

FAMILY, RELIGION, PEDAGOGY AND EVERYDAY EDUCATION PRACTICE

EDITORS

BEATA PIETKIEWICZ-PAREEK

RAFAŁ WŁODARCZYK

INSTYTUT PEDAGOGIKI
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MONIKA HUMENIUK

University of Wrocław

ORCID: 0000-0002-9888-3010

BETWEEN ORTHODOXY AND HERESY IN THE PEDAGOGY OF RELIGION. THE HERMENEUTIC AND AESTHETIC INSPIRATIONS BY THE THOUGHT OF GIANNI VATTIMO, LUIGI PAREYSON AND ERIKA FISCHER-LICHTE¹

ABSTRACT:

The subject of the study is a project of ‘weak’ pedagogy of religion. This project is inspired by post-metaphysical thought of Gianni Vattimo. Poor ontology and radical hermeneutics become a strategy of opening the pedagogy of religion to heresy, i.e. ambiguity, polyphony of interpretation of texts, artefacts, and religious practices. Thanks to this, the traditional pedagogy of religion gains the possibility of seeking inspiration for itself on new, non-theological borderlines of aesthetics and performativity. Two examples of such references are mentioned in the study: Luigi Pareyson’s aesthetics of formativity and Erika Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of performativity. They show interesting examples of progression from orthodoxy to heresy in the ‘weak’ pedagogy of religion.

¹ Originally published: Monika Humeniuk, “Między ortodoksją a herezją w pedagogice religii – hermeneutyczne i estetyczne inspiracje myślą Gianniego Vattimo, Luigi Pareysona, Eriki Fischer-Lichte”, [in:] *Religijność i duchowość z perspektywy pedagogicznej. Od idei do empirii*, ed. M. Szczepska-Pustkowska, S. Zielka, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2022, p. 51-66.

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*Principles are long, life is short.
[...] because our death comes
more quickly than the principles
do—which is why we are forced to
bid them farewell. This is why the
finite human creature [...] must
live without principled justification
(so that conscience is always
more a solitary than a universal
thing, and maturity is above all
the capacity for solitariness)*
Odo Marquard, *Farewell
to Matters of Principle* ²

Behold two scholars engrossed in their own work.

The task of one is to remain faithful. Constancy, permanence, tradition. He carefully takes on the wisdom of his masters in order to pass it on to his pupils as accurately and as unerringly as possible. Transcription. Meticulous attention to the minutest detail. A sacred commitment to the past, honouring it in a message for the future where ‘not a single jot, not a single line...’.

The same truths cannot be differently expressed, for if they could be they would cease to be themselves. The use of inadequate symbols is not only error; it is also profanation both of the knowledge and of the holy object matter to which it refers³.

The task of the other scholar is to effect change, embolden, awaken and enliven. Motion. Transgression. Truth sprouts new leaves, penetrates

² O. Marquard, *Farewell to Matters of Principle*. *Philosophical Studies*, New York, Oxford 1989, p. 16.

³ F. Znaniecki, *Social Role Of The Man Of Knowledge*, New York 1940, p. 103.

thoughts and experiences from beyond its old self. The conscientiousness of reproduction gives way to the passion for innovation. The work of the latter scholar is like laying successive layers of fabric on the needle, like combining its separate parts, like sewing new patterns into the smoothness of the matrix, embroidery linking the source with the novelty. The wisdom of the first masters is subject to this movement; it is enriched, developed, multiplied. How to reconcile the readiness to violate the source truth and the fear of losing it with the overwhelming desire for development and change? This question, although posed in reflection on the work of religious scholars, or, as F. Znaniecki argues, the founding fathers of modern knowledge in general, is still valid today. Between continuity and change. The core of 'truth' and its margin. Orthodoxy and heresy.

...

