Passions' Performance
On the Effects of Affects[1]

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Introductory Remark

What is to be discussed on the following pages is *not* a repetition of my postdoctoral-thesis on *Passivität aus Passion* (*Passivity by Passion*, or the turn from passivity to passion?). Instead I make some remarks on the relevance and structure of ›passivity‹ as a phenomenological category and give some examples of passivity's performance. In focus are forms and figures of passivity *in language*: how passivity is present and effective in language (resp. use of language) and how we orient ourselves in the activity-passivity relation in lifeworld and religion. The hypothesis is: passivity is omnipresent and not omnipotent, but quite powerful. The range of phenomena is structured by three aspects: grammar, rhetoric and hermeneutics (and as postscriptum in aesthetics). The examples are: what does it mean to be in a passive position, i.e.: to be seen and asked, to be expelled (extremely as ›bare life‹), and to be (and become) a witness, to be suffering (for something) and finally: what may it mean that God is in a passive position (that he suffers)?

Behind this exploration and explication of ›passions' performance‹ lies the idea that religious symbols are symptoms of basic forms of passivity (in creation, in sin, in redemption or salvation etc.). Religion *is* a culture of passivity and therefore theology needs a special sense *for* the diverse passive positions of (religious) life. In this regard it may be helpful to develop a hermeneutic of religion by its passions and passivities. At least God's ›pathos‹ and faith as passion are crucial there. They signify a challenge to theology to understand these ›calculated absurdities‹ as symbols for a way to live with and by these passivities, insofar as they are ›salvific‹, and to live against and without them, insofar as they are ›evil‹.

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[1] As a terminological remark: I understand passions at first hand in the sense of the Greek ›pathe‹, and passivity as the Greek ›pathos‹, in succession of Aristotle. The further differences are made along the elaboration by contemporary phenomenology, mainly Levinas and Bernhard Waldenfels. For this reason I do not care about the terminological differences between ›passions‹, ›affects‹, ›feelings‹ and ›emotions‹ (and ›moods‹). The concept of ›pathos‹ is used in an inclusive sense.

1. Common Ways to Deal with Passions[2]

The easiest way to deal with the topic of ›passions' performance‹ would be to identify basic passions or emotions by means of which we or ›the culture‹ are ›driven‹. The thesis accordingly would be: *Man and culture are driven by passions*. This would fit in well with quite different theories:

- An existentialist view could accept that fear is fundamental for ›*becoming* a self‹ (Kierkegaard).
- A Heideggerian could accept that the *angst* of death is fundamental for *human* life.
- With reference to Plato or Aristotle one might remember rather the bright or lucky passions to be the *primum movens* of culture and especially of philosophy. Plato in his Symposium noted the *eros* as fundamental passion moving man towards the ideas; or in antiquity the search for ›luck‹, hence the wish to become lucky, was the basic motivation of human agency.
- Even a Freudian could agree (I assume) that men are driven by passionate desires, be it the desire for sex or for death.

However, dark or bright *passions make man ›moving‹* and they are *the cause of movement in culture*. Not least of all they can be understood as the *primum movens of religion* (or *to* religion). Giambattista Vico for example understood fright and horror as origins of myth and religion. The *effects* of affects or the performance of passions are, in this reading, ideal cognition, culture and especially religion.

But the common *use* of ›passions' performance‹ today rather takes place in business and politics. What for centuries was (and still is?) done by Religion is nowadays done by politics and economy: *business with fear*. Apocalypticism is as usual as there are reasons for fear that are indefinite enough to make *angst* out of it: the global warming (cf. the belated Al Gore) and the economic crisis are actual versions, the nuclear danger, cold war or the millennium bug have been other ones before.[3] In Europe it was, once ago, the forest dieback. My intention is not to argue against the serious reasons at

[2] In the end of my book about Metaphors and Life-world, there remained an open question of Hans Blumenberg to Nietzsche: his philosophical eschatology is directed by the expectation of the ›super-human‹ (Übermensch). May that be the reason why he could not understand ›the passion‹? And what would it mean ›to understand the passion‹? It means at least to draw a distinction: the distinction between passion and action, and to ask, how they are to be related to each other. Does this imply that the passion is not an action? That seems doubtful: In the gospel of John for example the passion *is* narrated as an action. So the question still remains: What is the passive in the passion, what is the difference to any action, if there is a difference?

[3] Is terrorism capable of being an apocalyptic danger?

stake here. The rhetorical *use* of these problems is however remarkable. They function the very same way as once ago pestilence and comets did: as topics for the use of apocalyptic patterns. Fear makes business ›go round‹[4], and sometimes politics as well.

The opposite, or rather the supplement, works perhaps even more effectively: Bright passions normally work better (even in election campaigns): delight, happiness and joy are the more effective references for affective techniques (like rhetoric).

The excitements of passions are, traditionally speaking, suspicious. The more or less chaotic arousals have been regarded as the grounds of the Fall, the origin of anarchy or the resource of sophistic argument. Temptation and seduction, deception and illusion are traditional topics of the critique of passions (or emotions etc.). The *danger* or risk caused by them is the resource to argue *against* them: You shall not derogate reason by passions!

This certainly is not simply wrong: Especially the scientific treatment of passions should not be too passionate. The same applies in law or in politics: to be elected simply ›by passions‹ or as a result of passionate campaigns and promises is risky. And in law the judge should be free from passions for or against the accused. The critical maxim to act and think not ›by‹ passions is a rule made to purify and neutralize certain communications from passions.

Taking passions on the other hand to be a danger and accusing them to reason for irrationality is equally reductionist. Their driving forces and their energy would be cut off and too generally restricted as ›impure‹. This would mean to become theoretically blind for passions and emotions.[5]

2. To be Driven by Passions (Differences)

Is the thesis ›man (or culture) are driven by passions‹ therefore trivial and dangerous or is it as general as it is worthless? Inferences and possible discoveries depend on further differences:

a) On the one hand they depend on the difference to the thesis that will or cognition are basic and that passions are merely accidental or marginal;
b) On the other hand they depend on the further identification of passions and on the elucidation about *which* passions and *how* they are effective.

The value of the thesis depends not least on the question whether and how it opens up the horizon of perception and which possibilities of analysis and description it implies. In difference to a rationalist (or cognitivist) and an ethicist (or moral) view of God and faith the model of pathos might open up *other* ways of attention, analysis and description.

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[4] Not least in Hollywood.

[5] One may call it ›theoretical alexythymia‹: being speechless in regard to emotions and passions.

a) Cognitive and Ethical View (of God and Faith)

A *cognitive* view of culture and religion (and God) supposes that cognition and reason are basic, but not passions. An *ethical* view supposes that (the more or less) free will and self-determination are basic (and passions are heteronomous). Thus, in opposition to these two alternatives, it certainly does not sound trivial to assert that the forms and modes of *pathos* are basic, that they are the driving forces.[6]

It is possible to exemplify this in respect to the concept of faith as well as in respect to the concept of God: Is God primarily determined by his cognition or will? Both possibilities have been held in scholastic theology, either by the Thomistic or by the Franciscan tradition. If God, though, »is love« (John, Jüngel), he primarily is *not* determined by cognition or will, but by *this* passion of being a ›loving father‹, i.e. by his passion for men and their salvation. It is ›love‹ then that moves him. It is ›love‹ that determines the concept of God. One might object that ›love‹ as metaphorical attribute of God is not merely a passion or an emotion, but that it rather is the rational and the purely good.[7] I do not want to contradict, but at any rate the model for cognition and speech here is a (conceptual) metaphor taken from the field of passions and emotions – no more, but no less either. This entails to think and speak of God in the mode of *pathos* (in difference to *ethos* and *logos*).

