

Methodological Ludism

Chapter 14 Methodological Ludism: Beyond Religionism and Reductionism

1. Introduction

In 1970, as a new anthropologist, using the method of participant observation, I witnessed a boys' initiation ritual in a small Congolese tribal society, the Wagenia of Kisangani (Droogers 1980). This rite of passage had not been held for fourteen years. For five months almost the whole tribe of about 8,000 people was busy staging the initiation. More than 1,300 boys, aged between 5 and 20, were isolated in fourteen camps. The ritual accompanied the boys during a transition in their life. It did so by using symbols in dramatic and social contexts that were part of its various phases.

My training provided not only the method of participant observation – in fact a simulated participation – but also the stereotypical expectation that ritual is a religious phenomenon, and that initiation is a vehicle for the transmission of culture, especially religion. Besides, Africans were supposed to be incurably religious (e.g. Thomas et al. 1969: 5). I soon found out, however, that Wagenia reality was different. Their reflection and behaviour were to correct my academic discourse. They introduced me to the ludic.

The initiation ritual was mainly secular. It contained only a few religious references, principally to spirits of the dead, as when the boys were painted white, the color of the spirits, in order not to be harassed by them. Moreover, the Wagenia boys' initiation proved to be a rather boring experience for most of them. Explicit transmission of culture hardly occurred. The main thing the novices learned – but most of them had known before – was wrestling. Besides, a lot of time was invested in training an imitation of a military parade observed in town. In this make-believe parade the older boys played the role of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The oldest novice, who acted as the chief of

the camp, was given the role of the state president, Mobutu. The smallest boy played the role of the region's archbishop, at the time a man of very small stature.

Though predominantly secular, the ritual was reminiscent in some respects of religion. There were a few secrets that the non-initiated, especially the women, were supposed not to know, but that almost all of them were acquainted with. Yet the women played their role of outsiders, almost as I played my role of insider. Thus, the women were supposed to believe that the boys in the camp stayed day and night unprotected in the open air, except when it started raining. Then a big bird with enormous wings came to the camp to offer the boys shelter from the rain. A bird-like sound was heard from the camp, and the men and the boys chanted and danced to the rhythm of the bird's song. As most of the women knew, this bird was not a bird at all, but represented the hut in the camp, built in a U-form, with a 'breast' and 'wings', as of a bird. The sound of a bird was imitated by an instrument made out of two sticks and a big shell. At other stages in the initiation two more 'animals' were enacted by the men, again using musical instruments, always with the suggestion that the women were being led to believe that extraordinary beings manifested themselves. Here too the women played their role, but knew what was being staged.

This was my first experience with an intriguing mixture of profane and seemingly sacred elements. Besides the 'normal' religious element of the belief in spirits of the dead, there was an enacted element that might be called religioïd. The men and women played at religion, as the novices did when teaching the smallest boy to act as an archbishop. It was obvious that everything was played, but also that the illusion was maintained in a strict manner, as if it were real. The ludic seemed part of a religious, or at least religioïd, atmosphere. Of course, my participant role was also an illusion, a method of make-believe, though not religious or religioïd in nature, although the *Wagenia* word for white man was the same as that for spirit of the dead.

About ten years later, when doing fieldwork in a Brazilian spiritist healing group, I had another confusing experience that led me to the ludic (Droogers 1991). The group was composed of about thirty people, many of them with an academic training. Its leader, a medical doctor, had developed a specific method of spiritist healing. It was a combination of spiritist, Christian, Afro-Brazilian and medical insights. As was the case in Congo, some form of enactment seemed to occur, at least to me. But now the playfulness was not a manifest part of the partici-

pants' view; it had much more to do with my own academic bias and corresponding presuppositions. In this case, the ludic – though not fully absent from the people's behavior – was primarily a promising concept in my search for an explanation. Perhaps the experience with the Wagonia influenced me in my way of looking at these spiritists.

The group attributed the affliction of the patient to demonic spirits. One of these spirits was made to manifest himself in a spirit medium. The coordinator of the healing session then started a severe but often also rather humorous and ironic – ludic, I would say – dialogue with the spirit, with the ultimate intention to convert him, often 'in Jesus' name'. The converted spirit would then stop his attacks on the patient and would accept to continue his evolutionary course through a morally progressive series of reincarnations. Normally the spirit would first resist and utter blasphemous statements, but gradually he would give in. Often he was referred to a hospital in the spirit world in order to prepare for reincarnation.

Thus, in a few minutes, a small drama of transition, a rite of passage, was enacted – at least that was my interpretation – in which the cause of the patient's affliction was first made real. Very often the demonic spirit was shown to have sought revenge for acts his victim had committed against him in a former life. This cause was subsequently eliminated through the conversion of the spirit, and sometimes also by a reconciliation with the patient. Like the boys' initiation, the healing process produced a transformation in a symbolic and dramatic way, within a social context, and in a consecutive series of phases. In my view, then as now, metaphors were used as effective resources.

To the participants the spirits were real; here was no question of a useful illusion. On the contrary, in a book the group's leader presented the healing method as new medical science (Lacerda de Azevedo 1988, 1997). Knowledge was constructed within a socio-political context in which scientific knowledge was supposed to represent the highest standard. As an academic doing research among academics and formally addressed as 'professor', I was constantly challenged by my spiritist friends to position myself and to agree with them. My research was to validate their method. The group's leader wanted me to take the message to Europe and spread it there. However, my participant observation was much more observation than participation. Despite the fact that several members of the group affirmed that I could be a good spirit medium, I remained an outsider. Yet, if I did not accept their discourse about the

manifestation of spirits, I would have to look for another explanation for their behavior, and most of all for their healing successes.

In both fieldwork experiences, I had come with the metropolitan academic discourse I had been trained to use, but both times I was challenged to change my mind. The people I studied taught me to look for other dimensions: in Congo for religion in playfulness, in Brazil for religion in science. Their behavior and reflection rendered my type of discourse problematic. The Wagenia proved not to be as religious as I had supposed them to be; the Brazilian spiritist academics were not as secular as I had expected them to be. Supposedly religious Africans were enacting a secular play with some religioid characteristics, whereas supposedly secular Brazilians were in a very serious manner enacting a drama with religious entities, presenting their view as a new erudite science, although I sometimes found them as playful and inventive as the Wagenia.

