

Metamorphosis

Chances and Risks in the Relationship between Aesthetic and Religious Experience

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“One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in bed he had been changed into a monstrous vermin. [...] ‘What’s happened to me?’ he thought. It was no dream.”¹

Franz Kafka’s (1883–1924) story is one of the greatest, but also most depressing stories of a metamorphosis. It shows what literature, which along with music and art is among the great cultural forms of human expression, can achieve. It opens up spaces of imagination in which the human relationship to the world can articulate itself. Here it is the fear of finding oneself transformed in a world in which one no longer finds a place. Kafka, they say, is the poet of modernity *par excellence*, he looks deep into its abysses. If we want to read his text metaphorically: Is this also the role of the Christian religion in the secular Western modernity? Do its attempts to approach the numinous resemble those of a vermin vainly trying to survive in the world of humans?

This is the question I will try to answer in my last of three parts. Before that, in a first step, I would like to define the relationship between religious and aesthetic experience in order to compare the relationship between religious and secular approaches to the numinous. In a second part, I will then illustrate this with examples from art.

1. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, London 2005, 3.

Religious and Aesthetic Experience

The topic of the conference where this paper was initially presented, “Approaching the Numinous”, is delicate but ingenious. Theologically, the term is by no means self-evident; there are major schools of theological thought that would say that Christianity worships precisely not the numinous, but a personal God. Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) introduced the numinous prominently into theology. He thus stands in a long tradition that I would call liberal, but Otto does not simply replace God with the numinous, things are more complicated. He is in the tradition which considers all human expressions to be symbolizations. The numinous is not an ontological or metaphysical category like the Platonic idea of the good. For Otto, the numinous is a “box”, or actually I should say a container, in which people’s ways of symbolizing the experience of the numinous are gathered. We can never say what the numinous is, we can only say how people react to it.² That is why there is no other way of dealing with the numinous than approaching. This is the doorway to looking at art and religion as such ways of approaching the numinous.

Religion and art have always been siblings. It seems that it was at about the same time that our ancestors began to paint their caves with pictures that they started to practice religious rites. In his fascinating book, which as we know was also his last, Robert N. Bellah (1927–2013) asked why this is the case. He sees an anthropologically rooted common ground between art and religion. He takes up the work of the psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) and distinguishes between being- and deficiency-cognition.³ Deficiency-cognition is the everyday interaction with our environment, it serves to orient ourselves in the world practically and technically for the sake of our own survival. It asks which deficiencies must be overcome in order to better orient ourselves in the world. Being-cognition looks at being as it is, it does not pursue any functional or utilitarian interests. Being-cognition is reminiscent of Immanuel Kant’s (1724–1804) “*interesseloses Wohlgefallen*” (pleasure without intention), which plays a key role in his aesthetics. One could also think of Joachim Ritter’s (1903–1974) theory of compensation.⁴ It is out of fashion today, but played an important role in Germany for a long time. According to Ritter’s thesis, from the eighteenth century onwards, the emerging aesthetic compensated for the deficits of a technical and

2. Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, Munich 2014, 5–12.

3. Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*, Cambridge, MA 2011, 5, <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674063099>.

4. Joachim Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik: Studien zu Aristoteles und Hegel*, Frankfurt 2003, 407–434.

functionalized approach to the world. It sees a higher reality shimmering through in nature, and in this, on the level of feeling, it replaces the old metaphysics of nature, which had been eliminated by the scientific-technical worldview. Aesthetics, one could say, saves a remnant from the great machine of the technical and rationalistic disenchantment of the world, as Max Weber (1864–1920) described it so impressively. Bellah, however, does not make all these connections to Kant and Ritter's theory of compensation.

I do not want to discuss any further here how useful this distinction into being- and deficiency-cognition is. What is important for our context is what we can observe with Bellah and, in my opinion, already with Kant and Ritter: There is a dimension of our approach to reality that contemplates the essence of things and the world free of exploitation interests. This approach dwells in contemplation. Bellah calls this way of dealing with the world "beyonding", it frees and relieves people from the "dreadful immanence".⁵ According to Bellah, this kind of approach to the numinous happens in very diverse ways and in very different processes of representation in human consciousness and culture. Religion and art belong in this sphere, each using very different modes of representation. Religion is more than concepts and art more than images. How do they relate to each other in their approach to the numinous?

