the secular act, released from any *a priori* religious interpretation, to then go on to move, with new methodological and theoretical tools, towards religious activity: “Secular activity does not constitute for us the result of a process of the deterioration or the re-composition of religiousness, but rather an analytical springboard for studying religion” (*ibid.*: 76). Researchers in HSS have much to gain, scientifically, from detaching themselves from established religions. It enables them to construct the object of their study separate from words used in an ecclesial context that claim to be at the origin of the subject and, by doing so, they avoid restricting themselves to an overly monotheistic and clear-cut vision of sacredness.
- 18 It will have been understood that sacredness presents itself as a subject for scientific study is as much as – and even more on condition that – it detaches itself from religion and keeps its distance. If it is confined within religiousness, sacredness only appears in everyday life as a kind of mime or parody of an artifice of production that is all the more colourful for being hollow, and all the brighter for being void of meaning and



transcendence. The significant gap proposed by Christian Bromberger sets up an initial distance that allows us to consider sacredness with a greater degree of autonomy while still giving it meaning through a system of referrals to religiousness that are more complex than the analogy. At another degree of distancing, the reversal of perspective operated by Albert Piette allows us to look at sacredness as a syncretic construction. We must therefore take sacredness as our starting point, but what is it exactly?

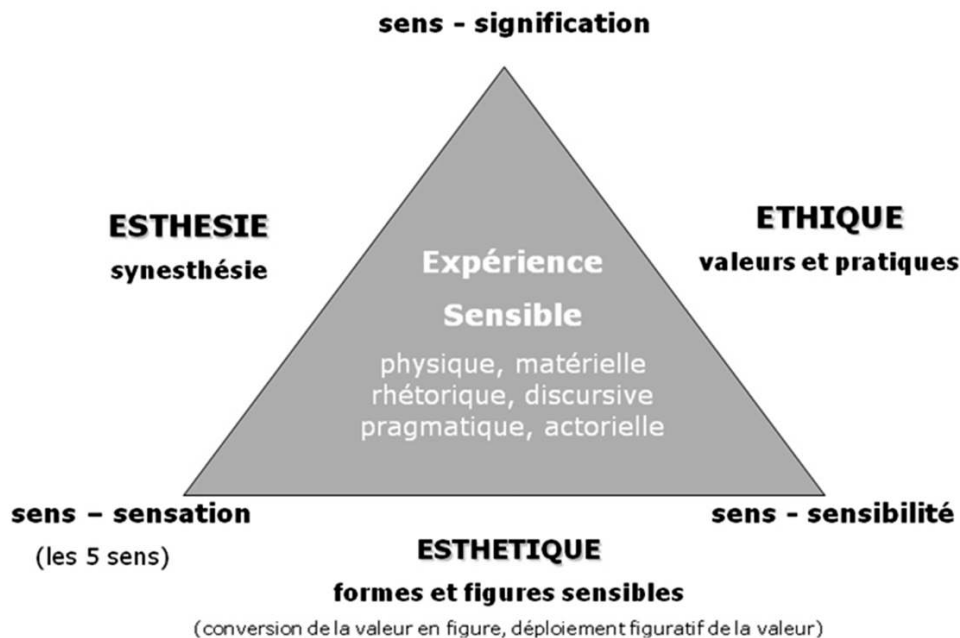
- 19 Since its noted return to the social scene (Ferrarotti, 1993) and to the media<sup>3</sup>, the word “sacred” has imperceptibly infused and percolated into the discourse of common meaning, to the point of being regularly used in everyday speech, mainly in a metaphorical fashion. While the metaphor retains all its strength of production of meaning, the passage from an adjective (“sacred”) used to designate without even thinking about it an object, an individual, or a place invested with that property, to a noun (“sacredness”), invented in the twentieth century to designate that which is sacred as the object of thinking, raises a number of epistemological difficulties. We need to stop a moment to take a look at them.
- 20 Jean-Jacques Wunenburger (2009) emphasises that the diversity of the concepts of sacredness which have multiplied in the HSS in the past century bears witness to the difficulty in grasping a subjective and objective reality conceptually, because it already proceeds from a complex experience of sensitivity involving metaphysical and spiritual beliefs. To add to the complexity, the approach to sacredness proves to be fairly extensively conditioned by the concepts to which it is linked (religion, sanctity, purity, transcendence, etc) and by those to which it is placed in opposition (profane, ordinary, impure, etc), as well as by the analytical method adopted.

## Sensitivity and sacredness

- 21 This dossier proposes taking a first look at the de-territorialisation of sacredness using an approach inspired by socio-semiotics in order to understand the re-composition of the ways it is expressed and its significant forms. From our point of view, because of the scope of this extension, it makes sense to replace sacredness in the context of the sensory experience (Boutaud, Veron, 2007) in which the senses are manifested in three different registers: the registers of aesthesia, aesthetic and ethic. From the outset we should note that the assonance of the terms is not here an indication of a taste for anaphora or paronomasia but reflects above all the unity of the sensory world and solidarity which inter-defines the terms by their contiguity and their complementarity. *Aesthesia* refers to feelings, perceptions, sensory manifestations which a semiotic obedience – Peirce, to be exact – considers as occupying first place in the timeframe of the experience; the *aesthetic* aspect refers to the forms of expression and representation which reveal the social and symbolic forms invested in sacredness; the *ethical* aspect refers to the axiology of sacredness, to its system of values in combination with practices which are globally the result of a type of behaviour – an *ethos* – or a way of living which are attached to it and which embody it.



