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Some Important Conceptual Lines of Discourse Theories in Cultural Studies of Religion

As cultural studies, discourse analysis, and religious studies are all highly ambiguous terms, used to denote vast fields, I will start by briefly sketching them in the restricted and contingent sense in which they are used here, before proceeding to discuss the potential of particular facets of discourse theory and methodology for cultural studies.

The term 'discourse' is very often used to denote an object of research (see Keller, this volume), but without explaining how their use of the term discourse relates to a particular understanding of discourse theory. One understanding of discourse theory is that it is a perspective and a bundle of very divergent methods. Introductions to discourse analysis regularly distinguish between descriptive and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010, 167) and sometimes come to the irenic conclusion that all discourse analysis is political insofar as language itself is always deeply political (see, for example, Gee 2014, 9). Descriptive discourse analysis can be narrowly restricted to linguistic aspects, with attention to such things as speech and intonation, or it can be applied more broadly, in the pragmatics of language-in-use or even in action theory. Here, following the tradition of Michel Foucault, discourse is understood as a construct consisting of utterances and practices which are institutionally established to different degrees (Foucault 1972). Thinking the Foucauldian perspective in cultural studies means turning all phenomena into practices and investigating these practices with specific questions in mind. This goes beyond approaches that focus solely on the analysis of conversations and speech acts – even if one understands language as a tool or an action, in the intentional-conventionalist sense proposed by John L. Austin (locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts), John Searle, and others – since such approaches fail to address culture in all of its complexity, as permanent institutional structures exerting power that becomes relevant for knowledge production. Language-in-use approaches only seldom expand their scope to include the epistemological framework, the episteme, in which what is thinkable, imaginable, and sayable in a particular historical period is embedded (see, for example, Keller's long citation of A. Schütz on the "preconstituted world of scientific contemplation," and Johnston, this volume).

Religion, as the generally presumed object of the study of religion, requires a second preliminary remark. In the academic and theoretical self-understanding of religious studies today, religion is often regarded as a discourse, or as being 'discursively constituted.' This implies that a particular interpretation of discourse theory has entered into the constitution of religion as an object. Kocku von Stuckrad expresses

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this idea when he proposes a "discursive study of religion." He indicates the difference between the term "religion" (in lowercase) and the "discourse on religion" by using capital letters ("RELIGION") for the latter, thus indicating the "societal organization of knowledge about religion" (2014, 14). Discourse theory allows us to treat the subject of our investigation and the model we employ equally, historicizing the latter as well. Both are discourses. This makes plain the universalism of this approach, which is comparable to transcendental philosophy, but in this case is applied to empirical culture/s rather than abstract concepts. It is this understanding of discourse analysis, as a discursive practice which itself adds meaning to certain discourse, that von Stuckrad calls its "double-bind" (2013). Through this double-bind, a third order of signification of scientific reflection is added to first-order object or emic discourses and second-order discourses on religion, be it a theological reflexivity or the ways in which other societal subsystems reflect on this field.

A sign that discourse analysis or theory would become central to the study of religion can be seen in the linguistic turn after World War II, which ended the essentialist and phenomenological direction of the discipline. Jonathan Z. Smith, as one exponent of this turn, is mainly interested in discursive norm-building through categorization (what he calls "taxonomies"; see Smith 1996); another is Hans G. Kippenberg, who takes Austin's speech act theory as a point of departure (1983). The sociology of new religious movements was a forerunner in analyzing religion in terms of discourse to better understand why beliefs are so divergent within one and the same culture (Hjelm 2016, 20; Barker 2006).

Cultural studies and the cultural turn are particularly important to today's discourse debates, as this conglomerate of academic disciplines and this perspective reconstruct 'culture' as an all-encompassing web of shared knowledge, contingent habits, and effects, which is thus predestined for studies of the all-embracing concept of discourse. Discourse theory can also profit from certain offshoots in cultural studies: the cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaft*) around 1900, the much more influential British Birmingham School from the 1950s onward, and a second wave of cultural sciences and respective debates around the crisis of representation with the 'cultural turn' in the 1970s. Today, with 'cultural studies' in the titles of book series and the names of academic departments, these traditions have mostly been merged to form a few eclectic conceptual mixtures. More conservative – and primarily continental – approaches include metaphorology, the genealogical formation of concepts, cultural history, *école des annales*, history of mentalities, image studies (*Bildwissenschaft*), social structure and semantics, cultures of memory, and many more. Key issues include anthropological debates and postcolonial studies, with their critique of Western modernity and its prioritizing of specific forms of knowledge. Each of these shifts, attentions to, and obsessions with the historicity of language patterns, topics, and the interrelation of social structures with visual as well as semantic forms constitutes an important strand in today's thick cord of discourse theories. Part of the praxeological turn in cultural studies and the analysis of