The same applies to the concept of ›faith‹: If faith is not primarily cognition or agency (or will), but a ›feeling‹, as Schleiermacher put it, then faith is rather a *pathos* than *logos* or *ethos* (cognition or will). This certainly is a difference in contrast to any rationalistic or moralistic view of faith. Positively it points towards a ›holistic‹ perspective on faith: it is not a *noumenon* of pure reason or of free will, but a *phainomenon* of life, body and soul, i.e. of the whole man.

b) Which Passions and How?

In the theory of religion one of the important differences is, whether religion is seen to be an answer to fear (or angst) or a culture of love and happiness.[8] It seems to be standard regarding religions to be provoked by fear (cf. E. Tugendhat). This often is combined with the common opinion that religion is a ›reduction of contingency‹ (and not a *culture* of contingency). Religion then is driven by fear and makes use of it in teaching and preaching. But even though in Luther's theology the apocalyptic scenario (God against devil etc.) was essential for the grammar of passions, it nevertheless

[6] Remember the resistance to Freudian perspectives, they are significant and symptomatic.

[7] I don't ask here for the narrations (and history) of ›purifying‹ the concept of God from revenge or anger.

[8] The latter can become ridiculous as well (in religious arousals), but that does not speak against the difference as such.

is evident that to him Christianity is *not* a religion of fear but of love. The medieval horizon, however, was nonetheless still vivid for him and thereby for some Lutheran theologians succeeding him.

Is the fear of death, at least of the eternal death, a basic passion of Christianity? This would result in faith being basically anxious. If on the other hand love (or charity) is the answer, what was the question? How to deal with angst and fear? *This* approach sounds reductive, because the reason for religion would always be the same, may it be death or angst. There is nothing more and all culture of religion would become a mere compensation of this existential problem.

Amazingly enough it seems to be convincing for ›observers‹ that religion results out of fear and angst. Religion then would be, like Descartes put it, ›whistling in the dark forest‹: a means to drive away your fear and anxiety. I do not want to argue against this view (it is evidently reductionist). It is thoroughly misguiding and leads to an ›understanding‹ of religion in compliance with the prejudices one already had beforehand.

The opposite though seems to be wrong as well: Does religion grow out of joy and delight? The Epicurean worldview seems to be working without any religion. And in (late) modern times, when the individual's desires and the ›pursuit of happiness‹ became dominant, there is no growing desire for religion to be observed. This is an argument against a straightforward deduction of religion from certain *needs,* like e.g. the need to compensate this or that passion. The question is *not*, whether religion is provoked by certain passions, but in what sense they are relevant and form a basic dimension of human life, and of Christian religion in particular.

3. Lack of Sense for Passivity?

The question of the *meaning* of passion and passivity differs from questions of their reference. The first is a rather existential question, or a hermeneutical and phenomenological one. Take for example two basic passivities: *to be born and to die.* The reference is clear, but what does it mean? A description in a phenomenological sense would be difficult ›at the limits of life‹. And to ask ›how does it feel‹ is also senseless, because it goes beyond any givenness.

Therefore the meaning of Christ's passion cannot only be the ›end of life‹. Mere death is not its meaning (it is never a ›meaning‹ but the end of any meaning at all). To give meaning, though, to his passion in retrospect is as usual as it is *not* self-evident. To make sense out of the senseless might be arbitrary, at least as long as it is not anchored in one's own experience and somehow as well in the experience of the one who suffered the passion.

This is why the interpretation of *this* passion urges at least theology to ask for the meaning of passion and passivity; ›at least theology‹, because in this

perspective passion and passivity are basic and irreducible expressions (in religious as in scientific, theological language). In this regard theology differs from other perspectives insofar as they may ignore the question of passion and passivity. It seems to me that in philosophy for example activity is basic and at the center of interests: epistemology is directed by the activity of synthesis, ethics is directed by the use of freedom and the rules and maxims of activity, and even aesthetics often seem to be directed by the activities named reception of art. Insofar as the active and autonomous subject is the model of perception and rational reconstruction there might appear a *lack of passivity* or at least a lack of sense *for* passivity.

4. Passive Reduction

The contrasting idea is quite simple to express: All action is *re*action. Concerning human agency this mechanical model, though, is insufficient. Hence one better says: All action *answers* to a question (Gadamer); or is *response* to a challenge (Collingwood); or it is response to a precedent affection or *pathos* (B. Waldenfels).[9] The antecedent to any action then is a passion, which provokes the action and shapes it. If one is blamed guiltless, the response will show by its ›sound‹ how one feels and thinks about the accusation. The model is simple and quite general: Every ›interaction‹ corresponds to a precedent action, which is given as passion and provokes a response characterized by the passions.

The *effect* of the model is to open up the horizon of description and interpretation: One has to ask for every action in an interaction, in how far and to what extent it is a response to its antecedent. »What was the question, the challenge or the pathos (event) beforehand?« One might call this question and this mode of interpretation a ›passive reduction‹: asking back to the antecedent passivity and the underlying passions of a response.

By the way: Every interaction thus can be seen and interpreted also as *interpassion*: as a corresponding play of passions. This underlying dimension of passion and passivity of every interaction is usually invisible or latent. To make it visible is to work on the manifestation of these latencies. And to look at our interactions in this regard is a work against the usual dominance of activity and the active subject. It is a work against the ›lack of sense for passivity‹.

[9] The differences are neglected here.

5. Grammar

The passive is a grammatical category, indispensable and essential for our speech, rooted in our language. A basic distinction for our orientation, in speech as well as in life, is made visible by it.

Possibly due to this reason Aristotle conceptualized the passive as one of his ten categories. You can ask for everything real and possible, in respect to what it is passive. To all action there corresponds a passion, to every activity a passivity. Thereby it seems to be a distinction of *agency*: The agent is active while the patient is passive. The passive clay is formed by the active potter.

Luther made use of this Aristotelian concept of passivity at the heart of protestant theology: The *mere passive iustificari* is made explicit metaphorically by characterizing the sinner as *materia mere passiva*, formed by the act of God: The sinner »non vult *esse materia mere passiva*, sed active ea operari vult quae ipsa *patiendo* debebat Deum sinere operari et ab eo *accipere*«.[10] And this soteriological thesis has a theological (i.e. epistemological) implication: »*notitia nostra de Deo est mere passiva*«.[11] This shows how the grammatical difference becomes relevant for the grammar of theology.