In the tradition of German liberal Protestantism, the relationship between religious and aesthetic experience has traditionally played an important role. The topic has been dealt with in at least three important constellations. For the first time, and probably most intensively, this happened in the era of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who himself was significantly involved in it. The relationship between religion and aesthetics was brought into a new light by the philosophy of Kant, since he fundamentally elaborated the constructive and active parts of human consciousness in our understanding of reality. A fundamental commonality emerges. Religious and aesthetic experiences are not simply images of reality; rather, they process it in independent representations. Whatever we know and experience of God and the world, we can only represent it symbolically. On this basis, the German Romantics stated a fundamental proximity between religion and art with, as is well known, very far-reaching consequences. They discussed to what extent art could and should take the place of religion in the future. When German Protestant theology had to reorganize itself after the First World War, Paul Tillich (1886–1965) drafted quite grandly a theology of culture.⁶ He worked on this theme throughout his life, albeit later with less

5. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, 9.

6. See the brilliant overview Werner Schüssler & Erdmann Sturm (ed.), *Paul Tillich: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, Darmstadt 2007, 55–67.

intensity. Tillich's theology of culture, in its different variations, is based on the fundamental conviction that the basic existential questions of religion about the meaning of existence are dealt with in forms of expression and symbols. Tillich was therefore alert to the cultural forms of his time in order to explore possibilities of connection and translation for religious questions. His interpretations of Expressionist art, for example, are quite remarkable. After his emigration to the United States, Tillich no longer played a role in Germany for at least a generation. In our context, the criticism of Tillich in Germany is interesting. The main argument is as follows: Those who look for points of reference in culture betray the essence of religion. Anyone who asks about the relationship between religion and the secular gives up what religion is in its essence. I think this objection is wrong, even absurd. But we have to be able to say something about it, so an answer needs to be able to say why aesthetic experiences are interesting for religion.

Finally, the relationship between religious and aesthetic experience plays an important role in contemporary German theology. Since the 1980s, questions pertaining to liberal theology have returned with vigor. How can the Church function in a society that does not automatically or naturally see itself as Christian. In many ways, today's debate is a legacy of Schleiermacher and Tillich. One of the most profound contributions to the relationship between aesthetic and religious experience is by Ulrich Barth. He is undoubtedly one of the most important figures in contemporary German-language theology and has now also recently presented a systematic theology. *Symbole des Christentums* is without question one of the most important contemporary theological books in German.⁷ Barth is an excellent connoisseur of German idealism, he was president of the Schleiermacher Society for a long time. He combines philosophical and theological knowledge in a truly magnificent and clear definition of the relationship between aesthetic and religious experience. I will present its main aspects in the following.

Even a simple observation of cultural history reveals an inner connection between art and religion. At least since Plato (c. 428–c. 348 BCE), European culture has been familiar with the idea that poets need a special inspiration, or more precisely a divine inspiration, to be able to create their works. It would be worthwhile to trace this idea of inspiration in more detail. The modern concept of genius goes back to the Renaissance, which religiously fills in what Hans Belting (1935–2023) observed in his famous separation of image and cult. With the Renaissance, according to Belting's thesis, the