TABLE 1. The sensory trinity.



- 22 Within the limits of our approach, we do indeed need to progress by degrees, starting by locating sacredness in the sensorial trinity, as we conceive it, between aesthesia, aesthetics and ethics, i.e. between sensations, sensitivity and significance; the *aesthetic*, sensory dimension, may be the origin of this sensory deployment, but this is not systematically so. It would be perfectly valid to imagine a reverse process with the adoption of a relational ethic in respect of sacredness attached to values and a catechism even before it is appropriated – let alone incorporated – on the aesthetic level.
- 23 In aesthesia there is sensation, in aesthetics a motif, and in ethics a relationship. We may refine this further:
1. Aesthesia, or rather synaesthesia, which Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) recalls as being the rule. From the outset, the senses cooperate and manifest themselves in their association, their correspondence. What is needed is therefore work to discretise and isolate one dominant sensory manifestation among the others. In the figurative register, we know that, from this level of sensory perception onwards, every basic sensation gives rise to an image and a sensorial form which prefigure the very process of iconising the sensation. All the senses are of course mobilised in the sensory relationship with the sacred; sacredness confers on them a degree of particular intensity, as will appear in all the context of this dossier. The question will even be extended, here, to the capacity to render, in the image and the figuration of sacredness, the form and the force of the sensations felt in the direct experience of sacredness.
  2. In terms of communication, the *aesthetic* dimension of sacredness may be understood, fundamentally, as the conversion of this value of sacredness, the ontology of sacredness (in terms of content), into a figure or a figurative manifestation of sacredness (in terms of expression and representation). That is why the aesthetic aspect involves sensory forms and figures, in all their figurative extension (texts, objects, devices, spaces, situations, action modes, etc), while the ethical aspect operates on the discourse, the values and the methods firmly attached to that which is sacred. Aesthetics provides a mediating level of sacredness,

converting immaterial sensations and abstract values into motifs. As a space for figurative mediation, which by definition materialises these abstract, immaterial dimensions, the aesthetic register constitutes the perfect level for communication.

3. The ethical aspect invokes sacredness not only as a value, but also as an axiology, i.e. a system of values from which emerge transcendence, self-transcendence, commitment, the experience of otherness, etc. Relational ethics – with oneself and between oneself and other people – on the basis of sacredness; practical ethics, materialising the relationship with that which is sacred through a bodily *hexis*, support, gestures, rituals, truly expressive manifestations of sacredness. All that is part of its *figuration* in the various contexts where we shall soon apprehend it. Behind the continuity and the contiguity of *aesthesia*, *aesthetics* and *ethics*, behind the assonance and the paronomastic effect, it is the sensory unity of sacredness which is condensed, manifesting the interrelationships between its constitutive dimensions.
- 24 If, when we consider the sensory order, synaesthesia is the rule, then iconicity is the key. That is why this dossier on sacredness focuses on the *figure* and the *figurative*, which should be envisaged at three broad complementary levels:
- the *iconic or visual level*, often translated as the *image* of sacredness, the possibility of putting it in image form, as here in this dossier, through pictorial expression, art photography and advertising images;
  - the truly *figurative level*, meaning where semiotics has recently defined its field of extension (Fontanille, 2007), sensations materialised by experience up to the *ethos* and the culture which, in the present case, affect by degrees the production and reception of sacredness. Much more than a visual aid, the figurative space of sacredness is deployed through messages of all kinds, but also through objects, devices, displays and actions which stage sacredness in both the religious space and the profane space. In this respect, how can we not establish mental passageways between the sacred space of churches and the sacralised image of certain commercial spaces – the new temples devoted to brand names – through a full and complex staging of all the expressive forms of sacredness (Boutaud, Dufour, 2012);
  - at a third level, the figurative as a *stabilised motif* of the mental representation of sacredness, with stable, constant iconised traits. This means that outside the contextual variations to which sacredness is subject, sensory properties are maintained and are identifiable as the distinctive traits of the essence of sacredness and its recognition. Let us think for a moment of a figurative motif such as *separation*, for which Émile Durkheim (1924) indicated one of its dominant traits as being its *intensity* or hyperaesthesia; if this is true, the subject then becomes aware of a supra-sensory reality which presents itself in a different way, in a different light, with particular strength and energy; or again *axialisation*, which places sacredness on a horizontal axis as occupying a separate, outside (*sacer*) place and on a vertical axis as occupying a superior place, or the representation of sacredness as a *syncretic figure* which works the image of a unified whole that is suddenly animated by balanced, clear traits.
- 25 In taking this further, we need to apprehend the displacement of sacredness, as a figurative space, to its social figuration, with the entrance of the subject onto the stage, the stage effects of sacredness: the codes, rites, social ceremonies, all the liturgy surrounding sacralised representation and practices. We have to incorporate in this dramaturgy of sacredness, as *stage* and *narrative* (Goffman, 1974; Ricoeur, 1983), as we shall see in the articles in this dossier, what proceeds from – to express it in a pompous fashion – a semiogenesis of sensitivity: a *prefiguration* of the relationship with sacredness; a *configuration* of the sacred space or arrangement, so as to incorporate and mobilise

objects and stakeholders; because we will not be able to stop at that point, the *performance* of sacredness which supposes the entrance of the players onto the stage, with their power of *figuration* to give strength and vigour to that which is sacred, in forms that are not made routine but are ritualised and codified.

