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RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING – BETWEEN SACRED AND PROFANE
TOWARD A RITUALIZED MYSTIFICATION

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Abstract: Religion was always perceived as the threshold between two worlds. It is a space where individuals are supposed to be connected to a different reality through the mediating power of a particular ritual, at a specific time and in a certain space. A new space of appearance is the expected outcome along with this relocation from profane to sacred. Religious broadcasting could be conceptualized as a visual and acoustic “altar”. The ritual, space and time are the pillars of this audio-visual “cathedral” the very space that could build the bridge between sacred and profane, and the means for this mediated, symbolic transfer. This paper tries to outline the power of media representation in the context of religious broadcasting that uses ritual and imagination to maintain and negotiate the distinction between sacred and profane and to generate alternative narratives. In this regard, the religious broadcasting, presuming the sacerdotal role to represent, mediate and interpret the relationship between sacred and profane is being conditioned by a ritualized medium. As a result, the religious messages could end up as a ritualized mystification that would jeopardize the production of meaning.

Key Words: sacred and profane, religious broadcasting, religiosity, media, representation, mystification, ritual

Introduction

A visionary perception about visualization, representation and reception that introduce the conversation about media and religion remains *Buddha TV* (1974), a work of video artist Nam June Paik¹. It is only through the technological capabilities of the media that the self-contemplation of Buddha can be eventually achieved, which just reinforce the common perception of religion as focusing on itself in an ongoing self-absorption, private game. On the other hand the message can be idealized and represented via technology, a public display of religion which could add the question of representation in this new space of appearance: which is more real, the message or the image, the representation of the message or the message itself? The intersection between media and religion is not just a developing field of research that attracts a growing interest from scholars, journalists, politicians and religious institutions but an emerging trend that characterize, ironically, the very fabric of this secular age. This is to say that there are visible symptoms around us that our secular society is “predestined” to manifest itself using a religious framework – even if religion is understood mostly as a social construct, as in Durkheim definition² or at least to reflect some sort of a numinous aura.

There are two main developments that can further advocate multiple and varied interference between media and religion: (1) every media channel is literally flooded by avatars of organized or “spontaneous” religion and (2) the core elements of religion are experienced openly through all the media. Actually the assumption that any medium is entirely secular can no longer be sustained³. It seems that media have radically reoriented the way we perceive and interpret the reality. Religion becomes a powerful interpretative tool used by media in constructing the reality; on the other hand religion is tempted to use the media to generate an ultimate certainty. Media and religion have come together in fundamental ways. While they may occupy the same spaces, serve some purposes and galvanize same practices⁴ the relationship between them is far from being congruent. It is true that within this field, can be distinguished some overlapping approaches but it has been suggested that it is problematic to assume that media and religion are distinct phenomena⁵. It is quite opposite, the media and religion involves similar processes of mediation between the sacred and the profane.

The aim of this paper is to outline a specific medium of visual representation – religious broadcasting as a contemporary example of how the interference between sacred and profane is negotiated in the paradigm of mediated reality. I use the broad sociological definition of religion developed by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. Religion could be an inner driven metaphysical quest “to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos”⁶ but we can speak of religion only in a materialized

form, “as soon as the sacred is distinguished from the profane”⁷. Can a religious television communicate a deep meaningful message in a highly ritualized medium, without compromising the message and altering that medium?

The core argument of this paper is that this very process of visual representation may possess an interesting proclivity, namely that every mediated narrative become mystified, the distinction between sacred and profane being only an imaginary one. In fact I will argue that a ritualized mystification is actually the result of a twisted representation and that the failure of the production of meaning occurs in the process of the mediated ritualization of the medium and the content. For this reason I will propose five possible symptoms of this mystification, manifesting itself in the following forms: coagulation of the meaning; sacralization of the profane; profanization of the sacred; objectification of the transcendental and the commodification of religion. For the purpose of this paper I will limit my analysis to religious television only as a medium of visual representation in the context of the binary opposition of the sacred and profane.

Between the sacred and profane

Contemporary ritual theorists⁸ have complained about Mircea Eliade, Emile Durkheim and Rudolf Otto’s all-inclusive dualism of sacred and profane even as they persist in using the terms as conceptual and religious tools⁹. However as long as a hierophany can be reproduced in the space of new visibility created by the media, the traditional distinction between sacred and profane can no longer be dismissed as being facile. That religion can manifest itself, “no matter how or where in the profane world”¹⁰ is already not just a theoretical probability but a well-documented evidence. In fact anthropological studies of comparative religion demonstrate that all cultures possess the whole paraphernalia of religious symbolic representation in which the sacred is bestowed and the meaning is produced on certain types of acts and experiences¹¹.

