From Ritual Theory to Theorizing Rituals

Just as one may see indigenous (emic) debates and discussions about ritual(s) as a form of ritual studies, indigenous ritualizes have also developed (emic) theories about rituals over many centuries. But hardly anyone of them, predating the last decades of the nineteenth century, is still thought of today whenever we refer to the domain of ritual studies in an academic context. From the late nineteenth century on, however, for such nascent sciences as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and the history of religions, ritual was of paramount importance. The scholarly concept of religion, for instance, came into being roughly simultaneously with the modern term ‘ritual’. On the other hand, the inherently religious character of rituals can no longer be taken for granted, and this posits a challenge for theorizing both religion and ritual. The influential Cambridge School regarded rituals as the inseparable twin of myth. Early sociology of religion emphasized the crucial role rituals play in the maintenance of societal coherence, and the contemporary debate still takes its bearings (implicitly or explicitly) by this intellectual legacy. So does psychoanalysis with its observation of structural similarities between neurotic and ritual behavior.” Just as these disciplines rest on a long history of debate and discussion, the topics to which they have linked ritual—religion, myth, society, and the psyche have been widely discussed, and the essays of Part II of this volume attempt to review these debates and to outline some further perspectives.

While being largely neglected in ritual studies, as the notes to the foregoing paragraph should have indicated, ritual theory—that is, theories about rituals—is by no means a blank slate. On the contrary, much has happened in the (theoretical) study of ritual in recent decades.” Indeed, much more has happened than may emerge from what is apparent in many publications on rituals—witness the extensive annotated bibliography in the second volume. This bibliography aims to survey what we regard as major contributions to ritual theory published since 1966, a year that the editors, for different reasons (discussed in the introduction to the bibliography), have come to consider a watershed in the scholarly study of ritual. Along with the abstracts of the articles and books listed in the bibliography, an attempt is made to highlight the main empirical materials discussed by the authors, and their major references to other authors. In that way, the bibliography briefly indicates the type of rituals informing theoretical discussions (as their 'key examples' or 'paradigms'), and it provides some elements for the genealogy or intellectual back-
ground of the single theoretical positions, including those presented in this book." As the bibliography tries to make a much larger corpus of theoretical reflections on ritual accessible than is presented in the articles in this volume, it is more than a mere appendix.

Like most definitions, any theoretical focus on rituals simultaneously raises at least two questions: What do rituals share with other features of cultural organization, and what is specific to ritual(s)?" Therefore, the relation of ritual to other forms of social action stands at the beginning of the theoretical inquiry." On the other hand, the universal validity of the category 'ritual' is open to doubt, and the search for conceptual alternatives to 'ritual' such as the notions of 'public events' or 'cultural performances' is not only challenging but also necessary for theorizing rituals. While we should not simply take the general theoretical category of 'ritual' or 'RITUAL',-- as Handelman puts it--for granted in epistemological terms, an inquiry into possible emic equivalents for 'ritual' in some other than Latin and modern Western European languages serves as a reminder of non-theoretical alternatives to structuring the semantic universe.

An important insight from the formative period of ritual theory pertains to ritual's specific form, or structure." At the same time, 'process' has become a key-term in ritual theory." While recent theorizing attaches greater importance to ludic elements in rituals and stresses the emergent qualities of rituals, the structural approach remains valid enough to require careful review. Against common sense assumptions, an emphasis on (syntactical) structure has even led one theorist to question the inherently meaningful quality of rituals." As in the case of form, once again the ensuing scholarly debate" made it clear that one should not take anything for granted when it comes to ritual--and this seems to be a reasonable starting point for any attempt at theorizing rituals.

According to a standard epistemological model, a theory is an abstract and coherent set of statements that are based on empirical observation, hypotheses, and laws. It is empirically testable and explanatory and allows one to make predictions. When applying this, or similar, epistemological standard(s), there are not many theories of ritual around." This is not accidental, because those theories of ritual that live up to such expectations such as cognitive theories share most of their premises with the epistemological model of 'theory' sketched above. However,
there are a good number of other theoretical approaches emerging from a broad range of academic disciplines, discursive settings, rhetorical devices, logical set-ups, and methodological premises. They have different agendas, address different problems, and are inspired by different sorts of rituals as their primary empirical points of reference. Some of the approaches assembled in Part III of this volume are grounded in full-fledged macro-theoretical enterprises, such as the cognitive sciences, biology (ethology), and semiotics while others take their point of departure from more loosely organized fields of research, such as theories of action and praxis, performance, gender studies, and virtuality. Further approaches apply specific theories, such as philosophical aesthetics, Luhmann's (system) theory of communication, and Bateson's theory of relational form, to the study of ritual.

