'MATERIAL RELIGION' AS SUBJECT AND MANIFESTO IN SOCIAL STUDIES ON CHRISTIANITY:
A Review of MINNA OPAS, ANNA HAAPALAINEN (EDS.), *CHRISTIANITY AND THE LIMITS OF MATERIALITY.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, XV+274 pp. (Bloomsbury Studies in Material Religion, 1)

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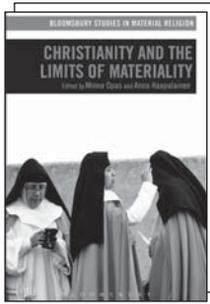A b s t r a c t : The reviewed collection of articles constitutes a continuation of an academic discussion of material religion. On the basis of research in different cultures, the authors try to show the way Christians conceptualise, negotiate, contest and challenge questions of material aspects of religious life. They interpret materiality not merely and solely in a narrow sense, i.e. as specific ritual objects (candles, icons, altars, statues, and so on), but as a set of historically and culturally specific relationships between material and immaterial / spiritual in a certain religious tradition. The criticism of the review mainly focuses on the disbalance between 'theory' and 'practice' in the material religion studies presented in this collection. In some articles, the ethnographic component often appears to be in the shadow of ambitious and recurring methodological manifests.

K e y w o r d s : anthropology of religion, materiality, media, semiotic ideologies.

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'Material Religion' as Subject and Manifesto in Social Studies on Christianity

In its methodological orientation, the collection *Christianity and the Limits of Materiality* edited by Minna Opas and Anna Haapalainen of the University of Turku belongs to an ambitious program specialising in the study of material religion: the physical mediators of interaction with the transcendental and their reception in various cultures. This research programme brings together scholars working in one way or another on the problems of religion and media: anthropologists, religious studies scholars, historians, and specialists in the areas of cultural heritage, visual culture, and performance. This tendency has obtained an institutional framework through the publication of the thematic journal *Material Religion*, founded in 2005, and also through regular conferences on the material aspects of religion. The collection of articles under review is the outcome of one such conference with the same title, 'Christianity and the Limits of Materiality', which took place at the University of Turku in September 2014. Following the thematic compendium, *Key Terms in Material Religion* [Plate 2015], this publication is the second to be published in the

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Bloomsbury Studies in Material Religion Series edited by the pioneers in the field: Amy Whitehead, Birgit Meyer, Crispin Paine, David Morgan, and S. Brent Plate.

The research project on 'material religion' aims to resolve a large number of dichotomies: the opposition between the material and the spiritual, the immanent and the transcendent, and the Cartesian opposition of soul and body, which are characteristic both of religious cultures themselves, and of the specialists who describe them. The representatives of this tendency criticise the consistent dematerialisation of religion which has taken shape in the classical works of anthropology and sociology: Edward Tylor's definition of religion as a belief in the supernatural, Emile Durkheim's dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, and Max Weber's direct opposition of form and meaning. But, convincing though such criticism may be, the methodological foundations of this very promising project still do not seem altogether transparent. The reasons for that may lie in the subject's inaccessibility to anthropological observation, and also in the fact that the relationships that connect it with social structures and social activity are not obvious. How can an anthropologist observe and interpret the somatic sensations of his / her believing informants? Or how they see and hear (cf., for example, [Coleman 2009])? It is evident that the anthropologist should first of all work on conceptualising and narrativising these forms of material experience — the dogmatic, the collective, and the individual. However, editors of this collection propose to address the social praxis determined by local notions of materiality, its forms, functions, and limits. Let us see how this has turned out.