7. Ulrich Barth, *Symbole des Christentums: Berliner Dogmatikvorlesung*, Tübingen 2021.

individuality of the artistic process gains in importance.⁸ The artist's design of a Christian motif becomes a religious treatment that can build up religious imaginary worlds. That is why the painting emerges from the shadow of the cult. The Platonists of the Renaissance did not simply want to enhance the subjective creative power of the artist with their theory of inspiration, they were not that modern after all. The artist needed divine inspiration, an idea taken up by Romanticism. Through the power of the artist, art elaborates a perspective on reality that religion had not yet articulated in its classical forms, appealing above all to the imagination. Two details are interesting. As far as I can see, the Renaissance understood the relationship between art and religion as complementary rather than competitive. The artist can represent the divine, but he does not take the place of the priest. The task was to make the divine ground of all reality visible through art, and that meant above all: to make the beauty of people and the world visible as a reflection of divine beauty. In the genius aesthetics of Romanticism, both of these things change. The relationship between art and religion is now conceived in a thoroughly competitive way; art can not only see differently, it can also better see and depict the mystery of the world. This is the birth of art as a substitute for religion. Artists become priests of the numinous. Secondly, the mystery of the world is not exhausted in its beauty alone. The dark and the incomprehensible are also aspects of the human experience of the world that art can capture. Both the claim of art to surpass itself and its power to represent the incomprehensible have had far-reaching consequences for the history of art, music, and literature in the nineteenth century.

Let us return to the definition of the relationship between aesthetic and religious experience. On the basis of Kant's theory of aesthetics, Barth elaborates four constitutive elements of aesthetic experience.⁹ Firstly, aesthetic experiences are experiences of the fulfilment of meaning. Reflection and imagination work together to form an interpretation of the world that, for the most part, does not have to be linguistic, but can also be bound to moods and feelings. Something shines through that can be described as meaning, that is as a special determination of the content and purpose of what is experienced. The viewer become absorbed in the here and now. Secondly, aesthetic experiences are interruptive experiences. The ordinary world of everyday life is interrupted, something appears without intention or interest. In the aesthetic experience, the question of what something is good for is extinguished for a moment. It is simply there and for itself. Barth refers to Robert Musil (1880–1942), who thus assigns art a sphere

8. Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, 6th ed., Munich 2004.

9. Ulrich Barth, *Religion in der Moderne*, Tübingen 2003, 235–262.

of the counterworld to our everyday world. Thirdly, aesthetic experiences happen as “Widerfahrnis” (something that happens to us). Aesthetic experiences cannot be produced or made, they happen spontaneously. Although human consciousness actively participates in the construction of aesthetic experiences through reflection, imagination, and interpretation, a passive moment is added here. In aesthetic experiences, something encounters, something opens up, something reveals itself. However one may define revelation, it is obvious that the door to religious experience opens wide here. Fourthly, aesthetic experiences are experiences of transcendence. They not only interrupt our everyday experience, they transcend it. Something shines out behind and above things. Something is revealed that is otherwise invisible. Aesthetic experiences live from what Bellah would call “beyonding”. They engage in “approaching the numinous”. Aesthetic experience lives essentially from the representation of the unrepresentable.

Fulfillment of meaning, interruption, passivity, and transcendence are four important moments of aesthetic experience. They all constitute religious experiences as well. This is an important intermediate result. There is a fundamental structural affinity between aesthetic and religious experiences. But, and this is the second important result of Barth’s investigation, they fill out these structural elements very differently. Aesthetic experiences live essentially from imaginative moods, from pre-linguistic forms of interpretation. In this they are more pleasing and also lighter, which, as Barth says, constitutes the “charm” of aesthetic experiences.¹⁰ Religious experiences are more strongly bound to content-related attributions, they link the dimension of meaning and transcendence in a way that also holds some intellectual impositions, and are thus more complex than aesthetic experience.

Barth’s structural analysis provides us with ample material to further reflect on the relationship between aesthetic and religious experience. Religion and art are not simply images of a reality out there, but both are essential means of symbolization with which people process, express, and communicate their experience of the world. Because of the great structural affinity, the boundaries between the two are fluid. Unless one has a very narrow understanding of Christian religion that is exclusively oriented towards Christian dogma, it is impossible to tell when, for example, an aesthetic experience of nature turns into a religious feeling of gratitude. How should this work? Should red lights come on and a loudspeaker announce: Attention, attention, you are now entering the religious sector in your experience. It is not possible and not even necessary to name such a transition point. What seems important to me is to take a closer look at the fundamental

¹⁰. Barth, *Religion in der Moderne*, 262.

structural difference between content determination on the religious side and experience-intensive vagueness on the other side. With this distinction, we can measure the advantages and disadvantages that lie on each side of religious and aesthetic experience.