## The essence and strength of sacredness

- 26 An element is sacred for a social group because it has been designated as such in advance by a body authorised to do so: denomination, clergy or order, congregation, etc. But, separate from and prior to any outside institutional designation, how does an individual gain access to sacredness by his own efforts, how does he become aware that he is in the presence of something sacred, and how does he experience it directly? This question leads us to attempt to determine the main features which truly characterise sacredness, to give sacredness content.
- 27 The phenomenological description of this proposed by Rudolf Otto (1917) in his pioneering work in terms of strength, power and force pointed even at that early stage to the modalities of perception being located far beyond language and *logos*, at the level of emotions and affects. Sacredness is not to be read or deciphered like a text, on the surface of the things to which it applies. Firstly, it offers itself as an emotion that is felt intimately and intensely. In his study on the phenomenology of sacredness, Paul Ricoeur (1974) also speaks of it as a strength, *the efficacy par excellence* whose circulation does not use the articulation of meaning. Although he retains a degree of critical distance from Rudolf Otto, whom he criticises mainly for his insistence on the irrationality of sacredness, Paul Ricoeur (*ibid.*: 57) agrees that human experience of sacredness does not fall within the category of proclamation, transmission or interpretation: “In my opinion, the characteristics of sacredness do not lie in a proclamatory hermeneutic, but are part of what I would like to call a manifestational phenomenology”. The expression “manifests itself” which is frequently used in reference to the modalities of the appearance of sacredness gives a fair indication that it escapes the conventional verbal, discursive register, apparently foiling any conventional communicational approach.
- 28 If sacredness is not of the same order as speech, if it may be apprehended in the form of energy or force, it would be possible for it to manifest itself in the sensory register, of which Mircea Eliade (1954: 70-71) has long noted the importance in the history or religions and beliefs: “There is no religious experience without the intermediary of the senses [...]. In other words, everywhere throughout the religious history of mankind, sensory activity has been given value as a means of participating in that which is sacred and attaining the divine”. Mircea Eliade (*ibid.*: 78) has taken a particular interest in shamanic initiation rites, the process of which, with its tests, produces a change in the sensory scheme of the individual selected, a qualitative transformation of his sensory experience which creates for him a new sensitivity: “We could almost say that, as a result of all these tests, the sensory activity of the ‘elect’ tends to become a hierophany: sacredness manifests itself through the strangely sharpened senses of the shaman.”
- 29 ICS researchers, and HSS researchers more generally, appear to be helpless when faced with this diffuse, inarticulate force. At this initial stage of its manifestation, sacredness cannot be apprehended and interpreted directly. It remains accessible solely through the account given by the person who has a synaesthetic experience of it, placing researchers

in the same position as a psychoanalyst in grasping the topic: “In the same way as we are only able to know what a dreamed dream is from what the dreamer recounts when awake, we are only able to know sacredness through the person defining it” (Meslin, 1988: 63). The likening of dreaming to sacredness as two objects that are resolutely separate from their respective observers may be enriched by the contribution of Paul Ricoeur (1965). Since a dream cannot be interpreted directly, it is in fact the discourse of the dreamer which is interpreted by the analyst, thereby effecting a displacement of sense. In fact, the analyst replaces the dream by the reported discourse of the dream, constituting the primitive speech of that desire, which the desire would utter in a non-constricted prosopopoeia. It remains to be seen whether it is possible to draw the same conclusions from an eye-witness account given by a mystic as from an oneiric narrative, and to state that sacredness, like dreaming, is also close to language since it can also be retold, analysed and interpreted. Paul Ricoeur seems to give an affirmative answer, since, postulating that speech is originally symbolic, he affirms that speech is always needed to take up the world and turn it into a hierophany. Here again, these are points on which our dossier will shed light indirectly.