Depending on the levels of abstraction, one can distinguish between three types of theoretical approaches to ritual: 1. Approaches that apply particular theoretical frameworks (aesthetics, cognition, communication, ethology, and semiotics); 2. approaches that address particular fields of scholarly discourse (action, gender, performance, and praxis); or 3. approaches that consider ritual in its own terms as 'a structured whole' (relationality and virtuality). Moreover, these types of theoretical approaches offer a wide range of methodological options: they vary in their degree of rigidity, plasticity, and complexity; they also exemplify different versions of theory or modes of theorizing.

However, this volume intends to be more than a mere collection of essays presenting a panorama of available approaches to ritual theory. The guiding intention here is to introduce a perspective that we refer to as 'theorizing rituals'. Here this term is not used in the established sense of 'forming theories' but instead refers to a wider scope of activities, indeed implying a multifarious agenda.

To begin with, theorizing rituals, as we use the expression, is not at all about presenting just another theory of ritual(s), or another set of ritual theories. On the contrary, the project of 'theorizing rituals' shares the general insight that the age of 'grand theories'--thus, theories that seek to explain everything--is over. As we understand theorizing, any one theory will hardly suffice to account for the complexity of the phenomena. In modern scholarly practice of the study of ritual, one will therefore probably always need to refer to more than one theory.
Today theoreticians of ritual(s) instead generate to—put it more modestly—theoretical approaches, which only try to explain a certain aspect of the material concerned. Theories may be distinguished from theoretical approaches in the following terms: Whereas theories can be regarded as explicitly formulated sets of propositions and hypotheses that are applicable to a wide range of empirical data, theoretical approaches, by contrast, are concerned with a particular field of research; for this purpose, they operationalize relevant theories as their general frame of reference for their argument while addressing specific theoretical issues related to the respective empirical data. Only those approaches to the study of a particular field of research, which rely primarily on theories as their argumentative frame, can strictly be regarded as theoretical approaches.

Obviously not just one such theoretical approach is needed, but quite a number, so that together they shed as much light as possible on the subject studied—our case: rituals. Yet it is unlikely that it would be possible to generate a complete set, such that no additional approach could be thought of. There will always remain gaps between the theoretical approaches available. Comparing them reveals desiderata that every approach leaves open. In that way, new theoretical issues or perspectives may emerge. On the other hand, theorizing about the multiplicity of theoretical approaches sheds light on their relative advantages and disadvantages. They may overlap and/or rival one another. This activity generates such questions as: which approach is better, elucidates more, or even is valid to begin with? In summary: theorizing requires the refinement of single theories, as well as their mutual critique and competition. It works in, with, and between theories. It reaches beyond particular theories and takes a meta-theoretical perspective, putting the various approaches into context.

But there is more to it. Whereas the aim of ritual theory is to articulate a particular set of hypotheses and to draw conceptual boundaries as precisely as possible, the project of theorizing rituals is an open project. It has an emergent quality. Theorizing rituals is a reflective and reflexive process. It is reflective in that it reflects upon its own procedures, trying to improve and adjust them when necessary. However, it is reflexive in that it does not claim to have a neutral, 'objective' stance, but rather points to, and perhaps even questions, its own position within scholarly discourse as such. Theorizing (rituals) is not easily satisfied by, and not even primarily interested in, 'answers' to such obvious questions as what ritual 'is', or what rituals are all 'about',
how they 'work', 'function', etc. By taking stock of the answers, theorizing rituals does not take the questions for granted. It scrutinizes the mechanics by which questions are posited and answers are provided. Hence, it has the potential to look at the mechanisms of how scholarly discourse works. It is as radical as it is critical. It problematizes and contextualizes. It takes multiple perspectives into account. It is a multi-voiced discursive practice. And hence it offers more than just one more theory of ritual(s). Indeed, it is not satisfied with theories, and it may also lead to rejecting claims of theory, of repositioning theory. It may play the game of theory, but it may also question its very rules. While theory aims to construct a consistent and limited set of principles, theorizing may, for theoretical reasons, opt for the open-endedness and incompleteness of the theoretical endeavor. In a way, it is the 'betwixt-and-between' of theory. Theorizing, it may be said, is an attempt to connect theory to other forms of scholarly practice. It is not located before 'the real things' happen (such as in fieldwork), nor does it occur afterwards, nor is it 'the real thing' itself." It is a reflexive attitude, a commitment to theory as a discursive adventure.