To start with, it should be noted that this collection of articles is distinguished by a rather curious analytical perspective. Minna Opas and Anna Haapalainen point out in the introduction that the categories of the material and the spiritual are not determined once and for all, but rather they are constantly being redefined, discussed and challenged, and regularly give rise to doubts among the believers themselves. In this regard, the editors make the personal and collective normalisation of the relations and limits of the material in different Christian cultures the collection's central research problem. They divide the practices of normalisation into three modes of boundary work that create the limits of materiality. The first mode, *doubting*, refers to the processes within which Christians struggle with the ambiguous nature of matter or the lack of congruence between the spiritual and the material. In its general form, this mode touches on questions of belief and unbelief, of knowledge and doubt of their relation to religious materiality. The second mode of the functioning of the limits of materiality, *sufficing*, is connected to the evaluation of the quality of matter and the working out of criteria within the group for defining its 'quantity' and sufficiency. The third

mode, *unbinding*, considers the value of matter and the blurring of the borders between the material and the immaterial. Furthermore, special emphasis is placed here on human corporeality and its limitations, and also on the means of overcoming these limitations and making the body a trustworthy space for spiritual experience.

The collection has a laconic tripartite structure corresponding to the division into regimes described above. It is made up of the results of ten studies focused on the material aspects of 'lived religion' in different Christian communities. However, as we shall see, the boundaries between the modes are delineated in a somewhat arbitrary way. The first section, entitled 'Doubting', opens with the article 'Spirit Media and the Specter of the Fake' by the anthropologist Marleen de Witte, about identifying and recognising 'spiritual fraud' among the Charismatic Pentecostals of Ghana. De Witte points out the extent to which religious experience is a technique, and shows how subtle the distinction may be between pious effort to produce a particular spiritual condition and simply simulating contact with the divine. Another study in the same section, 'Organic Faith in Amazonia: De-Indexification, Doubt, and Christian Corporeality' by Minna Opas, relates to the difficulties encountered by Yine Christians in Peru in their attempts to identify the sincerity of their faith in their own bodily condition. Opas examines these doubts in semiotic terms, as the de-indexification of faith, that is as a disjunction between the object (faith) and the sign of its presence in a person's body, and analyses the epistemological implications of this process. The third article, 'Things Not for Themselves: Idolatry and Consecration in Orthodox Ethiopia' by the anthropologist Tom Boylston, offers a perspective for studying Christian materiality in its connection with the authority of the divine. Boylston gives several examples — fasting, consecration, and idolatry — as illustrations of the necessity of preparing materiality in a particular manner and connecting it with the transcendent world so that it might become a legitimate mediator of sacred power.

The first article in the section 'Sufficing' — 'The Bible in the Digital Age: Negotiating the Limits of "Bibleness" of Different Bible Media' by Katja Rakow — acquaints the reader with the discussion that has unfolded within communities of American Protestants about the legitimacy of the new electronic Bibles. The discussion has shown that by no means all Christians are enthusiastic about smartphone Bibles. Some believers feel that these devices lack — here Rakow follows the religious studies scholar Timothy Beal — *Bibleness* [Beal 2015], i.e. the set of semiotic characteristics of a printed Bible that is sufficient for it to be identified as a sacred object.

The materialisation of the Bible is also the object of study in 'The Plausibility of Immersion: Limits and Creativity in Materializing

the Bible' by James S. Bielo, who chooses as an example the famous 'Ark Encounter' theme park in Kentucky, which recreates the story of Noah. What makes this case interesting are the attempts of the creators of the park to balance the requirements of the entertainment industry with the demands of Protestant fundamentalists: on the one hand, to create an attractive leisure venue fulfilling the criterion of historical reliability, and on the other, to further the conversion of its visitors to Christianity. Observations on the invention and enterprise displayed by the designers in their efforts to achieve both ends have allowed Bielo to focus not only on the limitations of materiality but also on the creative possibilities and solutions of those who have to deal with these limitations.