My attention, also this time, is drawn to the interface between pedagogy and religion. I wonder about the significance of Znaniecki's illustrations for a sub-discipline close to me, for the pedagogy of religion⁴. I return to the questions that I have pursued for some time: does the metaphor of the Polish sociologist imply that the work of the second scholar significantly enriches the work of the first, or rather that it weakens or neutralizes it? Is it possible to hold as certain that the successive overlapping layers of thought and practice resulting from the historical and hermeneutical work on the tradition of sources rob it of the unique 'truth', impoverish it, or rather stimulate this tradition to develop? In addition, who, when and on the basis of what regulations should decide about it?

Znaniecki's reflection contains an interesting, thoroughly hermeneutical and mediating solution.

⁴ The pedagogy of religion in the remainder of the study will be seen in its connection with the Christian tradition, defined after Bogusław Milerski as a (sub)discipline concerned with the educational potential of various forms of religion and the formulation of theories of religious education and religious socialization in the area of the Church, family, school, and society. Pedagogy of religion understood in this way would integrate pedagogical and theological norms, making the subject of its interest both pedagogical reflection and practical theology. See B. Milerski, *Hermeneutyka pedagogiczna. Perspektywy pedagogiki religii*, Warszawa 2011, p.140.

Religious scholars throughout the world have achieved it by applying always the same guiding principle: Whatever in the domain of knowledge is verily true cannot be new; whatever is new must be false. The total Truth, including all the partial truths ever to be known, was already known to the spiritual ancestor of the school— god, demigod, or divinely inspired superman⁵.

Commentaries, on the other hand, i.e.

The second method of interpretation permits the religious scholar to re-discover certain holy truths which his immediate predecessors for some reason have failed to transmit or even truths which the spiritual ancestor of the school, knowing that mankind was not yet prepared for them but foreseeing that their disclosure would come in the proper time, intentionally failed to reveal at tire beginning⁶.

Both scholars, fulfilling their tasks, act in line with the nature of the source.

As the hermeneutics scholars André La Cocque and Paul Ricoeur comment on the well-known question:

the plurivocity of the text and a plurality of readings are connected phenomena. Hence the text is not something unilinear – something it could be in virtue of the finality instituted by the presumed intention of author – but multidimensional, as soon as it is not taken as something to be read on just one level but on several levels at the same time by the historical community marked by heterogeneous interests. Just as a work of art solicits several interpretations whose cumulative effects are meant both to do justice to the work and to contribute to its subsequent life, the ways in which the interpreting community process a historical reading and interpretation contributes to the pluridimensionality of the text. These become part of the text⁷.

⁵ F. Znaniecki, *Social Role of the Man of Knowledge*, op. cit., p. 105.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 108.

⁷ A. LaCocque, P. Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, Chicago, London 2003, p. xv.

Justifiably, inspiration for further reflection is contingent on the story of religious scholars. It seems that the problem of norm and departures from norm, tradition and progression occupies pedagogical thought to a similar extent as they do religious studies. What deserves special attention here is the meaningful potential contained in the categories of orthodoxy and heresy, categories referring to the problem of 'source' and 'commentary', of what is the norm and what is not, categories prompting questions about the fate of orthodoxy infected by heresy and questions about the inner dynamics of their reciprocity. The above question also triggers reflection on the causal power of the heresies themselves: how far from the source of the tradition and to what extent and with what effect will phenomena and processes originally associated with that tradition (religious or pedagogical), under the influence of the heresy, still be identified with it?