knowledge–power (*savoir–pouvoir*) are linked to the ideology critique characteristic of Birmingham cultural studies, with its Marxist legacy and engagement with race and class – a heritage that some scholars want to carry over into critical discourse analysis, and which comes to a head in laying bare hegemony and ideology (with regard to religious studies, see Hjelm 2016, 21; on linguistics, see Fairclough 2010 and Jäger/Maier 2009; on postcolonial studies, see Laclau/Mouffe 1985; on the sociology of knowledge, see Rainer Keller's work). In the cultural studies approach to religion as a discourse, the theoretical strands outlined above are found in attempts at analyzing conversations, textual content, dispositifs, anthropology, and the sociology of knowledge.

In this chapter, I discuss the reception of these various theoretical strands in religious studies in the light of selected concepts that take their systematics from Foucault's discourse theory. I focus on basic theoretical considerations rather than on the details of individual positions and the differentiation of methods. Space does not permit me to give a complete history of the reception of discursive approaches, or even merely of the most common elements taken from discourse theories in the study of religion.

1 Problem Configuration, Solutions, and Unintended Effects

An extremely interesting insight for the cultural study of religion, taken from Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, is the concept of problem configuration, as this concept can uncover patterns within the religion discourse when applied to it. Problem configurations emerge on the macro level of interaction in institutional fields and serve as heuristics for underlying challenges to action within historical constellations. Problem configurations prompt reactions – attempts to address a newly perceived reality. This exciting new angle allows us to acknowledge the generic category of religion itself in European discourse as a reaction to such a problem configuration.

What initial situation makes the introduction of the 'religion' category a meaningful practice? History of religion has been kept apart from political theory, as well as from economics. In separating these societal domains, beginning in early modern times, a generic religion was created in the interests of an autonomous state. In Timothy Fitzgerald's words, "the construction of modern discourses on generic religion has been made possible and conceivable by the parallel construction of a number of overlapping discourses on nonreligious/secular science, politics, the nation-state, economics, law, and education" (2007, 7). Fitzgerald contends that, to this day, a specific discourse of religion and of religious studies are to blame for a one-sided and inappropriate line of thinking, which he outlines as discourses on

barbarity and civility (2007). Religion "is a modern invention which authorizes and naturalizes a form of Euro-American secular rationality" (Fitzgerald 2007, 6). He argues in favor of embedding the religious studies narrative in the academic discipline of religious studies (and its concept of religion) into a history of early modernity in Europe. Similarly, Kocku von Stuckrad paints a picture of intensified debates in the late nineteenth century on the question of where to draw the lines between religion/science/pseudo-science, a process he calls the "scientification of religion," and one which often descended into polemics against magic, astrology, alchemy, and other areas, at the same time incorporating some of these elements into the newly plausible sciences (von Stuckrad 2014).

