

# How to capture the ‘wow’: R.R. Marett’s notion of awe and the study of religion<sup>\*</sup>

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Current scholarship in the social sciences and humanities, including the study of religion, shows a marked appraisal of bodily sensations, emotions, and experiences as eminently social and politico-aesthetic phenomena (rather than reducing them to a matter of mere individual psychology). How to grasp the genesis of shared perceptions and feelings, and even some kind of ‘wow’ effect, in relation to a posited ‘beyond’ has become a central issue for scholars of religion today. Placed against the horizon of the material turn in the study of religion, R.R. Marett’s approach to religion as an ‘organic complex of thought, emotion, and behaviour’ and his concept of awe gain renewed topicality. Engaging with Marett’s ideas in the context of broader debates about religious experience, in this article (which is based on my 2014 Marett lecture) I call attention to the surplus generated in the interplay of religious things and bodily sensations and explore its role in politics and aesthetics of religious world-making. My central point is that Marett’s work offers valuable resources for an approach to religion that neither takes for granted the existence of a god or transcendental force (as in ontological approaches), nor invests in unmasking it as an illusion (as in critiques of religion as irrational), but instead undertakes a close study of the standardized methods that yield the fabrication of some kind of excess that points to a ‘beyond’ and yet is grounded in the here and now.

In the early twenty-first century, religion appears to be a far more prominent and resilient phenomenon than envisioned by theorists who understood modernity in terms of increasing rationalization and secularization. By now, it has become commonplace to state that religion is not likely to disappear, but rather is constantly transforming in myriad and complex ways. One salient trend that captured my attention over the past years – no doubt partly triggered by my research on Pentecostals in Ghana with their marked religious expressivity (e.g. Meyer 2006; 2010) – is the strong emphasis placed on religion as an extraordinary experience, mobilizing the body, tuning the senses, and generating emotions. Obviously, this concern with sensations and emotions as harbingers of authenticity and with the desire for deep and special experiences features more broadly in contemporary Western societies, and beyond. In the spheres of religion, politics, popular culture, and advertisements, the body is profiled as a solid ground of

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existence and a potential harbinger of the sublime, prone to experience spectacular ‘wow’ effects and a sense of wonder and amazement. Terms like ‘awe’, ‘awesome’, and ‘sublime’ – once part of the language games of religious studies and philosophy – have become colloquial expressions that pinpoint an amazing entanglement of banalization and sacralization in the conjuring of a ‘sacred surplus’ (Chidester 2008: 94; 2012: 43-5; see also Taussig 1999: 3).

How to address these phenomena as anthropologists of religion? How, in other words, to develop an approach that allows us to ‘capture the “wow”’ without either taking for granted the existence of the god or ‘beyond’ to which the sense of ‘wow’ refers or dismissing it as an irrational illusion? This is the central question of this article.

Over the past two decades, scholars in the anthropology of religion, and the study of religion in general, have engaged critically with the genealogies of the terms and concepts that shaped inquiries in their disciplines, laying bare a problematic, ideal-type Protestant bias. The heightened sensitivity to the distortions brought about by scholarly concepts contributed to the current trend in the anthropology of religion to study religious traditions in their own right and from within. Important differences notwithstanding, the concern to ‘take religion seriously’ is shared across a broad spectrum of scholars working on the anthropologies of Islam (stimulated by the work of Talal Asad – e.g. 1993; 2009 [1986]) and Christianity (such as the work of Joel Robbins [e.g. 2003; 2014]) with their focus on ethical traditions and value systems, as well as those associating themselves with the ontological turn with its emphasis on modes of being. I appreciate the critical potential of these admittedly diverse endeavours to critique Eurocentric and secularist stances to religion by a focus on committed believers, a view of Islam and Christianity as living traditions, or a concern with modes of being and their beings. And yet ‘taking religion seriously’ comes with its own limitations, such as the loss of a vantage-point ‘from outside’, which is, in my view, still indispensable for critical scholarly analysis (as argued in Meyer 2015*b*: chap. 5). The implications of such a loss come to the fore most pointedly with regard to the ‘anthropology of ontology’ (Scott 2013),<sup>1</sup> which not only yields intriguing works in the anthropology of religion (e.g. Espirito Santo & Tassi 2013; Goslinga 2012; see also Meyer 2015*b*: 193-5), but even appears to recast anthropology itself in religious terms. I think that the current retreat into a deep ontology-driven study of the specific ways of people’s engagement with spirits, gods, and supernatural entities is ultimately unproductive. The starting-point of this article is that it is time to move a step further towards an approach to religion that explores a religious tradition or mode of being from within, but also offers a standpoint from which to say something about it.

There is a need for a critical reconfiguration of the study of religion and its modes of producing knowledge in general, from various disciplinary angles, including anthropology (Meyer 2012). In so doing, it is necessary to move a step further than the critique of mainstream genealogies that have long shaped disciplinary inquiries. The guiding idea put forward in this article is that we need a more encompassing archaeology of knowledge production in the field of religion (see Brunotte 2013) which pays due attention to thinkers and concepts that were side-lined and more or less forgotten and yet may have something important to offer for present-day inquiries. In other words, the current critique of the established canons of intellectual history invites us to hold up to the light once again the work of barely remembered fringe figures and their concepts.

Robert Ranulph Marett (1866-1943) is such a scholar and, as I will argue in this article, his concept of ‘awe’ is a fruitful starting-point for any scholarly attempt to ‘capture the

“wow”. For my own work, Marett has long been a source of inspiration; the notion of ‘sensational form’, developed as a heuristic concept to explore how religious regimes offer authorized modes and means to experience the divine and to develop a sense of extraordinary presence, is indebted to his notion of awe (Meyer 2006: 9-10; see below). However, so far my appraisal of Marett has remained rather implicit. The invitation to deliver the 2014 Marett Lecture, on which this article is based, offered an opportunity to engage more explicitly with his work. Even though there is an annual lecture in his name, organized by Exeter College, Oxford, where he served as a long-term rector, Marett’s person and work appear to be barely known by contemporary scholars in anthropology. This neglect is a symptom of a particular knowledge regime that marginalized him and his take on religion and society.

Characterizing Marett as ‘surely one of the most underestimated figures in the history of modern British anthropology’ (Stocking 1984: 109), George Stocking noted his role as a ‘mediator’ between French and British scholarship, who introduced Durkheim’s work to anthropologists and scholars of religion, including Jane Harrison, in Britain (see also Brunotte 2013: 86-7). In the early twentieth century, Marett was a much-discussed scholar. But interest in his work waned after the First World War. Starting as early as the 1950s, his *oeuvre* was increasingly seen as old-fashioned; at least in anthropology, few scholars show a serious interest in his writings. He is taken to be a marginal figure, the successor of E.B. Tylor and predecessor of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, with whom social anthropology really took off in Oxford. In a famous quote, E.E. Evans-Pritchard pinned him down as a ‘genial and ebullient classical philosopher’ who said things that were ‘amusing’ and had ‘an element of truth in [them]’; he saw Marett as a typical armchair scholar for whom to ‘understand primitive mentality there was no need to go and live among the savages, the experience of an Oxford common room being sufficient’ (1965: 35). In a more sympathetic tone, Raymond Firth stated that Marett, whose ‘contributions seem somewhat undervalued nowadays’ (1973: 159), had a ‘scholarly and ingenious mind, though rather unfocused and overgiven to imagery’ (1973: 35).<sup>2</sup> Clearly, for these accomplished scholars writing the history of the discipline, Marett did not embody what was regarded as distinctive about British social anthropology. He still was an armchair scholar at a time when his colleagues and students did actual fieldwork, his writing style was flowery rather than crisp and concise, and, perhaps even more importantly, he stressed the relevance of (social) psychology while many of his successors rejected psychological approaches of social phenomena as reductionist.