Religions know and recognize the phenomenon of heresy within them. Heresies emerge from them as new currents of thought, practices or rituals which, initially linked to religious or confessional sources, become autonomous under certain circumstances and often create completely new religious qualities⁸. Others arise independently of religion, securing the needs to which religion was previously supposed to respond. In pedagogical thinking, too, after defining orthodoxy, it is possible to indicate phenomena and entire pedagogical tendencies whose distinctiveness is based on opposition to tradition, on pedagogical *heresy*⁹. Since in both fields, the field of pedagogy and the field

⁸ Christianity itself, after all, emerged from Judaism, initially being one of the many Jewish sects, which only in time became a separate historical religious tradition. Among local scholars of specific religious phenomena, however, there are usually numerous and protracted disputes about the boundaries between what is still an attempt at reform within the tradition and what can already be recognized as a new quality, or heresy. This applies mainly to the Christian tradition, where attachment to orthodoxy can be very strong, while in Judaism the Talmudic tradition of commentary is a sanctioned hermeneutical practice. An example of a Christian dispute about the actual status of heresy can be found in the discussion around lesser medieval, pre-Reformation movements within the mainstream tradition (eastern and western), i.e. Paulicianism, Bogomilism and Catharism, see P. Czarnecki, *Kataryzm włoski. Historia i doktryna*, Kraków 2013.

⁹ The subject of heresy in pedagogy deserves to be probed in depth on another occasion. Meanwhile, suffice it to say that for a long time, anti-pedagogy was regarded as the 'main' heresy in pedagogy. Without trying here to justify or criticise this approach, it is worth pointing to at least one 'proof' of heretical nature of this trend. For the theory of

of religion, both the category of heresy itself and the dynamics of its emergence from orthodoxy seem to be present and recognizable, it is worth looking from their perspective at the previously indicated borderline of both fields, namely the pedagogy of religion as a specific space of two types of thinking, a subdiscipline in a way doubly 'exposed' to the impact of heresy. Hence the questions, as it seems, crucial for the reflection contained in the further part of the considerations: how far can these 'heretical' 'commentaries' (the work of the second scholar) shift the boundaries of the traditional pedagogy of religion, raised, after all, on the basis of the orthodox reading of the source text, a pedagogy most often seen confessionally, transmissive, oriented towards a precisely defined formation of the subject? In what research spaces, after a possible transgression, could this sub-discipline look for inspiration for further development?

In the further part of the study I will recall the main topics of Gianni Vattimo's radical hermeneutics, which seems to be an important strategy for considering heresies in the pedagogy of religion, a strategy of weakening strong ontology in philosophical and ideological conceptions in this field, a strategy of 'unsealing' orthodoxy and opening it up to what is 'heretical'. According to Vattimo's intuitions, such weakening of orthodoxy makes it possible, in the next step, to take experience and thought beyond the limits of what is identified only with pedagogy or religion, towards what is related to art and performative aesthetics. The last part of this text will be devoted to this transition.

upbringing oriented teleologically and in axiological terms, the approach of anti-pedagogy to the problem of good and evil is sometimes regarded as clearly anti-pedagogical. As H. von Schoenebeck writes, "Developmental changes in our lives do not take place vertically, upwards, but horizontally. Therefore, all my reactions and behaviour have a subjective meaning: impatience, stress, aggression, etc. They cannot be evaluated from the perspective of 'good&evil', because there are no objective measures for evaluating behaviour. In human relations, therefore, we never make mistakes, we never do evil. Therefore, we do not need to improve ourselves according to external directives, evaluations, we do not need to self-evaluate. It is enough to be ourselves and to enter into natural, open, authentic relationships with other people, just as we do as adults towards our partner whom we bestow love upon" (H. von Schoenebeck, "Rozstanie z pedagogiką", [in:] *Edukacja alternatywna. Dylematy teorii i praktyki*, ed. B.Śliwerski, Kraków 1992, p. 253).