Anna Haapalainen also develops the questions of the material reconstruction of biblical events in her article 'Humanizing the Bible: Limits of Materiality in a Passion Play' about the theatrical performance of the Passion plays at a Lutheran church in Turku. The author is interested in what makes a modern performance of biblical subjects look convincing and authentic. In doing so, she chooses to reject the seemingly appropriate research framework of ritualisation as insufficiently sensitive to the material dimension of what takes place. Haapalainen takes a different focus and concentrates on various material aspects: the choice of costumes and settings, the position of the sets and props, the way the characters are played, which, in her view, allows the temporal dislocation to be overcome and makes the biblical heroes comprehensible and close to the modern audience.

The last work in this section, 'The Death and Rebirth of a Crucifix: Materiality and the Sacred in Andean Vernacular Catholicism' by Diego Alonso Huerta, considers the specifics of a pilgrimage to a cross venerated in the Lima region of Peru. The author asks why the pilgrimage to this holy place is still maintained, though the original shrine burnt down and a new cross has been set up in its place. To answer this question Huerta proposes a tripartite model for analysing the pilgrimage,[1] which includes the myth that asserts the authority and authenticity of the sacred place, then the actual practices of veneration of the place by the pilgrims, and specifically the material properties of the shrine. He also examines the dialectical relations between these three components, which, he is convinced, create a mimetic connection between the original cross that was destroyed and its replacement.

The third section, 'Unbinding', consists of studies focused on the problems of the materiality of the body. 'Proving the Inner Word:

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[1]   This is evidently a revision of the well-known model of John Eade and Michael Sallnow, who proposed a complex analysis of the texts that guaranteed the legitimacy of a pilgrimage site, the actions, and motives of the pilgrims, and the sacred place itself [Eade, Sallnow 1991: 9].

(De)materializing the Spirit in Radical Pietism' by Elisa Heinämäki concerns the practices of recognition of the action of the Spirit among Radical Pietists in eighteenth-century Sweden. Heinämäki shows how, despite their rhetoric of immediate contact with the divine, the practices of radical Pietism were inductive, material, embodied, and, consequently, politicised. Igor Mikeshin's work 'The Return of the Unclean Spirit: Collapse and Relapse in the Baptist Rehab Ministry' raises the compelling question of the interdependence of moral and bodily transformation, and of how they are interpreted and formalised within the programme of a Baptist rehabilitation service as well as in the biographical narratives of its participants. The last article of this section and the whole book, 'Mimesis and Mediation in the *Semana Santa* Processions of Granada' by Sari Kuuva, analyses how authenticity and aesthetic effect are produced using the example of the famous procession in Andalusia. Papier-mache statues of the saints are an essential attribute of this procession, and, according to Kuuva, they become 'media of presence' of the divine, thanks to the decorative efforts of the organisers of the procession and the demonstration by its participants of certain emotional and sensual responses.

In what follows I shall discuss five of the articles published in the collection in detail, choosing them on the one hand as the most demonstrative examples of the 'material religion' approach, and on the other as particularly provocative.

Questions of the genuineness of religious experience stand at the centre of the discussion by Marleen de Witte, who is an advocate of the material turn in the social studies of religion. As she rightly remarks, the suspicion that the material forms of religion may be nothing but a fraud created by human beings for the purposes of self-deception is characteristic not only of new atheists and certain social scientists but also of believers themselves, particularly those who place themselves in the Protestant tradition. Therefore, the methodological position proposed in this research is an analysis not only of the creative potential of materiality in various religious contexts, but also of its risks.

This position is hardly innovative: the idea of the ambiguous, or rather semiotically unclear status of material objects in religious practices was fundamental to one of the defining works of this research area, Matthew Engelke's monograph *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church* [Engelke 2007]. Engelke and de Witte's approaches are also akin in their conviction that media and religion should not be conceived as mutually exclusive fields. Rather should religion itself be understood as a mediation. However, in de Witte's opinion, such a definition has one drawback, namely the ontological gap between the material and the spiritual. She

proposes to bridge this gap by the concept of *spirit media* — material forms that not only mediate something that is understood in spiritual, but also create them and make them real to believers. If we recollect the works of Birgit Meyer, the concept of spirit media seems to mean the same as the concept of *sensational forms* — authorised mediators and regimes of mediation, appealing to sensual perception and experience, between the human being and supernatural worlds and agents [Meyer 2009: 13]. In her turn, de Witte stresses the performative character of such media.