Catherine Bell does something very similar to critical discourse analysis, without citing Foucault or introducing a qualified notion of discourse, and may therefore represent work in the study of religion that goes in the same direction as discourse analysis without entering the specific field of discourse debates. As the title of her article indicates, she reveals "Paradigms Behind (and Before) the Modern Concept of Religion," defining a paradigm as a "'knot' operative in our discourses" and "a basic tool for advancing knowledge as a social enterprise" (2006, 28). She also uses the metaphor of archaeological strata of paradigms (ibid.). Thus she acknowledges the force of ideas and models, and sees them as social action. In contrast to Fitzgerald, she accepts the possibility that the process of the reification of religion and religious identities in religious cultures was not "necessarily a logical or internally directed one" (ibid.). In her own work, she uncovers the misleading ideas of smaller models, such as the "uniqueness of ritual action, the cosmological medium of the text, our cultural beliefs about beliefs" (2006, 29), the latter including belief in religion's intrinsic goodness and noblesse. Concerning the level of reflexivity in contemporary theory of religion, she delivers a damning indictment, saying that many variants of the following paradigms are very much alive: Christianity as a prototype, the world religions model, religion as opposed to rationality, the cultural necessity of religion (to which, for instance, the cognitive and evolutionary study of religion are prone), and religion as a Western construct. The latter is of utmost interest to us here, as it seems to explain what discourse theory on religion is all about: deconstructing religion as a Western construct. What is wrong with this? The consequences of postmodernism are ambivalent. On the one hand, Bell criticizes the simplistic relativist assumptions behind this idea, while on the other hand, she argues that it helps to apply the cultural lens that shapes our view of other religions self-reflexively to our own scholarly understanding of the religion category: in both cases, Christianity is the prototype, together with the other paradigms. Moreover, the culturalizing of religion is a strategy intended to keep its continuity under the conceptual roof of culture.

Postcolonial and critical feminist work (such as on the category of gender, on which see Joy, this volume) was very important in helping to explore more of religion's premises. As a descendent of constructivism, discourse theory has deontologizing effects (see Johnston, this volume): cultural and economic orders are only

the most salient plausibility structures, and the 'place' of religion is produced in a poststructuralist web of differential signification. Nevertheless, the radical conceptual and historical deconstruction of religion in Jonathan Z. Smith's famous claim that religion "is theirs [the scholars' of religion] to define" (1998, 281) does not render redundant studies of the efficacy and institution-building force of the category of religion in history up to the present. But it does decisively introduce the above-mentioned third-order level of reflexivity.

Scholars can approach contemporary discourses on religion with this requirement for third-order reflexivity. An analysis can come up with distinctions between argumentations, different interests, and different social groups promoting a goal – sometimes with compatible frames of reference, and sometimes not. The recent 'god is back' discourse may serve as an example. Titus Hjelm, for example, critically investigates the secularization theory and distinguishes five relevant discourses: the desecularization debate; talk of deprivatization and post-secularity; the effects of "welfare utopianism" on public religion; a discourse in which religion is seen as a social problem or as an expedient; and finally the mediatization or publicization of religion (2014). For our purposes, it is interesting to see how he evaluates and relates these discourses: he analyzes each of them on its own and then distinguishes between public discursive utterances and the social effects that that are made intelligible in terms of membership numbers; dispositions; correlations between religious belonging and income, nationality, or profession; structural change, such as in new or altered institutions; and, together with this, new procedures for allocating power or resources. In a particular sense, these discourses constitute several meaningful layers above and independent from structural continuity or change. These may involve hectic, short-term evaporations of utterances within social groups that do not receive institutional back-up, a shared interpretation of 'the situation,' or respective elites and their ideas and means of enforcing change, among other things.

This is a recurrent pattern in both the critical and the affirmative use of a variant of discourse analysis: introducing a temporary and a relevant-real distinction. Discursive practices – even when they are loud, frequent, and performed – need not be reflected in institutional structures and social positions (see Keller, this volume, on the dispositive; see also Adele Clarke's focus on "situation" in 2009). Perhaps this distinction is not so much about an ontology of concepts as it is about a detailed, compartmentalized research practice that examines a multiplicity of discourses at a given moment of cultural negotiation, when the outcome or tendency of formative power is not yet decided and not yet materialized in structures.

2 Recurrent Discourse Figurations in the History of Religion from a European Perspective

Generally speaking, discourse theory is a perspective from which to study the structure of categorical orders and the particular ways in which knowledge is organized, legitimized, and used at a specific moment in history, and also as a pattern across history. This is often done with a critical impetus with respect to ideology, society, and culture. In historical terms, therefore, discourse theory has found space and confirmation in the period of postcolonialism. But this is not its only use; within the framework of European thought, discourse theory has also proved to be effective and successful in deconstructing the presumptions of Christianity as a prototype of religion (Bell 2006), alongside further presumptions about Christianity and modernity.