WEAK THOUGHT (KENOSIS) AND THE PRINCIPLE OF PRODUCTIVE INTERPRETATION IN GIANNI VATTIMO'S RADICAL HERMENEUTICS

In the article “Hermeneutyka słabej myśli Gianniego Vattimo jako inspiracja dla pedagogiki religii”¹⁰ I outline a ‘weak’ pedagogy of religion project. The starting point for this project is *kenosis*¹¹, the Christian idea of God’s incarnation understood as diminishment and weakening. The myth of the incarnation and crucifixion of God, according to Vattimo, expresses the sense of aspiration of hermeneutics itself. ‘Weak thought’ finds its expression in the specificity of ‘post-metaphysics’, in the perspective of ‘decomposition’ and ‘dispersion’ of the total and comprehensive (also of the sense of history), in the abandonment of essential and dogmatic thinking. The ‘program’ of a weak ontology holds that such a change in the way of thinking about fundamental traits seems to be thoroughly Christian, since it assumes that “*the transcendental, or that which makes any experience of the world possible, is nothing less than transience [caducità]*”¹². Being is not, but happens, it is what accompanies as a frailty all our representations. “To recall Being means to recall such transitoriness. Thinking the truth does not mean ‘grounding’, as even Kantian metaphysics maintains. It means rather revealing the waning and morality which are properly what make up Being, thus effecting a breaking-through or *de-grounding*”¹³. The formula of weak thinking is oriented towards a non-metaphysical conception of truth akin to the experience of art rather than the positivist model of scientific knowledge¹⁴.

¹⁰ See M. Humeniuk, “Hermeneutyka słabej myśli Gianniego Vattimo jako inspiracja dla pedagogiki religii”, *Forum Pedagogiczne* 2019/2 part 1, p. 119-131.

¹¹ See G. Vattimo, *Poza interpretacją. Znaczenie hermeneutyki dla filozofii*, Kraków 2011, p. 61 [G. Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation. The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, Stanford 1997].

¹² G. Vattimo, “Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought”, [in:] G. Vattimo, *Weak Thought*, New York 2012, p. 47.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

¹⁴ I wrote about it in: M. Humeniuk, “Między katechizmem a biblioteką – w stronę inkluzyjnej pedagogiki religii”, [in:] *Między ekskluzją a inkluzją w edukacji religijnej*, ed. M. Humeniuk, I. Paszcza, Wrocław 2017, p. 125.

Discussing in the above text¹⁵ the hermeneutical ‘coordinates’ of the Italian philosopher’s concept, I pointed out two key factors¹⁶. The first premise is connected with the necessity of recognising the secondary nature of truth perceived as conformity to so-called eternal, objective facts, truth treated as a reflection of the ‘actual’ state of affairs, and the necessity of recognising the historicity, or finiteness, of primary truth. The second premise is connected with the necessity of recognising tradition, within which truth may reveal itself and be subject to hermeneutical principles of verification and falsification.

In the first case, philosophical aspirations aiming at establishing ontologically strong, certain and fundamental truth are suspended. The ‘actual’ state of affairs, as the Italian hermeneutist proves, cannot be stated clearly and distinctly, timelessly and unconditionally. The world is a field of incessant conflict of interpretations, where every argument put forward to support a particular reason is underpinned by an awareness of its own particularity and limited access to knowledge. This postulated ‘factual state of affairs’ inevitably remains a philosophical and persuasive interpretation of a particular historical situation. As is the case in all post-metaphysical philosophy, also in Vattimo’s work there is a clear shift of focus from metaphysics to ethics. For the subject is not the bearer of the Kantian a priori, but the inheritor of a historical, finite language that enables and conditions its access to itself and to the world, and thus an ethical subject, acting in the world and exerting an ethical influence on it¹⁷.

In the second premise, Vattimo indicates and develops the ideas of a unique union of hermeneutics and the tradition of Christianity, stressing that “Modern philosophical hermeneutics is born in Europe only because it is here that the religion of the book is present, focusing attention on the phenomenon of interpretation; and because this interpretation is based on the idea of the incarnation of God, understood as *kenosis*”¹⁸. According to Vattimo, the Christian ‘event’ of salvation, God’s incarnation, is a purely hermeneutical fact: being the actualization of the Old Testament prophets’ announcements, it turns out not only to be the fulfilment

¹⁵ See M. Humeniuk, “Hermeneutyka słabej myśli Gianniego Vattimo jako inspiracja dla pedagogiki religii”, op. cit., p. 119-131.