- 30 Leaving aside this question for the moment, let us return to two opening remarks, this time with a closer link to the coming articles. Above all, sacredness leads to a rupture or, at the very least, a change in degree. Perceiving sacredness, even before its content is known, consists of perceiving a break in the *continuum* of sensory reality to such an extent that the very idea of a threshold or frontier transpires as a necessary condition for the manifestation of sacredness. Indeed it corresponds to a type of both perception and conception of a reality that is differentiated from the immediate reality in which we stand and which may be qualified, for the sake of convenience, as profane. Sacredness reveals itself clearly through a sign and then a process of differentiation. It cannot be confused with the everyday since, to use Rudolf Otto’s expression, it is deemed to be “*ganz andere*” – totally different. Sacredness implies in principle a division of the world in two, on either side of a clear demarcation line, a frontier, a sensory, symbolic *limes* rendered eminently perceptible to the individual, as evidenced by the personal memories of Michel Leiris (1938: 112-113): “Alongside the objects, the places, the spectacles which exercised such a special attraction on us (the attraction of anything which appears to be separate from the everyday world), I find the circumstances and facts more or less imponderable, giving me the acute perception of the existence of a separate kingdom, one that is reserved, totally unlike the remainder, and detached from the mass of the profane.” Set alongside the banal, the familiar, and the trivial, sacredness thus proffers the feeling of a reality that is completely separate, inaccessible, and perhaps even forbidden.
- 31 The second remark is that sacredness provokes the experience of a *reality of a different nature* to ordinary reality. To attempt to get a glimpse of what this “totally different” is made of, we must return to Rudolf Otto, for whom this dimension is indeed a force, but an ambivalent one. It imposes both fear and respect, terror and admiration (what he refers to as “*numinous*”) faced with something that escapes us and goes beyond us, something which we are unable to control, or even approach. For example, certain natural occurrences appear to be more capable than others of arousing this impression of strangeness and strength by their manifestation in either space or time, like the experience of the grandiose in the face of something infinitely powerful (such as a devastating weather phenomenon) or infinitely large (cosmology, geology, etc). Without taking the list any further, phenomena that are unusual because of their scale, their

intensity or their extent appear likely to bring out this feeling of the presence of sacredness in as much as they establish a certain specific relationship between the subject and the world, giving the subject an acute awareness of a mystery that escapes him or a incommensurable, crushing supra-sensory force.

- 32 By its ambivalent nature, sacredness may manifest itself in the form of feelings of jubilation when faced with the mysteries of life, but also, conversely, in times of distress, affliction and fear such as the experience when faced with death – *trauma*. The experience of fear, of an existential fear, is often accompanied by a resurgence of sacredness. David Le Breton (2000) stresses that subjectivity attains that which is sacred and intimate through the display of the self in an intense effort or a tangible risk which culminates in trial by ordeal. More often than not, the trial is unconsciously based on an intuition of destiny, with the player relying on a force beyond himself to decide on his future life. Exaltation of moments “saturated with being”, sacredness “often presenting itself by its proximity with death. Increasingly, the risk of losing one’s life thus presents itself as the most radical and quickest means of fabricating intimate sacredness, engendering individual metamorphosis” (*ibid.*: 179). David Le Breton pays particular attention to this upsurge in the borderline experiences of people directly facing death. Whether it is euphoric or dysphoric, and is caused by fear or fascination, this “totally different” nature is characterised by a type of dizziness which may make the person concerned feel a diffuse sentiment of plenitude, a sense of highlight with a taste of perfection, and personal transcendence: “Sacredness is a diffuse energy, of social and individual provenance, capable of vivifying an object, a period of time, a situation, a space, an individual, or an action” (*ibid.*: 180).
- 33 Having quickly laid down this phenomenological framework, some details are nevertheless necessary. Although sacredness proceeds from an energy, from the *totally different* which tears us away from ourselves and may plunge us into difficulties, not every interior experience of what surpasses us, not every personal transformation may be assimilated to sacredness, otherwise we would slide into a coarse form of ontology of what occurred and was created through such a dimension of the sensory and of being. For example, it would be wrong to think that every instance of rupture or intensification in one’s emotional life constituted an instance of sacredness. We are overcome by mindless fear when faced with serious danger to ourselves, but we are not able to accede to the consciousness of an invisible higher presence. Through these various sensory and sensorial modalities, *the experience of sacredness* – to take up the terms used by André Cognard in this dossier – presents itself, like a differential perception of the world and of beings, like a true ontological rupture, by which humans determine themselves in relation to an eminent otherness, which they simultaneously keep at a distance and try to get closer to it.
- 34 The contours of sacredness which separate it on its external frontiers from the domain of the profane, like its profound content, vary considerably in terms of space from one tradition of thinking and one culture to another (the uncleanness of pork, the sacrament of monogamous marriage, etc), and in terms of chronology, from the most distant ages to the most recent (the moon has long since ceased to be a hierophany in western society), to such an extent that its evident elasticity makes it impossible to determine it definitively. It does not impose the same common meaning on all, to such an extent that Jean-Jacques Wunenburger (2009) emphasises how much its cultural inscription therefore subjects it to profanation (sacrilege) as soon as something which is sacred for some

people is treated as an undifferentiated, banal reality by others. The profanation of heritage objects that are charged with a highly symbolic national identity occurs more particularly in wartime; during the First World War, Reims cathedral, the Gothic expression of French building genius, was deliberately targeted by German troops and was elevated by intellectuals and artists to the status of metonym of the martyrdom of France.