Marett’s ideas were marginalized by the canonization of social anthropology as a discipline in which the structural functionalist paradigm gained prominence. In the study of religion, however, his ideas had a more long-lasting influence, especially in the phenomenological school that evolved around Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) and Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950). In my view, qualifying Marett as *passé* is not simply a statement about his scholarship as such, but above all a symptom of a particular production of knowledge about religion with its specific dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, of remembering and forgetting. We have now reached a moment in which scholarship in the social sciences and humanities in general, and the study of religion in particular, is engaged in recuperating for social theory the eminent importance of the body, sensations, and emotions in the actual making of life worlds (Reckwitz 2012). The body and aesthetics (e.g. Rancière 2006), on the one hand, and all sorts of artefacts and materials, on the other, have become prime sites of scholarly inquiry (e.g. Hodder 2012; Latour 2005) and productive grounds for the development of new

concepts and approaches that appraise materiality (Meyer 2012; Morgan 2010; Vásquez 2011). In the context of current debates, Marett's approach to religion as an 'organic complex of thought, emotion and behavior' (1929: x) and his concept of awe gain renewed timeliness, as I will try to show in this article.

My own professional trajectory can help explain my interest in exploring Marett's take on religion. Trained as an anthropologist and working on religion in Africa, I have recently accepted a chair in Religious Studies at Utrecht University. Finding myself between anthropology and religious studies (Meyer 2012), I feel a remote affinity with a figure like Marett. As a scholar of law, philosophy, and classical studies, and involved in archaeology and folklore (quite actively with regard to his home, Jersey), Marett operated in a diffuse field in which neither anthropology nor religious studies had yet crystallized into the disciplines we know today. Positioned in the midst of big debates about the nature of modern society and witnessing the birth of the modern social sciences, Marett is a much more interesting thinker than his marginal position in the current disciplinary canon of anthropology may suggest. He is an intriguing figure who invites us simultaneously both to explore the disciplinary trajectories in anthropology and religious studies with their specific ways of knowledge production through which he got sidelined, *and* to engage with the ideas and concepts that characterize his approach in the light of present concerns. Based on an admittedly sympathetic reading, I would like to highlight the important insights and ideas contained in his work. Placed in the context of current criticisms raised about dominant paths of scholarly thought that, in their turn, once surpassed Marett's work, these insights and ideas are compelling elements of an archaeology of knowledge production that should be laid bare, rather than being forgotten.

In sum, with this article I would like to re-member Marett's ideas about religion, paying special attention to his notion of awe, and their reception by scholars of religion. My point is not to engage with Marett as a timeless classic whose work can be directly transposed into the here and now. Engaging with his ideas, I argue, will throw present debates into relief, and also indicate possibilities in his work that could have been developed, but were not – and if they had been, our current debates might have played out differently. I will think with, about, against, and beyond Marett from the standpoint of current issues and inquiries, as sketched above. In so doing, my main concern is to develop a better conceptual and methodological grasp of the surplus – call it awe or the 'wow' effect – that is generated in the interplay between the material world and bodily sensations and explore its role in the politics and aesthetics of religious world-making.

### **Marett's approach to religion**

Marett's impact in religious studies has been different than in anthropology, even though at present he is not much referred to in these circles either. In his entry on Marett in the volume *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft* (Michaels 1997), Martin Riesebrodt describes him as an important marker in 'the transition between evolutionism and functionalism' (1997: 171) whose work plays no role in current debates because it is 'hopelessly outdated and unacceptable' (1997: 183), even though certain elements of Marett's ideas – in particular those in relation to the notion of 'awe' – may fruitfully be synthesized with the Weberian notion of charisma (1997: 184). While Riesebrodt pins Marett down as a 'classic of passage' ('Klassiker des Übergangs', 1997: 184), Hans Kippenberg, in his seminal work *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte* (1997, translated into English 2002), credits Marett with having brought about a major transition in the

study of religion. He argues that Marett articulated a new, modern concept of religion understood as 'an amorphous experience of power' (1997: 181; see also Bengtson 1979 for an appraisal). As is well known, Marett's rise to fame began with his lecture, written in a rush and with guts, delivered for the annual meeting of the British Anthropological Society in 1899, in which he presented his bold pre-animism thesis. Navigating between the predominant positions taken in debates about religion, Marett proposed a third position:

Thus, to put the matter as broadly as possible, whether we hold with one extreme school that there exists a specific religious instinct, or whether we prefer to say with the other that man's religions are a by-product of his intellectual development, we must, I think, in any case admit the fact that in response to, or at any rate in connection with, the emotions of awe, wonder, and the like, wherein feeling would seem to have outstripped the power of 'natural', that is, reasonable explanations, there arises in the region of human thought a powerful impulse to objectify and even personify the mysterious or 'supernatural' something felt, and in the region of will a corresponding impulse to render it innocuous, or better still propitious, by force of constraint, communion or conciliation (1929: 10-11).

At first sight it might appear that the central point of Marett's critique of Tylor's evolutionary scheme was to claim the existence of a stage prior to animism, thereby still remaining within the confines of evolutionary thinking.<sup>3</sup> However, as Kippenberg stresses, Marett's major concern was to find – in quite a similar manner to Durkheim, whose work he did not yet know when he wrote his lecture (see Marett 1941: 161) – a common human core with regard to religion: 'Our common human nature, I believe, embraces a permanent possibility of religion' (Marett 1929: xxv), albeit deployed in various ways. In a way, Marett was caught in between a waning evolutionist and a nascent general perspective on religion. While he still responded to Tylor in the framework of evolutionism, his own concern was not to speculate about the origins of religion (1929: xxiv-xxvii). His interest, rather, was to develop a practical approach – a 'formula' that could serve as a 'memoria technica' (Marett 1929: xxviii) – to analyse from a comparative perspective the diversity of religions, in so-called 'savage' and 'modern' societies. He was wary about venturing a clear-cut definition of religion and formulating a narrow conceptual apparatus. Since in his view the study of religion still had the status of an infant science,<sup>4</sup> he "kept it loose", as artists are advised to do when giving first shape to a picture' (1929: xxx).<sup>5</sup> Challenging the view of survivals as traces of an outdated religion that had been superseded by rational understanding, he insisted that religion was rooted in an elemental mood that evolved around the notion of awe.<sup>6</sup> This is what makes his work still compelling today.