One more way in which the concern of theorizing goes beyond the realm of theory is by entering theoretically dense fields of scholarly discourse that do not necessarily result in theoretical approaches. These fields are indicated by a number of paradigmatic concepts, some of which are discussed in Part IV of this book. Most of these concepts do not derive from the available market of theoretical production so much as they mark the middle ground between scholarly discourse and some apparent features of rituals, such as their having to do with embodiment," emotions," language," media," transmission," and also their being complex," dynamic," (presumably) efficacious," and framed" affairs. In that way, they 'exemplify' the scholarly discourse about what is generally perceived as 'ritual(s)'. While this link to the 'bare' features of ritual is also obvious for some, if not most, of the theoretical approaches there is a general consensus that rituals have to do with action, aesthetics, behavior, performance, practice, social relations, etc. The concepts are not linked to well-established theoretical, methodological, and academic programs. They are not framed as 'theories'. While they are certainly theory-laden and of theoretical relevance, these concepts cannot easily be subsumed under the roof of any single theory. They cut across the borders of the theoretical approaches and have a diverse range of theoretical affiliations. But apart from being of 'exemplary' significance for the discourse about 'ritual', and in thereby 'exemplifying' scholarly discourse about 'ritual', they are 'paradigmatic' in the sense that they
may powerfully model our understanding of 'ritual'. Some of the terms we have (subjectively, but also, in our opinion, strategically) selected for this section, however, are (as yet) not generally accepted 'paradigms' of ritual theory, while others have only recently turned into key-terms for the study of ritual in a similar vein as liminality' or 'flow' did some decades ago.

Agency, to take but one example of such a powerful key-concept and it happens to stand first in the respective part of the volume is an important term for different theories of action," society, and cognition. In this volume, however, agency is considered not as a clear-cut term within a well-defined frame of a theory but as a theoretical concept allowing for, and implying, a specific style of conceptualizing ritual(s) by providing a focus. A theoretical concept theoretically conceptualizes ritual(s), and theorizing concepts re-conceptualizes discourse. This, however, is more than a merely terminological exercise, which would be concerned only with the 'technical' use of terms. By putting rituals in a theoretical focus, concepts as well as approaches may 'uncover' something about rituals and, in a reflexive turn, about our interest in them. Putting the very concepts into focus, then, may 'reveal' something about the objects, the subjects, and the parameters of discourse. Concepts also problematize such seemingly obvious things as the participation in rituals, their framing, embodiment, and efficacy.

Many of the concepts and approaches discussed here refer implicitly or explicitly to --and in that way bridge--the observer and the observed. Performance, gender, rhetoric, and reflexivity, for instance, are crucial elements of ritual theory and ritual practice alike. The list of concepts and approaches could well be extended beyond those discussed in this book." That would be one of the further avenues of the ongoing scholarly project of theorizing rituals. The essays assembled in this volume (and the annotated bibliography) are not intended as the final word on rituals. The assembly of these essays here allows the contours of a common field of research to emerge. Yet this field is far from being homogenous and consistent. Consistency is an important aim of theory, but theorizing must find a different way of coping with heterogeneity and with the complexity and emergent quality of scholarly discourse.

My criticism is based on the assumption that rituals and dramatic media: - including the medium of theatre - are phenomena in different spheres of human activity. In terms of speech act theory, ritual is a complex macro-"speech/medium act", whose main purpose (perlocutionary effect) is to
influence a divine entity (to change a state of affairs) for the benefit of the performer or the community on behalf of which s/he operates. In principle, a ritual may be performed by means of either a single medium, such as natural language (e.g., a prayer), or other media, including non-verbal ones (e.g., the sacrifice of an animal). The macro ritual speech/medium-act may feature several media in varying proportions and order. It can thus be conjectured that ancient rituals may well have included components formulated in the medium of theatre, as their building units, even if there is no extant evidence for this. On a different level, the medium of theatre is a method of signification (categorization) and communication, which affords means for the representation and description of worlds, especially fictional ones. In this capacity the theatre medium may reflect any intention and be employed for any purpose, including purposes that contrast those of ritual. For example, whereas one of the secondary purposes of ritual is to reaffirm the beliefs that nourish the community, theatre can be employed for either reaffirming or refuting them. The latter function cannot even be imagined in the context of ritual.

In its anthropologic scientific guise or, to be more accurate, in what was then thought to be a scientific method, the claim that tragedy and comedy developed from Dionysiac ritual was suggested at the beginning of the twentieth century, by a group of English scholars who published their major works around 1912-14, and are known by the collective name of the Cambridge School of Anthropology (CSA). The main scholars of this school were Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray and Francis McDonald Cornford. Inter alia, their aim was to promote the thesis that Ancient Greek drama originated in ritual, Dionysiac ritual in particular, during the sixth century BC. They supported this thesis by archeological and literary evidence from ancient Greece and surrounding cultures, whether contemporaneous or not. Despite substantial differences, they shared a basic approach and main theses, which made them a unitary and distinct school.