But what could this possibly mean: ›a passive cognition‹ or ›to be merely passive‹? It sounds like mere nonsense or at least like a category mistake. Accordingly such talk of passivity resembles a certain kind of calculated category mistakes known as metaphors. Paradoxes or hyperbolic expressions are, verbally taken, nonsense, but they articulate a difference in point of view. What is said is what is shown, namely that there is an antecedent act or event in comparison to which *we* are in a basically passive position, be it in justification or cognition of God. If that is *not* to say that we are just clay, and if that is not regarded as mere nonsense or mere ›rhetoric‹, one has to ask for the meaning of passivity in human ›interpassions‹.

How does it feel to be in a ›passive position‹, like *to be* seen or to be asked, to be exposed (to attention, to ridicule or derision), to be accused or hit and hurt (or even killed), or *to be in something*, to be in danger of death (of one's own life) or to be in love?

6. Looks and Questions (Rhetoric)

It is a question of perspective: In an interaction every passive corresponds to an active. You may be seen by someone seeing you; you may be asked, by someone asking you. But to be *seen* and to be *asked* are not *only* grammatical markers for the passive position.

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[10] M. Luther, *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius*, WA 40/1, 407, 16–17 (my italics).

[11] Ibid., 610, 24–25 (my italics).

a) *To be visible* means at least to be corporeal (the passivity as quality of the *pura materia* reappears here in a human context). By being corporeal one is sensitive and vulnerable.[12] Thus visual sensitivity entails that one may be touched by the looks of others, one even might be vulnerated thereby. This is not necessarily uncomfortable or invidious. If one follows the ›neocartesian‹ intuition »I am seen and therefore I am«,[13] one might experience the looks of others as a foundation of one's own existence. Such an exhibitionist inclination is probably not the rule. I assume the contrary to be more common: To be seen, to be exposed to the looks of others, is an uncomfortable position.[14]

In regard to passivity ›to be seen‹ entails questions like »How does it *feel* to be seen« and »What does it provoke?« By the response to the looks of others one shows how it feels (intentionally or not). Making one's passivity visible this way is what I call the performance of this passivity. This applies to passions like showing yourself, making yourself visible, public and present (by texts or by pictures).

In a theological context the visibility (as passivity) is relevant in several dimensions. The main question probably is: How does it feel to be seen by God, always and everywhere? To be ›in God's eye‹ traditionally is an expression of security (or rather certainty) about being safe as the creator takes care for me. For the sinner, though, it becomes dangerous, because every sin is seen and will be judged. For the saved it can be an expression of soteriological relation: To be seen by graceful eyes means to be saved ›over time‹, lifelong and even longer.

In a hermeneutical perspective these metaphors of ›being seen‹ are significant, because they articulate an invisible relation expressed in the language of visibility and phenomenality. The qualification of the passivity (*how* I am seen, and how it feels) is a way of saying and showing how I relate to God in God's view.

This results in a twofold view of myself, as sinner and justified, and a twofold view of God, as the judge and the loving father. The performance of the view is its ›eschatological diachronicity‹ as an effective view of my existence. The ›loving look‹ makes one beloved and it may provoke a loving look back. But that is ambiguous: The desire in the ›loving look‹ can provoke a withdrawal, because the desire also is a burden and might be uncomfortable. To be ›wanted‹ (dead or alive; or for military service; or for any other ›service‹) is a demand or even a claim. It could be experienced as an attack.

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[12] Cf. H. Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2006).

[13] I am on TV and that's why I am; I am online etc.

[14] Facebook and YouTube are counterexamples!

The views of others have an impact on the ›me‹ (as part of the self). This is well known since Mead and Ricœur. There is a performance of the self as it is viewed by others: These looks make me reflecting about them; they change my behavior; they are felt and thereby are directing (or partly determining?) my way of life. Becoming a self means to integrate these views of others in one's own (self)perception. How might this happen? How do I integrate ›to be seen‹ in my own view? The usual answer is: By reflection. By means of reflection I anticipate the others in my own consideration (like in an internal dialogue). The passivity created by means of self-reflection, though, can never take the place of the others who are external and foreign to my self.

In theology the problem reappears: Is it possible to integrate ›to be seen by God‹ in one's own self-relation? The usual answer is given by reference to conscience, because in my conscience the voice of the other is present to me all the time. But protestant theology insists on the irreducible externality (*verbum externum*) as well as on a certain strangeness of God (*iustitia aliena*). The passivity in relation to him therefore can never be reduced to an internal relation of the self. Why and what for?

I suppose it to be self-evident that ›to be seen by others‹ remains different from self-perception and from any internal ›image‹ of the others or from the anticipation of their looks (on me). There is or even has to be drawn a distinction between the other and the image of him or her created by oneself. Integrated in the self there is an image of the other as an imaginary presence of his or her look. To draw a distinction here means to make an ›iconic difference‹ connected with a certain iconoclastic gesture. Like in regard to God his metaphorical or pictorial image *is* not himself, what is more or less self-evident in the Jewish-Christian tradition.[15] To insist on this difference also in regard to other others (than God) is to insist on the difference of an internal and an external passivity. I would like to insist on it for the sake of saving the ›otherness‹ (*iustitia aliena*) as well as the openness of the self (as creature, as sinner, as human beings in need of justification).

b) *To be asked* implies to be put in a passive position, exposed to a question without any choice or possibility for deliberation beforehand. The person asked lands in the perspective of an expectation: He or she is expected to *give* something, namely answers or responses. There is a kind of obligation to become active. This position of passivity is fundamental for the person who is asked to answer. One of the worst cases probably is to be asked

[15] The *sacramental* or kerygmatic representation as mode of ›real presence‹ is another question, not to be discussed here. Also the reverence for Christ-icons in the orthodox tradition, as grounded in the decisions of the 7th ecumenical Council in Nicaea (787), raises questions on how precisely to describe this iconic difference in regard to God, or rather Christ and the icons depicting him.

›Why?‹,[16] or even worse: ›What for?‹ and finally: ›So what?‹.[17] The more general the questions are, the more impossible the answers. In due course the position of being asked can become quite inconvenient.

Already the ordinary question »Does God exist?«[18] anticipates an answer (depending on the questioner), but beforehand applies the task of answering to the questioned other. The ›pious‹ question »Do you believe in God?« is no less uncomfortable, because it confronts with the task to confess or not. It already is a mode of response, if one withdraws from such a position or ignores or rejects the question.

The performance of questions, especially of this kind, is remarkable: Great, too great questions swallow you up, so that you might wish for the earth to swallow you up. Or they challenge you and you accept the battle. However, the question provokes reactions or responses. Of course, these responses are active and more or less spontaneous. The situation beforehand, though, is one of ›being as becoming‹: You are brought into a passive position by a question. If you are asked or questioned, if you are seen, you become and you are exposed, no matter if you want it or not. It overwhelms you before any consideration and without being asked before. Even if someone is in the position to ›be asked‹ (like a teacher) or wishes to be asked (like a politician), hence even if it does not feel ›uncomfortable‹ to be asked, even then the *performance* of a question remains the same: The question (and the questioner?) puts the questioned in a *passive position*. Out of this position the questioned one cannot not respond. The performance is not only the passive position in which the questioned is put, but it is the ›activation‹ of the questioned person. Whatever he does or does not, his reaction is a way of responding.