In both cases, the secular and the religious were intermingled in a fascinating and puzzling manner. Religious and non-religious factors competed for priority in the explanation of the phenomena I had observed. How seriously was religion to be taken? How far was religion something essentially playful? How was religious knowledge being constructed, and how was my academic knowledge of religion constructed? When studying religion and ritual, what was the value of enacted participation as a method? Did informant and researcher have in common the fact that both were players?

2. The Problem

Doing social science implies debate. Any debate has its own map of options, often based on dichotomies, like mind/matter, self/other and nature/culture, that have been with us for a long time already. What can I do, as a social scientist, when involved in such a theoretical or interpretative debate? Should the options be accepted as permanent and for ever inevitable? Or is there a way to go beyond the well-known options? If there is a way out, would I be able to follow it without abandoning my own preferences?

The conflict under discussion in this chapter is that between a reductionist and a religionist view of religion. Although in the course of time a whole spectrum of varying and nuanced opinions has been developed on both sides (see the next section), the original issue is still

basic to the current discussion (e.g. Idinopulos and Yonan 1994). The central question under debate is whether religion can adequately and totally be explained by exclusive reference to non-religious facts and factors. The debate is asymmetrical in that the problem is not so much a cause of concern to reductionists as it is to religionists. Reductionists, mainly but not exclusively social scientists, usually explain religion by referring to psychic and social characteristics of human life.

Reductionists will maintain that it is perfectly possible to explain religious behavior, including believers' opinions about the truth of the sacred, by appealing to non-religious factors, and without reference to a supernatural reality that is supposed to manifest itself. They will not exclude participants' opinions from their data and their explanation of religious behavior, but they will not regard them as truths about the sacred, as religionists – directly or indirectly – do. From the reductionists' point of view, theirs is an adequate use of informants' views, and consequently there is no problem at all. Therefore they will refer to the religionists' claim that the manifestation of the sacred is an important element in the explanation of religion as a non-debate. They generally do not see the need to refer to a sacred reality and may find the use of the word 'reality' at the least dubious in the case of the supernatural, even though they may accept, as a fact to be explained, that the supernatural is something real and 'natural' to believers. To reductionists the supposed truth of these beliefs in a sacred reality is in itself not an element in their scholarly study of religion, but only the fact that people say it is true. Even if, in a hypothetical case, some day the beliefs in question were shown to be really true, it still remains to be explained why people accept them.

Conversely, in the religionist view, an explanation of religion takes into account that the 'other' reality that is the object of religious activity can manifest itself. Religion would not exist without people's experiencing this other reality, and therefore its manifestation should be part of the explanation. The comparative approach excludes the acceptance of the views expressed by one particular religion on this manifestation. Accordingly, less specific notions of the sacred are adopted, implying that specific religions express particular views on this universal sacred. The sacred that manifests itself is supposed to be paralleled by human capacities, such as the production of symbols.

Despite – or perhaps because of – this wide gap between religionists and reductionists, I shall explore a solution that leads beyond the familiar options. I look for it in the notion of the ludic, or playfulness. The

hunch that the ludic might show a way out of the problem has been with me for some time now, as may have become clear from the brief autobiographical reference to some of my anthropological field-work experiences, just as these same experiences put the relation between religion and science on my agenda. But first of all a more detailed appraisal of the conflict between religionism and reductionism is needed – as it were the map of the available options. Then this appraisal is applied to the cases presented in the introduction. After that the notion of the ludic is discussed. The next section puts the theme within an interdisciplinary framework. In the penultimate section, the lessons of the preceding sections are compared in order to explore the chances of finding a way beyond old repeated options. A conclusion summarizes the argument.

3. Religionism and Reductionism: The Options

It is useful to make an inventory of the options that are at stake in the religionism/reductionism debate. Clarke and Byrne (1993), Guthrie (1993: 8–38), Idinopulos and Yonan (1994), and Segal (1989) are sources for such an inventory. The central question can be formulated as a choice between two alternatives: Must religion be explained in terms which refer to a sacred reality that manifests itself (religionism), or should the explanation of religion be exclusively ‘humanistic’ and limit itself to a psychological and sociological framework, referring to human conditions that are external to religion (reductionism)?

A common distinction is that between methodological theism, agnosticism and atheism: in explaining religion and for methodological purposes the student accepts that a sacred reality exists (methodological theism); abstains from an opinion about this issue (methodological agnosticism); or denies the existence of the sacred (methodological atheism). In scholarly practice the second position has the same effect as the third, but its proponents, in suspending a judgment, intend to show more respect for other people’s beliefs.

The adjective ‘methodological’ suggests that the options are valid in research alone. The scholar may cherish another opinion in private. A reductionist may opt for methodological atheism or agnosticism, while being a theist in private. This is possible precisely because of the fact that to him or her the truth question is not an element in the explanation of religion. Religionists will most probably be religious per-

sons, but this does not exclude far-going variations between their religious convictions. The fact that religions differ in their truth claims implies that religionists must in some way position themselves, either opting for a certain religion, or accepting some basic general view on the sacred that is supposed to manifest itself in all religions. Yet, in the latter case a preference for a certain religion as the best expression of the sacred is still possible. In short, private opinions and scholarly convictions can but need not coincide.

One should be aware that these views did not develop in an ideological vacuum, but were part of an intellectual struggle concerning the right definition of reality. In terms of the sociology of knowledge, the question is in what social and cultural context the construction of an academic discourse takes place. This means that what is normal and natural in our own cultural context should be considered problematic, and even treated as exotic. This applies to religionists as well as reductionists.