These two areas of application in religion theory and modernity theory are interdependent in many ways. With respect to Christianity, interconfessional disputes between Catholic and Protestant denominations, as fundamental bifurcations in the discourse within the history of religion in Europe, also became significant in defining the Other during the period of colonial expansion. The example of the discourse on 'fetishes' shows how African religious practices are interpreted as conforming to Catholic practices, which Protestants perceive as a characteristic form of material culture. In the same way, a salvific Christian position is attributed to Jews and to Native Americans in the colonization of North America. In this sense, discursive patterns are tools with which to discover the world. Moreover, they are constitutive of worlds in the sense of social constructivism and the new institutional theory. Studies of colonial discourses have revealed quite a bit about European categorizations and axiomatic worldviews, and have made discourse history the most important tool – in the sense of historicizing one's own worldview – linked to a critique of the exercise of power in this colonial worldview.

The cultural study of religion, which will be addressed below, has resulted in countless blended discourses on religion and culture, such as the 'origin of religion in Africa' discourse (Atwood 2015), or alternatively the 'Arian origin' of religion; the 'world religions' discourse, useful for maintaining universalism in times of pluralism (Masuzawa 2005; Bell 2006); the *sui generis* concept of religion (McCutcheon 1997); the 'secularization' discourse; the idea of the 'return of religion'; 'good/bad religion' and 'high/primitive religion' discourses; and many more. Some of the favorite recurrent discourse 'figurations,' 'constellations,' 'knots,' or 'strands' with regard to religion in the context of European history of religion are: pastoral power, with its confessionalism (Protestant or Catholic bias or polemics; see for instance Smith 1998, 180–81); the *longue durée* of the binary cipher of Orientalism–Occidentalism, from the fifth century BCE, with Herodotus and Alexander the Great, up to Edward Said's examination of the political discourse on Islam in 'Western' media (Baker, Gabrielatos,

and McEnery 2013); and Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory. Further vistas of Central European patterns of discourse on religion include dark/light dualism (Huffer 2012, 21), the female savage/rational male, left-handedness /right-handedness (Knott 2005), insider/outsider perspectives, and reading/deciphering the book of nature.

In such contexts, discourse figuration is used to denote heterogeneous theoretical elements of more limited scope, such as textual pattern (metaphorical lines of right-/left-handedness, for example), or of wider impact, often using the term dispositif. Dispositif has become a significant category and research strand in sociologically oriented discourse analysis. The term refers to socio-material infrastructure, distributive networks for the circulation of knowledge, and recurrent, formalized, or everyday means of knowledge production. A dispositif – like the gender dispositif or the world religion dispositif – is effective on the meso-level of institutions and conventions, and it determines shared structures that are not reducible to the intentions of individual actors. Dispositifs are domain-specific, and each competes and interferes with many others. They therefore also yield unintended (side-)effects in terms of social impact. Dispositifs are interpretive categories which gather and bundle empirical data.

3 *Savoir–Pouvoir*: Knowledge–Power

The previous section deals with the postcolonial critique of the sovereignty of definitional power over central categories and orders of knowledge, and of taking advantage of the mighty machinery of science, media, and technology to circulate specific knowledge to remote localities. This brings another essential element of discourse theory into play: power. For Foucault, categorizations of knowledge are so closely linked to power structures, which go far beyond political organization and permeate the actions and the worldviews behind every action, that he speaks of power–knowledge (Foucault 1977). Discourse theory is not merely an analytical tool for historians and scholars in the field of cultural studies, but has also affected many of the cultural power positions which have been subjected to such a critical examination. In particular, long-established Christian organizations have been robbed of some of their emically ascribed features, such as ethical purity, universalism, justice, and the idea that human nature is innately religious. Russell T. McCutcheon thoroughly examines the US-American discourse on religion and meticulously lays bare the power interests and primarily political agendas of diverse voices in this orchestra (1997). He reveals a hidden agenda predominantly based on Christian interests, in which religion is passed off as morally pure, free of politically compromising practices or corruption, and critically untouchable.

The field of religious studies has also been severely affected by the distinction between or confusion of 'insider/religious' and 'outsider/academic' perspectives. 'Zen studies,' for example, flourished in the US as a reaction to the countercultural attraction to East Asian religious traditions and psychotechniques. In the 1990s, Bernard Faure critically examined this new discourse and revealed its South-East Asian romanticism. He explained common practices as a popularized and in many ways locally adapted form. Post-2000 'modern yoga studies' underwent a similar development, from Eliade's universalist résumé to today's multi-sited ethnographies (Strauss 2002) and reconstructions of multiple influences in a cross-cultural field of modern postural yoga invention (Singleton 2013).