To ask and to be asked differ in respect to their *affective* impact or *performance*: To be asked can be an uncomfortable situation. The question touches the one who is asked, he is affected by the question and by the one who is asking. To be the one who is asked means to be affected. And to ask someone before one is asked might be a way to avoid this affection. Not a symbol, but a symptom of this affection can be the *blushing*[19] as Charles Darwin already noted:

> BLUSHING is the most peculiar and the most human of all expressions. Monkeys redden from passion, but it would require an overwhelming amount of evidence to make us believe that any animal could blush. The reddening of the face from a blush is due to the relaxation of the muscular coats of the small arteries, by which the capillaries become filled with blood; and this depends

[16] Imagine God is asked ›why me?‹ – What should he answer?

[17] A.R. Bodenheimer, *Warum? Von der Obszönität des Fragens*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999), 80.

[18] Ibid., 142.

[19] Cf. ibid., 70.

> on the proper vaso-motor centre being affected. No doubt if there be at the same time much mental agitation, the general circulation will be affected; but it is not due to the action of the heart that the network of minute vessels covering the face becomes under a sense of shame gorged with blood. We can cause laughing by tickling the skin, weeping or frowning by a blow, trembling from the fear of pain, and so forth; but we cannot cause a blush […] by any physical means, – that is by any action on the body. It is the mind which must be affected.[20]

No other animal can blush, only human beings are capable of it. It certainly is not an ›ability‹: You *can* not blush, but ›it happens‹, without willing or wishing. It is not intentional. It is a significantly human symptom of an affect (or feeling or emotion[21]). *Where* the affect is effective is open to discussion. As Darwin puts it, it is effective in the mind, but one might also say ›in the soul‹, because it is not (only?) an affection of the *nous*, but of all parts of the soul, manifest in the visible ›form of the body‹, the face.

The physiology and neuro-physiology focus on the bodily aspects, causation and visible reaction. But psychology and anthropology can ask for the cultural, moral and not least religious context and pragma-semantics of blushing. The inconvenience or embarrassment evidently depends on the rules given and embedded in a form of life.

Blushing is a typical *human* symptom, usually perceived as the manifestation of shame. It remains questionable though, whether only shame provokes blushing. It is a response showing embarrassment, shyness or modesty and perhaps awe as well.[22] Even less could be enough: an inconvenience, like to be seen or to be asked.

Remember Adam who is asked by God: »Where art thou?«: Perhaps there is an internal voice of conscience corresponding to this external voice of God.[23] When Adam feels his guilt, the question of God is ›making it explicit‹ (and conscious). There is no ›blushing‹ of Adam (and Eve) mentioned here. A look on the history of arts, though, shows that painters supplemented this

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[20] C. Darwin, »Self-Attention – Shame – Shyness – Modesty: Blushing«, in *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, 20th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1872), 148. It follows: »Blushing is not only involuntary; but the wish to restrain it, by leading to self-attention actually increases the tendency.«

[21] The possible differences are neglected here: ›Affect‹ is not restricted to causal affect programs, like facial reactions of anger or disgust. It is used for the whole range of the greek *pathe* and *pathemata*, latin *affectiones*.

[22] We make a difference between blush and *flush* (like in ›angry flush‹), whereas the flush is a reaction to an artificial causation (pepper, etc.).

[23] Or is it his external voice first ›raising‹ the conscience? That depends on the question, whether Adam had already a moral difference in his mind before being asked by God. In the mythical shape the question, whether conscience is already present in doing wrong or if is ›waken‹ by the voice of an other, remains open.

lack of symptom. Genesis 3 narrates how inconvenient the passive position is and it shows that the question alone is not the origin of Adam's inconvenience. The structure of being asked is precisely the situation of being asked *as sinner*. This hamartiological concreteness is decisive for the passivity of Adam's position: »I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself« (Gen 3:10).

Fear (or more existential: angst) is the basic passion (shall one say: emotion or affective state?) and *hiding* the initial reaction in this passive position. It is remarkable that this hiding is earlier than the manifest voice of God's question. Before they even hear him asking they already become aware of his presence, right after their awareness of being naked has been raised.

Here the passivities of ›being seen‹ (being visible) and ›being asked‹ come across each other, as if ›being asked‹ is the explicit version of ›being seen‹. Intriguingly the (shaming) visibility *post lapsum* is made manifest by the covering (»they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons«, Gen 3:7). The consequence of the awareness of nudity is to take cover for the sake of hiding oneself (partly) from the looks of each other. That they hide themselves from the looks of *God* comes second only – not by fig leaves but (ironically?) just by ›trees‹ (they »hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden«, Gen 3:8). No *blushing* is mentioned, but it can be supplemented by imagination (like in art).

One can understand the twofold hiding as reaction to a twofold passivity: The first is to be exposed to each other, the second to be exposed with the new situation in front of God. Both passivities are now given as consequences of ›breaking the rules‹, however this happened. In my view it was *not* a ›wrongdoing‹, a ›malefactum‹ (like Augustine said), but a drifting by the dynamics of affection and inclination, i.e. by a dynamic before and underneath the manifest agency. Conceptually spoken: It was a dynamic of *pathos* before and underneath the *ethos* and *logos* (agency and cognition).

The manifest effect of Adam's (new) passive position is the affective and spontaneous *hiding*: first as a visible means for invisibility (partly by the leaves); second as a hiding of oneself from ›God's eye‹ (for a while by the trees).

From the first one might deduce the whole range of cultural means of clothing, buildings and even institutions as the arts or media(lity). The relations to each other become indirect, mediated by signs and symbols. This indirectness is *not* simply the consequence of sin and its awareness, but it is the range of freedom in cultural formations.

From the second one might deduce the dark sides of culture: the reasons for shame and embarrassment, as they are shown in strategies of hiding oneself and rejecting one's own responsibility. It seems that in the end (or at first) a lack of relation, a loss of a ›good conscience‹ or of ›immediacy‹ to God is grounded here. However, in this second hiding there arises a special passivity: To be exposed to God's eye, to be seen by Him becomes basically

inconvenient, because He is (beforehand) seen as judge, and thus his eye becomes the ›law's eye‹. In this view on God as punishing judge a change of grammar is manifest. This view is as just as it is wrong because it typecasts God to the role of keeping the rules. This image of God misguides us to a narrow horizon of life, it drives us out of Eden.

This way the questioning God and the questioned Adam are put into the roles of master and slave (remember Hegel).[24] The master is made by the slave who makes himself a slave and thereby the master a master. This new perspective changes the whole view. Maybe asking normally implies that the questioner puts himself in the role of the master, and the other one in the role of the slave who has to give an answer. In Genesis 3 the case is more complex: A slave of his own (of his desires?), Adam hears the voice of God as the voice of his master, putting him in the inconvenient position of hiding himself. This is an indirect ›reduplication‹ of Adam's inconvenience beforehand.