He developed his modern theory of religion, as Kippenberg sketches vividly, in the midst of an overall intellectual crisis at the turn of the nineteenth century, in which increasing doubts were raised about the capacity of historicism and evolutionism to unveil a progressive trajectory based on a set pattern of natural rules that underpinned rightful moral behaviour and that gave a sense of purpose and continuity. The study of culture, and of religion in particular, was increasingly understood as a promising field for systematizing possible modes of sense-making in a modern world in which meaning was no longer given.<sup>7</sup> Especially in Germany, the hotbed of idealism, Romanticism, and a deep fascination with Classical Antiquity, the question of making sense in – and about – modern society loomed large. As Kippenberg points out, Marett's concept of religion was attractive for scholars and a larger public because it offered an understanding of the history of religion in accordance with which the study of the past would not simply

yield insight into long-surpassed developmental stages, but also unveil a common core that was still valid in the present (though perceived as being threatened with the onset of modernity) (Kippenberg 1997: 193). Identifying such a common core of religious phenomena across time and space, Marett and those inspired by his work laid the ground for a modern systematic and comparative study of religion (with its own shortcomings and pitfalls).<sup>8</sup>

Of course, I do not promote an uncritical appraisal of Marett. His work is not exempt from profound criticisms of the modern study of religion as being theoretically and normatively indebted to Western epistemologies and hence in need of being de-centred from a postcolonial perspective (Asad 1993; Masuzawa 2005; van der Veer 2001). As David Chidester points out in his recent book *Empire of religion* (2014), which spotlights how comparative religion is rooted in colonial power structures, Marett was a typical exponent of knowledge production under the aegis of imperial theory. Still, he was more conscious of the intricacies of translation across cultures and religions than many of his peers and rejected the use of Western, biased notions such as that of the 'fetish'. In his perceptive comment on R.S. Rattray's *Religion and art in Ashanti* (1927), Marett pointed to the misrepresentations that ensued when terms such as 'fetish' and 'magic' were used: 'Unless we are very careful, the anthropological science may find itself tacitly committed to a theory of religion, which brands it as a pathological phenomenon at the start' (Marett 1927: 392). Seeking to flesh out the notion of awe, which evolved from his view of religion as instigating a sense of wonder (see below), he chose the Polynesian notions of *mana* and *taboo* (as reported in the writings of the missionary Robert H. Codrington) so as to express his general 'formula' for describing religious experience (1929: xxviii).<sup>9</sup> Marett acknowledged that, in elevating the terms *mana* and *taboo* to general categories, their original meaning was distorted: '[W]hen the science of comparative religion employs a native expression such as *mana*, or *taboo*, as a general category, it is obliged to disregard to some extent its original or local meaning' (1929: 99; see also Chidester 2014: 52). Thus, his appropriation of *mana* and *taboo* into the comparative study of religion did not solve the problem he signalled with the adoption of the notion of the 'fetish'; the use of these terms, too, involved a generalization that was far removed from the actual context of use and arguably resonated more with modern concerns than with those of their original users. As pointed out by Chidester, the use of such a generalized vocabulary betrays a typical insensitivity to the 'tripartite levels of mediation' (2014: 5-11) through which terms and notions travelled, from indigenous interlocutors to missionaries to scholars, becoming more and more alienated from their original meanings and modes of use and increasingly employed as neutral concepts.

And yet it would be problematic to conclude from this critique that the study of religion would be better off without concepts and, by implication, that Marett would have nothing to offer for present-day research. In the introduction, I signalled my unease about the current trend in anthropology to study religion in its own terms. One major problem I see with this overall trend, which encompasses a diverse set of different approaches, can be spotlighted by a brief discussion of the 'anthropology of ontology' (Scott 2013), with its characteristic inclination to privilege modes of existence above modalities of making sense, to assign primacy to being above representation. In this perspective, existence and being are aligned to life itself – in all its fullness and proneness to instil a sense of wonder and astonishment – whereas the production of knowledge through concepts is discarded as unable to match this fullness. To invoke Tim Ingold as a prominent representative of this position: 'The way to know the world,



they [scholars who are not into the “animic way of thinking”] say, is not to open oneself up to it, but rather to “grasp” it within a grid of concepts and categories’ (2011: 74-5; also quoted in Scott 2013: 863). With all respect for Ingold’s ground-breaking ideas, I disagree with the negative lure attributed to concepts and categories, as if they would be bound to produce dead knowledge and alienate scholarly inquiry from the real thing. This stance is grounded in a problematic privileging of ontology above epistemology and an in my view too uncritical romanticist celebration of vitalism.<sup>10</sup> Its pitfalls become especially clear when applied to the study of religion, where, under the motto of taking religion seriously, it sustains an endorsement of metaphysical beliefs and statements and a preparedness to think with, rather than (also) about, them. By extension, as pointed out by Michael Scott, ‘something arguably religious runs through much of this anthropology of ontology. This type of anthropology is not only an aspect of the anthropology of religion, it is often also the anthropology of religion as religion – a new kind of religious study of religion’ (2013: 860). I do not share his apparently positive view of this development, in which religion, as ‘the term that keeps wonder open’ (2013: 860), is introduced as an angle from which to criticize Cartesian knowledge production. The rather crude contrast drawn by Scott between an anthropology of ontology that sustains wonder and Cartesianism as wonder-occluding (2013: 862) strikes me as problematic. So does his mapping of the field in terms of these two options – as if there were a choice to be made between either being an ‘ontologist’ or a Cartesian dualist (I am neither). Moreover, emphasizing the experience of a sense of wonder on the level of knowledge production may fall short of embarking on a much-needed scholarly exploration of the processes and techniques through which a sense of ‘awe, wonder, and the like’ is made to arise in lived experience, which is my prime concern. Exactly here lies one of the merits of Marett’s concept of awe, as will be pointed out below.

In my understanding of knowledge production, a scholarly concept is neither fully congruent with nor totally independent from the phenomenon to which it refers, but instead is part of a method or approach intended to achieve insight into the phenomenon. A concept is both distinct from and an indispensable mediator of things in the world, for scholars as well as for their interlocutors. The point here is a thorough reflection about ‘the conditions of possibility of producing knowledge’ (Fabian 2014: 201), on the level of scholarly research and in the context of life as lived by the people among whom we conduct our research. For me, the value of a scholarly concept depends on its sensitizing capacity: that is, the extent to which it allows us to unlock and throw light on not so obvious aspects of a world of lived experience – looking deep – and to allow for comparison – looking across. I use the term ‘concept’ in the German sense of *Begriff* – from *begreifen* – through which complex phenomena can literally be ‘grasped’ or ‘captured’. This is what the purpose of knowledge is, in my understanding (and the reason why I do not share the negative resonance of these terms as invoked by Ingold). Hence ‘how to capture the “wow”?’ is first of all to ask about suitable concepts and methods that offer ways towards deep understanding and fresh ethnographic insights into a world of lived experience *as well as* allow for conveying the complexities involved in cross-cultural translation and conversation among scholars.