4 Discipline and Regulation

In addition to power, another concept from the Foucauldian tradition has also been consistently important in cultural and religious studies: discipline and disciplining. The exertion of power has often been considered from the point of view of disciplining bodies. Body politics are a common research topic for Foucauldian adepts. Talal Asad's studies are a good example of this. Early on, he interpreted a religious system (Islam) as a discourse, in the sense that the heterogeneous traditions of Islam could be understood as a community of people who referred to the Qur'an as a "certificate of origin" (Asad 1986b; see also the concept of "self-constituting discourses" in Maingueneau's chapter in this volume). Asad also applied another important Foucauldian theorem to religion: *genealogical work*. In *Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (1993), and in several essays on attitudes to the body in the medieval Latin Christian church, he compared the Benedictine and Cistercian orders (for instance, with respect to practices related to food, sexuality, and penance; Asad 1983, 1986a).

For Asad, the advantage of a genealogical approach is that it can uncover unconscious "formations" rather than merely expressly symbolical and cultural interpretations or "representations" of the body (1997, 43), thus taking advantage of Foucault's concept of "discursive formations." Religious subjects are regulated and disciplined via their (material or fleshly) bodies. These medieval subjects submitted themselves to a strict code of bodily discipline that ruled their everyday lives. The scope of subjective experience and the modes of regulation are clearly connected to forms of governance. The medieval monastic world – with all of its internal differences between (male and female) monastic orders, which Asad points out – is clearly distinct from the early modern world, in which subjects submit themselves to a new political order ruled by a secular sovereign. In this latter form of governance, individual experiences occupy a much bigger reflective space than tradition, and these experiences gain significance as a result of their difference and variation.

In place of techniques for disciplining the self, it is disciplined more and more by normalizing practices that occur in modern times. Whereas disciplining is based on more or less clear-cut rules and regimes, the procedures and dynamics of normalizing occur within a range; they are informal and situated. Their regime is specialized and adapted to a much wider scope of free action in individualized modernity. The agency of these two types of change therefore differs, even if they occur simultaneously in different social milieus and spheres. In current debates, it remains an open question how far the contemporary regime is still normalizing and how far it constitutes a regime of control and radical data transparency, or whatever one may see as essential trends in the neoliberal cultural ideology of consumerism, in which entrepreneurial selves and 'prosumers' essentially co-align (*pro*duce) their con*sum*ption of products by providing their data in various ways in exchange for certain perceived benefits, such as the free use of communication services, spending time giving feedback to providers to improve their products, and accommodating smartphones to their needs.

5 Governance

> This immediately entails a choice of method that one day I will finally try to come back to at greater length, but I would like to point out straightaway that choosing to talk about or to start out from governmental practice is obviously and explicitly a way of not taking as primary, original and given object, notions such as the sovereign, sovereignty, the people subjects, the state, and civil society, that is to say all those universals employed by sociological analysis, historical analysis and political philosophy in order to account for real governmental practice.
> (Foucault 2008, 2)

This citation mirrors the central concern of Foucault's main argumentative thrust, which is still pivotal for many practitioners of discourse analysis: knowledge and truth are the outcome of social production, of historical contingency as opposed to universal principles – a crucial point being how they are regulated and the scholar's duty to reveal this. The citation also points to a weakness: the lack of an elaborated method, a gap that many sociologists and linguists have tried to fill.

In the field of religion, governance has received increasing attention (Martikainen 2013, 129–34). In recent work, it is mainly conceptually linked to regimes of truth-telling, territory, and neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is an important field, defined as "practices" in Foucault's late work on governmentality and biopolitics (Foucault 2008), the latter replacing earlier dichotomies between liberation and repression in his studies on sexuality, referring instead to gradational biopower. Very recently, closer scrutiny of neoliberal governance has gained ground in the cultural study of religion (see, for example, Martikainen and Gauthier 2013). Tuomas Martikainen develops a systematic approach to the "multilevel and pluricentric network governance of religion" (2013, 129) in order to grasp the many ways of regulating religion besides

the church-state model. Religion and immigration is a related field (see, for example, Bradamat and Koenig 2009).