Religion was always perceived as a mass phenomenon, in which individuals were supposed to be connected to a different reality through the mediating power of a particular ritual, at a specific time and in a certain space in order that the relocation from profane to sacred must be completed in a new space of appearance.

Durkheim wrote in 1912 that all religions produce and communicate the meaning according to the binary opposition of the sacred and the profane. In different forms this dualistic understanding of religion can also be found in the writings of Max Weber, Gerardus van der Leeuw, and Mircea Eliade.

According to them without this binary division there is no authentic religion because the act of distinction itself, the separation, is the very first act of any religious genesis. The sacred consists of an ideal,

transcendental reality that cannot be grasped by the ordinary means or common individuals. The sacred must be signaled and almost “advertised” by specific rites that can be performed only in a time and a space fully consecrated for this purpose. The rite is sacred because a sacred person performs it in a sacred space and at a sacred time. The relation ritual-time-space represents the basis and the means of this mediated, symbolic transfer. But mostly, the sacred can be defined only in opposition to the profane. This is the fundamental prerequisite. The profane is the everyday and the utilitarian¹², the commonplace, familiar and mundane. Mirroring the sacred experience the profane is experienced itself in a worldly time, an ordinary space and by common individuals that are in need of sacralization if the symbolic transfer into transcendental is to be realized, even for a momentary experience.

It is the function of religion, as means of ultimate transformation, to “resacralize our lives” to enable to experience sacred space and sacred time¹³? Sacred space was conceptualized as the symbolic center of the world, connected with the transcendent by a vertical symbol. From this perspective all religious sites, be they church, synagogue, mosque, temple or other structure, separates the sacred from the profane world. By coming in contact with these consecrated spaces one may cross the boundary between the sacred and profane. Being an existential space and not a geometrical one, as Eliade¹⁴ reminds us, the multiplicity of sacred spaces and consequently sacred centers does not alter the sacredness of this ideal space. In the same manner time, like space, is characterized by the same dualism: sacred and profane. It is only through the power of the hierophany that the sacred time is distinguished from the ordinary time. The sacred time is a time of revelation in which the very act of beginning is symbolically reenacted and experienced.

The sacred time is attuned to a different, transcendental “clock” which means that it passes at an entirely different rate than does the chronological time. There are some circumstances that can alter the time in such way that “it can pass slowly or more quickly, or can cease altogether”¹⁵. With the invention of the clock, where nature by default was supposed to furnish the time, it was now this piece of human machinery who assumed the role of great divider of time, the producer of minutes and seconds, therefore dissociating time from human events¹⁶. From now on the profane and the sacred time would be more rigorous divided introducing a new form of conversation between the secular and transcendental. The individual and not the nature will decide the time and “seasons”, from now every hierophany would be carefully supervised and mediated. The insertion of technology in the communication process is bound to offer a different leverage in the negotiation between representation, reality and appearance. In fact every communication technology “generates its own balance between the real and the

imaginary, and thus its own secularity and sacredness”¹⁷, salvation by technology being a feature of modernity.

Actually, by assuming a distance between secular and transcendental, religion “offers practices of mediation that bridge the distance and make it possible to experience, or produce the transcendental”¹⁸ the “temple” or the sacred space being the material link between secular and transcendental. The performer has a paramount role in this mediated ecosystem, he or she being the mediator between the sacred and the profane spheres. The performer (priest, politician, artist, presenter, etc.) represents the presence of the sacred in the “religious” rituals. Those rituals, as generators of constructed immediacy are the stopgaps for the transcendent. The revelation is just a temporary experience, a manifestation of a sacred reality as a “temporarily real world of its own” and “continues to shed its radiance on the ordinary world outside” even after the ritual and performance has ended¹⁹. Through the hierophany time is renewed and sanctified, the sacred being transferred to all participants in the ceremony. Since ultimate reality is beyond individual’s abilities to express there must be another venue to communicate about the sacred in a meaningful way. In this context the symbolic language is the only verbalization possible in which the symbol as “a literary, verbal, visual, or silently suggestive device”²⁰ points beyond itself to something that cannot be commonly represented. In order that the profane could be transferred to the sacred the symbols acts as “bridges”²¹.

This is why only the ritual can deploy the symbolic language in a meaningful way that can transfer the participants from profane to the transcendental reality via the sacred. It could be said that the ritual is the attempt to transform the profane into the sacred not only for the purification and preparation of the participant but to the ultimate goal to connect the participant to the non-representational, transcendent reality. In this sense the whole religious structure is a symbolic universe.