¹⁶ See G. Vattimo, *Poza interpretacją*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁷ See *ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

or decipherment of the sense of the prophecies, but also a stage in the hermeneutical process of interpreting the history of salvation, followed by the era of the Spirit animating the text. The Spirit is, as the philosopher underlines, the most *hermeneutical* person of the Trinity¹⁹, a safeguard of the ongoing updating and enriching of the history of salvation. Vattimo calls this principle an *idea of productivity of the interpretation act*. It means that “interpretation is not only an attempt to grasp the original meaning of the text (for example, the authorial intention) and to reproduce it as literally as possible but also to add something essential to the text [...]”²⁰. Productivity of interpretation is in a sense paradigmatic for European culture, which has understood that commentary is not casual, instrumental or secondary, but the actual effect of interpretation to which this culture has subjected the Christian message²¹. According to Vattimo, the encounter of the ‘kenotic tendency’²² with the idea of *productive interpretation* helps to see the secularisation of Western culture not as a process of linear and progressive rejection of the Christian heritage, but rather as a token of topicality of the Christian message.

This is where the formula for the work of the ‘second scholar’ comes to the fore; the work of the polyphonicity of myth, of releasing and developing new meanings within the old tradition. Each articulated version becomes a new quality, a new ‘heresy’, significantly different from orthodoxy and at the same time organically connected with it through reference to tradition and its origins. In such a perspective, every novelty, every subsequent work of art, text or commentary inspired by and produced in the field of Christian tradition within a particular interpretative community can be considered a legitimate manifestation of hermeneutical interpretative work.

For the pedagogy of religion, the adoption of Vattimo’s principle of *kenosis* along with the hermeneutic principle of *productive interpretation* may be a new way of thinking about the sub-discipline. I called the formula quoted in the text²³ as the project of a ‘weak pedagogy of

¹⁹ See G. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, New York 2002, p. 60.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 62-63.

²¹ See ibidem, p. 63.

²² See G. Vattimo, *Poza interpretacj*, op. cit., p. 66.

²³ See M. Humeniuk, “Hermeneutyka słabej myśli Gianniego Vattimo jako inspiracja dla pedagogiki religii”, op. cit., p. 119-131.

religion'. In the first step, as I have already signalled in the introduction, it would be characterised by a weakening, an 'unsealing' the orthodox and dogmatic versions of the Christian message, versions legitimised by the official teaching of individual religious institutions, versions which form the basis of a transmissive, kerygmatic pedagogy of religion. In the second, those versions of the Christian message which, due to their unorthodoxy, used to arouse distrust. As such, they were usually depreciated or completely excluded from the mainstream tradition. They functioned at most on the periphery of pedagogy and religion as niche or quite 'outlaw' heresies without a chance for recognition of the official teaching of church teaching offices, in which their potential was often shown as cognitively and pedagogically 'suspect'²⁴. The so-called 'weak' pedagogy of religion would create space for their legitimacy; here they would gain the possibility of 'legal' articulation and transmission within local interpretative communities, certainly niche, but still remaining in the field of legitimizing tradition of Christian message. Their inclusion in the field of pedagogy of religion, or more specifically, the 'weak' pedagogy of religion, seems to have a worthwhile pedagogical potential, which I addressed in the aforementioned article²⁵. In this text, I would like to pay special attention to the topic of religious experience and the potential of related reflection by the hermeneutical strategy of 'heretical' *kenosis* within a traditional, orthodox pedagogy of religion. In the strongly ontological metaphysical reflection at the interface of pedagogy and religion, in the reflection characteristic of traditional pedagogy of religion, the cognitive formation of the subject was prior to experience. The main goal was to equip it with a stable system of beliefs (doctrines) and related rituals, i.e. religious practices.