Religionists developed their views in the context of expanding Western culture. The history of Western expansion had rehabilitated what were formerly considered barbarous societies as civilizations. It became possible to study the so-called 'world religions' linked to these civilizations, to collect their texts and to document their rituals. Comparisons could be made. Religion in the singular, as a human capacity, came to the fore. Inspired by philosophical phenomenology, methods were developed that should guarantee a scientific quality and a certain correctness of the observations, excluding the Western bias. Though many of the new theories were reductionist in nature, some, inspired by a form of modern liberal Christian theology, maintained the idea of a common manifestation of the sacred behind the diversity of religions. Religionists have had to defend themselves on two fronts, against science, and against Christian theology. The latter conflict was often caused by the coexistence of 'Comparative Religion' and Christian theology in the same department. This ungrateful position of 'attack and defence' (Sharpe 1975: 144) seems to have contributed to the formulation of a religionist point of view by such scholars as Söderblom, Otto and Van der Leeuw. Using other sources Eliade arrived at a similar position.

The adoption of a non-religious frame of reference, especially in methodological atheism, is nourished by Enlightenment science's skepticism and the critical question raised by the rise of modernity of why religion should exist at all (Clarke and Byrne 1993: 28, 32, 40). Criticism of religion has often been the main motive to seek for an explan-

ation: how could people believe in an illusion? Behind their objectivity, scholars were taking part in the secularization process, and occupying positions in the competition between religious and scientific world-views. The debate between religionists and reductionists, though different in essence, cannot be isolated from this conflict. It is its hidden agenda. If reductionists qualify it as a non-debate, the – rather arrogant – presupposition is that science has overcome religion and dictates the norms. One of the two parties wants to take the place of the judge.

The reductionist goal of producing a *general* theory of religion as such, understood in the universal singular, necessarily leads to the exclusion of religious explanations, because the latter are supposed to be linked to particular religions (Clarke and Byrne 1993: vii, viii, 28). The most common explanations in this category refer to such non-religious functions as wish fulfillment, the social order, or cognition (Guthrie 1993: 10). Ironically, the reductionist attention given to function has led to a definition of religion in which not the supernatural or the transcendental was the criterion, but the unity of the group or the resolution of ultimate existential questions. As a consequence, what formerly had been called secular, like ideology or even science, came to be viewed as religious.

Though maintaining the basic option, some amendments have been formulated (Clarke and Byrne 1993: 55, 73, 74; Segal 1989: 126–9). Thus, on the religionist side, it has been suggested that the specific forms religions show are only symbolic approximations of a sacred reality that is by definition beyond our knowledge. In this way a general theory can be maintained without embracing a specific religion. Similarly, on the reductionist side some have advocated a symbolic approach, advancing the idea that religious expressions are not what they seem to be, but refer symbolically to another – in this case secular – reality.

Another refinement has occurred with regard to the question of how the opinions of the religion's participants should be appreciated. Straightforward religionism would accept them as true and valid in the explanation of that religion. When, in a less strict form of religionism, religions are understood as expressions of a sacred, unknowable reality, the participants' views are heard for their symbolic referential value. On the reductionist side, if emphasis is put on the mechanistic role of structures, less attention tends to be given to participants' views, especially if some supra-individual structural mechanism is considered responsible for the rise of religion. Yet, the symbolic approach in reductionism will include participants' beliefs and behavior in its ex-

planation, since these contain information on the symbolic system. Related to this, but for other reasons, an actor-centered approach will in any case consider the believer's religious point of view. Similarly, when it is considered a basic human characteristic that people confer meaning – though not necessarily religious meaning – to reality, participants' views are basic data in research (Segal 1989: 109–135).

4. Experiences and Options Confronted

The fieldwork experiences related in the first section may be commented on in the light of these central questions. Thus, experiencing the spirits of the dead was a reality that was not subject to discussion to my Wagenia and Brazilian informants. To me it was out of the question that their opinions were part of my data. My personal problem in participant observation was of course whether as a researcher I accepted that my informants were right and that spirits were real, especially as my Brazilian informants did much to try to convince me.

Yet, my skepticism obliged me to look for other explanations, like attributing healing power to metaphors. The ambiguity of my position implies that, in a rather eclectic way, I see the value of reductionist theories of the three types mentioned by Guthrie (1993: 10), also when dealing with the above-related fieldwork experiences. With regard, first of all, to *wish fulfillment*, anxiety reduction plays a role in both the Wagenia and Brazilian case described above. The Wagenia boys who paint their body with white clay are seeking protection, believing that spirits can be deceived. When they and their fathers dance with the 'big bird', they are at the same time reassuring their mothers and experiencing male security and unity. The Brazilian spiritist healers are seeking relief for their patients by eliminating the spiritual cause of the affliction.

The interpretation of religion that focuses on *social order* can also be applied to the cases just presented. The Wagenia spirits of the dead represent the continuity of society. The initiation ritual reinforces social structural distinctions related to age, gender and kinship. The whole ceremony accompanies the boys' transition from the world of women and children to that of the men. In the case of the Brazilian healing group, their battle against demons is a way of establishing a social order based on charity. Both Wagenia novices and Brazilian spiritists were constructing their identity.

The third group of interpretations, of a more *cognitive* nature, also applies to my fieldwork cases. The Wagenia initiation ritual can be understood as an effective manner of accompanying boys on their way from childhood to manhood, even though the low frequency of the ritual means that the youngest boys are still too young and the oldest already too old to reach this result. Yet, because some of the fundamental organizing principles of their society are active in initiation, all boys become acquainted with them. Even though education in the strict sense hardly takes place, the ritual therefore has educational value. Cognitive aspects are also present in the spiritist practice. They not only present their method as a new science, but also include religious categories, like demonic spirits and Jesus, in what they see as a scientific interpretation of affliction.

It may be clear that even a generous eclectic use of theories of religion does not exhaust the cases described. None of the theories allows for the playfulness present, especially in the Wagenia case, and also, in my view, among the spiritists of the healing group. It seems that in the religious context there is a margin for experiments and creativity. Even experiments with make-believe are possible. The boundary between the possible and the real is vague. All these considerations led me to the idea that the ludic could not only be an underestimated dimension in religion, but could also offer a way out of the dilemma between religionism and reductionism. Epistemological questions (raised at the end of the first section) contributed to that idea.

I now explore a trail beyond the dichotomy of religionism and reductionism. Yet, scientific paradigms are tenacious and resilient. Usually they are still very much alive outside the discipline in which they have been declared dead for some time. Besides, the amended frames of reference have still not dealt with the challenge of the religious and theological explanations of religion. Methodological theism remains taboo among most social scientists, despite lip-service to postmodernism.