It is curious that the interpretation of media from this point of view makes it possible to turn one's attention to the work done by a human being, which may at times be quite prolonged and serious.[1] Even the body and senses of the believer must be correctly prepared and 'made' — only then can they become the milieu for the experience of the divine. The result of reflection on this necessary (but not always sufficient) condition is that the deliberate imitation and regulation of bodily reactions in the relevant contexts need not be perceived by the representatives of religious cultures in negative terms since it is supposed that sooner or later quantity should become quality.[2] However, this may not happen. De Witte proposes that anthropologists should concentrate on the gap between 'faking spirits' and 'making spirits', or, in other words, between fiction and fact, and also on how religious actors construct the relations between these modalities and recognise them as distinct from each other.

How the problem of recognising fake and real supernatural forces is solved depends on the localisation of power in a particular culture, be it the religious hierarchy, institutional catechesis, or personal charisma. Charismatic Pentecostals articulate individual access to the transcendent and affirm the authority of personal 'revelation', which raises the level of reflection on the authenticity of such experience. At the same time, the understanding of authenticity here does not exclude some degree of technical specificity: it is hard to imagine modern Charismatic services without a complex of materialised practices, including work on the voice, specific physical contact, vestments, dances and gestures, and also the use of modern technology as spirit media — television, radio broadcasts, synthetic sound, photography, video cameras, etc. In the author's opinion, concern about spiritual fraud has also been reinforced by the massmediatisation of charismatic Christianity, making the use of

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[1]   This is, incidentally, also noted by Birgit Meyer [Meyer 2010: 752].

[2]   For example, Saba Mahmood's informants, during the first stage of their work on themselves, did not consider the simulation of modesty to be hypocrisy, as it would have been perceived from the position of the Western secular model of subjectivity. They saw the purpose of this simulation as an attempt to synchronise their outward behaviour with their inner motives, which required time and effort [Mahmood 2011].

additional resources for producing effects and affects become obvious to a wide public. De Witte mentions the public discussions about 'fake pastors' who employ various media tricks to bolster their own status and persuade the flock of their special spiritual powers (p. 48). The social reaction to cases where the man-made origin of certain 'miracles' was unmasked makes it possible to conclude that artificiality in producing contact with the divine is typical and natural (that is, the particular theatricality of Charismatic Christian services is well known to anthropologists of religion), but at the same time must necessarily be veiled and made implicit (pp. 50–1).

In fact, the ethnographical material presented by de Witte is confined to a listing of the various material practices at Charismatic churches and a regrettably brief mention of 'fake pastors'. De Witte does not, however, present her work as theoretical: formally speaking, indeed, the whole book is constructed on empirical research. However, it seems that a properly anthropological interpretation does not follow from the material in this article: it is, rather, primary to it. Ethnographical data may illustrate the laconic and undoubtedly convincing theses from the 'material religion' field of the study, but all this remains seemingly optional, thanks to the theoretical originality of these assertions.

The research conducted by one of the editors of the collection, Minna Opas, is also devoted to doubts, in this case, among the Yine Evangelicals, representatives of one of the indigenous peoples of Peruvian Amazonia. Here the lack of certainty results from the disparity between Christians' subjective evaluation of their own spiritual condition and the objective evidence that might confirm the reality of that condition. For Evangelicals, this evidence proceeds from the presence of a particular organ of faith in the body — *ruwekinri*. The difficulties begin when a Christian does not sense this organ within his / her body. Then the questions arise: does the lack of a sense of *ruwekinri* mean that there is something wrong with your Christian life? Perhaps it only seems to you that you are living in faith?