Before pursuing this question, I would like to highlight four crucial aspects of Marett’s approach to religion that underpin his concept of awe and warrant further attention because of their intriguing resonance with current issues in the study of religion. First, there is the concern with emotions. Key to Marett’s understanding is the

idea that a subtle emotional ‘thrill’ is at the core of religion – in its most ‘primitive’ as well as in more developed forms. Thus, he ventured a psychological theory of religion:

As regards theory, I would rest my case on the psychological argument that, if there be reason, as I think there is, to hold that man’s religious sense is a constant and universal feature of his mental life, its essence and true nature must be sought, not so much in the shifting variety of its ideal constructions, as in the steadfast groundwork of specific emotions whereby man is able to feel the supernatural precisely at the point at which his thought breaks down (1929: 28).

Stating that ‘the emotional side of religion constitutes its more real, more characteristic feature’, he none the less conceded that people could only communicate about their religious experiences via ideas put into words. This dependency on language, however, was no reason to neglect the emotional dimension, as was the case in the intellectualist school of Tylor and Lang, against which he positioned himself. In my reading, we encounter here another instance of Marett talking back, thereby strategically profiling emotion. However, circumscribing religion as ‘a certain composite or concrete state of mind wherein various emotions and ideas are *together* directly provocative of action’ (1929: 5, emphasis added), Marett presented an integrated view of religion according to which feeling, thinking, and (as will become clear in a moment) practices were interconnected. In so doing, his take on religion appears to surpass the problematic dualism of sense/meaning, on the one hand, and the senses/sensation, on the other, on which rests the unfortunate cleavage between intellectualist versus emotion- or experience-orientated approaches that has long structured the study of religion and social theory in general. It is problematic because it pre-empts understanding how sense-making is grounded in, rather than opposed to, sensation. Marett’s approach offers an early incentive to think beyond this cleavage and move towards a more integrated understanding of what German philosopher Sybille Krämer (1998) calls the sense of the senses (‘Sinn der Sinne’).

Second, there is his take on the relation between psychology and sociology. Marett criticized psychology for finding it ‘convenient to make abstraction of the social dimension’ (1929: 133), thereby focusing unduly on the individual and neglecting the forming influence of society. He was convinced that, ‘primarily and directly, the subject, the owner as it were, of religious experience, is the religious society, not the individual’ (1929: 137). Obviously, this drew him close to Durkheim and associates, who regarded the social as an entity *sui generis*.<sup>11</sup> However, for Marett, they went too far in this respect, as ‘they appear to regard social phenomena . . . as objective simply in the sense of independent of individual control’ (1929: 129). If psychology abstracted from society, Durkheimian sociology abstracted from the individual. Marett proposed an integrated view, with social psychology doing ‘a kind of bridge-work between the objective and the subjective elements of our experience’ (1929: 132). In other words, social psychology was ‘to balance (not exclude) the methods of individual psychology and social morphology’ (Bengtson 1979: 650). To me this balanced view makes much sense because it does not oppose individual and society, but thinks about them as entangled (as is also the case with Elias and Bourdieu). Emotions are not reduced to the realm of the individual, and hence taken as falling out of the ambit of social anthropology. Indeed, Marett’s ideas, though often criticized for being geared to reductive psychological explanations, resonate surprisingly well with current approaches to the shaping of collective emotions as a social process that involves shared ‘emotional regimes’ with



their specific 'emotional styles' (Riis & Woodhead 2010: 10-12; see also Knoblauch & Herbrink 2014: 358-9).

Third, there are the conceptual implications of Marett's philosophy of knowledge, which brings him quite close to what we now call constructivism. In his view, any of the disciplines involved in the study of religion produces its own abstractions and figments. With his typical wit and eloquence, he remarked that it is 'notorious that in science one is apt to hug one's pet abstraction so devotedly that one's fool's paradise comes in the end to be mistaken for the real world' (1929: 139). While questions about 'real existence are better reserved for metaphysics' (1929: 139), he favoured the combination of sociology and psychology because they could, as it were, deconstruct each other's figments, and in so doing provide a multi-perspectival picture of the intersection of individual and society, thinking and feeling, ideas and practices. In the light of Bruno Latour's critique of Durkheim and the sociology grounded in his work as abstracting 'the social' from actual actors and practices in the material world (Latour 2005: 13-17), Marett appears more nuanced and less prone to reify the social and attribute an ontological primacy to it than Durkheim.<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, there is Marett's emphasis on religious acts. Obviously, this ties into a long-standing discussion about the primacy of rites or myths. Marett's famous phrase that 'savage religion is something not so much thought out as danced out' (1929: xxix) was made against the intellectualist view of religion that gave doctrines and ideational systems undue privilege, in his view. The fact that Marett, again, tended to 'speak back' by stressing the primacy of feelings and movements over ideas should not, I think, distract from the fact that the thrust of his take on religion was the integration of emotions, ideas, and practices into an 'organic' whole. I agree with the philosopher D.Z. Phillips, who explained in his Marett lecture in 1983 that Marett meant to say 'that a kind of dance is the condition of thought, that what is primary is active response rather than reflection' (Phillips 1986: 174).<sup>13</sup> Phillips sees a close resemblance between Marett's ideas and the idea of Wittgenstein that 'language does not emerge from reasoning' (quoted in Phillips 1986: 174), but is a human response or reaction to the external world. Since, as noted, the ultimate point of Marett's analysis was to make a general statement about religion, I read this phrase as a provocative argument that introduces 'dance' – in the broad sense of the moving body and, by implication, also the efforts to keep the body still – as a general feature of religion. While I do not wish to exaggerate Marett's topicality, I still think that he proposed nothing short of what we would now call a performative perspective that assigns power to bodily practices and acts in shaping ideas and effecting emotions, bringing about what I call aesthetic formations (Meyer 2009: 6-11).

In sum, my point is not to celebrate Marett as a timeless, alas ill-remembered, classic. Instead, the purpose of this section is to situate his work in the archaeology of knowledge about religion, so as to provide a more three-dimensional view for contemporary debates. Reading Marett in this way brings into the picture aspects of his work that reverberate strongly with current attempts in social theory in general, and the study of religion in particular, to surpass an approach to the social as an abstraction dissociated from the material world of lived experience and to recuperate emotions for social analysis. His integrated approach to religion as comprising ideas, emotions, and practices offers an important corrective and alternative to the intellectualist understanding of religion that became a dominant strand not only in anthropology (e.g. Radin 1927) and, albeit to a lesser extent, religious studies, but also

in mainstream approaches to modernity in terms of disenchantment, rationalization, and secularization. Against this backdrop, his notion of awe in particular has great analytical potential, as will become clear in the next section.