There is ›something‹ lost, named ›the Paradise‹: one could call it a primordial lifeworld (Lebenswelt) without any difference between wish and reality, i.e. a world without desire, because there was no ›*lack* of something‹ (of time, of God's presence) and no difference of lifetime and worldtime (cf. H. Blumenberg).[25] Loss and lack determine the days after, the life in the sign of lacking God's presence and shortage of time and space. This position in history after paradise is in many respects determined by passivities, not only as givenness of certain conditions but also as lack and loss, that cannot be ›compensated‹ by activities. Even the best work or life cannot change the fundamental condition ›coram meo‹ and ›deo‹. A main aspect of ›sin‹ is to be passive in a sense that one cannot overcome this passivity oneself.

7. Mark of a Limit (Bare Life)

This irreducible passivity is always (in what sense ever) a result of one's own life. It is not a mere ›malefactum‹, rather it is a result of being misguided by the dynamics of one's own passions (seduction, temptation-metaphors). Due to this the passivity of sin differs from the position of being expelled. An expulsion always leaves open the possibility of hope (to come back etc.).

The position most extremely in contrast to the situation of being expelled is the *›bare life‹* (cf. G. Agamben). It is not the position of a sinner (in a meaningful religious context) or a sacrifice, which is *for* something like salvation or expiation. Even a victim, not dying *for,* but *because* of some reason,

[24] About Hegel cf. Bodenheimer, *Warum?*, 34.

[25] Cf. H. Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).

is still in the horizon of meaning, possibly at least. In the extraordinary case of becoming a victim for and because of nothing, life like death seems to be senseless. It is ›out of any order‹, beyond any sense and meaning. Bare life seems to be mere nonsense: no more sense is given and can be ascribed to this position even *more* passive than any meaningful passivity. The question raised in the beginning (»What does it mean to be in a passive position?«) finds its end or limit at this point.

The mode of cognition and agency of a ›bare life‹ is (as Agamben puts it) *inoperativeness*. This could mean a situation beyond any possibility of acting and reasoning, beyond speech and feeling. This is the worst case of ›apathy‹ as it puts others at a loss for words.

The intriguing question is whether the *ascription* of sense or meaning would be an overwhelming of such a meaningless victim? If Christ at the cross would be an example for ›bare life‹, is interpreting his death as ›death *for* (salvation)‹ already a ›making sense of‹ and theology going beyond the limits of death?

To ascribe sense to a victim or a suffering is always precarious. It is also ambiguous as it can be an overwhelming of the suffering person. But it can as well mean to make a demand and to speak to (and of) him. To speak to the ›bare life‹ would then mean demanding not to stay in this extremely passive position. In the case of God's demand on the sinner, theology uses to speak of ›waking him up‹. God calls the sinner out of his old life.[26] Can this be a model and a mode of speech fitting as well for the communication with ›bare life‹? Speaking to him is an act of communication and thereby a way to overcome extreme passivity, the isolation of being ›like dead man‹. The consequence would be that ›to speak to‹ is a way to overcome the loss of relations (i.e. of death, cf. Jüngel, *Tod*). The implications for the communication with possible examples of ›bare life‹ in society and beyond their limits are obvious: suspicious inhabitants of camps, immigrants or as well homeless and others ›out of society's order‹ are figures of a passivity *without* possibilities. To make demands on them might be a way of opening up new possibilities of life to them.

8. Witnesses and Prophets (Hermeneutics)

One step back: The dangerous situation of a state's evidence shows that one is not only always witness of one's own life, but *becomes* witness of certain events. That you ›become‹ a witness shows that witnesses are ›in becoming‹. One could say the witness is a figure of ›contra-intentionality‹: One becomes a witness against one's own will and remains it ›for life‹. To become witness therefore is not a question of ›human agency‹, but primarily of ›hu-

[26] And of course sin is not to be heard in a moralistic sense.

man passivity‹. In contrast to all expectations, what happens to me makes me become a witness of it. This passive position is even more inconvenient than to be asked and seen.

The *witness of the gone*, the past, is constitutionally late. The witness appears, when God is gone, when the event is over, when presence is past. This lateness is quite normal in every speech (or use of signs): something is denoted only when it is already gone (the use of names is different though). But the denotation by a witness is late in such a way that it is under suspicion of being too late. His precarious diachronicity remains doubtful. Without this doubt there would be no witness but simply a ›hard proof‹. The witness gives room and time for doubts.

The *witness of the coming*, the future, is constitutionally early, often *too* early. The prophets as well as Jesus always have been ›anachronistic‹. They do not fit *in* their time, because they bear witness to *another* time (and space), ›obviously‹ *less* real than the past and the present world. While the witness of the past has got the memory as ›authentification‹, the witness of the coming has only his imagination, thoroughly unstable. One can exterminate the past and even easier the future by killing or ignoring the witnesses. Therefore ›witness-protection‹ is not only a question in law but especially in religion. There is a need for a religion's ›witness-protection-program‹.

Prophets are examples of an extraordinary passivity as they act on the limits of their religious community (but of course in the end *for* it, by opening up its horizon). They *become* prophets not only by being asked, but by being *called*, even against their will (cf. already Moses). It seems to ›feel‹ quite uncomfortable to be *made* a prophet. Bad passions or feelings and resistance are of course topics of authentification and reliability (or of truth).

Thereby the model of a prophet's destiny is a paradigm for the whole of Israel. The *suffering* of the Prophet, however, is extraordinary and someway vouches for Israel's destiny. Hence a soteriological difference arises in the suffering by means of the servant's example (2 Is.): »Suffering as chastisement is man's own responsibility; suffering as redemption is God's responsibility. […] it was He Who had placed upon Israel the task of suffering for others«.[27] By *this* suffering, concentrated in the ›suffering servant‹, this extraordinary passivity is understood as redemptive, at least for others (or even for all men?).

What happens if such an ascription is made? Heschel seems to read the prophets as ›true history‹ and takes the texts as ›narrated events‹. I prefer to concentrate on the ›narrative event‹ (the event of narration): It is an interpretation of a (narrated!) suffering *as* an effective, especially redemptive one. The interpretation is of course belated (diachronicity) and directed by an ex post teleological perspective. The question or challenge lying behind

[27] A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper Collins, 1962/2001), 192.

this answer might have been the question of the meaning of Israel's and the prophet's destiny. Losing the land and the temple seemed to be nonsense. Therefore it first was understood as chastisement for disobedience. But the suffering of the servant had to be meaningful beyond that interpretation. The preposition ›for‹ in ›suffering for others‹ is obviously decisive: it makes the suffering effective ›for‹ others, i.e. the passivity is *made* redemptive (is asked and is seen *as* redemptive) by means of an ascription. I do not argue here at the level of history and experience, but of rhetoric and narrative techniques: There is implied a hermeneutical ›disclosure‹ by means of which a fate became transparent for a sense of salvation.