Opas sees the roots of this uncertainty in the ontology of Amazonian cultures, according to which being human means having an unstable condition of the body. This model of the subject conceals a permanent threat that the person may be influenced not only by living beings of various kinds, but also by pathogenic objects and substances. The epistemological implications of this ontology are such that it is impossible to know for sure whether any particular person is acting independently or under the influence of someone or something. Meanwhile, mistrust of human actions is also dictated by the Christian context, which cultivates sensitivity and attentiveness to the process of mediation and the legitimate means of religious experience.

The problem of the verification of faith, which is a pressing one for many Yine Evangelicals, is connected by Opas with the concept of sincerity, which she proposes defining as a material, and not an essentially linguistic practice. That is, if in the classical (one should add, Protestant) model of sincerity there should be the greatest possible correspondence between person's inner condition and its verbal expression [Keane 2002], then in the case examined by Opas the connection between the inner sensation of an organ of faith growing inside person's body and that person's pious actions (which I suppose should also include their habits of speech) is evidently what is placed in question. It would seem that it is precisely by orienting themselves on these actions that the people around him / her can evaluate the sincerity of a Christian's faith, and this is usually what happens (p. 70). However, Opas's informants are looking for confirmation of their own sincerity within themselves, and they do not always find anything to give them a positive indication of the condition that they seek. Opas designates this phenomenon as a de-indexification typical of the local semiotic ideologies, within which the referential relations between the sign (the organ of *ruwekinri*) and the signified (faith) break down.

The example cited in the article offers interesting perspectives for reflection on the semantics of the anthropological concept of sincerity, especially thanks to (or perhaps despite) the fact that the author herself does not outline the semantic contours of the concept she uses. Nor are any results from participant observation reflected in the work, which is a pity: thoughtful ethnography is precisely what would have allowed the reader to understand what the author means by suggesting that sincerity should be regarded as a material practice. Does this mean that sincerity is primarily a social obligation, experienced through the subject's body? And what epistemological imperatives allow the representatives of different cultures, and the researchers studying them, to speak of some social activity in terms of sincerity? For example, is sincerity possible in the case here, when knowledge of one's inner condition is potentially unattainable, unaccountable to subjects themselves, meaning that they are unable to express it? Incidentally, the idea that sincerity is not based solely on linguistic forms has been expressed by other scholars as well.[1] However, the author's approach in this article does not entirely fit into this trend. As far as one can tell, for Opas the materiality of sincerity consists precisely in the materiality of the inner condition, verifiable through its conformance to a certain moral norm. A more popular approach to sincerity considers a different type of materiality. As the anthropologist Webb Keane points out, we cannot read

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[1] A detailed critical examination of current research of sincerity in the anthropology of religion may be found in [Haeri 2017].

thoughts, but we can read the signs indicating those thoughts [Keane 2015: 83]. In such case, sincerity is the expression of one's inner conditions in a material 'wrapping' (be it speech, ritual, gift, gesture or whatever) and in a way that it can create the illusion of the transparency of those condition to someone else.

But to whom? It is here, in my view, that the weakness of Opas's interpretation lies: sincerity is considered more an individual than a social phenomenon. However, even from Opas's brief remarks, one may suppose that in the community under study, the degree of essential social accountability is quite high. Yine Evangelicals suspect each other of being under the influence of external and supernatural forces, and they evaluate the virtue of each other's Christian life. In other words, for Opas's informants, the question of an adequate representation of one's inner world to other people is no idle one. Here too it would have been possible to discuss what function the manifestation of doubts about one's own sincerity fulfils for 'social transparency'. Such a discussion would also require attentive participant observation, in order to describe and understand how these doubts are conceived and embodied, to whom and in what social situations they are demonstrated, how and why people change their opinions of themselves, and how they maintain a balance between assurance and its absence.[1] With regard to the ethnographical subject under examination here, it can be assumed that the demonstration of doubts in the sincerity of one's faith is one of the basic strategies for assertion of that very sincerity. Rhetorical moves of a similar style may be discovered in various Christian contexts: the true believer is the one who is always ready to give an account of his / her sins (which may not exist). A propos, this interpretation is yet another critical argument in the discussion of the thesis that 'sincerity is a material practice': here again, the linguistic (communicative) dimension of the definition of sincerity cannot be avoided.