In the case of a 'weak' pedagogy of religion, the situation is reversed: experience takes precedence over cognitive formation (although, of course, this does not mean that reflection on the experience itself is deprived, but only secondary to it). *Kenosis* and the principle of *productive interpretation* as hermeneutical strategies of influencing the subject open up a space for the specific 'practicing' and 'talking about' religious experience. Together with the logic of the 'second scholar',

²⁴ See *ibidem*, p. 127.

²⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 119-131.

the logic sanctioning the interpretative polyphony of tradition, opening the subject to what is unorthodox and heretical, the pedagogy of religion gains the possibility of new, creative ways of *co-operation* with tradition. This *co-operation* helps to move the sub-discipline to another borderland, this time the borderland of pedagogy, religion and art. Here religious experiences gain a certain analogy in relation to aesthetic experiences (and vice versa), thanks to which it is possible to 'speak' about them in the language familiar to art theories.

In the final part of these considerations I would like to point to two inspiring concepts from this extremely broad field: Luigi Pareyson's concept of the operational 'aesthetics of formativity' and Erika Fischer-Lichte's concept of the aesthetics of performativity. Both develop the topic of aesthetic experience, opening, by analogy, the space for reflection on religious experience. They are at the same time an illustration of an interesting progression, a dynamic set in motion by hermeneutical *kenosis* and the principle of *productive interpretation*, a process of gradual shift of reflection on pedagogy and religion from the orthodox core towards heresy: a polyphony of meanings, practices and... experiences themselves.

THE EXPERIENCE OF ART VS. THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE – THE AESTHETICS OF FORMATIVITY AND THE AESTHETICS OF PERFORMATIVITY ACCORDING TO LUIGI PAREYSON AND ERIKA FISCHER-LICHTE

Luigi Pareyson is an Italian hermeneutist, a master of Gianni Vattimo, who often refers to him in his texts. Pareyson's philosophy is known as the 'ontology of freedom'²⁶ or 'hermeneutics of myth'²⁷, and the aesthetics he derives from it is called the 'aesthetics of formativity'. The ambition of his hermeneutics is to describe and understand a work of art and the process of creation. As he himself emphasizes, his aesthetics is a concept that

²⁶ See L. Pareyson, *Ontologia della libertà. Il male e la sofferenza*, ed. G. Riconda, A. Margis, F. Tomatis, Torino 1995, after: G. Vattimo, "Przedmowa do wydania polskiego", [in:] L. Pareyson, *Estetyka. Teoria formatywności*, Kraków 2009, p. 9.

²⁷ See G. Vattimo, "Przedmowa do wydania polskiego", op. cit., p. 10-13.

as a result of reflection on aesthetic experience, turns to determine its sense and potential [...] [this aesthetics – MH] is not a metaphysics of art, but an analysis of an aesthetic experience. It is not an abstract definition of art considered as such, but it is a study of a human being who makes art, a human being in the act of making art. It is a philosophical reflection on an aesthetic experience undertaken to address it, demonstrate its possibilities, define its scope and limits, clarify its human significance, and unfold its universality²⁸.

Associated with individual experience, it comes in an almost infinite spectrum of versions, diverse yet equal aesthetics, poetics and art programmes on the one hand, and individual readings, aesthetic experiences on the other.

Sometimes we saw it as a revelation of the deep sense of things, a symbol of cosmic life, a patron of the mysteries of the universe, an initiator of the inner magic of reality, and sometimes as pure play and pure love, satisfied with itself and its own lightness. At other times we treated it as an interpreter of reality, a faithful imitator of nature, a merciless representation of facts, and sometimes as a dream, a delirium, a flight of fancy, a struggle with reality, the creation of a new, unknown reality, pure abstraction based on itself [...]. Sometimes it was an escape from life, a longed-for respite from the world and from human passions, a refuge of the soul in the pure contemplation of fantastic figures and dreamed worlds, a spiritual remedy for the anxiety of human activity. Sometimes it was a necessary manifestation of public and social life²⁹.

Each of its aspects expresses a spirit of a moment in the history of an individual and a society.