Reconstructing this *relecture* of the servant's fate as a ›making of sense‹ (in a constructivist or constructionist sense) would be too easy. The whole story then would come down to a ›making of religion‹ or salvation. It would just be a narrative construction of the prophetic religion. The decisive difference rather is made by the *gestures of passivity*: gestures of the non-intentionality of becoming a prophet; of the ›given‹ word of God; of the involuntary suffering, etc. To read these gestures only as narrative strategies of authentification may be fitting and plausible, but their implicit demand, their pragmatic truth-claim would then be ignored. These gestures need further hermeneutic consideration. I understand them as traits of ›externity‹, as pointing to an otherness, different from historical or narrative figures. Putting things this way implies admitting a (pragmatic) claim of these gestures. They are not only (constructed) signifiers. They are rather symptoms of an experience one has not chosen, i.e. of a meaningful passivity. The meaning of this passivity is given only in retrospection, by the narrative elaboration of the prophet's fate.

P. Ricœur interpreted the prophetic subject as *sujet convoqué* and *soi mandaté*.[28] The prophets become what they are by the passivity of an *appel*; in the narrations of course identified as ›His Word‹, represented by the Old Testament in its three parts (Tora, Prophets, Scriptures). They signify »l'un sur l'autre le moment de l'appel et celui de la réponse«.[29] For Ricœur it is

[28] P. Ricœur, »Phénoménologie de la Religion (1)«, in: *Revue de l'Institut Catholique de Paris* 45 (1993), 59–75 and idem, »Le sujet convoqué. A l'école des récits de vocation prophétique«, in: *Revue de l'Institut Catholique de Paris* 28 (1988), 83–99, 83.

[29] Ricœur, »Phénoménologie«, 73. Here one can observe another use of the model of ›question – answer‹ or ›challenge – response‹, now as ›appeal and response‹. Cf. ibid., 60: »Une phénoménologie peut sans aucun doute se proposer de décrire sous ses traits les plus universellement répandus cette structure de l'appel et de la réponse qui paraît régir tant les sentiments que les attitudes. A cet égard, cette phénoménologie aurait pur tâche essentielle de distinguer la structure appel/réponse du rapport question/réponse, en raison de l'équivoque attachée au terme réponse, commun aux deux couples de corrélatifs. Autant le rapport question/

crucial that the scripture signifies an *appel* of *totale étrangeté*[30] (can one say: of radical otherness?). This reading points in the same direction, as I suggested. The theological question, however, is whether this ›strangeness‹ (or otherness) is given only in the scripture or the narrative ›configuration‹, or whether it rather is a ›qualifier‹ given in the concept of ›God‹.[31]

It was Abraham J. Heschel[32] who developed his own point of view (against the *Deutsche Christen*) by writing *The Theology of Pathos* of the Jewish prophets. After a first part (until page 281) on the preexilic prophets there follows the second (285–632) on their *Theology of Pathos* and its implications for the concept of God. There is a twofold focus: on the feelings and experience of the prophets, and on their theology in the sign of *pathos*. To put it hermeneutically: the performance of the prophetic passivity is Heschel's ›pathetic‹ theology, i.e. *his* elaboration of a different concept of God (originally already in the 1930ies): God is to be understood not as anthropomorphic, but as anthropopathic. He is a passionate God, feeling *for* and suffering *with* Israel.

About ›The meaning of *pathos*‹ Heschel wrote:

> [The] divine pathos is not conceived as an essential attribute of God, as something objective, as a finality with which man is confronted, but as an expression of God's will; it is a functional rather than a substantial reality; not an attribute, not an unchangeable quality, not an absolute content of divine Being, but rather a situation or the personal implication in His acts.
>
> It is not a passion, an unreasoned emotion, but an act formed with intention, rooted in decision and determination; not an attitude taken arbitrarily, but charged with ethos; not a reflexive, but a transitive act. To repeat, its essential meaning is not to be seen in its psychological denotation, as standing for a state of the soul, but in its theological connotation, signifying God as involved in history, as intimately affected by events in history, as living care.[33]

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réponse implique, comme le rappelle Gadamer à la suite de Collingwood, un domaine *préalable* d'entente commun, autant le rapport question/réponse a-t-il pur fonction d'engendrer ce domaine d'entente par l'obéissance au plan du sentiment affecté et par l'invocation au plan de l'attitude de prière«.

[30] Ibid., 66, following Frye.

[31] Or is it both? Is the otherness of the text of the Holy Scripture itself trace of the otherness of God as suggested by M. Coors, *Scriptura efficax. Die biblisch-dogmatische Grundlegung des theologischen Systems bei Johann Andreas Quenstedt – Ein dogmatischer Beitrag zu Theorie und Auslegung des biblischen Kanons als Heiliger Schrift* (Göttingen: V&R, 2009)?

[32] 11.1.1907–23.12.1972. He studied since 1927 in Berlin and obtained his doctorate in 1932 (the title only in 1935) with the work *Das prophetische Bewußtsein* (published 1936 in Krakau). There he analysed the ›prophetic consiousness‹ as paradigm of a ›pathetic theology‹, grounded in passions (in the sense of *pathe*). In his later book *The Prophets* (1962) he elaborated this concept.

[33] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 297.

It is remarkable how dominant the model of *ethos* remains in this ›theology of *pathos*‹. This may be a consequence of the Neokantian context of Heschel's studies. But this ethical grounding is reconceptualized in his main idea of God's passion as ›living care‹. Here one can observe the idea of an *ethos* developed out of *pathos*, out of the ethical consequences of a certain passion. Passions' performance *is* action in being the response to the precedent passion. Its performance is also the *mode* of the provoked action: in what kind of ›spirit‹ (cf. J. Fischer) the activity appears.

In my view, however, the remarkable point here is the idea of ›*God's pathos*‹. Even in respect to God Heschel's concept is dominated by His *ethos*, activity and free ›will‹. The formation and meaning of His will, however, is decisive: it is determined not by ›the purest of all possible reason‹, nor by ›essential attributes‹ or other cognitive foundations. It is, in a way, ›anti-foundationally‹ *given* (as well for God ›himself‹?) in the mode of ›living care‹. This means that this passion is the fundamental givenness and phenomenality of God. It would be thoroughly misguiding to see it only as the result of cognition, deliberation or other rational reasons in God. The basic phenomenon (one could probably say ›revelation‹) *is* nothing else than this ›caring for‹. It is *this* passion of God, which turns the suffering into a suffering ›for‹ others. That is the ›reason‹ for this passion: It makes the suffering transparent for a salvific meaning.[34]

In understanding this passion of *care* one can understand care as »the secret of anger«,[35] but also »anger as suspended love«.[36] Finally, it is up to question, what it means ›to be in love‹ *for God* (and what is happening in this theological ascription)? To take the risk of a thesis: Ascribing this passion to God is a *response* to his performance (as well to ›our‹ passions). It is a narrative *gift* to God, given in the narrative configuration (prophets or gospels for example), refiguring ›our‹ form of life. Understanding it as response and gift (and not as a ›projection‹ or ›self-deception‹ grounding our passions in an illusionary concept) is again a gesture of passivity.[37] It is a deictic mode of signification, pointing away from ourselves back to the ›whence and whither‹ of our experience. This gesture implies a demand: to *share* it,[38] to take part, and to make use of this ascription by taking[39] it as orientation in

[34] Here could follow a discussion of God *being asked*: in the request for forgiveness, and the relations of ›gift and grace‹.

[35] Cf. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 374.

[36] Ibid., 378.

[37] May one call it a supplementation of the prophetic or apostolic gestures?