### **Awe beyond the phenomenology of religion**

Marett's work in general, and his notion of awe in particular, were still in favour among scholars of religion, especially in Germany and the Netherlands, when British social anthropology had long left him behind. In his famous book *Das Heilige* (published originally in 1917 and reprinted many times), the Protestant systematic theologian and scholar of religious studies Rudolf Otto posited an understanding of the numinous as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*: the holy as a mysterious force that was both terrifying and gripping, invoking sensations of fear and awe. Disagreeing with the approaches developed in the rising sociology and history of religions that regarded religion as an object of study and offered a contextual analysis of its function and socio-economic aspects, Otto strove to write about religion from (what he took to be) within. The phenomenology of religion to whose development he contributed remained a guiding paradigm in religious studies especially in Germany, as well as in the Netherlands and the United States (around Mircea Eliade and Ninian Smart), until it was subjected to fundamental critique and breakdown in the 1970s and 1980s (see Vásquez 2011: 87-110). I argue here that it would be mistaken to discard Marett in the slipstream of this critique.

Before turning to differences between Otto's and Marett's takes on awe, I would like to share my observation that the phenomenology of religion, and the work of Otto in particular, tends to evoke fierce responses (like a red rag to a bull) in the current field of religious studies. In academic configurations in which scholars in religious studies need to stress their distinction from theologians, the former seem to regard it as crucial for their identity to refute any suspicion of working from a believers' perspective and hence strongly reject Otto. These responses made me realize that certain strands of religious studies produce knowledge on premises quite different from those I have been familiar with in the anthropology of religion. Put somewhat crudely, I see the following pattern: while current anthropologists may more or less easily go along with believers' perspectives (to the extent of embracing the ontological turn), scholars in religious studies seem to be more inclined to take some distance from the religious ideas and practices they study and to place a high value on the use of concepts for systematic knowledge production. This yields different epistemologies, modes of analysis, and writing styles. Having moved into religious studies as an anthropologist, I face the challenge to find a balance for my own work. My interest in Marett is part of this endeavour.

Invoking the English notion of awe, Otto stated that 'Marett comes within a hair's breadth of the matter' (2004 [1931]: 17).<sup>14</sup> The only thing he missed in Marett's position was a clear differentiation between religious and other feelings. However, as many scholars remarked, Otto distorted Marett's ideas about awe. While for Otto the holy was a power *sui generis* that made itself felt by inducing feelings of awe in human beings (expressed by the proverbial goose-bumps), Marett's approach does not presuppose a transcendental force that operates as a generator of such feelings. For the study of religion, the problem with Otto's approach is that the idea of complete transcendence is grounded in a metaphysical assumption that not only eludes scholarly research, but also denies the role of human practices in accessing the numinous (see also James 1958: 165).

The crux of the problem with Otto's approach, at least from a socio-cultural perspective, was that it failed to bring to the fore the centrality of human acts in developing the means to access – and by the same token to imagine – a force perceived as transcendental.

However, dismissing the phenomenology of religion as being too close to Protestant belief statements, and too religionist in an overall sense, does not require rejecting Marett's work. In distinction to Otto, who based his theory of religion on the existence of a transcendental force, Marett took as a starting-point the human being who reaches out to such a force from his or her position in the immanent, the here and now. For the study of religion, this is a crucial difference. As noted, for Marett, religion was grounded in an emotional thrill that arose in moments of crisis, at the point where 'thought breaks down'.<sup>15</sup> He speculated that such points might be at the origin of religion, and this was echoed in his philosophical idea that 'religion is the facing of the unknown'. While this idea strikes me as typically Christian (or even Protestant), in my view the thrust of his approach none the less was to study religion from the other end, as already institutionalized and in action. By virtue of being objectified or personified, experiences of emotional thrill in relation to 'the mysterious or "supernatural" something felt' were transmitted and repeatable. Hence Marett insisted that

we must go on, however, to consider religion sociologically. A religion is the effort to face crisis, so far as that effort is organized by society in some particular way . . . *It has standardized a method.* It involves a routine, a ritual. Also it involves some sort of conventional doctrine, which is, as it were, the inner side of the ritual – its lining (1929: 212, emphasis added).

What I find important in this statement is the idea that religion, once established, offered a standardized 'method' that allowed for repeated experiences of awe (which may, of course, be unique and special for individuals, but structured and standardized none the less). The natural phenomena as well as the human-made artefacts around which such methods evolved were set apart (*taboo*) and attributed with power (*mana*).<sup>16</sup> With Riesebrodt (1997: 183), I agree that Marett's position entails the possibility of an, as it were, 'artificial' – in the sense of human-made – invocation of awe through certain authorized 'methods' or procedures that lend themselves to repetition. An example is the mysterious sound of the bullroarer, used by the Aboriginals, which 'furnishes the ceremony with a background of awe' (1929: 226; see also Riesebrodt 1997: 183). Interestingly, Marett analysed the initiation ritual during which the bullroarer was used by pointing out the political repercussions of its powerful sound. He pictured the young men lying on the ground and listening to the vibrations, through which, he imagined, 'there looms up before their minds the figure of the ultimate lawgiver; whilst his unearthly voice becomes for them the voice of the law' (1929: 26).<sup>17</sup> The point here is that Marett described the bullroarer as a wonder-working object (rather than one that is necessarily animated, as Tylor would have it) that effects in listeners a sense of the presence of a power that is both 'supernatural' and political.

Here we encounter what I regard as the most compelling aspect of Marett's work: a view of awe as being effected through an authorized procedure that involves particular objects, spaces, and sensing as well as sense-making bodies in the context of specific power structures. Awe here is understood as a powerful emotion produced and reproduced through specific and authorized methods. In the service of political power, awe is invoked to impress and amaze, sustaining that power with an aura that elevates it beyond the ordinary and makes it be perceived as sublime. Resonating with Durkheim's notion of effervescence – the sublime feeling that erupts when taking part in a ritual

performance, yielding in participants a sense of society as a pre-existing transcendent power – Marett’s notion of awe allows for a much more fine-tuned operationalization that helps us grasp the process of its actual production. Since the thrust of Marett’s approach is performative, it allows for a micro-analysis of the coming into being of a ‘sacred surplus’. More will be said about this in the following section.

To conclude, Marett neither attributed awe to a transcendental force, be it the numinous (as for Otto) or an abstract social sublime (as for Durkheim), nor reduced it to a pure illusion that has no real existence and hence has to be dismantled by critical research (as for logical positivists). In so doing, he articulated an approach to awe that still stands in the aftermath of the criticism that the phenomenology of religion assigned primary existence to the numinous. Analysing the evocation of awe from the perspective of human beings who are part of a religious group or tradition, Marett ventured a truly sociological approach (see also Comstock 1981: 628). The suggested link between awe and political power urges us to take into account both the political dimension of religion and how the political taps into techniques of invoking awe that at first sight may seem merely religious. In this sense, awe could fruitfully be analysed as part of a technique of organizing – and hence binding as well as governing – people in various domains by getting them hooked on a wonder-working device. Here lies a significant difference with regard to Scott’s take on wonder in the context of the ‘anthropology of ontology’, which he contrasts with a dominant Cartesian-based scholarly reasoning that explains wonder away. In my view, this blurring of scholarly reflection about religion with religion itself resonates with the old phenomenology of religion associated with Otto and Eliade, which has been discarded for good reasons, as explained above, and is not helpful to the study of the invocation of awe as a socio-political phenomenon.