- 35 Man is the agent of the semantic production of sacredness; he is also the agent of the displacement or even suppression of his own community. He may have this virtue because of something or someone who has attributed it. In a word, mankind sacralises and desacralises at will according to the period, to sensitivities, to imagination, etc. It may desacralise – some may say profane – what it had previously sacralised just as surely as people burn what they have once adored. It is necessary to understand why, at a given moment in time, a society, a community, a group recognises something or someone as being sacred and why, at a different moment in time, the same group withdraws that quality. Sacredness therefore needs to be identified as such, and this is only done against a background of a meaning attached to it which has to be determined, shared, and passed on.
- 36 Sacredness is difficult to grasp and categorise in the *numinous* state; it presents firstly a shifting, labile, nomadic nature which Roger Bastide (1975) qualifies as “wild”, like raw material that has to be tamed. It is on the other hand possible to describe how sacredness manifests itself whenever its manifestations possess a shape, a structure, an articulation. Whatever its emotional and sensory strength, sacredness manages to reach beyond the primitive stage of affects and take on a tangible form in the sensory world. As a sort of energy which emerges from the individual’s awareness, sacredness, to be experienced to the full, needs projections on the basis of which a still diffuse feeling can convert itself into stabilised figures.

## The figurative space of sacredness

- 37 Mircea Eliade defined as *hierophany* everything by which sacredness shows itself, thereby opening the way for a phenomenology of sacredness. To return to more communicational considerations, we shall say that sacredness manages to embody itself, in the primary sense of “taking on a body” or becoming flesh, in objects and myths, to deploy itself through postures, games and rites, which place it in a figurative aesthetic. From our point of view, the point of view favoured in this dossier, the passage from aesthesia to aesthetics with regard to the experience of sacredness occurs in obedience to a form of anthropology and a semiotic of the sensory (Floch, 1995; Landowski, 2004; Boutaud, Veron, 2007) which cannot be reduced to a mere description of sensations. It presupposes a play of positions and relations between basic sensations, a first sensory contact with the world, and two other levels or poles of manifestation of the senses: firstly, the sensory or symbolic forms, to use the words of Ernst Cassirer, and secondly the literal sense, in terms of significance.
- 38 That is why we are presenting this dossier under the title of “Figures of Sacredness”. The notion of *figure* refers very directly to one of the keys to communication: the *figurative dimension* which offers sacredness a level of expression, through signs, objects, spaces, moments which take material form in gestures, rites and actions, and engage the players in performing situations. This figurative space is obviously condensed in the figure of



sacredness, which we consider to be a *sensory figure*, in as much as it proceeds, as we have just recalled, from the articulation of aesthesia, aesthetics and ethics. It will not have escaped the reader that we are referring to “figures” of sacredness in the plural, such that sacredness becomes the figure that encompasses other sensory figures which take advantage of the extension of the notion, in terms of social, mediated and of course commercial projection, commensurate with the infusion of this value in the circulation of discourses. Moving from one article to the next, the reader will not be surprised to see the scope of the extension available to sacredness, by the emancipation and empowerment of religiousness, reaching as far as effects of chiasmus between religiousness which is being desacralised and the temples of merchants who are sacralising brand names.

- 39 The wheel has turned since the time when sacredness was exclusively instituted by whichever religion imposed itself on the largest number and designated to that group, from its position of moral authority, some image of transcendence (statue, reliquary, place of an apparition, temple, etc). Meaning was then deployed on the basis of a spiritual value for the entire community. Régis Debray (2009: 61) even makes the assembled group the framework indispensable for the emergence of sacredness: “Wherever there is an ‘us’, there is a form of sacredness; and wherever ‘we’ fall apart, sacredness becomes more vague. In the same way as there can be no private language, sacredness cannot only involve a single person”.
- 40 If this perception, of a force or energy, requires deliberate action on the part of the consciousness, the recognition of its symbolic forms demands that the mind emancipate itself from just the immediate data of perception and know how to discover, beyond the actual meaning of the sacred objects, a second more figurative meaning. Thus seeing sacredness in a type of matter (fire, stone), a shape (cross, circle), a colour, or a place means that it is being treated as a sign of something else, its tangible part in this world being related to an immaterial part elsewhere. This capacity to understand the world symbolically, which is inherent in sacredness, is not fanciful or left to the individual’s free interpretation; rather, it is dependent on a syntax, the codification of a set of beliefs, a tradition, a culture in which the individual has been trained by teaching, or perhaps even by an initiation.
- 41 The consequence of this hermeneutic presupposition is that sacredness may be defined as both object and subject. It is an object in that it is based on the consecrated material realities to which meanings are attached by means of shared knowledge, transported by myths and borne by players. We find again here the foundations for the figurative space that is the key to our dossier. It is also subjective, as there is no obligation to acknowledge the sacredness of a reality if it is not laid down and proposed as such by one’s field of belief (Wunenburger, 2009). In short, sacredness truly takes on meaning in a culture in which it is objectivised, named, and socialised: “To decide on [its] reality, it is first necessary once more to discern its connotations by means of an analysis, since *a priori* no philosophical speculation can decide what should be sacred, as it is a cultural figure” (Vergote, 1974: 477).
- 42 A change or, at the very least, a profound mutation is occurring in the paradigm; what used to be a religious or doctrinal revelation shared collectively has become a social creation experienced by each individual separately. In an autobiographical text, Michel Leiris (1938: 102-103) wondered not what sacredness consisted of but what *his* sacredness consisted of: “What are the objects, the places, the circumstances which evoke in me that



combination of fear and attachment, that ambiguous attitude which determines the approach to a thing that is both attractive and dangerous, prestigious and rejected, that mixture of respect, desire and terror which may pass for the psychological sign of sacredness?" Sacredness has gradually detached itself from the major systems, firstly from religion, and continuing in its stride, from society, to break up in keeping with today's individualism: "[It] is a value and an individual projection, subjected as such to the random nature of personal singularities [...]; the feeling it engenders and its points of imputation are becoming diversified, crumbling as individual initiatives take on increasing importance" (Le Breton, 2000: 178). Like St Augustin who, despairing of finding God in the outside world, marvelled at finding God within himself, the place where sacredness is produced lies deep down within us, at the level of individual subjectivity, and it is discovered, Michel Leiris tells us, by means of "introspection and individual psychology".