They also shared a serious methodological problem: their object of research was never defined unambiguously. It has never been clear as to whether they were attempting to determine the origin of definite dramatic genres - tragedy and comedy - or the origins of the theatre medium itself. They definitely appear to have preferred dealing with the first question, but elements of the second one were quite often mixed in their deliberations. Unfortunately, this distinction has remained somewhat unclear even in more recent studies, not to mention books of theatre history. The widespread implicit assumption is that these are two aspects of the same issue; in other
words, that the creation of both major dramatic genres and the medium of theatre are two aspects of the same process. Nonetheless, in my opinion, the discussion of these should be separated, because genres are defined and distinguished among themselves by the structures of their fictional worlds and moods (e.g., serious/sublime or comic moods), while the medium of theatre is shared by all dramatic genres. For example, in the process of its creation, tragedy could have adopted the already existing medium of theatre employed in popular comedy.

The crux of the CSA's argument is the assumed existence of a pre-Dionysiac ritual that worshiped the Spring Daemon (*eniautos daemon*). The presupposition of this ur-ritual probably explains the existence of a set of different faiths featuring the very same pattern of death and resurrection of a god - such as Osiris, Tamuz, Adonis, Orpheus and Persephone – that corresponds to the yearly cycle of the seasons. In this sense, the Dionysiac ritual is a specific offspring of the Spring Daemon ur-ritual; i.e., of a divinity that represents the cycle of death and resurrection of nature.

According to this approach, the dithyramb was created within Dionysiac ritual from a ritual dance (*sacer ludus*) that represented the *aition* (mythical narrative) of the divine spirit/god Dionysus. Dithyramb is a kind of serious and sublime choral storytelling poem, devoted to narratives of gods and/or heroes. The CSA scholars accepted Aristotle's dictum regarding the development of tragedy from dithyrambic poetry. However, in contrast to Aristotle, who was relatively close to this process and did not mention any connection between dithyramb and Dionysiac ritual, they argued in favor of continuity - mediated by dithyramb – between Dionysiac ritual and tragedy. They also claimed that this ritual source left its traces in the structure of the fictional worlds of both dithyramb and tragedy.

Murray suggested an apparently sophisticated method to detect these traces in a pattern of recurrent narrative elements, appearing in a certain order, which were supposed to reflect the pattern of death and resurrection characteristic of the rituals generated by the ur-ritual of the Spring Daimon, including the Dionysiac ritual. This pattern was assumed to include the following events, in this order: (1) *agon* - the struggle between the Spring Daimon and its enemy (winter); (2) *pathos* - the ritual death of the divinity; (3) *messenger* - the report of the death or display of the corpse; (4) *threnos* or *lamentation* - the expression of grief; (5-6) *anagnorisis* – the recognition of the dead god and *epiphany* or *theophany* - his resurrection and apotheosis.
Already in 1927, Pickard Cambridge - the leading scholar of ancient Greek culture - in his book *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, demolished one by one the various arguments of the CSA. He demonstrated that there is no evidence of the presupposed ritual of the Spring Daimon or of any similar one in all ancient Greece. Harrison herself implicitly acknowledged this fact by supporting her own claim with Egyptian sources concerning the ritual of Osiris, who in her view was the prototype of the gods who die and resurrect. In general, the assumed existence of an ur-ritual can be accepted, but only on condition that it explains something with regard to either ritual or tragedy. However, while this assumption can explain the existence of a set of rituals revealing the same pattern of death and resurrection, and their distribution within a relatively delimited area, there is nothing in it to explain the creation of the tragic dramatic genre.

Pickard Cambridge also demonstrated that the traces of the set of narrative components, in their stipulated order, as suggested by Murray, can not be found either in any known form of ritual, including Dionysiac ritual, or in any known dithyramb or tragedy. Even in Euripides' *The Bacchae*, the only extant tragedy that dramatizes a central episode of Dionysus' life, the pattern of death and resurrection does not materialize. Pickard Cambridge claims that the application of this model involves an intolerable degree of flexibility in the definition of terms, as illustrated by Murray himself. In principle, the assumption of a mythical pattern shared by ritual, dithyramb and tragedy is obviously absurd, especially because of the reduction of all fictional actions to a single pattern that stresses the narrative elements of death and resurrection.

It also contrasts the diversity of fictional characters and actions in both dithyramb and tragedy. Indeed, in many a known tragedy principal characters die, but their death is final, as human death is, and there is no tragic hero who eventually resurrects.