'Formativity' for Pareyson is a "an inseparable union of production and invention: 'formation' means making and at the same time figuring out a 'manner of making'"³⁰. In a sense, every human action is formative; however, formativity related to a work of art seems to reveal its uniqueness and exceptionality which translates not only into the act

²⁸ L. Pareyson, *Estetyka. Teoria formatywności*, op. cit., p. 18 [L. Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*, Milano 1988].

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 336.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 19-20.

of creation, complex as it unites in the work the body with the spirit, the physical with the spiritual, the artist with matter and the law of art, but also the exceptionality resulting from the act (process?) of recognising the work of art:

The work of art reveals its own irreplaceable perfection only to someone who is able to grasp it in the process of finding conformity with itself. Then the work appears as final and unmodifiable in its 'finiteness', only then do we perceive the fecundity flowing from its 'model character'. [...] And only then can one truly 'read' and 'judge' a work. Reading means also performing, which means bringing a work of art to life in the way it wants to be brought to life. Judging, on the other hand, means comparing the work as it is with what it would like to be. Both are possible only if we understand the work as a law unto itself³¹.

Usually religious theories as well as theories of art point to an important aspect of the inner experiences of the subject, difficult to express and describe, connected with symbols and metaphors. Thus, in Pareyson's existential description of the aesthetic experience and the creative process itself, religious experience can also easily recognize itself: it is anthropological rather than metaphysical, individual and internal. The abstract, metaphysical, totalizing concept of art which Pareyson firmly rejects can be compared with the general if vague category of religion usually in the 'service' of the traditional model of pedagogy of religion. It assumes the form of a universal credo of faith, a static doctrine and permanent orthodoxy, hardly translatable to the experience of an individual subject. Both the creation of a work of art and its contemplation are for the Italian philosopher strongly individual and particular acts or processes, impossible to reproduce in other configurations. The weak pedagogy of religion, by legitimising polyphony and heresy, creates better conditions for such individual, existential experiences than the traditional, kerygmatic pedagogy of religion geared primarily towards the formation of the collective subject.

While Vattimo's kenotic pedagogy of religion, paradoxically, derives its strength from weakening ontology and orthodoxy, including

³¹ Ibidem, p. 20.

dogmatic interpretations of the texts and artifacts of the source tradition, and Pareyson's aesthetics of formativity redirects attention from cognitive formation to the problem of understanding (of the process of creation, the work of art and aesthetic experience), then the aesthetics of performativity can be considered the next significant step in the hermeneutical parting with a strong ontology. This would be a step towards not so much the *understanding* of a text, dogma or rite, but rather towards *experience* in itself and the attendant *transformation* of the subject. The aesthetics of performativity shifts the focus from the notion of *work*, strongly ontological in this concept, to that of an *event*.

As the German professor of theatre studies Erika Fischer-Lichte explains, in performativity the subject-object dichotomy is broken down and neutralised. This dichotomy is replaced by a dynamic interdependence, in which the position of subject and object is often impossible to determine; nor can they be clearly distinguished from each other. In the traditional view, the work of art or the actor becomes a subject that produces meanings, which are then transmitted towards the recipient of the work or the viewer. In the aesthetics in question, signs and arbitrary meanings are deconstructed. Analysing the performance of the artist Marina Abramović, Fischer-Lichte explains this new dynamic:

the spectators' physical reactions were a direct result of their perception of Abramović's actions, but not of the possible meanings that those actions might carry. When Abramović cut the star into her skin, the spectators did not hold their breath or feel nauseous because they interpreted this as the inscription of state violence onto the body but because they saw blood flowing and imagined the pain on their own bodies. What the viewers perceived affected them in an immediate, physical way. The materiality of her actions dominated their semiotic attributes. As such, their materiality is not to be seen as a bodily excess, in the sense of an unresolved surplus that could not be worked into the meanings that were attributed to those actions. Rather, the materiality of Abramović's actions preceded all attempts to interpret them beyond their self-referentiality. It did not yield to and dissolve into a sign but evoked a particular effect on its own terms and not as the result of its semiotic status. This very effect – holding one's breath, the feeling of nausea – set the process of reflection in motion for the audience. Rather than addressing the possible meanings

that Abramović's actions implied, the spectators wondered why and how they reacted. How do effect and meaning relate in this case?³².