As I will show, the dimension I add to the debate has relevance for the interdisciplinary study of religion. Its claim goes beyond the current discussion between religionists and reductionists, and it sheds a different light on religion and on the explanation of religion. Before this can be shown, the concept of the ludic must first be discussed.

5. The Ludic

It is almost impossible to give an adequate overview of what has been written on the ludic. The literature on the subject is vast and at the same time extremely diverse and even contradictory. There is an obvious difference whether one refers to games and sports, or to theatre, or to a child's way of playing, or to animals' play, or to power games in political strategy – to mention only a few of the examples authors have taken as their starting-point. In view of my particular interest I have made my own selection and summary from the material that was available. This means that I will ignore some important authors in the field, and give preference to others who may be not so well-known.

A working definition of the ludic, adapted to my purposes, can be formulated as follows: *the ludic is the capacity to deal simultaneously and sub-junctively with two or more ways of classifying reality.*

With regard to the term 'subjunctive', I follow Victor Turner who distinguishes between the 'indicative mood', the domain of the 'as is', and 'the subjunctive mood ... used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, or possibility', the domain of the 'as if' (Turner 1988: 25, 169).

Simultaneity is the other defining term. Pruyser (1976: 190) attributes to the player a 'double awareness'. Huizinga, who with his *'Homo Ludens'* (1952) contributed immensely to our understanding of the ludic, has emphasized the seriousness of play, even though he has been criticized for not sufficiently emphasizing the simultaneity of seriousness and play (Ehrmann 1968: 33; Pannenberg 1984: 323, 524). According to the critics the ludic is not an extra, but part and parcel of human reality. The compartmentalization and pluralism that are characteristic of modern society have made us blind to that characteristic. In Victor Turner's terms: the 'indicative mood' has overcome the 'subjunctive mood' (1988: 101). The ludic has been exiled to its own sphere. Modern society has thereby lost sight of play's real nature. As we will see below, postmodernism has partly recovered this perspective.

Thanks to simultaneity, things can be discriminated and yet equated, just as in a comparison differences and common traits can be included. The ludic capacity implies a double view of reality, combining perspectives. One application of the ludic capacity is therefore the art of handling contradictions, dichotomies and paradoxes. In scientific methodological terms the ludic represents an eclectic, poly-paradigmatic way of looking at reality. But examples also abound in daily life. It is possible to

enjoy a movie and at the same time be conscious of how actors and director have done their job. On the one hand, participation and identification occur, on the other hand, one is constantly observing and reviewing what happens.

Even though participant observation is a *contradictio in terminis*, anthropologists make of simultaneity their trade mark. The participant observer's position represents continuity as well as rupture, identification as well as distance, both simultaneity and simulation. A seemingly contradictory procedure has proven to be a productive method. Perhaps one should not be too afraid of making a virtue of necessity. When discussing methodological theism, atheism and agnosticism, I referred to the distinction between scholars' positions in their practice of studying religion, and when speaking as private persons. This seeming contradiction may be positively valued as a symptom of the ludic capacity.

In the remainder of this chapter I will argue that the ludic, as a human capacity, can and should manifest itself in the scholarly study of religion, and moreover that it is fundamental to religion itself. I will also suggest that the 'double awareness' can be put to use to find a way beyond religionism and reductionism. This allows for a combination of two diverging positions, and adds the possibility of a meta-position.

6. Interdisciplinary Views

Simultaneity and subjunctivity have been discussed in various, relatively diverging disciplines and schools of thought. In a playful manner, not hindered by seeming contradictions or mono-paradigmatic and disciplinary scruples, I will now call my witnesses from these disciplines and schools to the box. The summary I give here reflects my rather haphazard and sometimes intuitive reading experience. I was amazed by the surprising similarity between seemingly divergent arguments. Despite their variety, all references reinforce the plea for the application of the ludic capacity, both in religion and in the study of religion. The perspective the Wageningen first showed to me, and that the Brazilian spiritists confirmed in their own way, can be pursued in the scholars' tribe.

My first witness is Maurice Bloch (1991). He has drawn anthropologists' attention to connectionism – also called parallel distributed processing, PDP (D'Andrade 1992: 29; 1995: 138–49) – as a fundamental hypothesis about human thought. Whereas it has long been assumed

that people think as they speak, i. e. in sentences, recent research suggests that people are able to appeal to different ‘non-linguistic chunked mental models’ (Bloch 1991: 194) at the same time, making up their minds within seconds, ‘making it possible to carry out thousands of tiny computations simultaneously’ (D’Andrade 1992: 29). Images are used as stores of information. Connectionists suggest that knowledge is made accessible ‘through a number of processing units which work in parallel and feed in information simultaneously ... the information received from these multiple parallel processors is analysed simultaneously through already existing networks connecting the processors’ (Bloch 1991: 191). The simultaneity also means that dichotomies can be overcome. Once a conclusion has to be explained, sentential logic and dichotomous thinking take over again. Though they are much more visible and seemingly dominant, they do not represent the normal way of thinking.

Quinn and Holland (1987) have developed similar ideas. They coined the term ‘cultural model’ as a narrative, prototypical, schematic and simplified form of social knowledge that is available to interpret events. Quinn and Holland stress the simultaneity of a variety of cultural models used to perform tasks, both interpretative and goal-embodying, verbal and non-verbal, thinking and doing (Quinn and Holland 1987: 6–8). Following Lakoff and Johnson, the authors distinguish between proposition-schemas and image-schemas (Quinn and Holland 1987: 24, cf. Quinn 1991: 58). The first type is based on what Bloch has called sentential logic, while the second illustrates the connectionist-PDP view of the way knowledge is organized. A key image, a root metaphor, often physical and bodily, can summarize knowledge in a way that is much more rapid than its explanation in propositions would be. This has methodological consequences, as Csordas (1993) has pointed out, suggesting ‘somatic modes of attention’ as an important instrument in research. The holistic perspective of the key image is complemented by the verbalization of propositional logic. One might perhaps add: the religious experience of inspiring images is complemented by the verbalizations of narrative in myth and of reason in theological – as well as atheist – discourse.