In contrast to the CSA, Pickard Cambridge also argued that the link between dithyramb and Dionysiac ritual was severed in the early stages of the former's development. In fact, there is no known dithyramb, either complete or fragment, that narrates the *aition* of the god. Apart from a short deferential passage in honor of Dionysus, no known dithyramb tells its *aition* or any other narrative connected to his life and death. In contrast, there is ample evidence that dithyrambic poems dealt with narratives of various heroes and gods, typical of the Homeric tradition. If this was the case, the tradition that linked dithyramb with Dionysiac ritual was severed prior to the advent of tragedy. Cornford too, in *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, suggested a theory of ritual origin for Aristophanic comedy, from Dionysiac ritual. In principle, he accepts the Aristotelian
account, according to which Attic comedy developed from popular forms of comedy that existed prior to their institutionalization in Athens, which in turn developed from phallic songs. In particular, Cornford mentions the previous existence of Megarean farce, mentioned contemptuously by Aristophanes himself. Cornford's innovation resides in his attempt to link Aristophanic comedy to Dionysiac ritual, as it was understood by the CSA, by mediation of the phallic songs and pre-Aristophanic popular comedy.

Like Murray, Cornford suggested a set of narrative elements, appearing in a strict order, shared by Dionysiac ritual, popular comedy and Attic comedy. This set includes the following components: (1) **prologos** - the exposition scene; (2) **parodos** - the chorus' entrance; (3) **agon** – the struggle between the gods; (4) **parabasis**; (5) **sacrifice** - the display of the vanquished and dead god, who symbolizes the Summer; (6) **feast** - the dismemberment and eating of the god; (7) **marriage** and **comos**. In Cornford's view, only the **parabasis** does not belong in the supposed shared pattern, because of its non-dramatic nature. It is assumed, therefore, to be an innovation of Attic comedy itself. If other formal components, such as **prologos**, **parodos** and **comos**, are discounted, the allegedly essential components of the Dionysiac pattern are: **agon**, which represents the struggle between two principles - or seasons - identified by Cornford as the hero and the villain of the dramatic action; the **sacrifice**, which represents the slaying of the benevolent god by the malevolent god; the sacred **feast**, which represents the dismemberment (and/or cooking) and eating of the god (i.e., omophagy); and **resurrection**, followed by a ceremony of **marriage**, which represents the return of the god and the union of the powers of fertility that ensure the renewal of nature and the welfare of the community.

Against the background of the claim that both dramatic genres developed from the very same ritual, the lack of agreement between Murray's and Cornford's patterns is surprising, to say the least. Among the non-shared elements the oddest one is Cornford's **marriage** (*ieros gamos*), which should have united the representatives of the two spiritual/divine entities in order to bring about nature's fertile renewal. Cornford's claim is that "[Aristophanes] plays regularly end with a procession in which the Chorus marches out of the orchestra, conducting the chief character in triumph and singing a song technically known as the *Exodos*. The hero, moreover, is accompanied in this *Κήρμος* by a person who, perhaps because she is (except in one play) always mute, has attracted less notice than she deserves. This person is sometimes a nameless courtesan, sometime an allegorical figure." Assumedly, this parade symbolizes the above-mentioned
marriage. Cornford is aware that no Aristophanes' comedy features a marriage ceremony in the literal sense of the term, and that he uses "marriage" in a metaphorical sense. He assumes that Aristophanes' comedies preserved the marriage ceremony of two youngsters, which according to tradition used to be performed within the Dionysiac ritual and symbolized the union of nature's powers. Ridgeway comments that the theory of a sacred marriage between the god of the Sky and the goddess of the Earth, which took place at Eleusis, is only based on authors who lived in the Christian era and who described accurately what happened in Eleusis in their own times. "The Philosophoumena itself, on which Harrison based her argument, was not written before the second century AD." Pickard Cambridge notes that there is no evidence of a Dionysiac ritual - in any of its forms - in which a sacred marriage was performed in the context of a phallic parade. An additional significant difference between the models of Murray and Cornford resides in the narrative element of resurrection, which is a precondition of marriage, and which together complete the alleged mythical pattern of death, resurrection and sacred marriage.

Murray admits that tragedy ends in the midst of the pattern, in the phase of sacrifice, without the element of resurrection and marriage, and that the "extreme change of feeling from grief to joy", which characterizes the full pattern, is consummated by the satirical play - the fourth play of a typical tetralogy. This is, however, a very weak argument, since to the best of our knowledge the satirical play features a fictional world, different from and independent of that of the trilogy. Similarly to his criticism of Murray's model, Pickard Cambridge demolished one by one Cornford's arguments, which inter alia are supported by analyses of Aristophanes' comedies. However, with regard to these comedies too, the application of his model involves what Pickard Cambridge conceived as an unbearable flexibility in the definition and application of terms. In principle, if indeed Dionysiac ritual, dithyramb, tragedy and comedy materialized the same narrative pattern and even the same myth, and presented the very same action either to a community of believers or an audience, this would not have posed any problem. If this were the case, the age-old ritual pattern would have been easily recognized in subsequent forms. The problem is that no known fictional world described in dithyramb, tragedy or comedy corresponds to the aition of Dionysus.