A very illuminating example of a discursive approach to religion in this regard is Breda Gray's Foucault-inspired article on neoliberal governmentality, with a case study of refugee work undertaken by churches and religious organizations in Ireland (2013). Competition between religious and secular organizations, with the state as a stakeholder advertising the projects, leads to a specific institutionalization within the field of refugee work. The pastoral power of care is combined with the rationale of technological and calculative governance, such as efficiency, targets, benchmarking, performance indicators, and an audit culture. Traditionally the pastor is held up as an example and is distinguished by their knowledge of the biographies of those entrusted to their care. Pastoral power is a relationship of obedience. The subordination of those entrusted to this care is realized through confession and the examination of consciences, and at the same time has the merit of individualizing the cared-for person. Within the process of secularization, this pastoral care is widened to social governance, notably through social work and psychological professions. Once a church makes bids for projects in refugee or other social work, it has to adapt to neoliberal, administrative discourse formation, which involves serious changes to the church's former procedural rationality, its human capital portfolio, and its control mechanisms, among other aspects. Therefore, the intermingling of religious organizations in the highly professionalized and socially differentiated subsystems of societies will have a lasting and unforeseeable effect on particular religious dispositifs.

The governance discourse is regularly accompanied by the question of the possibility of resistance. Is practicing yoga or mindfulness an escape from neoliberal governance, or does it stabilize the workforce for further exploitation? Foucault insistently pushed this question in the context of his extensive work on the history of sexuality. When are gender regimes a space for free expression – if indeed this can be seen as freedom, with all the problematics of prescribed confessionalism – and when are they spaces of domination? When do religious regimes enter alliances with psychiatric power or other discourses and the regimes these exert through institutionalized practices? Saba Mahmood's adaptation of Foucault's proof of resistance in discourse points to the agency of Muslim women in Cairo, which disrupts the pattern of female subordination to patriarchy with 'Western' feminist images of freedom (2005).

6 What Room Is There for Subjectivity in the Discourse?

Foucault's conception of the subject is a topic that should not be neglected, and it has been controversial from very early on in the reception of his ideas. A few remarks on the possible importance of the subject in the structure that largely constitutes discourse are therefore called for. What importance do individuals, the 'individual,' late modern subject actors, the self – or however human beings are conceived – have in discourse theory?

Whereas earlier theory-building addressed the cognitive knowing subject, this subject is now embedded or even dissolved in a map of social interactions. Such interaction may now even include animals, non-human beings, material things, or a material vitality. In the above-mentioned work on governance, the subject's self-regulation appears as agency. In recent decades, this regime has been variously characterized as optimizing, privatizing, publicizing, or individualizing. Foucault transposes the individual subject to the more general, historical form of subjectivity. Religion is a well-established political technology used to regulate subjects by inaugurating a form of subjectivity. One of these forms or regimes of subjectivities is truth-telling. Foucault contends that epistemic games of truth-telling enable the renunciation of truth, as in votes or exclamations of feeling and felt bodily experiences.

In the same way, Asad investigates how asceticism uses pain to find out how far the body depends on sensory perceptions. The body is not an obstacle on the way to truth, but rather the arena within which the truth can be brought to light (Asad 1983, 311). From medieval physical torture to the pressure put on penitents with the intention of causing mental pain that will lead to the confession of sins, a bodily sensation (pain) is linked to the revelation of truth (Asad 1983, 321). The habitus of confession "has become an attitude that can have – let's say – simple psychological functions such as an improved knowing of oneself, a better composure of oneself, realizing one's genuine inclinations, the option of leading one's own life" (Foucault 1977, translation mine). To describe this life of one's own and this idealization of authenticity, a history of the contemporary self seems set to become a new discipline, recording practices of subjectification and self-relationships. In this vein, "self-care" and "technologies of the self" are concepts of utmost importance (Foucault 1988).