[38] That is, what shall be done with a gift.

[39] This sharing and taking part shall be understood not as an ›act‹ out of ›deliberation‹, but rather as an ›infection‹ or ›getting involved‹. One may be ›animated‹ by it, or not.

cognition and agency. This would be the final performance of this passion. Heschel himself may be seen as an example for this orientation.

This way the meaning of ›response to the pathos‹ gets its specific accent: It is the response, that we *are* and that we *give*. We give a response to God in this gesticulating mode of narrations (of his passion); and we *are* a response in our way of life.

9. Contemplation, or: Passions in Slow Motion (Aesthetics)

I want to close these phenomenological exercises by focusing on a further example of ›passion's performance‹, taken from the field of art. In 2003 there was an exposition at the Getty museum in Los Angeles, a series of video installations by Bill Viola,[40] named *The passions*.[41] In the years before, Viola had studied theories of affects from baroque times (Charles Le Brun[42]). This does not only hint towards an *iconological* background, but also to the impact: theses videos are performed affects. But what you *see* there (at first glance) is *less* than you get (involved).

In using theories of affects Viola designed his videos in an *iconographic* tradition of devotional pictures, especially of Masolino's Pietà from 1424

[40] »Born in New York in 1951, Bill Viola is one of the world's leading video artists. He has been making video art since 1970, when the first portable cameras and recorders became available. His work has ranged from single videotapes to immersive architectural video installations including video projections, sound and sometimes physical objects. Deeply involved in Buddhism, Viola's preoccupations have always been the inner or spiritual-self and the boundaries of consciousness. Since the death of his parents and birth of his children in the 1990s his work has often drawn on his own life to explore recurring themes of birth, death, self-discovery and personal transformation. Viola lives and works in Long Beach, California with his wife, collaborator and manager Kira Perov and their two children.« (http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/bill_viola/theartist.htm, accessed April 30th 2009).

[41] Cf. http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/bill_viola/theexhibition.htm (accessed April 30th 2009).

[42] Cf. Ch. Le Brun, *Methode pour apprendre a dessiner les passions. proposee dans une conference sur l'expression generale et particuliere* (Hildesheim/Amsterdam: Olms, 1982 [1702]). Cf. *Handwörterbuch der Seelenmahlerei. Zum gemeinnützigen Gebrauch, besonders für Zeichner, Mahler und Liebhaber charakteristischer und allegorischer Darstellungen. Nebst zwei und funfzig in Kupfer gestochenen Köpfen, die vorzüglichsten Gemüthsbewegungen und Leidenschaften betreffend* (Leipzig: Kleefeld, 1802).

(pic. 1)[43] and Giovanni Bellini's *The Dead Christ supported by Two Angels*, 1465–70.[44]

[Picture 1: Masolino, Pietà, 1424; Museo della Collegiata di Sant' Andrea, Empoli, Italy]

[43] »Viola says that ›Emergence‹ began with a passing idea for a piece called ›Woman Supporting Slumping Man‹. Later, leafing through a book on the early Renaissance Italian artists Masaccio and Masolino, he came upon a color plate of Masolino's fresco showing the corpse of the dead Christ in his tomb, supported by his mother Mary and John the Evangelist. ›I sketched it and put it away‹, he says. ›I'm not interested in restaging historical paintings.‹ Still later, an image occurred to him of two women pulling a dead man out of a well, and he looked back to Masolino's composition. But since he wanted to embody the idea of birth, he began to imagine that as the body came out of the well, an unexplained surge of water would accompany it.« (http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/bill_viola/acc_emergence7.htm, accessed April 30th 2009).

[44] Cf. http://www.wga.hu/art/b/bellini/giovanni/1459/021pieta.jpg (accessed April 30th 2009).

Both hints, the iconological and the iconographic one, may make it plausible that Viola's *passions* are relevant in regard to ›passions' performance‹: They are exemplifications, ›expressing‹ what they perform by showing (Greek: *deixis*) themselves. In the context of contemporary video-installations the point special about them is their temporality. They are passions in slow motion. The video-loop is so slow that one recognizes the ›stills‹ are moving only after several minutes. As time goes by the figures of the devotional scene are moving very slowly. The picture becomes a moving picture: between movie and video-still.

Giorgio Agamben noted: »In front of the eyes of the unbelieving spectators the *musée imaginaire* becomes a *musée cinématographique*«.[45] In *Emergence* the time and the topic are intensified by means of slow diachronicity. Slowing down the time is to perform intensification. As Viola himself said: »When you watch time slow down like that, you know, you feel the actions open up, like a flower... I realized that human emotions have infinite resolution – the more you magnify them the more they keep unfolding, infinitely. I began to sense that these feelings, or at least their residue, seem to exist outside of time, in some other eternal dimension.«[46] It sounds as if Violoa ›magnifies‹ emotions, as if they are shown in a magnifying glass. It also sounds a bit sublime, as if the slow motion would be a staging of eternity. Critical ears are reminded of the preaching ›of real presence‹. Agamben again said (with an affirmative accent), that he saw a ›kairologic saturation‹[47] (remember the ›saturated phenomena‹).

To show what is said, I pick out one of these videos, *Emergence* (2002). What you see ranges somewhere between lamentation, pietà and entombment of Christ: a scene taken from the classic repertoire of devotional images. From there *Emergence* draws its performative impact: to arouse (or annoy?) the passions of grief and sublime mourning for Christ (I assume). One could perhaps say that the *imago agens* (the image of memory) becomes an *imago patiens*, an ›icon‹ of passion, in which Christ's passion and the passions of the two women are crossing (coinciding). But what about the reception of the spectator? Are the spectators moved by an effective icon? That, of course, is open to discussion. If this, though, is the case, it raises the question, what aesthetic difference there is in regard to classic devotional pictures or to contemporary movies (cf. e.g. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*, 2004)?