Approaching the Numinous

Raphael's (1483–1520) *Sistine Madonna* plays an important role in Hans Belting's argument. The painting can be used to show how the Renaissance moved from the cult image to the art image. The difference from a medieval or even orthodox depiction of the Virgin Mary is striking. It is the artist himself, Raphael, who appears here with his art as an interpreter of the Marian apparition. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) once mocked Raphael, saying that he was an Italian who wanted to paint nothing but beautiful women. It is true that Raphael ties the appearance of the divine in Mary to the ideal of beauty. But behind this lies a long Platonic tradition that conceives of the good, the true, and the beautiful as one. The two angels pose a riddle. No one but Raphael himself could tell us what they are supposed to tell us. In any case, their nonchalant, almost cheeky attitude brings a new, friendly and benevolent note to our dealings with divine transcendence.

A major turning point is Romanticism. An infinite amount has been written about Caspar David Friedrich's (1774–1840) *Monk by the Sea*. We know that the artist was intensively occupied with Schleiermacher's theory of religion. Obviously, he was looking for new forms of expression to depict the immeasurable and infinite of human experience of the world. The painting can also be seen as an attempt to translate the experience of the numinous into the secular by means of art. In his study *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*, the American art historian Robert Rosenblum (1927–2006) has worked out that in Friedrich's work, artistic representation chooses paths that leave classical Christian iconography and ecclesiastical symbolic offerings behind. The question is: Why? Rosenblum provides an interesting clue. François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) had already written in 1797 in his book on the Christian religion: "Personne n'y croit plus",¹¹ no one believes it any more. At the dawn of modernity, have Christian symbols outlived their usefulness? Wolfgang Schöne (1910–1989) argued similarly. In a much acclaimed essay, he traced the history of images of God in art and stated for art in the period from 1800: "God has become unrepresentable." But he adds: "Turned positively: God is invisible for today and tomorrow."¹²

11. Robert Rosenblum, *Die moderne Malerei und die Tradition der Romantik*, Munich 1975, 18.

12. Wolfgang Schöne, "Die Bildgeschichte der christlichen Gottesgestalten in der



*Figure 1. Raphael, The Sistine Madonna, 1513–1514, oil on canvas, 265 cm x 196 cm.
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.*



Figure 2. Caspar David Friedrich, The Monk by the Sea, 1808–1810, oil on canvas, 110 cm x 171,5 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

Another aspect deserves attention. As a painter of transition, Friedrich certainly still drew on classical Christian iconography in the painting *Cross in the Mountains*.¹³ *The Tetschen Altarpiece*, as it is also called, provoked a considerable reaction. It is intriguing to note the criticism by Basilius von Ramdohr (1757–1822), a jurist who was completely committed to the spirit of the Enlightenment. There is no need to style the Ramdohr controversy as a showdown between Romanticism and the Enlightenment, but his criticism of the sentimentalism of art is noteworthy. He saw a “narcotic haze” coming from Friedrich’s painting, an evasion and an exaggerated appeal to the affective in order to overwhelm the viewer with it. Ramdohr felt emotionally harassed by Friedrich’s religious depiction. One certainly does not have to agree with Ramdohr, but at least one has to think about what the appeal to the affective means for religion.

At the end of the nineteenth century in art, the style of realism put an obvious and deliberate end to the Romantic interest in the numinous; Impressionism, in turn, showed an interest in using new forms of representation that incorporated the artists’ inner experience. However, one cannot attribute a particular interest in the numinous to Impressionism. This only becomes apparent in the post-impressionist turn. With Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), and Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), new art forms of “beyonding” came to light. During their lifetime, all three had the greatest difficulty in getting their art noticed by their contemporaries. A short time later, a striking turnaround occurred, for all three are now among the best-known painters of European modernism. Cézanne has been a lasting inspiration to poets with his new view of nature, the play of colours and the mystery of the landscape that shines through in his paintings. Reiner Maria Rilke’s (1875–1926) letters to Cézanne and, still in our time, Peter Handke’s examination of the teachings of Sainte-Victoire make it impressively clear how modern art can be understood in a fascinating way as approaching the numinous.¹⁴

This also applies to the art of van Gogh, even if the reception of his paintings is somewhat more difficult. His pictures are so often printed and seen on postcards and wallpaper that the perception of his art could sometimes become very dull. Some of what Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) wrote in

abendländischen Kunst”, in Wolfgang Schöne, Johannes Kollwitz & Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen (eds.), *Das Gottesbild im Abendland*, Witten 1957, 54.