Marett’s ideas about the production of awe fit in well with my understanding of religion as a practice of mediation between humans and a professed invisible ‘beyond’. As I have pointed out elsewhere, for me the term ‘religion’ refers to ‘particular, authorized and transmitted sets of practices and ideas aimed at “going beyond the ordinary,” “surpassing” or “transcending” a limit, or gesturing towards, as Mattijs van de Port (2010) put it poignantly, “the rest-of-what-is”’ (Meyer 2012: 23). Religion is the domain *par excellence* that offers standardized procedures to generate in religious practitioners – over and over again – a sense of wonder and amazement: the production of a sacred surplus. I think about this production in terms of a ‘fabrication’, in the sense of Latour. Coining the notion of the ‘factish’ – a human-made and yet sublime thing – as a substitute for the problematic notion of the fetish, he aims to show that ‘in all our activities, what we fabricate goes beyond us’ (2010: 22-3). I read this and his related statement that ‘we help to fabricate the beings in which we believe’ (2010: 39) as a persuasive provocation to look at religion as an assemblage of people, objects, and practices that generates a sense of belief, and possibly awe, in the process of operation. At stake here is an approach to religion that neither takes for granted the existence of a god or transcendental force, nor invests in unmasking it as an illusion, but instead undertakes a close study of the standardized methods that yield the fabrication of some kind of excess. This is the theme of the third and last part of this article.

### **Religious forms and the production of a surplus**

I started to engage with Marett’s work in 2006, when I sought to develop an approach to religious sensations as socially constituted *as well as* personal experiences that encompass thinking and feeling. My keen interest in this topic arose through my research

on Pentecostals in Ghana, where I encountered a powerful orchestration of shared sensations, producing a thick emotional profile. Initially, I was quite at a loss to find suitable concepts to analyse productively what was going on in these settings, especially to account for the evocation of thrilling emotions and the profuse use of body techniques without falling into the pitfall of an individualizing and de-politicizing approach. I found work in the framework of the classical phenomenology of religion unsuitable because it took the existence of the transcendental as a starting-point. Approaches to religious experience, for instance those inspired by William James, were of limited use because they tended to take individual feelings as authentic expressions generated from within and to downplay institutional structures that ensured repeatability and routine, regarding them as secondary. By contrast, I sought to analyse the genesis of sensations, and the feelings and ideas involved, within particular religious-aesthetic formations (Meyer 2009). As mentioned in the introduction, Marett's ideas about awe as a product of a standardized religious method formed a prime source of inspiration for me in developing the concept of sensational form (2006: 10-13).

In the study of religion, form is usually taken as secondary to meaning, which is identified with a form's content. I take this as a symptom of a modern (and perhaps even Reformed Protestant<sup>18</sup>) view of meaning that distinguishes between in principle arbitrary carriers or vehicles that operate as mere outer forms, on the one hand, and the substance conveyed by them, on the other. In schemes of religious evolution, from 'primitive' to 'modern', form is thought to be predominant in the lower stages, while in the higher ones it is dispensable and content reigns supreme. Max Weber famously claimed that 'salvation religions have devalued form as contingent, as something creaturely and distracting from meaning' (1970: 341; see Meyer 2010: 743-50). Marett, too, shared the common view of primitive culture as still being bound to form and took modern civilization as able to dispense with it, albeit to some degree. Stating that of all human activities religion was 'most subservient to form, ritual being religion's second nature' (1929: 141), he left some room for form even in modern religion. Still the notion of form is not elaborated in his work.

In my work over the past years, I have pleaded for a rehabilitation of form in the study of religion (2006; 2010; 2012). Form may be more or less marked in the experience of religious believers, but in any case it is indispensable if shared sensations are to arise. To avoid misunderstandings, let me stress that I do not use form in opposition to content. Shaping what is indeterminate and not yet differentiated into a *Gestalt*, form is a necessary condition for the articulation and indeed, formation, of content and meaning. My understanding of form resonates with Ernst Cassirer's notion of 'symbolic form' (1923: 15; see also Meyer 2015a), which refers to an irreducible entanglement of a sign and its meaning. Note that Cassirer did not use the term 'symbol' in the usual current sense, in which it is a mere vehicle of meaning. Symbolic forms stand

between us and the things ('die Gegenstände'); but in so doing they not only describe, negatively, the *distance* between us and the things, they also provide the only possible, adequate *mediation* and the medium through which any mental being ('irgendwelches geistige Sein') becomes graspable and understandable (1923: 16, original emphasis).

The objective material world not being accessible as such, 'symbolic forms' operate as its indispensable mediators, bringing into being worlds of lived experience. Thus, Cassirer proposes a theory of mediation in which symbolic forms take a constitutive part in practices of world-making. Note that this stands in marked contrast to

conceptualizations of signs that emphasize their alienating dimension, for instance in theories that assume the primacy and immediacy of experience, sensation, and affect, to which signs are secondary, or in the Lacanian notion of the symbolic. It also differs from the concern with modes of being, as profiled in the anthropology of ontology, that assign primacy to being, rather than asking how it is constituted through forms (including concepts).

This stance towards form as a constructive mediator is the background of my concept of sensational form in my approach to religion. I developed this concept as a heuristic, sensitizing research instrument to grasp the genesis and working of religious sensations. Referring to a configuration of religious media, acts, imaginations, and sensations in the context of a religious tradition or group, a sensational form provides an authorized procedure to experience, in a structured manner, a movement towards a limit that evokes a sense of there being something more: a 'beyond'. Sensational forms are the basis for creating more or less intensely experienced bonds between people and the divine, supernatural, or transcendent and each other. As I put it in my recent inaugural lecture:

Authorized and authenticated as harbingers of what lies 'beyond', sensational forms have the double aspect of streamlining or shaping religious mediation *and* of achieving certain effects by being performed. Thus, sensational forms are 'formats', in that they direct those taking part in them on how to proceed, as well as being 'performances', in that they effect or make present what they mediate (Meyer 2012: 26; original emphasis).

In short, sensational forms are prone to effect a sacred surplus in a more or less powerful, persuasive manner for those involved.

Sensational forms include body techniques that become embodied in the habitus; they play a key role in implementing a particular religious aesthetics (in the sense of *aisthesis*, understood as a sensory engagement with the world that synthesizes sensation and sense-making) that tunes the senses and structures perception in a specific and selective manner, directing attention in a particular way and inducing openness for an amazing extraordinary experience.<sup>19</sup> Examples of what I have in mind encompass Loyola's spiritual exercises (Smith 2002: 36); the 'ethics of listening' to Islamic sermons which require a 'pious ear' (Hirschkind 2006: 67-104); forms of 'visual piety' in pictorial devotion (Morgan 1998; Pinney 2004: 193); engaging in glossolalia and other forms of sacred speech (Verrips 2013); and consuming holy food (Behrend 2011: 41-51). What cuts across all these different examples is the shaping and framing of the body and the senses as harbingers and an index of the divine.