From the 1960s onward, there is a lacuna with respect to a history not only of the self, but of self-governance (Eitler and Elberfeld 2015). A rising number of therapeutic cultures, which ascribe to subjects a need for therapy, constitute an environment in which the discourse of "vulnerable" or even "traumatized" subjects (Argenti-Pillen 2000) suits the neoliberal industry of supplying support for the vulnerable (for example, migrants; see Gray 2013, 71), whether in the form of anti-trauma therapy (for instance, the new trends in yoga therapy propagated by Price et al. 2017) or mindfulness

as a modernist offshoot of Buddhism (Samuel 2014). Discourse theory explains how dispositions work in subjects and what role religions play in connecting affective and ethical dispositions to the more stable formation of a particular historical subjectivity alongside others (on piety, for example, see Mahmood 2005; on the ethics of soundscapes, see Hirschkind 2009).

Altered personal relationships – in families or partnerships – are but one trigger in the discursive changes and interrelated formation of new spiritualities and religious practices; further factors include economization, new forms of networked communication due to globalized digitalization, and transcultural discourses on sustainability and spiritual practice (Strauss and Mandelbaum 2013) that shift and swirl existing discourses, as well as creating new ones.

7 Questions, Limits, and Critiques of Discourse Theory

What are the limits of discourse analysis? Does this approach have a specific operative range within which it is useful, and beyond which it is limited or even unsuitable? Controversies have regularly raged over topics such as the scope of action Foucault's interpretation of culture leaves to agents, the question of non-human agency, the supposed negligence of non-discursive practices, the implosion of 'religion' as a specific category (among others), and claims that discourse analysis is inappropriate for material culture and the body.

Like system theory, discourse theory implies that autonomous subjects are entangled in a structure. Semantic propositions do not equal utterances, but account for a figuration that shapes agents and has influenced their world even before they act upon it. A discourse is more than language as a tool to extrapolate the world. In this sense, subjects are created, maintained, and subordinated to a structure: the discursive web. At the same time, subjects are of the utmost importance in discourse theory. A 'subjectivity formation' conceptualizes the historical conditions of ways of life as well as formative and often oppressive forces and renders them describable on a meso-level. 'Subjectivity' denotes a very important theoretical issue; it is not simply an intentional agent or institution, but indicates the scope of action, options, and feelings – in short, the possible being – of subgroups of people at a given time.

In this regard, discourse theory is very close to what is known in Pierre Bourdieu's structural sociology as field theory, in which critical discourse analysis is a permanent battle over enforcement and hegemony, and it is superior to system theory, where no equivalent conceptual level of subjectivity can be found. The intentionality of actors is limited to the micro-level: the further one moves away from this level, and the more institutionalized the interaction, the more unintended effects take over and develop certain dynamics of the anonymized exertion of power.

The recent debate on the categorization of New Age spirituality serves to provide some insights into how the limits and strengths of discourse theory are currently being discussed. Paul Heelas, for example, opposes Foucauldian interpretations of New Age spiritualties by rooting them in this-worldly "life" (2008). Not very convincingly, he opposes "lived life" to the distanced analytical view. Others examine the transfer of so-called 'psy' discourses into the domain of self-help, therapy, and personal growth, suggesting that these technologies of the self are the product of a form of neoliberal governmentality that reduces personal agency and forecloses political critique and social change. But how can we decide whether spiritual practices are disciplinary techniques that simply reproduce dominant (neoliberal) subject positions, or whether they open up a libertine space? And is liberalism the way to escape regulation? One under-theorized concept is that of a normative bias in some strands of critical discourse analysis, which argues that hegemony is always problematic and constitutes an unjust (unequal) exertion of power (but see Reiner Keller's remarks above, this volume). Very strong hegemonic relations indicate that ex-colonial actors do not have complete and equal freedom to act, and that self-images are interdependent in both Occidentalism and Orientalism. A post-colonial 'bad conscience' may contribute to excessive attempts to justify equality. Social science research is clear on this point; Eileen Barker, for example, points out that there is no way to decide whether frequent sexual intercourse or celibacy is better, or which religious organization "oversteps the boundaries of permissible behaviour" (2006, 391).