Even if by sheer coincidence the creation of a given genre had coincided with the creation of the medium, this would have not cancelled the distinction between these processes. Any new genre
would at least have benefited from the prior existence of the medium. Parallel creation does not contradict the mutual independence of narrative and medium components. In principle, the same fictional world can be described by different media - such as fiction (by means of natural language) and theatre (by means of a dramatic medium); and the same medium is capable of describing different fictional worlds. The possible use of different media for the description of the same fictional world is clearly demonstrated by the transition from dithyramb (which is a storytelling genre) to tragedy (which is a dramatic genre). On the grounds of the same mythical narratives, the conversion of a member of the dithyrambic chorus into an actor was enough to change a storytelling poem into theatre. Moreover, from a historical viewpoint the parallel creation of genre and medium definitely did not happen. There is clear evidence, from the beginning of the sixth century BC, to the fact that Attic comedy was preceded by popular forms of comedy, and that these forms also preceded the advent of tragedy. Nonetheless, the CSA did not overlook questions regarding the origin of the theatre medium altogether. Harrison claims that the dramatic form of representation originated in a primitive form of imitation. She stresses the semantic link between the Greek words for ritual, "dromenon", and "drama", both from "dran", which is the Doric word for "to do". Obviously, she uses "drama" in the restricted sense of theatre representation. Her intention was to point at the similarity between medium, which is a method of representation based on doings on stage, and ritual, which is a kind of doing that employs representation. In her view, dromenon is a doing involving representation and imbued with religious meaning; e.g., savages returning victorious from war would commemorate their success by re-doing the acts that brought them victory, and before setting off to war, they would anticipate their victory by pre-doing them. It is thus that Jane Harrison conceives the advent of mimetic rites, since "all rites que rites are mimetic".

For Harrison, since ritual is essentially mimetic, the transition from ritual to theatre is self-understood. In this sense we should conceive her approach as a theory of the creation of the theatre medium, despite the problems that this solution raises in itself; in particular the lack of consideration of the essential difference between ritual and theatre, as suggested above. From this difference we may infer that the medium of theatre can be employed in the framework of ritual, without the former developing from the latter. From the development of tragedy from dithyramb we may also infer that dramatic genres need not develop from previous theatre forms. It is more reasonable to assume, therefore, that the creation of mimetic rituals, if Harrison's
scenario did happen at all, derives from an innate propensity of the human brain, which conditions all human activities. Furthermore, in stressing the origins of the dramatic fictional structure, she deviates from her search for the possible origins of the theatre medium.

In his search for the origins of Attic comedy, Cornford is not concerned with the question of origins of the theatre medium at all. He simply presupposes that this medium existed even before the creation of popular comedy (which preceded Attic comedy), claiming that comedy developed from theatre elements already existing in Dionysiac ritual, in particular the representation of a sacred marriage. As mentioned above, the existence of such a representation prior to the sixth century was refuted by Pickard Cambridge and Ridgeway. Nonetheless, Cornford assumed that "it is difficult to see how drama can come out of what is not, even in germ, dramatic". The logical problem is that this is a kind of regressive argument: if theatre could only develop from a previous theatre form, the problem of its original creation cannot be solved. In addition, it contrasts Murray's acceptance of Aristotle's dictum that tragedy developed from dithyramb, which despite its typical dialogical element is not of the nature of theatre at all. Consequently, it is possible that Cornford's expression "dramatic in germ" refers to these dialogical elements. Still, since storytelling naturally includes dialogical elements, theatre could have developed from a previous non-theatrical form.

In his "excursus" Murray does not address the question of creation of the theatre medium and, as mentioned above, he accepts Aristotle's claim that tragedy developed from dithyramb. Since popular comedy was created not later than the beginning of the sixth century BC, it follows that both Attic comedy and tragedy could have borrowed the theatre medium from this early theatrical form. It can be conjectured, therefore, that Thespis, who "lived" approximately half a century later, figured out the possibility of performing the serious mythical narratives typical of dithyramb in a medium that was already in existence, and that apparently had not been employed for this type of narrative before his time.