In the article by Katja Rakow, the object of study is the public discussion that has unfolded among the members of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches as a result of the ever-growing use of electronic devices as a person's own Bible instead of the usual printed book. Rakow begins her considerations with the argument that every transition from one material mediator to another heightens the believers' awareness of materiality. In other words, the older established form of mediation is usually perceived as adequate for direct access to the Word of God, while the newer form does not seem so convincing and provokes lively debates.

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[1] A number of possible research questions connected with the role of doubts in the discursive lifestyle of representatives of different cultures are proposed, for example, in [Pelkmans 2013: 16].

On the basis of an analysis of Internet discussions in the English-speaking Protestant milieu, Rakow has identified three basic regimes of Bible use, in which its materiality is articulated in different ways. These regimes differ from each other in their rhetorical construction as follows. The commemorative regime refers to the interconnection between materiality and memory. The debaters whose contributions are examined by the author prefer the printed Bible precisely because it is capable of preserving and refreshing the memory. This capacity is rooted in the material characteristics of the printed book, which create such a 'Proust effect': in it remain marginal notes, book-marks and pressed flowers, and its leather binding acquires a worn appearance from frequent use, the pages wear out and change colour. The printed Bible may become a family relic passed down from generation to generation, preserving ever more palpable evidence of being read by people bound by kinship ties.

The semantic-hermeneutic regime of use refers to the practices of individual and collective reading and interpretation of Holy Scripture. This section of the article rather resembles a potted over-view of user experience, and so I shall permit myself not to spend time on describing user preferences amid the diversity of Internet applications. What looks more interesting here is the author's com-ment on Christians' reflections on the affordances of various media: they point out that the printed book and the 'hypertext Bible' impose fundamentally different practices of reading and using the Scripture.

In the third regime, performative, the printed book is once again accorded its expected primacy. During ritual events the pastor and his congregation prefer to use the Bible in the form of a book, since it is an *icon* of the Word of God, whereas the materiality of electronic devices is perceived as inadequate to achieve the performative effect. At the same time the majority of the Evangelicals and Charismatics who took part in the discussions take an optimistic view of the digitalisation of the Bible, writing this phenomenon into the histo-rical context of the change of material mediators: as once parchment was superseded by the printed book, so will a (gradual) digital revolution creating new means for spreading the Gospel.

In her conclusion, Katja Rakow calls her colleagues to be intellectually daring in their ethnographical description of modern technologies in various religious practices. This call is well placed, inasmuch as Rakow's research is founded primarily upon the eloquent con-tributions of a group of reflective intellectuals and active Internet users. However, it is hard to say anything that is not self-evident and is heuristically and empirically valuable about practices of using electronic devices: they appear far too close and common to anthropologists, even if they are discovered in the 'exotic' context of Pentecostalism and Evangelical Christianity. The author of this

article has achieved penetrating examination of this problem, pointing out the rationalisation and verbalisation of the mechanisms of mediation, and presenting this as the object of her study of semiotic ideologies.

Elisa Heinämäki's article is the only one based on historical material and analyses the strategies of dematerialisation characteristic of the Protestant project of Radical Pietism. Radical Pietists rejected the hierarchical authority of the Lutheran Church and insisted on individual relationships with God, independent of institutional support. Entering into such an immediate relationship was understood as being born again, and opposed to any mediated forms of religious life.