In this way a new relationship of feeling, thinking and acting is established.

The aesthetic of the performative uses *significance* in a novel and unique manner. In the course of a performative event, they (*signified*) are used as a kind of pretext drawing the recipient into the event, in order to leave him or her alone a moment later, disconnected from their signs (*signifier*). Disorientation becomes in this way a source of new meanings, which are the basis for reflection, crucial for the viewer taking part in the event. Performative acts (as physical actions) should be treated as 'non-referential' because they do not refer to something that pre-existed or exists within the event, to some substance or essence. Performance is about feedback created in a situation of co-presence and interaction; it is the principle of unexpected exchange, of mutual, unpredictable interaction. Even if the event itself were meticulously designed and carefully directed, the ultimate outcome of the generated experience and the meanings that the subject ascribes to it should be treated as unpredictable and impossible to repeat or recreate. They remain nonetheless, or rather because of this, strongly experienced, existentially authentic and responsible for the actual transformation of the subject.

The aesthetics of performativity, through its affinity with post-metaphysical philosophy, detached from a strong ontology and directed towards what is unique, disposable, specific, seems to reveal an exceptional potential of inspiration for a radically hermeneutical 'weak' pedagogy of religion. By means of an arranged performativity, focused on themes of religious tradition, the space of religious experience can be explored much more fruitfully than in the case of traditional religious rituals or even traditional art. The 'weak' pedagogy of religion, lacking the fundamental fear of losing the strong object of faith (according to the hermeneutic, strongly historicised concept of truth, such an object does not exist), will probably be much more audacious than the

³² E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, London, New York 2008, p. 17-18.

traditional pedagogy of religion to seek and submit to performative 'events', through which the subject, via the feedback loop, will gain access to new meanings, senses, experiences, values that enrich and expand its own religious reflection and imagination.

CONCLUSIONS

The necessity of self-limitation of the traditional pedagogy of religion, connected with metaphysical thinking and strong ontology, as well as with confessionally defined conditions of orthodoxy, may trigger questions about the possibilities and limits of further development in difficult, post-secular conditions. This pedagogy can be replaced by a project inspired by the post-metaphysical thought of the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo – a 'weak' pedagogy of religion with its key concept of *kenosis* and the idea of the productivity of interpretation. Weak ontology and radical hermeneutics become a kind of strategy for weakening orthodoxy and thus opening the pedagogy of religion to a heresy that is creative and invigorating for the tradition: to ambiguity, interpretative polyphony of texts, artefacts and religious practices. Thanks to the strategy of *kenosis*, the pedagogy of religion frees itself from the strait-jacket of dogma and can seek inspiration for itself in new borderlands. Besides pedagogy or religion in the broadest sense of the term, art, too becomes its natural space of exploration. All of them focus on the phenomenon of experience, this inner, existential and overwhelming truth for the subject, hence the search for inspiring analogies between aesthetic and religious experience for the pedagogy of religion. Luigi Pareyson's aesthetics of formativity and Erika Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of performativity are interesting examples of progression on the way from orthodoxy to heresy. The former focuses on the problem of understanding in the aesthetic experience, the latter refers only to the event in which the subject experiences a change, and the reflection takes place after the meanings originally attributed to this event have been deconstructed. Thus, the trajectory of transition from orthodoxy to heresy outlined in the study, in which hermeneutical 'weak thought' would be the driving source, is a scaffolding for the project of 'weak'

pedagogy of religion, a project to which I intend to devote attention in my subsequent studies.

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