Let me briefly turn to my research in Ghana, to spotlight how the notion of sensational form may fruitfully be used to explore in detail the production of surplus and inducement of a sense of wonder. Together with Rhoda Woets (Meyer 2011: 1040-50; Woets in press), I examined how the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is employed and understood by beholders to make tangible the realm of the 'spiritual' that is present in the 'physical' and yet inaccessible to ordinary sensory perception. As a sensational form that mediates the power of Jesus, the picture is seen by many as a wonder-working object with a powerful gaze, able to act to the benefit of its beholders in times of danger. Reminiscent of the logic of traditional power objects, the picture still signals the superiority of Christianity over 'heathendom'. It epitomizes the coming into being of a Christian world that partly encompasses, but at the same time fiercely attacks, the worship of indigenous spirits.



Many of the video movies that were at the centre of my research lay bare how this picture is imagined to operate spiritually: that is, to be effective in ways that are secluded from the naked eye. Tailored to the expectations and viewing habits of a predominantly Christian audience, these movies contain many special effects that are skilfully crafted to trigger sensations of 'awe, wonder and the like' about the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver people from the proverbial powers of darkness. The movies are made to impress the audiences and get them hooked. I analysed these movies as sensational forms that, in turn, include prime sensational forms of popular and Pentecostal Christianity as well as of traditional religion (Meyer 2015*b*). I examined in detail how these movies render visible and audible what remains inaccessible to the ordinary senses, thereby featuring as a kind of techno-spiritual device that mediates between the 'physical' and the 'spiritual'. Closely examining assemblages of bodies and objects (including pictures) in diverse sensational forms helped me to grasp the world-making potential of religion, and the genesis of awe and amazement, in the context of both Pentecostal religiosity and popular culture in general.

To conclude this section: inspired by and extending Marett's ideas about awe, I coined the notion of sensational form as a concept that points towards various procedures or 'methods' through which sensations of 'awe' or 'wow' effects arise. One of the assets of this concept is that it calls for detailed attention to the micro-practices of religious fabrication and hence to the production of a surplus, whose emergence needs neither to be attributed to a transcendental force *sui generis* nor to be deconstructed as mere illusion. Instead, it focuses on what I regard as human beings' quite remarkable capacity to engage in co-producing particular awesome effects that they do not reduce to their own actions *per se*, but experience as marvellous. This kind of extraordinary fabrication, or the fabrication of extraordinariness, can best be grasped by a theoretical approach that acknowledges the capacity of forms to make (and destroy and remake) rather than merely refer to a world. Importantly, such a fabrication is not an innocent, apolitical affair. As Marett's example of the bullroarer reminds us, the evocation of awe and related emotions in the category of the 'wow' often involves a conflation of supernatural and political power. In this sense, the concept of sensational form has been designed to allow for a detailed investigation not only of the genesis of such emotions, but also of their effects in persuading people about the truth and reality of the worlds constituted and sustained by sensational forms.

## Conclusion

Debating the transformation, rather than disappearance, of religion, the study of religion itself is also in need of a transformation that involves looking back so as to be able to develop a vision for the future. Inspired by the work of Hans Kippenberg, I sought to digress from the apparently obvious stance of positioning Marett as outdated, and to instead position him in the midst of debates about the predicament of modernity and the problem of meaning (*Sinn*) in the early twentieth century, seeking to imagine alternative conceptualizations. I hope that my alternative reading of Marett has been able to convey why his modern approach to religion and his notion of awe may – still or again – be a valuable resource for current and future research at the beginning of the twenty-first century. At the core of his notion, understood as referring to a powerful emotion generated through a standardized method, is the recognition of the human capacity to be impressed by and impress each other. This is central to shaping and sustaining power relations. Marett's view of awe as being effected through

a set of practices that are in principle observable and researchable stimulated me to launch the notion of sensational form, which I understand as a scholarly concept for exploring ways of producing a sense of an excessive surplus. This concept allows us to grasp from within the making of religious experience – and how the divine becomes real for believers – but at the same time it offers a vantage-point from outside.

In our contemporary world, the craving for deep experiences that involve some kind of ‘wow’ – and indeed for experiencing ‘life’ – has generated a veritable market for the production of wonder-working devices, body techniques and spectacular performances that are made to impress via strong sensations and feelings. Clearly, this is not confined to the sphere of religion in the common, institutional sense, but also pertains to the realm of advertisement, the arts, and politics, with strong populist and charismatic leaders entering the scene. Everywhere there seems to be a constant demand for emotional thrills. All kinds of sensational forms arise that promise some kind of kick. If Walter Benjamin still thought that the rise of technologies for mass reproduction would imply the loss of aura, and hence cultural forms’ loss of the capacity to instil a sense of awe in their beholders, it is clear by now that aura is resuscitated in ever new forms with their own dynamics and procedures of evoking awe (Bolter, MacIntyre, Gandy & Schweitzer 2006: 32). This became uncannily clear to Benjamin, who witnessed the aestheticization of politics as it played out in National Socialist performances that were designed to instil a sense of awe. Also in our time, awe is often deployed in political aesthetics of persuasion – at times even explicitly, as in the US military doctrine of ‘shock and awe’. It is of utmost importance for scholars today to undertake a cool analysis of such processes that is able to capture the making of the ‘wow’ rather than merely deconstructing it as nothing but an illusion based on some kind of trick. Analysing awe is not an issue of metaphysics, but a means to understand the micro-physics of power. Social theory, in general, and the study of religion in particular, are well advised to develop new synthesizing and sensitizing concepts that transcend outmoded dualisms of intellect and emotion, thinking and feeling, sense and senses, as well as the social and the individual, so as to be able to understand the politics and aesthetics of (religious) world-making in our time.

#### NOTES

I thank my hosts at Exeter College for the invitation to present the Marett Lecture and their splendid hospitality. Preparing the lecture and article offered a welcome occasion to engage with Marett’s work in the context of broader debates, both past and present, about the evocation of religious emotions and experiences. An earlier version was discussed in the lively colloquium of the Sub-Department of Religious Studies at Utrecht University. For stimulating and substantial comments on earlier versions of this text and overall encouragement I thank Christoph Baumgartner, Markus Balkenhol, Matthew Engelke, Johannes Fabian, Peter Geschiere, Brian Goldstone, Mattijs van de Port, Bruno Reinhardt, Terje Stordalen, Bonno Thoden van Velzen and – for his support throughout this writing project – Jojada Verrips, as well as Matei Candea and two anonymous reviewers of the *JRAI*. The research on which this article is based took place in the context of the HERA projects ‘Creativity and Innovation in a World of Movement’ and ‘Iconic Religion’.

<sup>1</sup> As Michael Scott argues in a recent overview, the various approaches that emerged in the wake of the so-called ‘ontological turn’ display a number of ‘often unrecognized affinities’ that warrant their circumscription as the ‘anthropology of ontology’ (2013: 859).