13. For an overview with further literature, see Jörg Lauster, *Die Verzauberung der Welt: Eine Kulturgeschichte des Christentums*, 6th ed., Munich 2020, 491–494.

14. Reiner Maria Rilke, *Briefe an Cézanne*, Frankfurt 1983; Peter Handke, *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, 10th ed., Frankfurt 2019.



Figure 3. Caspar David Friedrich, Cross in the Mountains, 1807/1808, oil on canvas, 115 cm x 110,5 cm. Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden.

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction comes true here.¹⁵ It is interesting that a museum like the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam obviously has liturgical qualities in the staging of art that open up possibilities of encounter in their specific atmosphere.

Van Gogh's late paintings of olive gardens in southern France reveal his great art of using colour to make visible the mysteriousness of nature, its power, its hidden magic. The pictures do not leave one untouched and from there they also shed light on his other great paintings. *The Starry Night* is considered a great work that shows the pulsating energy and mysterious power of the universe. The picture is painted resonance. Van Gogh can easily be seen as a painter of the numinous who approaches the numinous without any Christian forms of expression. A pastor's son, van Gogh had begun studying theology and wanted to become a preacher. It is not surprising that he reflected on his relationship to religion. His letters shed light on this. He wrote to his brother about "having a tremendous need for, shall I say the word – for religion – so I go outside at night to paint the stars".¹⁶ For the interpretation of his star pictures, this awakens many associations. But he also writes to his brother about his religious longing: "Ah, my dear brother, sometimes I know so clearly what I want. In life and in painting too, I can easily do without the dear Lord, but I can't, suffering as I do, do without something greater than myself, which is my life, the power to create."¹⁷ The "dear Lord" of Christianity becomes "something greater than me". Dogmatic theology should be worried by this conversion, because obviously the two are not the same. But one can also read it differently. Van Gogh explains what the Christian God means to him. On this basis, his art can make it possible to at least link the classical statements of Christianity to modern experience.

The Different Possibilities of Art and Religion

What can we learn from the discussion about the relationship between art and religion? I will conclude by summarizing this with a few thoughts. Modernity, with its rapid forces of change, must indeed appear from the churches' point of view as something like a great transformation from which Christianity emerges as a helpless bug unable to find its way in this world. "No one believes it any more", wrote Chateaubriand. The forces of transformation have been working on Western Christianity for 200 years.

15. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, London 2008.

16. Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, *The Letters*, 691, 29 September 1888, <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let691/letter.html>, accessed 2023-01-22.

17. Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, *The Letters*, 673, 3 September 1888, <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let673/letter.html>, accessed 2023-01-22.



*Figure 4. Vincent van Gogh, The Olive Trees, 1889, oil on canvas, 73 cm x 92 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York.*



*Figure 5. Vincent van Gogh, The Starry Night, 1889, oil on canvas, 73 cm x 92 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

Romanticism saw an opportunity to respond to the transformation of Christianity. Art was seen as a way of articulating the experience of the numinous better and more appropriately for the new times. Indeed, modernist art in the nineteenth century produced fascinating representations of the experience of the numinous in the world. Today, however, we know. They do not and cannot replace the specific way in which Christian religious practice approaches the numinous.