A recurring criticism of discourse analysis is that it is logocentric and is not able to take in the embodied quality of agents, since they are rooted in an artificial material world that affects them through affordances, among other things. With a view to the work of Asad and others, the contrary seems to be true: body disciplining and bodies in their materiality have in fact entered the arena of research. At the same time, cognitive and evolutionary approaches were not as common as they are today. Thus this criticism of discourse theory neglects the timeframe. Indeed, linguistic pragmatics was insufficient to give full meaning to practice in discourse theory, whereas ritual theories explicitly link discourse with materiality (Ioannides 2016) and pay attention to body movement, emplacement, and aesthetic delight in practices of text recitation (see the work of one of Asad's pupils in Hirschkind 2009).

Donovan O. Schaefer hints at another important topic, which discourse theory often overlooks: affects. Schaefer still observes a neglect of affect theory, which is why his book on religious affects is "about the ways that intellectual and political circuits are informed by relationships between bodies that are invisible to discursive analytics" (Schaefer 2016, 10). A question that arises from the same background – namely, the evolutionary theory of religion – asks whether animals have discourses, since some primatologists (such as Jane Goodall) argue that they have spirituality, for which Goodall finds proof in a group of primates' spontaneous dance in front of a waterfall. Schaefer gives no reason why a waterfall dance performed by chimpanzees should be religious, rather than an expression of aesthetic

taste or a theatrical performance – but the latter would be difficult if not impossible to prove, given that chimpanzees do not found theatre companies, which brings us to the cultural practice argument. Art, like religion, is a discursive conglomerate and not merely a 'massing of affects,' as in Schaefer's work. As primate research has progressed, supposed indicators of human uniqueness – such as cognition, language, tool use, and sociality – have faded away, one after another. Nevertheless, the ascription of religion is not on the same logical level. One would have to presuppose the category of religion, as it is not inevitable to believe that the exceptional *experience of* – or even better, *behavior toward* – a waterfall is a *sui generis* emotion (but a reaction to its rarity, the loud noise, damp air, bright light, fast movement, reflections, etc.).

Religion certainly did not fall out of the blue. There has to be some sort of transition, so we might be forced to indicate some pre-forms of religion – which might be less complex – but even then, it would be necessary to combine contingent forms of living if RELIGION is to be understood as a cultural rather than a genetic phenomenon. A cultural point of view would understand religion as a cultural phenomenon of a higher order, requiring institutions, social ranks, interpretations, misunderstandings, and the wish to regulate others as well as the way the world is represented. The difference between this and any naturalistic, pre-constructivist (or "essentialist"; see McCutcheon 1997), evolutionary discourse is salient here.

The question of how non-discursive practices (such as habits and conventions) constitute the hidden underside of discourses is a question that has been discussed for some time, and it has gained new actuality in recent studies of the aesthetics of religion (Grieser and Johnston 2017; Koch and Wilkens 2019). A crucial developmental step in cultural studies is taking place in embodied cognition. Perhaps recent voices speaking about how to deal with material religion and culture, the body and the senses, images, brains, and media will have a huge impact in pushing discourse theory a step closer to aesthetics.

8 Conclusion

This chapter reviews a small extract of work demonstrating the high, not yet fully exploited potential of Foucauldian discourse research in cultural studies of religion, along the lines of historical configurations of problems and their solutions, as well as their unintended effects; discourse formations; power–knowledge; discipline and regulation; governance; and subjectivity. The special perspective which discourse theory brings to cultural studies is praxeological, genealogical, and juxtaposes differentiated societal domains. Discourse theory has developed in a highly multidimensional manner and is especially successful in creating an entire zoo of conceptual items, such as genres, style, and dispositif. Methodologies for collecting research data can entail

focus group discussions (Ndaluka 2012) and expert interviews as well as other sources, such as media articles, religious writings and preaching, and different types of social events, practices, and structures (Fairclough 2010, 164). Thus it is easy to get lost in nomenclature.

It becomes apparent that the history of ideas and the history of concepts have to take a step back from their role as unifying narratives in the light of discourse analysis, paying postcolonial attention to discontinuity, rupture, and new elements brought together from subcurrents of known categorizations (Foucault 1972, 4–6). From the point of view of discourse theory, religious practices interact and overlap with sometimes surprising societal subfields, social movements, and new technologies at any time in history – this is not only typical of (post-)modernity. One considerable impact of discursive approaches is that they lead the cultural study of religion away from a fixed category of religion, away from the history of ideas, and away from a tendency to unify grand narratives, big social theories, and 'great-man ' historical reconstructions.

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