However it is by the manifestation of hierophany that the “unknown”, “unseen”, unspeakable” is made “flesh” in those forms that are familiar in the profane, natural world but they are no longer considered “profane”. And yet this is the very paradox of every hierophany, primitive or complex²². By manifesting the sacred, every form becomes something else but somehow remains itself. Only those who had experienced the hierophany “see” that form, object or feeling as being sacred. In this sense the sacred meanings are constructed by experience, perception and representation and are not necessarily “free-floating signifiers”²³ but they are materially mediated. Every sacred space requires a hierophany, an “invasion” of the sacred that detach the area from the common belonging consecrating it for a different purpose; symbolically is transformed in a different quality. This existential space could be multiplied and relocate in any part of the common ground without losing its sacred fabric. It is not the geometrical area that is “populated” by the

sacred, it is only the experience mediated by ritual in a sacred space at a sacred time. This is why the profane time too must be set apart through the same hierophany and transformed into a sacred time. The sacred is essentially what the profane is not and cannot be. The two constructions are destined to keep each other at bay, the religious life and the profane cannot share the same space and the same unit of time. The segregation must be definitive and irrevocable, the precondition for this Manichean equilibrium. However according to Durkheim this mutually exclusive relationship cannot go too far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible. This would irremediably dismiss the sacred as an existential necessity²⁴.

According to Rothenbubler²⁵, communication itself is absolutely characterized by a synthesis of the ideal and material, the individual and collective. This synthetic model anticipates aspects of social order that are “symbolically constructed and voluntarily enacted”. The cornerstone of this mediated experience is the ritual. A special space and a special time provide the context for the only act that can negotiate the intersection between the religious and the secular. Alongside the ritual there is another form through which meaning is communicated – the icon or “sacred image”. The icon is a symbolic form that is used for objectification of beliefs and self-transcendence²⁶. As with ritual, the icon has the same role of integrating the individuals and to attuning them to the belief system of social sphere. It generates symbols and images that can mediate the relationship of the persons with the sacred. However, in the end it seems that all the symbolism bears “the curse of mediacy”²⁷; the revelation is obscured by the medium.

The inherent religiosity of the media

In approaching the religious feature of the media we should keep in mind that the safest way to tackle the topic is to use the back door of mythology, to identify what role has performed myth as well as language in the mental construction of our world.

It was Hermann Usener in his study²⁸ about history of language and religion that identified in the evolution of religious ideas a specific phase related with the symbolic constructed reality – the production of “momentary deities”. It is something purely instantaneous, “a fleeting, emerging and vanishing mental content, whose objectification and outward discharge produce the image of the momentary deity”²⁹. According to Usener, every impression that individual receives, every wish that stir in him, every hope that lures him, every danger that threatens him can affect him religiously. It is all about the spontaneous feeling that can “touch” an individual or some display of power that can infuse an air of holiness and the momentary god can be created and experienced. It is something that exists only here and now in one

indivisible moment of experience, a magical moment that exist only for that individual who has been “exposed” to the “spark”. While not an elaborate hierophany, it is still a manifestation of an ephemeral but nonetheless a sacred reality. For the individual is more than actualization in appearance or just a symbolical actualization, it is a mystical one. Something invisible and “inactual” takes a holy form. It is a sort of beatification that produces an order of things higher than in which the individual ordinarily resides³⁰.

While to see the virtual world as a hierophany could be the easiest approach to take since it allows the traditional dualism of sacred and profane to remain intact, it is the essential hallmark of the hierophany, namely dividing the time and space in oppositional categories, that “qualify” it as such. In other words, there is no sacred and profane without hierophany and no hierophany could “survive” the “momentary god” moment without this dualism of spaces. In this case the screen serves as an entry point into the transcendent. The content of the vision is not primarily that relevant as long as the vision itself has the potential to startle, disorient and provoke in the individual a sense of awe. Once the object was projected into “immaterial world of light” this very act can aggrandize the object and summon in the individual the “spirit” of veneration³¹. Which just reinforces Usener’s theory that a momentary god has just been created. It is the main sacerdotal act of media support to create these momentary deities. To remind the audience that the mundane world is just a “shadow” of the ideal and only media can negotiate the conditions of relocation or at least a self-projection in forms suitable for every individual. In this context of mediated reality “any image, even the slightest and most banal, is transfigured on the screen”³². The “transfiguration” is enhanced by the medium itself, its capability to mediate and transform an object from profane to sacred.