Translated in structuralist terms this can also be called the paradigmatic comparison of syntagmatic chains. Connectionist and image thought is paradigmatic, whereas sentential and propositional logic is syntagmatic in nature. The process of ‘bricolage’ combines the two types of view and makes them more dynamic. It is like hearing melody

(contiguity) and harmony (analogy) at the same time, and improvising with them.

From cognitive anthropology we move on to psycho-analysis. An interesting way to illuminate the fundamental characteristics of simultaneity and subjunctivity in the ludic can be found in Donald Winnicott (1971). Though psychoanalytic in origin, his interpretation of play is not as strictly Freudian as, for example, that given by Alexander (1958), who links play with libido. Winnicott takes his starting-point in the infant's discovery of the difference between 'me' and 'not-me', between subject and object (1971: 6). He suggests that between the two there is an intermediate area to which inner reality and external life contribute. The individual, also when adult, is 'engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott 1971: 2). Winnicott locates play in the intermediate area. 'Transitional objects', such as the modern infant's teddy bear, represent a bridge between inner experience and outer reality.

In Winnicott's view, illusions are also characteristic of the intermediate area, since the transitional object seems to be part of both inner reality and external life. Interestingly, 'illusion' is etymologically related to 'ludic', as Huizinga has observed (1952: 12). Winnicott considers the illusions to be non-pathological (1971: 15), even though the child gradually meets with disillusionment, weaning being the clearest example. Adults maintain their illusions, as in art and religion (Winnicott 1971: 5). Winnicott suggests a link between the infant's experience and collective culture. Transitional objects are instrumental in constructing this link.

Transitional objects provide the first experience of symbolism. The softness of the teddy bear represents the mother's breast, experienced by the infant as part of the body. Transitional objects also offer the first experience of power: 'The mother's adaptation to the infant's needs, when good enough, gives the infant the illusion that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create' (Winnicott 1971: 6). It gives the infant the confidence that there is 'a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged' (Winnicott 1971: 12). To adults, religion and art belong to this unchallenged intermediate area. They offer relief from the strain of relating inner and outer reality (Winnicott 1971: 13). 'The thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself' (Winnicott 1971: 47).

Winnicott's approach to play can be confirmed by contributions from symbolic and psychological anthropology. Katherine Ewing (1990) speaks of the 'illusion of wholeness'. She suggests that a person will always maintain this illusion, despite the presence of 'multiple inconsistent self-representations that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly' (Ewing 1990: 251). People develop ways of managing inconsistencies (Ewing 1990: 255). They are 'adept at using multiple rhetorical strategies, relying on ambiguity and tropes to establish a position' (Ewing 1990: 262). As a consequence, cultures are not the coherent systems they have been assumed to be (Ewing 1990: 257). This can also be put in connectionist terms: the chunked models of the self-representations can be simultaneously active, despite inconsistencies. Quinn and Holland put it this way:

That there is no coherent cultural system of knowledge, only an array of different culturally shared schematizations formulated for the performance of particular cognitive tasks, accounts for the co-existence of the conflicting cultural models encountered in many domains of existence. (Quinn and Holland 1987: 10)

In my terms it is the human ludic capacity that allows for a satisfying management of inconsistencies, of the fundamental tension between consenting and diverging. Scientific thinking does not escape the co-existence of conflicting cultural models, but especially in eclectic approaches the multiplicity of views is recognized and becomes part of the method.

The analysis made by Winnicott and Ewing finds a parallel in the work of the Dutch anthropologist of religion Jan van Baal. Comparing play, art and religion, Van Baal (1972) points to a common source of these three sectors of culture. Human beings feel both part of the world and yet at a distance. Symbols cause that distance, because to the human subject, defined as *homo exprimens*, they refer to objects, even when these are not present. The capacity for reflection is paid for with distance, absence and loneliness.

In Van Baal's opinion, play, art and religion, each in its own way, offer a solution to the fundamental tension of being at the same time part of reality and at a distance from it (Van Baal 1972: 118). In *play* the participants create a separate world which they know to be fictitious. This world has its own rules, but despite these rules the uncertainty of chance is just as present. In *art* the world addresses the human being as essentially beautiful, as an invitation to enjoy reality. Thus it gives him

or her a sense of belonging, of being part, even though the aesthetic experience may be momentary. *Religion* offers a solution to this fundamental problem by offering a possibility of communication, primarily with supernatural powers, but also with fellow human beings and with nature. The difference between the world evoked in play and that evoked in religion is that only in the latter do matters of life and death predominate. Whereas in the reality of play uncertainty is exciting, in that of religion uncertainty nourishes fear. Of the three categories discussed here, play offers the greatest awareness that one is dealing with an imaginary world, with an illusion that helps one to understand the incomprehensible mystery (Van Baal 1971: 125).

Victor Turner, who contributed to various sub-disciplines of anthropology, developed a special approach to the study of the ludic, particularly in his later publications. Yet, early in his career, when coining the concept of social drama, play was already central to his observations. This led him on to the study of ritual and theatre (Turner 1982). The liminary phase in the ritual process (Turner 1974) has many ludic characteristics, even though the initial list of typical liminary elements did not include play (1974: 93). In a later work Turner calls play the essence of liminality, and speaks of 'the ludic capacity, to catch symbols in their movement, so to speak, and to play with their possibilities of form and meaning' (1982: 23). Liminality combines work and play. In the modern 'liminoid' setting, play is exiled to the sphere of leisure, with the exception of some professionals, like academics and actors, who make their play a commercial activity (1982: 33, 55).

Turner's work is very tentative and conjectural; it is most stimulating for the study of play. In his view, play bridges the contrast between the two hemispheres of the human brain, the two being characterized by different tasks. Following Barbara Lex, Turner (1988: 163) describes as tasks of the left hemisphere: speech, linear analytic thought, assessment of time, sequentially organized information. The right hemisphere is characterized by: limited linguistic capability, holistic synthetic thought, perception of space, information organized in patterns. From D'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus (1979: 174), Turner takes the idea of a 'rapid functional alternation of each hemisphere' (quoted in Turner 1988: 164). The left half is dominant and activating, the right half has a stabilizing effect. One is of course reminded of Bloch's distinction between sentential logic and parallel distributed processing. The connectionist 'processing units' might be located in the right hemisphere, whereas verbalization can be said to take place in the left half. The struc-

turalist distinction between paradigmatic comparisons and syntagmatic chains, or, in the musical metaphor, between harmony and melody, can also be included in this schema of the brain hemispheres.