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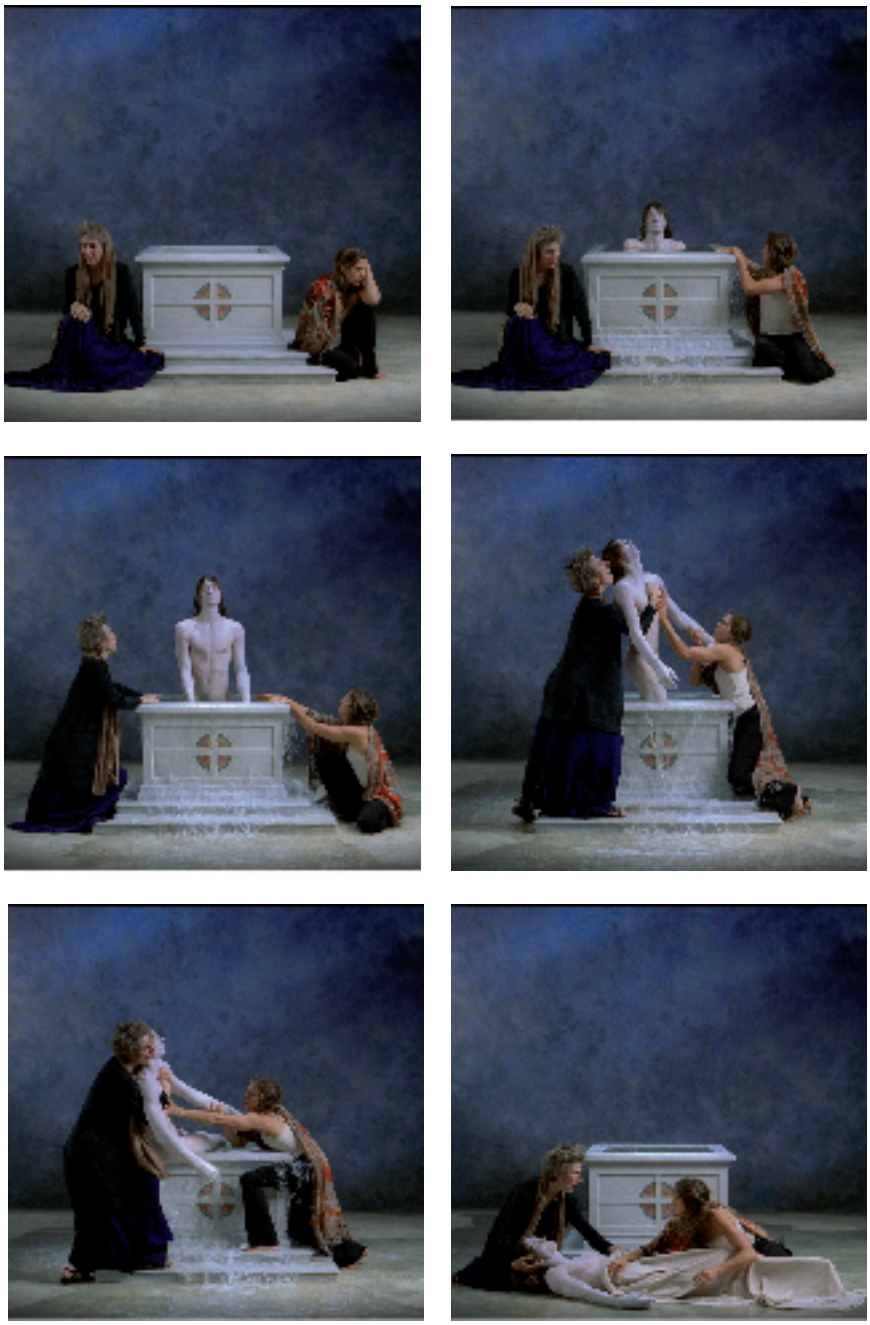
[45] G. Agamben, *Nymphae* (Berlin: Merve, 2005), 8.

[46] http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/bill_viola/acc_sixh4.htm (accessed April 30th 2009).

[47] Agamben, *Nymphae*, 9.

The loop starts with two women sitting beside a tomb.



To me it seems that the slow flow of time, the intensification of the performance by slowing down the movements, is rather special about this installation. The scene thereby becomes a certain new ›conciseness‹ or ›succinctness‹ (in the sense of Cassirer's *symbolische Prägnanz;* I would say: ›iconic conciseness‹). Perhaps it is *not* a ›kairological saturation‹, but rather an eschatological slow motion of time; not an aesthetic event of ›real presence‹, but of slightly moving and of withdrawal of ›the Real‹.

If Viola discovered the ›infinite resolution‹ of passions, e.g. in Leibniz' theory of infinite resolution in the analysis of contingencies (*verité de fait*), then he cannot hold the opinion of a givenness of ›real presence‹ as (perhaps) intended in the contemplation of devotional pictures (in the model of visio Dei). Whatever he might want to say, what *Emergence* shows (in my view) is the withdrawal of immediacy. The (infinite) video-loop is performing the infinite mediation and, even more, a ›real absence‹. At least it is a paradoxation of presence: What you see is not what you get, but it is moving and withdrawing itself.

Viola recorded the following Sufi poem in his notebook in 1976:

> With every moment
> a world is born and dies,
> And know that for you,
> with every moment
> come death and renewal.
> (Jalaluddin Rumi, from *The Mathnawi*).

It is a result of his studies of Eastern religion and philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism and Sufi mysticism.[48] This points to the background of the following self-interpretation:

> If I hadn't been studying texts and poems of the mystics and spiritual masters at the time I started with video, I don't think I could have made as much progress. These individuals gave me the language to understand what I was really seeing. One of the common threads in all these traditions, cutting across diverse cultures, is the idea that everything in front of us right now is merely a world of appearances. It's only a surface. The task is to understand and master sensory experience because you need the language of the senses to help decipher this surface and penetrate to the deeper connections underneath.[49]

The problem of this anti-phenomenological turn is the risk to reaffirm ›the real behind the surface‹, like in the Platonic search for the eternal behind

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[48] Cf. http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/bill_viola/acc_emergence4.htm (accessed April 30th)

[49] Http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/bill_viola/acc_emergence4.htm (accessed April 30th).

the flow of time. Following Viola's self-interpretation it would be possible ›to get what you see‹: a devotional picture in the audiovisual mediality.

Craig Detweiler[50] did so, following his obvious desire for affirmative contemplation:

> Yet, his work took a decidedly Christian turn with The Passions, his 2003 show at the Getty Museum. The emotional emphasis in Viola's recent work flowed out of the death of his father. For the first time, a painting made him cry. Viola found himself drawn to the emotional aspects of the Christian story, the grieving of Mary, the loss of a son. He found inspiration in Renaissance art. Working with professional actors in his Long Beach studio, Viola slowed their anguished emotions down to a microscopic level. Their silent screams call audiences to genuine empathy.
>
> Emergence (2003) takes us back to the anxious days just after Jesus' crucifixion. Two faithful women wait by a tomb, united in their grief. A ghostly vision rises from the sepulchre – a bodily resurrection. Viola captured the wonder, majesty and strangeness of Jesus' resurrection like no other contemporary artist. He brought the entire scene to life in dramatic slow motion.
>
> His impressive body of work is a tribute to a life of careful observation. He considers art, ›Doing something as a discipline in a life path – walking where no one walked.‹ He left an appreciative audience with the question, ›Are you on the path or just watching it?‹ When I watch a Viola video, I'm suddenly snapped back on the path. Art can't get much more religious than that.[51]

To be visible, like a video, and to be exposed, both imply to be exposed to quite different desires. A wishful seeing tends to saturation and satisfaction, if not to fulfillment. Detweiler's reading is of course based on biographical evidence, but it is based as well in his obvious desire. Was this all he wanted: to ›get much more religious‹?

I would hesitate, just to not satisfy my own expectations too fast. The extreme slowing down of the video's movement is not a path to eternity, but a loss of immediacy, and thereby the possibility to gain something different than one expected.

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[50] Craig Detweiler, PhD is a filmmaker, author and professor. He directs the Reel Spirituality Institute for the Brehm Center at Fuller Theological Seminary.

[51] Http://www.conversantlife.com/bill-viola-video-master (accessed April 30th 2009). Cf. the reference to ›slow dancing‹: http://www.apple.com/pro/profiles/michalek (accessed April 30th 2009).