If we are to judge the CSA according to the criticism it has attracted, we cannot avoid the conclusion that dithyramb, tragedy and comedy could not have developed from Dionysiac ritual, because there is no evidence of continuity either on the level of genre or on the level of medium. Moreover, even if they had been right on the level of genre, this could not have had any bearing on our quest for the origins of the theatre medium.
The main thesis of this theory is that theatre was recreated in the context of Christian ritual *ex nihilo*, in the tenth century AD, after a prolonged cut-off from the Classical tradition and the disappearance of any trace of early medieval theatre. It would appear that this approach is based on the CSA theory of development of ancient Greek theatre from Dionysiac ritual, while in fact it is of earlier origin. Seemingly, the almost absolute absence of documentation on any form of theatre towards the tenth century AD, unquestionably supports the recreation thesis, which is endorsed by the vast majority of scholars to this day. Nonetheless, two outstanding scholars, Edmond Chambers and Benjamin Hunningher, claim implicitly or explicitly that recreation within the framework of the Christian Church could not have happened. Theories of recreation in the context of the Christian Mass are of romantic source. In 1809 Wilhelm von Schlegel declared that drama could not be found in all Europe throughout the middle Ages. In 1839 Charles Magnin, in his book *Les Origines du Théâtre Moderne*, claimed that the new theatre was created from the festivals of the Christian Church during the tenth and eleventh centuries, exactly as it was created from the *religious festivals* in ancient Greece during the fifth century BC. Magnin established thereby an analogy between Christian Europe and ancient Greece on the grounds of a parallel creation of theatre from religious ritual/sources. In 1849 Edilestand du Miiril, in his book *Origines Latines du Théâtre Moderne*, adopted this analogy and suggested the Church as the cradle of European theatre. In 1886, Leon Gautier, in his book *Histoire de la Poésie Liturgique au Moyen Age*, conjectured – most cautiously - that the origins of European theatre reside in the tropes of Easter, especially those of the tenth century, and that these developed later into mystery plays and other religious works, until they eventually became plays in the spoken language. Tropes are non-official texts, inserted in the sacred macro-text of the Mass; but only a few of them were adapted to dramatic form. Moreover, even if they were sung in dialogic form, they usually did not feature enacted characters. Thus Gautier set the foundations for conceiving the description of the stage performance of the "Quem Quaeritis" trope as the document that bears witness to the recreation of theatre by the Church. Many years later Karl Young, in his book *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, expressed the view that in itself there is nothing in the tropes that could potentially recreate theatre. Despite this, the cautious thesis of Gautier swiftly became an accepted truth.

Since then the "Quem Quaeritis" is conceived in most books of theatre history as the source of modern European theatre. In 1929 Gustave Cohen, in his book *Le Théâtre en France*...
au Moyen Age, made a "dramatic" theoretical move in formulating his "law" that "[a]ll religions generate drama by themselves and all rituals willingly and spontaneously take dramatic and theatrical shape." He thereby set the foundations for conceiving the "Quem Quaeritis" as a particular instance of a universal law. Since all the above-mentioned theories presupposed that religious theatre eventually developed into secular theatre, Cohen's law bestowed upon it further validity. It is noteworthy that Cohen published his book in France in 1928, a year after Pickard Cambridge had demonstrated the groundless nature of the CSA theories. In addition, it transpires from the early phases of the recreation theory that the idea of development of theatre from Dionysiac religious festivals was suggested prior to the CSA, and that the latter only attempted to lend it scientific/anthropological foundation.

Against the background of Chambers' illuminating research, Hunningher set out to refute the recreation thesis. In his book *The Origin of the Theater*, he claims that the Church could not have recreated European theatre for two reasons: a) the supposed discontinuity from the tradition of Classical theatre did not happen and, therefore, there could not have been recreation; and b) there is an essential opposition between the nature of the Christian faith and theatre; therefore, the latter could not have developed from the former.

Indeed, in order to claim in favor of re-creation, a total break in the continuity of the theatre tradition that originated in Classical culture, even if that underwent a process of decay during the middle Ages, has to be demonstrated. The main methodical problem is that the settling of this historical and theoretical controversy depends on the nature of the evidence we now possess. From the beginning of the third century AD until the tenth century, the only sources on the existence of theatrical activities are the condemnations of Church authorities and councils. Those continuously and consistently denounced the art of the mimes (*mimi*), their followers and successors, and blamed even the clergy for indulging in these "Satanic" activities. From these objections alone it is possible to infer their existence. While the frequency of condemnations reached its peak by the ninth century AD, there is a pronounced decrease in them during the tenth century. It is during this century that the description of the performance of the "Quem Quaeritis", widely considered to be the first evidence on the recreation of theatre by the Church, was composed. The usual explanation is that the relative silence of the Church indicates that theatrical activities had completely disappeared. However, a diametrically opposite interpretation can also be suggested: that this silence offers evidence of the mitigation of hostility within the
Church itself toward these activities, and a growing awareness of their potential, if subordinated to the promotion of its own ends. Hunningher assumes that "the Church has always, with wisdom and discretion, adopted and sanctified worldly elements from which the people, the congregation, would not willingly be parted." It is not at all clear what were the actual professions of the mimes, against whom the Church was so critical. "Mimes" is a collective name for a set of stage artists who performed a program of short items, each belonging in a different art, similar to a variety show. Such a performance included animal-tamers, rope-walkers, escape artists, ventriloquists, magicians, puppeteers, musicians, singers, dancers, storytellers, and possibly actors too. We may safely conjecture that the objection of the Church focused not on the musical or circus-like performances, but on those who reflected an explicit heretical attitude to matters sacred to it.