Turner understands ritual as based on a combination of the two hemispheres' characteristics, producing a feeling of well-being. Ecstasy, mysticism, and enlightenment are terms for this state, in which paradoxes are considered acceptable or even welcome (1988: 166). Adding italics, Turner again quotes D'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus (1979: 177) who suggest that 'during certain ritual and meditation states, logical paradoxes or the awareness of polar opposites as presented in myth appear simultaneously, *both* as antinomies and as unified wholes'. In a later publication the same authors (Laughlin, McManus and D'Aquili 1990: 180) refer to play as 'at the very evolutionary foundations of both science and mysticism'. Turner affirms that play is difficult to localize in the brains. It has an inter-face function (Turner 1988: 167), 'betwixt and between', 'as if' rather than 'as is' (Turner 1988: 169).

Many of the insights that have been presented so far point to a link between the ludic and a fundamental human predicament: that of having to deal simultaneously with various forms of reality that make themselves felt all at the same time. This point has been pursued in symbolic anthropology. An interesting human instrument in dealing with this predicament is the trope, especially the tropes of metaphor and metonym. Tropes contain ludic aspects. They are used to get a grip on reality, to maintain the sensation of a unified, unfragmented reality. Fernandez speaks of the play of and between the tropes (1986, 1991: 6,7); Friedrich introduces the term 'polytropy' (Friedrich 1991: 17–55).

Metaphors pertain to two domains (Quinn and Holland 1987: 30). They are images taken from a familiar domain and applied to another, inchoate (Fernandez 1986, *passim*) and unfamiliar domain, with the purpose of clarifying this latter domain and making it more familiar. Scholars also use metaphors, as when society is compared to an organism or a mechanism. Especially in religion, metaphors return the subject to the whole, precisely by establishing a relationship between two domains, all the more so because hitherto these seemed unconnected (Fernandez 1986: 118–213). There is a double perspective in metaphors: society may be an organism, but even to functionalists it was clear that, literally speaking, it is not so. As McFague (1983: 13) has observed, metaphors 'always contain the whisper, "it is *and it is not*". Bateson (1973: 158), when speaking of play, distinguishes between primary and secondary process thinking: primary in the sense that map and ter-

ritory are equated, secondary when they are distinguished. Play in his view combines the two types of process thinking. In view of these observations, one might conclude that metaphors create illusions, but that these are useful illusions that are widely held and applied, also in science: 'scientific models can be construed as extended metaphors' (Edwards 1994: 180).

Of course, metaphors are not reinvented every time they are used. A speaker, using a metaphor, expects the audience to recognize the movement from two separate domains to two related domains or even one integrated domain (Fernandez 1986: 45). The ludic, as the capacity to deal simultaneously and subjunctively with two ways of classifying reality, finds in metaphors an important instrument for the routine connecting of these two orders.

Metonyms pertain to one domain instead of two, but lead to the same result. A particular experience or phenomenon within that domain is generalized for the whole of it. An example from religion is the Christian expression that 'the cross saves from sin', in which 'the cross' represents Jesus' death as well as a whole theological reasoning about his death. In the case of metonym, two levels of order, one partial and the other referring to a whole, are connected. This again illustrates the simultaneous double perspective of the ludic. So in both metaphor and metonym people play with domains and levels of order. They are engaged in 'the play of tropes in culture' (Fernandez 1986).

Metaphors and metonyms can be distinguished but occur together. If metaphors entail the suggestion of a unity, of one domain, despite linking two domains, they are closer to metonyms than the distinction at first seems to suggest. One should therefore not limit oneself to the study of metaphor, but look 'Beyond Metaphor' (Fernandez 1991). Again distance and contiguity are looked at simultaneously, within the context of culture. Fernandez (1991: 13), referring explicitly to reductionism, makes a plea for the combination of two approaches, one reductionist and distant, the other more poetic and participatory:

. . . on the one hand, anthropological poetics challenges the dehumanization that lies in the reductionist tendencies of scientific formalization, while, on the other hand, scientific formalization forestalls the excessively extravagant and freewheeling intuitive interpretations that are a tendency in poetic approaches.

Poewe (1989: 375) has observed that 'While academia seems preoccupied with text and genre, and the rarefied world of metaphor, many at

the grass roots level have returned to experience, "life", and a language empowered by metonyms. Scholars will more readily use metaphors because their supposed scientific objectivity keeps them at a distance from what they study. In daily life and in religion, reality is experienced as one domain, and consequently metonyms are more fitting. In Van Baal's terms religion is a way of restoring unity and wholeness. From within religious experience, then, metonym seems a better instrument than metaphor, even though metaphors keep being used.

Yet, scholars cannot do without metonyms. Especially anthropologists need them, because the distinction between metaphor and metonym is paralleled by that between observation (suggesting distance) and participation (suggesting one reality), participant observation being, as we saw, the twin method characteristic of anthropology. Here too, the ludic is present, since fieldworkers have to manage two perspectives at the same time. They need to find an equilibrium between distant observation and intimate participation. While observing, they belong to two domains; while participating, they belong to one only. When only observing they cannot participate, and vice versa. Fieldworkers often report on the play-acting needed in such situations. They too experience Ewing's tension between multiple selves and the illusion of wholeness, and find a way to manage these contradictions.

Finally, another school of thought that is relevant to our theme must be called to witness. Postmodernism, whatever its value in retrospect may be, has made two contributions to a growing awareness of the ludic in academic work. First, playfulness has been mentioned as typical of postmodernists (Rosenau 1992: 117, 135; Bryan S. Turner 1990: 4, 5; 1991: xxi). Postmodernists have a special interest in language games and experiment with style and narrative knowledge (Sarup 1988: 120). As in the ludic subjunctive dealing with two different orders, postmodernists cherish contradictions, indeterminacy, paradoxes and inconsistencies. Criticism of the one meta-narrative leads to experiment and openness, with carnival as a leading metaphor (Rosenau 1992: 141). Yet, unity and wholeness have become suspect, and in that sense postmodernism is blind to the fundamental tension between distance and participation, plurality and unity. To me, the simultaneity in the ludic seems to be more interesting than the – in the end often rather cynical – preference for fragmentation.