Heinämäki begins her discussion with a critique of the hegemony of the 'Protestant lens' in social studies of religion. Inasmuch as the emphasis on dematerialisation, the primacy of the spirit over matter, is a typical feature of Protestant culture, this has also become automatically true for the academic definition of religion per se. The basic aim of the material turn in this field is to challenge this assumption. But, as Heinämäki remarks (and it is hard to disagree), it is not that interesting to note that we have misunderstood religion in general, and Protestantism in particular, and to provide evidence that material practices also exist in Protestant cultures (unfortunately, also a widespread strategy). It is much more compelling to see how the postulated dematerialisation can be achieved and what material practices are included in this process.

Analysing her ethnographic data (and as far as this article is concerned they are limited to the personal diaries of two representatives of Radical Pietism, Sven Rosén and Peter Schaefer), Heinämäki encounters an ambiguity. On the one hand, the presence of the Holy Spirit must be identified in people themselves, in their hearts. On the other hand, there is an epistemological limitation imposed upon this necessity, according to which the actions of the Spirit may neither be foretold nor rationalised. In Radical Pietism, the spiritual rebirth of the personality is ascribed exclusively to divine, not human agency. However, this does not imply a levelling-down of man's worldly, fleshly nature; rather it is supposed it may be gradually transformed for the new life by the operation of the Spirit through a gradual cleansing from everything material and earthly. The diaries of the activists of this religious movement demonstrate that the formula of successful dematerialisation requires certain bodily self-discipline, mainly by means of fasting, and also regularly giving account to oneself of one's own flesh. Such observation of one's own body, its desires, and the organisation of its activities is incorporated into a complex work of monitoring the will of God in relation to one or another inner condition: whether it is of the Spirit and

whether it leads to contact with him. The reflexivity of Radical Pietism makes the body the object of consistent decoding: embodiment is a means of receiving divine signs and communication that need to be recognised.

Particularly curious in this argument is that discernment of the Spirit is not just a question of introspection. The identification of the Spirit in other people also produces no lesser concern. Being together in the Spirit is essential to maintain solidarity within the group, to feel oneself part of 'the spiritual community of believers'. But no less important (if not more so, as the author of the article subtly hints) for group solidarity is a recognition of that which has nothing to do with the Spirit, and this practice becomes the basic strategy for legitimising separation from the Church hierarchy. The fact of having received institutionally established authority and enjoying the privileges of that status automatically means that someone is not acting in the Spirit. The fact that this status is framed in various material forms (vestments, ritual objects, money, documents, etc.) further reinforces confidence in the verdict that has been pronounced. In my opinion, this research constitutes a successful example of how the mechanism of personal spiritual discernment with its delicate subtlety may be fitted into a context of a political declaration or a protest.

The last work I would like to discuss was written by Igor Mikeshin. It addresses the Good Samaritan Russian Baptist rehabilitation centre, the programme of which is designed to help people in their struggle with severe drug addiction. The ideology of this project is that matter, i.e. the human body, should be under constant disciplinary control, so as to drive out sinful passions and free the person from addiction. Thus, in addition to temporary isolation and the complete exclusion of drugs, long-term rehabilitation there includes intensive study of the New Testament, Christian doctrine, and the basics of the Christian life. The research is focused on the mutual relation between moral transformation, i.e. conversion, and bodily transformation, ideally remission. This connection, or what the local leadership understands by it, becomes particularly noticeable when there is a hitch in the system, in other words, when someone relapses.

From the point of view of the ideologists of the rehabilitation service, liberation from dependency requires a complete break with one's sinful past and a *radical conversion*, which is set out in the corresponding narrative: in the programme, the participants learn to speak about their lives before rehabilitation as a catastrophic mistake and of themselves as persons incapable of controlling their lives. Judging by Igor Mikeshin's comments, radical conversion is openly presented as a zealous self-transformation requiring the