- 43 Now that sacredness no longer emanates from a single source, by which we understand a religion or an order of some kind, a projective form of sacredness is being constituted on the fringes of established sacredness. This is not determined by a body of some kind, but results from an elective process on the part of scattered individuals, solitary subjects, to the stage where it takes on the extreme forms of idiosyncrasy:

"Sacredness is tending to become a subjective experience on the part of an individual who opens up to something other than himself; this may be defence of animal species threatened with extinction, ecology, the defence of prisoners, aid for the Third World ... Since everything appears to be able to become a place of sacredness, this may for some people take the form of sexuality or the use of drugs just as easily as the national flag or the *Corpus Christi* display may lose all sacred significance. It is true that this displacement of sacredness may be experienced as a violent reaction to a certain moral and political order, and to the over-technical nature of modern-day societies" (Meslin, 1988: 96).

- 44 This then opens up a vast field of possibilities for sacredness, which may become involved in an infinity of things, in the nooks and crannies of contemporary society, from the most immaterial to the most down-to-earth, from the most elevated to the most trivial: a football stadium, a film actor, a commercial brand name, the fatherland, a pet, etc. It seems that the sacred meaning has to extend its axiology from the values of spirituality and of the group, the place reserved for it by religion, to the oppositional values of triviality and individuality, in order to project itself into the entire semantic space. Drawing up a list of the sites, events, objects and circumstances to which this aspect refers in everyday life, Michel Leiris (1938) relates a number of memories from his childhood: the flat-brimmed top hat his father hung on the coat-stand when he came home from his office in the evening, and the Smith & Wesson handgun normally kept in the drawer of a bureau. The young Michel Leiris perceived the top hat as sacred because it symbolised paternal strength and authority, while the gun was the ultimate attribute of the person whose duty was to provide support for the household and protect it from thieves.

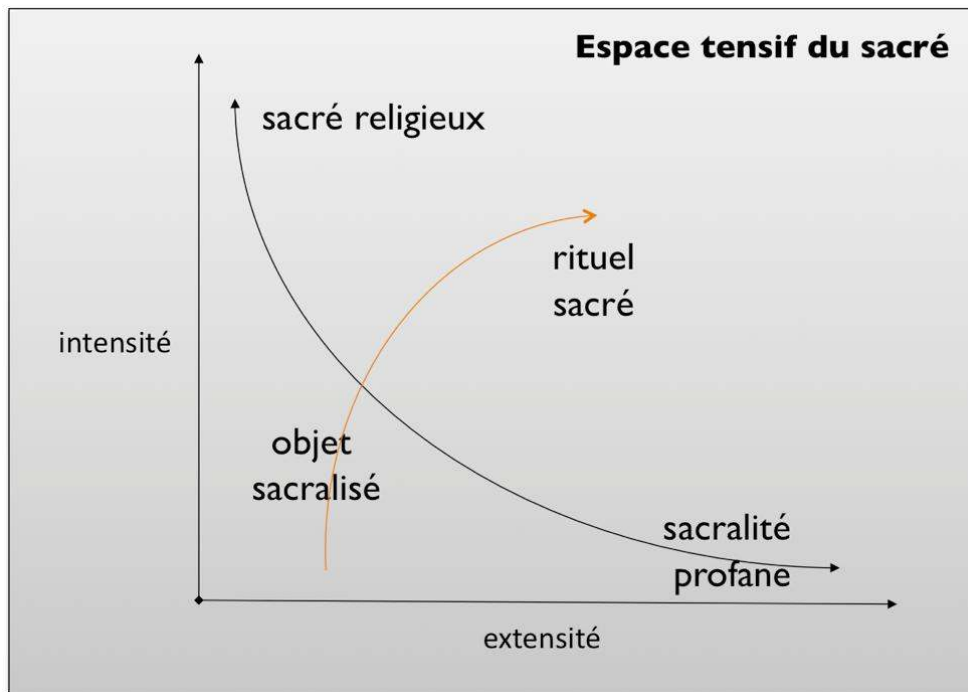
- 45 He also recalls the toilet where, as a child, he used to shut himself in with his brother every evening so that they could tell each other daily episodes of the stories they invented. In a radical seesaw effect, sacredness stretches from the trivial to the reality of places. Incongruity disappears if we accept that no element is sacred in itself, or worthless by nature. We shall therefore be forgiven for staying for some time in this

place, with the allegorical dimension adopted here by the inversion of the signal with regard to sacredness, without limiting its figurative and symbolic extension.