A second contribution of postmodernism has perhaps been less purposeful and more ambiguous. It does not relate to the ludic, but primarily to religion and science. I am referring to the idea that the postmod-

ern deconstruction of traditional scientific models has eroded the contrast between science and religion as forms of knowledge (Berry and Wernick 1992). When 'presence' is no longer a core concept and 'darker, more obscure ways of seeing and thinking' (Berry 1992: 2) become acceptable, that contrast loses much of its point. As Milbank puts it (1992: 31): 'one can no longer will the end of religion'.

Rorty, often mentioned in connection with postmodernism, introduces a term that comes close to the ludic. He speaks of the 'ironist' (1989: xv) as:

... the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance.

The ironist is opposed by Rorty to the theologian and the metaphysician. Since this ironism is linked to liberalism, the liberal being depicted as a person who thinks 'that cruelty is the worst thing we do' (Sklar quoted by Rorty 1989: xv), this posture is certainly not cynical. Compared to the ludic as defined above, it contains a certain degree of subjunctivity, but lacks the simultaneity of combining, for example, ironist and metaphysical points of view. Whereas Rorty's ironist is ironical about a foundation beyond time and chance, someone who is ironic in the ludic way will underline a double understanding, of both the 'either' and the 'or'.

Our witnesses, though drawn from such diverse approaches and disciplines as cognitive studies, psycho-analysis, symbolic anthropology, anthropology of religion, neurobiology and postmodernism, all point to the possibility of a subjunctivity and simultaneity in points of view.

7. The Ludic, Religion, and the Explanation of Religion

As we have seen above, the debate on reductionism and religionism suggests the need of a choice between different ways of classifying reality. The questions formulated in that section point to a series of tenacious contrasts, such as between rational and irrational orders, the religious and the scientific way of classifying, the believers' and the scholars' classifications, Western and non-Western views. They also refer to differing concepts of science.

It has already been observed that the sharpness of these contrasts has been somewhat eroded in the last decades. In the light of the preceding section, it seems to me that awareness of the ludic human potential reinforces this tendency and gives it a new basis, since it points to the art of simultaneously and subjunctively dealing with contrasting classifications. The various types of explanation of religion, even though contrasting and exclusive among themselves, can be valued in a ludic approach. Thus it will be possible to go beyond the familiar dichotomies, not necessarily by producing a synthesis or some form of dialectics, but by the simultaneous adoption of two or more perspectives. To their own disadvantage, scholars have left an essential part of the human potential unused. Academics may reflect the modernity of the time they live in, but they also suffer from the consequences of the modern exile of the ludic, domesticated in its own harmless sphere. They have to learn anew how to use both hemispheres of their brain at the same time, and thus to handle dichotomies.

If the ludic simultaneity has recently been recovered and rediscovered, this human talent should not be buried, but put to use. More than anywhere else, the study of religion is an area where it can be applied, not only because of its relevance for methodology, but also because religion is one of the areas where the ludic is at work. I suggest that methodological ludism is necessary to study the ludic capacity of religious people. Object and method happen to be based on the same foundation, and this is more than a mere coincidence. This similarity between the simultaneity of views in religion and in the study of religion presents itself for the simple reason that the ludic capacity can be applied to more than one field of human activity. The implementation of ludism as a meta-position in scholarly work opens the scholar's eyes to the believer's 'constellation' view.

This posture takes us beyond the choice between methodological atheism, agnosticism, or theism. In appealing to a perspective of simultaneity, the ludic invites one to take a triple view, at the same time theist, atheist and agnosticist. In this way methodological theism, so far neglected in the debate, can be given a place. Van Baal's legacy, expressed in his last publication (1990: 20, 55), urging us to consider the believer as normal and not as deviant, can then be elaborated. The anthropologist's method of participant observation offers a good starting-point if interpreted as a ludic activity in the sense I have given to the word (cf. Van Baal 1990: 55). If only as a hypothesis, scholars should invert the current perspective and start at the believer's end, taking the Mys-

tery not as an option but as an obliging necessity (Van Baal 1990: 67). In this light, the idea of a 'useful illusion' is no longer a contradiction, but acceptable within the simultaneity of the ludic perspective (cf. Kliever 1981; Nijssen 1991; Vaihinger 1922).

As a method, the application of the ludic capacity to the study of religion is more than a juxtaposition of opposing approaches like those mentioned in the first paragraph of this section. It allows for a new way of looking at religion. The methodological ludism advocated here offers the extra of a simultaneous view. This is not necessarily a synthesis, but much more an overview of the total constellation of possibilities. It is also more than empathy, since the subjunctive 'make-believe' guarantees a serious sympathy that is honest and absolute as long as it lasts. In that sense ludism goes beyond the religionist and reductionist positions.

The use of the ludic capacity, which is recommended for the study and explanation of religion, can also be encountered in religion itself. If indeed it is a universal human capacity, it must necessarily be present in the religious field as well. Van Baal's remarks on the closeness between religion and play point in this direction, as does Fernandez's emphasis on the play of tropes and the quest for wholeness in religions (Fernandez 1986: 188–213). The human and the superhuman, nature and the supernatural, the part and the whole, as different orders, are simultaneously and subjunctively present in the ludic capacity as it is at work in religion.

There are several other indications that the ludic and the religious are related, as in ritual, especially through the use of masks, but also in myth, as in the trickster figure. Huizinga has already drawn attention to this (1952: *passim*). Syncretism can be defined as a ludic way of dealing with religious classifications of a different order. The same can be said of popular religion – often syncretistic – as an alternative to official religion. Magic represents an alternative, illegitimate production of religion (Bourdieu 1971). It can be understood within the ludic perspective, as was affirmed by Winnicott's phrase quoted above about the ambiguity between 'personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects' and its link with the precariousness of magic. As Luhmann (1989: 332–3) puts it, following Winnicott:

The crucial part of magical practice is that the play-claim of being a powerful, efficacious magician is also a reality-claim, a science-like assertion about the objective instrumental efficacy of magic within the physical world.