Art can, but does not have to represent the numinous. That my examples end with the nineteenth century is not only due to the limited space of an essay. Autonomy of art is a noble keyword of modernity. In the twentieth century, art is once again breaking new ground. Today, the autonomy of art also includes being able to completely withdraw from expectations of fulfillment of meaning and transcendence. Contemporary art provides impressive examples of how art frees itself from these expectations. Analogous things are also happening in aesthetic theory formation. In the environment of the Frankfurt School, Martin Seel developed an “aesthetics of appearance” that sees aesthetic experience as being completely absorbed in the play of sensual appearances.¹⁸ When we lie in the grass and observe clouds passing by in the sky, we observe clouds passing by in the sky – nothing else. We take pleasure in the play of wind and clouds. There is no deeper meaning. Seel also transfers this to the way we deal with art. It is the rejection of everything “beyond”. This self-limitation of art and aesthetics is undoubtedly legitimate, no one would deny that. Wherever art takes this path, we must keep it free of all religious expectations of meaning. Let art refrain from approaching the numinous. Art and religion then live in two worlds.

Art does not have to, but it can approach the numinous. There are also many examples of this. However, the relationship between art and religion in this case is not easy to define. While for centuries in Christian culture art was the servant of religion, the reverse seems to have occurred with Romanticism at the latest. The claim arose that art could replace religion as a means of expressing the numinous in modernity. The examples of Caspar David Friedrich and Vincent van Gogh bring to light the extraordinary power of art to approach and represent the experience of the numinous. Art can represent the mysterious, the foreboding in our experience of the world, and take us as viewers into this “beyonding”. This enchantment happens precisely through the vagueness and openness of the moods created.

For religion, this offer of art is tempting, but it is also not entirely harmless. Nietzsche has a keen eye for this conversion: “Art raises its head where religions are weakening. It takes over a lot of feelings and moods produced

18. Martin Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens*, Munich 2000, 82–92.

by religion, puts them to its heart and now becomes deeper, more soulful itself.”¹⁹ What is tempting about this is that art can be used to subvert the impositions of religion. In van Gogh, however, we see that this also happens at the price of concretizing the content. Van Gogh seems to abandon Christian theism. This need not shake us, but we must remember that what the Christian religion has to say about the mystery of the world is more complex and also more concrete than what we experience in his paintings. We cannot replace the task of conceptual contemplation about our existence with art, but art can help us to stimulate this reflection. With Robert Bellah we can say: There is a capacity, a desire of human beings to deal with the mystery of this world and with the mystery of our lives. Religion and art are two great capacities to do this. But art and religion each do it in their own way. After the attempts of the nineteenth century, we know: Art cannot create a substitute for religion. That is a relief for us in theology, that is a relief for art itself. The task of religion is to use symbolic, ritual, and conceptual means to present the mystery of the world and the prospect of salvation in a way that is so tangible and concrete that people can draw support and comfort from it for their lives. Art, on the other hand, acts as an eye-opener, as a school of perception, as an exercise in “beyonding” that can lift the veil that lies over our everyday perception. To put it very short: Art opens our horizon to the open-endedness of our existence, religion offers concrete interpretations of how we can deal with it and live with it. The numinous is the incomprehensible, so by its very nature it allows many ways to approach it. We should respect and preserve this diversity. If we aestheticize religion or make art religious, both will lose in the end. Our approach to the numinous would then be much poorer. ▲

SUMMARY

Approaching the numinous is something that has forged a deep bond between art and religion in European cultural history. In the wake of Kant and Schleiermacher, the German theologian Ulrich Barth elaborates four constitutive elements that distinguish both aesthetic and religious experience: Fullfillment of meaning, interruption, passivity, and transcendence. From Raphael to Caspar David Friedrich to Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne, impressive examples can be found of how these dimensions oscillate between religion and art. Nevertheless, there is a limit: art can, but does not have to, approach the numinous. Art can act as an eye-opener, as a school of perception, as an initiation into what Robert Bellah calls

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I: Kritische Studienausgabe 2*, Berlin 1999, 244.

"beyonding"; art can lift the veil that lies over our everyday perception. Religion lives from the numinous. The task of religion is to use symbolic, ritual, and conceptual means to present the mystery of the world and the prospect of salvation in a way that is so tangible and concrete that people can receive support and comfort for their lives from it.