acquisition of certain hermeneutic practices and language and complete acceptance of Baptist doctrine. This severity is motivated by the idea of the mutually dependent character of the relations between spiritual and bodily conditions. If the necessary spiritual level (i.e. radical conversion) is not achieved, it will hardly be possible to avoid relapse and returning to a condition of sin. The author cites a number of life stories in which insufficient resocialisation within the Baptist service and relapse are framed in a single biographical narrative. The argumentation in this article is organised as if it is intended to prove to the reader a connection of cause and effect between these conditions, as is asserted within the service being studied. For example, in one story Fedya, an ex-addict, had a very lively response to the evangelistic part of the programme and quickly acquired the communicative features of a neophyte. In the middle of the rehabilitation period, Fedya decided to leave the centre, because he had stopped noticing any new changes in himself: he had already received Christ into his heart and it was not entirely clear to him why he should continue with the rehabilitation. Sometime after leaving the programme, Fedya began to use hard drugs again. Even though Fedya had entirely accepted Baptist teaching and rejected his past, writes Igor Mikeshin, he had not learnt to maintain faith within himself all the time by reading, studying, and interpreting the Scriptures, which can only be assimilated over a whole course of rehabilitation (p. 223). That is why he relapsed, the author concludes.

For this reason the article evokes mixed feelings. The impression is created that anthropological research has taken on some of the features of moral exhortation: as if the local interpretations had been so thoroughly assimilated by the anthropologist that they had been transformed into analytical assertions without sufficient distancing; meanwhile there are, at the least, several directions of reflection on the ethnographical subject presented. The first is connected to the disciplinary dimension of conversion. Although conversion is most often conceptualised in Evangelical Christianity as an individual, even intimate experience, there are many contexts when someone will monitor that experience. Rehabilitation centres are one such context. In the article, the disciplinary agents remain anonymous and faceless, though, in my view, this ethnographical line is particularly important for the problem of the local ideas of bodily and spiritual 'recovery'. This focus would also allow a closer approach to an understanding of how the ideologists of the rehabilitation centre mystify the public by proposing adoption of the radical conversion narrative as a discrete event, whereas in practice this conversion supposes continuous work on oneself. Does this mystification have any effect on the failure of the majority of participants to complete the whole programme?

Another possible perspective for this research is connected to the pragmatics of these narratives. In Protestant culture, stories about the miraculous transformation through conversion of someone who had been in 'the lower depths' are often intended to fulfil the function of evangelisation, and not only as personal witnessing but as the symbolic capital of a particular service, which had assisted to the best of its ability in bringing about the changes described by the convert. But what could be the missionary function of narratives of unsuccessful conversions, i.e. such stories of life as these of most of Igor Mikeshin's interlocutors? Do such stories provide any advantages in the ascent of the spiritual career ladder of their heroes? It would be equally interesting to know what the local administration does with these stories (which are much more frequent, judging by the author's observations, than 'success stories'), and whether they are rhetorically included in the compulsory programme of self-transformation. Of course, these questions are of only tangential interest to researchers of 'material religion'. However, the reflections offered here would have hardly lost much if they had not been included in the theoretical context of this collection.

On the whole, some of the articles in this publication leave an ambiguous impression. On the one hand, they rely on a very promising theoretical programme, and on the other, at times this programme legitimises some fairly banal observations. The project of studying 'material religion' is now years old, but its rhetoric still typically carries an innovatory charge; at least, the number of methodological manifestos makes it possible to speak of it very nearly in terms of a radical review of the foundations for social studies of religion (see, for example, Birgit Meyer's inaugural lecture at the University of Utrecht: [Meyer 2012], and also: [Meyer et al. 2010; Morgan 2013; Reinhardt 2016]). Sometimes, this modality of theorising does not help in developing the research area's empirical base, and this is noticeable in some of the works in the collection. I will also note that most of the authors do not share the editors' enthusiasm for 'the turn towards practice' promised in the introduction. However, despite such criticism, I can definitely recommend this collection since it contains a variety of subtle and interesting theoretical remarks and observations that will without doubt engage a reader in search of new intellectual challenges and their solutions.

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