- 46 It does indeed seem to be interesting to understand how, and perhaps under what conditions, triviality may take on meaning because of the use to which it is put. Michel Leiris' toilet appeared to be a different place, not because of its function, but because of the symbolic distinction it enjoyed in everyday experience. It was there that the two children gave birth to whole series of legends and constructed their own Pantheon of imaginary heroes. It was there also that the magic and the embryo of the secret society which Michel Leiris formed with his brother began to take shape. The subsequent closure of the place placed the two children as far as possible on the edge of ordinary life and as separate as possible from the other people relegated to the outside. The place functioned according to a logic of being set apart, of a spatial and symbolic cut-off, as signified by one of the etymological origins of the word sacred, *sacer*, meaning "that which is separate", which applies not only to places but also to people (Agamben, 2012). Lastly, the two brothers experienced the feeling of fear, of an interdict or a risk connected with the experience of sacredness. Although the family knew that the two brothers were behind the closed door, they did not know what they were saying to each other: "There was something more or less forbidden in what we were doing, indeed something that brought down reprimands on us when we stayed inside for too long" (Leiris, 1938: 107).
- 47 This example shows fairly clearly that sacredness is, in fact, an emanation of the profane, even if it is a trivial or reviled source. Once it is identified, its significant and expressive mediation means that it is raised up as such by various rites or practices that specifically consecrate it, both the event and its advent. This statement will not fail to come up in the articles that follow. In the present case, we may observe a dislocation between the system and the hierarchy of moral values at work in a society and the possibility of adopting a sacred meaning. It is by no means necessary to be enhanced or magnified to become sacred. Our example, trivial as it is, is proof that even if it has no spiritual value, any object or place may become precious and sought after by virtue of a principle of inversion noted on a number of occasions where everything at the bottom of the heap passes to the top, where the last become the first, where what is derisory and worthless under a profane regime takes on an inestimable value in a sacred environment.

## Tensive space

- 48 In the light of all the dialectic and dialogic relations thus perceived within sacredness, what logic are we following in this dossier? Using *figures of sacredness* as a starting point, this logic may be displayed within a tensive diagram, of which it is precisely the heuristic and figurative result which is exploited by semiotics (Fontanille, Zilberberg, 1998).

**TABLE 2.** The tensive space of sacredness.

- 49 To follow the thread of this dossier, it is possible to envisage a hermeneutic arc, ranging from religious sacredness to secular sacredness. This is crossed by sacralised ritual, as it is constructed and developed, beyond an object considered in itself as being sacred and taken in isolation. The tensive space constructed in this way finds its most intense – and at the same time its least extensive – expression in religious sacredness or, in other words, the expression of something sacred attached to a religion. Conversely, on the extensity axis, are all the detached, deployed forms of secular sacredness highlighted and staged in the media or commercial space, like all the temples to consumerism raised for the adoration of brands. A space that is less sacred, in terms of religiousness, than sacralised, in profane mode, which loses in intensity and depth what it gains in extent, in the commercial or professional world. Between the two extremes, with opposite valencies, ritual, which is both a method and a procedure, a principle and a creative process, constitutes the figure which maintains sacredness in this tensive space, open more than ever to communication.
- 50 Thus two forms of sacredness are placed in opposition. On the “intensity” axis figure lies the sacredness of the religious type, as instituted by a founding act or a performative utterance of an authority which designates such objects, whether they are alive or not, but necessarily in limited numbers, as being sacred. Such an imposition of sacredness may indeed nourish the confusion as to the sacredness immanent in the object. On the “extensity” axis lies another form of sacredness, which we shall therefore call secular sacredness, characterised by its production by a process of sacralisation by which a civil society, a community or even merely a small group of individuals confers the quality of sacred on an *a priori* unlimited number of objects.
- 51 This tensive diagram illustrates and guides the logic of this dossier, following the trajectory of meaning, from religious sacredness towards profane sacredness, from the angle of the issue which interests us here as a priority: the *figurative* dimension of

sacredness, the possibility of showing it as a *figure*, of producing motifs and *figures* from the three fundamental viewpoints of the figurative already mentioned: *figures of sacredness* through its use in images and its plastic, iconic and visual expression; *figures of sacredness* through an enlarged figurative space, in the semiotic meaning, which composes with a sensory universe: objects, spaces, arrangements, situational frameworks, actor-related occurrences, etc – an entire visible, sensory theatre for the sacred; *figures of sacredness*, lastly, which no longer refer to a specific figurative space, for example a place of religious worship or a commercial temple, to use our polar examples once more, but concern the figurative properties which determine its representation, whatever context is adopted, of religiousness or the profane: thus the motifs of separation, transformation or transfiguration, axialisation with the dialectic of near and far, in both vertical mode (ascendant-descendant) and horizontal mode (interiority-exteriority).