<sup>2</sup> And Firth adds in brackets: “‘Surf-riding on metaphors’ has been my own image for some of his argument’ (1973: 35). Firth views metaphors as being bad for, or even covering up a lacking, argument. Marett’s style of writing and reasoning may, however, be less personal and idiosyncratic than Firth’s remark might suggest; this style strikes me as quite typical of German Romanticism (see also Cassirer on Goethe’s use of metaphor, 1923: 15).

<sup>3</sup> Somewhat to Marett's surprise (1929: viii), Wundt read his ideas about pre-animism or animatism as introducing another evolutionary stage prior to animism. Seeing anthropology as 'a child of Darwin', Marett certainly looked for universals. This, however, did not imply a positive valuation of evolution in terms of progress. Like other scholars in the early twentieth century, he found that evolution *per se* could not offer a philosophical and ethical direction enshrined in history (see also Kippenberg 1997: 184-7).

<sup>4</sup> According to Marett, religion was 'the most troublesome of all words to define' (1929: 4).

<sup>5</sup> And he went on: 'To change the metaphor, I feel that all tight wrappings and swaddling clothes cannot but prove pernicious to an infant science, alive and kicking; though they may be all very suitable for a mummy' (1929: xxx).

<sup>6</sup> Thus, Marett refused to ground religion in an intellectual misunderstanding as was held by Tylor (see also Bengtson 1979: 646).

<sup>7</sup> The nature of modern society as lacking intrinsic meaning is expressed clearly at the end of Weber's 'Protestant Ethic'; this idea also underpins Geertz's notion of religion, which regards the issue of making meaning through symbols and an ethos as being the core of religion.

<sup>8</sup> See Brunotte, who suggests that a focus on the 'moderntheoretische Reflexionspotenz' of Marett's animatism concept can certainly contribute to an 'Archäologie einer alternativen Moderne' (2013: 87). On the whole her contextualization of the life of classicist Jane E. Harrison (who was partly inspired by Marett), whom she sees as a forerunner of current theories about emotions, images, and performance, runs parallel to my approach to Marett.

<sup>9</sup> See Tomlinson, who translates *mana* as 'efficacy' or 'the power to effect' (2007: 538).

<sup>10</sup> See also Laidlaw and Heywood (2013), who challenge the ontological project for not thinking through the double meaning of ontology as being and as being plus theories about it, and for failing to acknowledge its own meta-ontological epistemology.

<sup>11</sup> In his autobiography he referred to the work of Durkheim and associates in France, stating:

Émile Durkheim had founded the *Année Sociologique* as far back as 1895, but I had not come across it. In vol. vii H. Hubert and M. Mauss published their important *Esquisse d'une Théorie générale de la Magie*, in which they posited *mana* as basic for magic; very much as I had done for religion, or rather for all transactions with the supernatural conceived or perceived as a wonder-working power. Now I doubt if they have ever heard of me, even as I had never heard of them, when we severally arrived at what was roughly the same conclusion. But I had the almost unfair advantage of priority. Both of us undoubtedly hit the same bird, and theirs was the heavier shot; but I shot first (1941: 161).

<sup>12</sup> A further analysis of the differences between Marett's and Durkheim's takes on society would be worthwhile also in the light of the controversy between Tarde and Durkheim, which has been retrieved and analysed by Latour (2005: 13-17; see also <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/354>). Both Tarde and Marett were sidelined and eventually almost forgotten in the course of the profiling of Durkheimian sociology. Similar to Latour, I also argue that a return to a marginalized scholar may yield insights into alternative possibilities that were discarded in the past, but that may achieve a new centrality at a time when dominant paradigms are up for critique.

<sup>13</sup> I think, with Phillips, that Marett had in mind more than dance in the literal, narrow sense, as suggested by Drid Williams in his book *Anthropology and the dance* (1991: 48-50). This is one of Marett's most quoted and most misunderstood statements.

<sup>14</sup> In the first edition of his magnum opus (1917), Otto did not yet refer to Marett.

<sup>15</sup> For him there existed no *religious* feelings *sui generis*; rather, the human capacity to feel could be deployed both in religious and non-religious settings. Moreover, these feelings were to be generated by objects and practices, and did not emerge by themselves.

<sup>16</sup> While, for Marett, the notion of *taboo* provided a religious experience with its 'outward limit', *mana* was 'what is posited being something transcending the ordinary world, something wonderful and awful. Thus its main function is to supply the experience with its inward content' (1929: xxviii). Stressing the emotional value of *mana*, he defined it as 'the base designation of that positive emotional value which is the raw material of religion' (1929: xxix), some kind of 'theoplasm or god-stuff' (1941: 161).

<sup>17</sup> And he continued: 'Thus is the custom exalted, and its coercive force amplified, by the suggestion of a power – in that case a definitely personal power, that "makes for righteousness" and, whilst beneficent, is full of terror for offenders' (1929: 226).

<sup>18</sup> See the famous disputation between Luther and Zwingli, in 1529 in Marburg, about the question of transubstantiation of bread and wine in the Holy Communion. Were bread and wine really the body and blood of Christ (as Luther still insisted), or were they mere symbols in memory of the Last Supper (as Zwingli

argued)? The *Abendmahlstreit* spotlights the rise of a modern view of representation that sees symbols as distant and distinct from what they signify (see Kamper 1981: 141-60). We find this pattern in Saussurean linguistics. For a different, mediating stance, see below.

<sup>19</sup> This is also a key issue in the German aesthetics of religion; see the site of the Arbeitskreis für Religionsästhetik (<http://www.religionsaesthetik.de>).

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## Décrire l'émerveillement: la notion d'*awe* de R.R. Marrett et l'étude de la religion

### Résumé

En sciences sociales et humaines, et notamment dans l'étude de la religion, l'approche académique actuelle met nettement l'accent sur une présentation des sensations physiques, émotions et expériences comme des phénomènes hautement sociaux et politico-esthétiques, au lieu de les réduire à des questions de psychologie individuelle. La manière de saisir la genèse des perceptions et sentiments partagés, et même d'une sorte d'effet d'émerveillement, en relation avec un « au-delà » supposé est devenue une question centrale dans l'étude des religions. Face au virage matérialiste dans l'étude de la religion, l'approche de R.R. Marrett, décrivant celle-ci comme « un complexe organique de pensée, d'émotion et de comportement », et son concept de frayeur respectueuse (*awe*) reviennent sur le devant de la scène. Abordant les idées de Marrett dans le cadre de débats plus larges sur l'expérience religieuse, l'auteure attire l'attention dans cet article (basé sur la conférence sur Marrett qu'elle a donnée en 2014) sur le surplus généré dans l'interaction des faits religieux et des sensations physiques et explore son rôle dans la politique et l'esthétique de la cosmogonie religieuse. Son argument central est que le travail de Marrett apporte des arguments précieux à l'appui d'une approche de la religion qui ne tient pas pour acquise l'existence d'un dieu ou d'une force transcendante (comme les approches ontologiques) et ne cherche pas non plus à en démasquer l'illusion (comme les critiques de l'irrationalité des religions), mais examine les méthodes standardisées qui produisent une sorte d'excès pointant vers un « au-delà » tout en s'ancrant dans l'ici et le maintenant.

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