Probably, those included actors who specialized in comic or even satirical sketches, whether the object of derision was an individual or an institution. Such a performance, if it indeed made use of the theatre medium, in the sense of actors enacting characters, even if their quality was extremely low, could explain the hostility of the Church and ensure the minimal continuity required for the revitalization of the art of theatre. In general, it is plausible that the Church was not opposed to theatre in itself, but to its pagan connotations.

With regard to Hunningher's second objection, concerning the essential disagreement between Christianity and theatre, the facts reveal the opposite: Christianity and theatre were excellent partners for quite a long period. Hunningher is aware of that and, therefore, his claim is restricted to the necessary conditions for the recreation of theatre ex nihilo. He endorses the widely accepted view that theatre developed from Dionysiac ritual, because of its ecstatic nature, but he does not accept the thesis of recreation in the context of an essentially symbolical religion. In his view, following Kirby's approach, while ecstasy is a necessary condition for the creation of theatre, Christian symbolism precludes it, because the symbolic element of the Mass substitutes for the sacrifice, and the word substitutes for the deed; e.g., prayer replaces trance. For Hunningher, in the context of a non-ecstatic religion, only temporary adoption of theatre, and its eventual rejection can be conceived. Hunningher also opposes the assumption that the Mass features theatrical elements. On this issue he found support in Carl Young, who suggested a crucial criterion for the definition of a dramatic medium: "impersonation", in the sense of an actor enacting a character who is not himself. In Hunningher's view, this does not characterize
the Mass, and acting is essentially contradicted by its nature: its performance can not be
congeved as an enactment of the crucifixion, but as the actual thing. From the very beginning,
the Christian faith considered the Mass a real sacrifice. Its underlying intention was not to
represent or describe the crucifixion, but to reincarnate the experience. However, it is difficult to
accept that there is an essential opposition between a religion and a medium, which can serve
any purpose and communicate any message, including diametrically opposite ones. Whereas
Hunningher's claim that the church could only have adopted (or rejected) the medium of theatre
is acceptable, his line of argumentation is not.

For Hunningher the performance of the "Quem Quaeritis" - whose description appears in
the Concordia Regularis, can only be understood within the context of a continuous dramatic
tradition and as bearing witness to the adoption of theatre by the Church. In contrast, Nagler,
who published the text in English translation, claims that " in the Concordia Regularis, the birth
of medieval drama from the spirit of liturgy lies clearly before us". In my opinion this document
clearly supports Hunningher's thesis. Close analysis of the description of this performance
reveals a fairly good acquaintance with all aspects of theatre art and a level of sophistication that
contradicts the claim of spontaneous recreation ex nihilo. We should distinguish between being
the first theatre performance, which recreated the medium of theatre after a period of total
ignorance of the past, and the earliest document in our possession that bears witness to theatrical
activity in the Church. The main theoretical contribution made by Hunningher resides in that he
suggests, by implication, a pattern of relationship between ritual and theatre, alternative to that of
creation or recreation: adoption or rejection in any possible order. This pattern presupposes an
essential difference between ritual and theatre medium and the option of making use of this
medium by any ritual. A thousand years of rejection, and a few centuries of co-operation, even if
their ways eventually parted, supports the validity of this pattern. The question is, therefore,
whether or not this pattern is also valid for rituals that supposedly did generate theatre, in
particular ecstatic rituals, such as the Dionysiac one? I believe that the adoption-rejection (or vice
versa) pattern better accounts for the relationship between ritual and theatre in the Classical
period too, on the grounds of the essential difference between these two domains. This
alternative pattern conforms to the conception of theatre as a medium that can serve any
theological/philosophical/ideological idea or purpose, even opposing ones. To claim that theatre
was created or recreated by a ritual that employed it - just as it employs other media – is as
absurd as claiming that natural language, poetry or music originated in ritual. Hunningher demonstrated that it is extremely difficult to accept Gustave Cohen's "law", that any religion naturally and spontaneously generates theatre, when almost a millennium had passed between the first encounter of the Church with pagan theatre and the establishment of the Church theatre. A similar phenomenon, of lengthy rejection and eventual adoption, is found in the Jewish culture, which managed to sustain its hostility towards theatre for a few more centuries.