52 Thus the force line of the dossier cannot escape the following issues:

- At the heart of religiousness, already, with David Douyère and the “figure of the Incarnation, the Christian dogma which states that God resides in Man”, claiming an evidently theological import, but an equally communicational import, for this figure.
- Next, in the steps of the pilgrims, come the “social figures”, as Agnès Bernard observes, marked by their diversity: farmers with weather-beaten faces, families dressed in their Sunday best, hikers in casual clothing, priests wearing vestments, trendy young people, “BCBG” people, “Goths”. So many “figures” *devoting themselves*, or even delivering themselves up freely to the exercise of pilgrimage as a “deliberate, autonomous, modulable, individual practice, a mobile, exceptional practice” (Hervieu-Léger, 2001: 107), which religious communities henceforth keep up as “events”. As at the Vassivière pilgrimage (Lower Auvergne [France]), “the diocese mediatises the event, turning it into a communication tool combining the sacred dimension of the pilgrimage with the profane dimension of entertainment”.
- The issue of the displacement of religiousness, for Maria Giulia Dondero, away from holy figures and towards the secular and its fashionable figures, but from the highly specific angle of one figurative aspect of sacredness: olfactory iconography. This is a two-fold challenge: how can olfaction and sacredness be figured within this sensory and sensorial motif? In this respect, photography “has tried to show that it could figure the ineffable, the invisible, the transcendent, and has itself been ‘put to the test’ by figuring religious topics and characters from pictorial tradition”. Beyond religiousness, however, it also makes it possible to envisage sacredness in figurative spaces such as the advertising image of perfume, which retains the trace of the clue offered by olfaction and its power.
- One stage further in this tensive displacement of the religious towards the profane takes us into what is commonly designated as a *corpus*, a single human group and a unified space where sacredness composes with the values of commitment and surpassing oneself. This is the air force, seen from the inside by Claudine Batazzi and Richard Delaye. Here again, but in different ways, is manifested the figure of incarnation: “Each officer must embody the convergence of a number of sacred notions: that of the Nation, which confers on him extraordinary powers connected with the monopoly of legitimate violence; that of the French Republic, which places its trust in him and delegates these powers to him; that of the institution of the air force, which gives him the means of implementing that violence in the name of the community; that of the mission, which transcends behaviours and thinking in action.”
- Continuing the movement towards profane spaces and sacredness, Pascal Lardellier opens the doors of a new temple – the Apple Store. Following on from Émile Durkheim (1912), he

stresses, all other things being equal, the importance that may be given to this retail space: “the materiality of the arrangement is in fact inseparable from its ceremonial finality. Sacredness – however ethereal or diffuse it may be – requires a spatiality of its own, symbolic but real, which makes it visible, legible, and tangible”. The Apple Store therefore gives a view of, and more importantly makes it possible to feel and enter, a figurative space which effects the “extension of the sphere of sacredness” in all its dimensions (objects, spaces, frameworks, gestures, rituals). It may even be conceived that “as we progress through the store, we pass through degrees which enable us to come closer both physically and symbolically to the mythical figure of the brand and its essence”.

- 53 To give this dossier its full substance, we also needed to gather first-hand evidence from a very figure of the sphere of sacredness: André Cognard. Meditations spoken out loud by a major eye-witness of life and the experience of sacredness. André Cognard is an aikido sensei with a worldwide reputation; he took over as head of the International Academy on the death of Sensei Kobayashi (1998). He is a trainer, author and thinker on aikido as a practice and an ethic, and on the wisdom attached to martial arts. Although experience of sacredness can only be personal, we must let ourselves be guided by the image, on “the path that leads to forgetting”. Forgetting oneself as a “feeling of existing which is not conditioned by anything, not even by one’s own future, and it is there, and only there, that I see sacredness”. This is perhaps the point where even the figurative itself disappears.

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## NOTES

1. An exhibition was held at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in August, entitled *Traces of Sacredness*: "At the end of the period which we are accustomed to calling the 'disenchantment of the world', one section of modern art has invented itself in a landscape of overturned beliefs which continues to participate in the invention of contemporary forms. The exhibition proposes a route through the entire history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century art, from C.D. Friedrich to Kandinsky, from Malevich to Picasso, and from Barnett Newman to Bill Viola, questioning the way in which art continues to bear witness, in often unexpected forms, to something beyond ordinary everyday living and remains, in a totally secularised world, the profane pathway for an irrepressible need for elevation." (Access: <http://traces-du-sacre.centrepompidou.fr>; consulted on 06 May 2013.)
2. The general thrust as formulated by P. Tillich (1968: 293) is that the major religions are all in some way confronted with what he refers to as "quasi-religions". He subsumes in the concept of religion these secular movements which, according to him, "clearly present all the characteristics of actual religions, although at the same time they are profoundly different".
3. See the many books, seminars and journal papers in the field of HSS devoted to sacredness or to related topics such as belief, prayer, contemplation, the soul, etc. Among much other work, see: P. Lardellier, R. Delaye, Richard (2012); M. Leone (2012); *Le Temps des Médias* (2011); *ESSACHESS* (2011); N. Dusi, G. Marrone (2008).



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## AUTHORS

### **STÉPHANE DUFOUR**

CIMEOS

University of Burgundy

F-21000

[stephane.dufour@u-bourgogne.fr](mailto:stephane.dufour@u-bourgogne.fr)

### **JEAN-JACQUES BOUTAUD**

CIMEOS

University of Burgundy

F-21000

[Jean-Jacques.Boutaud@u-bourgogne.fr](mailto:Jean-Jacques.Boutaud@u-bourgogne.fr)