This allows magicians 'to waver between the literal and the metaphorical when casting a spell' (Luhmann 1989: 333). Perhaps students of religion should put a bit more of this magic into their study of religion!

It must be added that, as has occurred in the academic world, religions have often abolished the ludic dimension as disturbing. The subjunctive 'as if' is experienced as threatening. Simultaneity may be promising, but it is a menace to vested interests and to the sentential logical order of authorities. Therefore syncretism, magic, and popular religion are condemned by erudite religion as heresies. In this context it should be noted that doubt and scepticism are rarely part of the official version of a religion, even though they are typical of much religious experience, representing the ludic's double awareness. As Pruyser (1976: 190) affirms:

Though the focal feelings may convince the participant that he is in the presence of the Holy, there may be a dim but persistent feeling in the background of his consciousness that he is involved in an act of 'make-believe' and that it is perfectly within his powers to step out of it.

The Wagena initiation is, as we saw, a perfect example of this 'make-believe'. In a similar manner the Brazilian spiritists created their own healing method.

Without idealizing the individual consciousness, it must be observed that in religion, as in science, institutionalization may generate power mechanisms. Whereas in science a process of mono-paradigmatic school formation is the consequence, in religion fundamentalism and orthodoxy come to the fore. The connectionist mechanisms in religious thought are totally overlooked, and as a consequence one is blind to the ludic perspective. Metaphors are reified and taken literally. In Bateson's terms: map and territory are equated. What remains is the exclusively serious, verbalized and dichotomized sentential logic of orthodoxy, made for eternity, but in fact nothing more than a petrified monument of the past.

As far as science is concerned, the ludic posture demands what many would consider a literal *salto mortale*, the death of scientific explanation and debate. Yet, the special attractiveness of the ludic is the possibility to look at things from another angle, without abandoning a prior way of classifying that is considered preferable and even exclusive. The seriousness that is part of the ludic allows for both exclusiveness and inclusiveness. It is a way of playing with alternatives in which one can become captivated by each of these alternatives. It is the seduction of the meta-

phor that whispers 'it is *and it is not*' (McFague 1983: 13). It is a way of transforming the vice of contradiction into a methodological principle. The multiple selves of the researcher are complemented by the illusion of wholeness.

In terms of explanatory paradigms, a plea for the ludic therefore implies some form of eclecticism. The advantage of such an approach is that the space for creativity and experiment is enlarged, and in that sense the scientific enterprise need not succumb to the *salto mortale*, but appears rejuvenated. The ludic posture may, for example, put an end to a sterile exchange of arguments about the rationality of religion or of non-Western cultures. The self-sufficiency and inner logic of each way of classifying reality can be recognized without leading to a sterile relativism. It is the condition of simultaneity, instead of co-existence, that prevents relativism. In that manner the ludic also points to a way beyond a choice between objectivity and subjectivity. Secularization can be reconsidered in the light of the ludic perspective, interestingly not only from a scholarly point of view, but even in a personal way (Kliever 1981).

To elaborate on the methodological consequences would require another chapter. A new methodology must be developed, and this will certainly not be easy. The ludic capacity has some trickiness, is a trickster itself, as V. Turner (1988: 167–170) put it. Therefore its extra dimension escapes categories and makes for surprises. Yet, in scholarly work, something like Winnicott's intermediate area would be most helpful. It demands another way of looking and understanding, different from what scholars have been trained to do. The ludic offers a most promising perspective. Ludicity, though inevitably ludicrous to some, may lead to lucidity for others. One condition is that one forgets the over-serious 'official' view of religion that is often typical of Western culture and academic discourse, and also that one avoids the homogeneous univocal discourse on other cultures of the type 'The Bongo-Bongo are of the opinion that...'. Non-Western cultures and religions abound with examples of the ludic, as the Wagenia and their presumed secrets showed me when I started doing anthropological fieldwork. If the field of study is replete with examples, and if the double perspective required of the fieldworker is paralleled by that of religion, it should not be too difficult to adopt a corresponding methodology. It may mean that research reports have to avoid an excessively strict sentential logic. Since the publication of 'Writing Culture' (Clifford and Marcus 1986), anthropologists have more than ever been made aware of the

‘poetics and politics of ethnography’, in the words of the sub-title of that collection of articles. Awareness of styles will help to translate the ludic capacity into fieldwork methodology. With regard to politics, Wageningen novices and Brazilian spiritists have shown me the localized and political nature of my discourse. They called my attention to the ludic that had been exiled from my own discipline and that as a consequence I had been conditioned not to observe.

If ludism proves to be a viable alternative, the polemics between religionists and reductionists can gradually be brought to a conclusion. The interdisciplinary study of religion will be relieved of a cumbersome burden and can be immensely stimulated.

8. Conclusion

If students of religion integrate the human ludic capacity into their method, and discover its marks in the religions they study, the interdisciplinary study of religion will make a leap forward. The perspective of methodological ludism and of the simultaneity of classifications will make it possible to maintain personal convictions and at the same time accept those of others. In such a way one can be a believer and a student of other people’s beliefs. It will be possible to use preferred methods without abandoning other methodologies. One can be a methodological theist, atheist and agnosticist at the same time and even add to these positions. An eclectic use of paradigms will no longer be something to be ashamed of. Interdisciplinary contact will be greatly facilitated. As proponents of the method of participant observation, anthropologists are in an excellent position to play a leading role in developing this liminary – or even preliminary – approach.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Lourens Minnema for important reading suggestions; Anton van Harskamp, Bert Musschenga and the other members of the Relativism group of the Beziningscentrum of the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam for their comments; Rein Fernhout, Sander Griffioen, Hans Tennekes, Henk Versnel and an anonymous reviewer for observations on earlier drafts; the members of the ‘Specialisatieoverleg Religieuze en Symbolische Antropologie’ and the ‘Post-doc leesgroep’ for