Eliade was fully committed to his theory that the object is no longer profane after the hierophany. Citing the biblical episode about Jacob’s dream³³, Eliade argues that the metaphor “the gate of heaven” displays not only a spiritual meaning but also a very material one. Jacob took the stone used as a pillow and consecrated it laying down the foundation for the “house of God”. Actually it was the theophany that did the consecration and then “transfigured” that ordinary stone into a holy cornerstone for God’s house; it was possible because it occurred in specific space that was “opened” for communication with heaven, “the paradoxical point of passage” from one mode of being to another³⁴. This is the only way in which the geometrical space could be transformed into an existential one, a profane object into a sacred substance.

The space that media creates is characterized by the mediacy, appearance, omnipresence; in this space media has opened the door to the visibility of world and it is provided by the screen and the speaker³⁵. Due to its visibility the media is placed right in the center of the social

construction of reality. From this privileged position the generated narratives and images about the world are assumed by the public as a confirmation of their personal worldview, being internalized as the norm values, objective and “true”³⁶.

This is precisely the role of the ritual or “enactment of myth” that always it had it in the meaning production. Not only that organizes, confirms and conserves a particular understanding but ritual also opens a new way of thinking and being³⁷. In this sense ritual cannot resume its capability just to “explain” the world but also has the power to “create” the world. Some scholars³⁸ have pointed to the ritualizing dimension of individual’s engagement with television watching: it is repetitive providing a sense of continuity in the mundane existence. However, going back to Eliade he remarked that this continuity is primarily opened inside:

“The door that opens on the interior of the church actually signifies a solution of continuity. The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes the two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where these worlds communicate, where the passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.”³⁹

The “door”, the “threshold” reveals the solution of continuity, actually being the passage from one space to the other. In other words it can be said that television is such a vehicle that can transport the individual from the mundane experience to the ideal world of imagination. The visual representation can offer the opportunity to “reengage notions of the divine in a current media saturated context”⁴⁰. The screen is more than a “threshold”, a passage to other space but contains even the “spark of the sacred”, the hierophany being in the “sleeping mode” anytime potentially activated by the simple ritual of connection to the “other world”. It can compress the time and space that separate mundane from ideal lives and promise an immediate experience of transportation into another space⁴¹ – an experience that reflects a desire for a magical relocation and instant forms of salvation⁴².

Returning to Usener’s conceptual models, on a higher plane than those momentary deities, who are defined by ephemeral existence, magic spark and spontaneous effect, a new series of divinities, originating not from a sudden “revelation” but from the organized social system of individuals, are produced. The individual is no longer a passive container of impressions and influences but an active agent in directing the course of events according to his or her needs and wishes. This course is intentionally measured and is defined by periodicity, uniformity,

ritualization, mythologization and concretization. In this context every department of human activity must be represented and empowered by a particular deity⁴³. These “functional gods” or “special gods” do not require an exclusive commitment and are not incorporated deep into the existential scope; they are utilitarian, they serve a specific sphere of need and within that area they have achieved a sort of permanence, a definite character. In this framework none of the individual’s activity could be performed unless its designated god has been invoked in prescribed ritual and by his correct name⁴⁴. In conceptualizing the media from an anthropological perspective⁴⁵ the process of ritualization and mythologization of reality deserves a special approach. According to Coman, this is “a process through which media introduce a ritualized or mythological perspective to the image of the world they offer, as well as to their particular manner of structuring the image of reality”⁴⁶.

Being defined by this ritualistic and mythicized character media is bound to generate “functional” or “special gods” in the form of visual or textual narrative, “as clarifying images about the world, self-understood, in accord with its expectations, norms, hopes and fears”⁴⁷ that can serve the individual’s needs and wishes, according to a measured course of events. The audience is no longer passive, merely “consuming” impressions and influences or being at the “whim” of those momentary deities but producing meaning through the interaction with its newly functional gods. This can be achieved also by self-projection into the outer world but now giving it some concrete form. The “gods” are at hand, ready to be used and served in the same time. This constructed, mediated reality is deep compartmented, the needs and wishes of the audience being constantly materialized, concretized and eventually commercialized; for each need and activity a “special god” being produced. While the audience is in control of these personal departments without invoking these deities by using the media ritual and mythology, none of its undertakings could be described as successful. According to Usener these special gods represent a necessary phase; the transition of religious consciousness to its final and supreme achievement – the conception of personal god⁴⁸. However, this is where I will depart from Usener’s exclusive religious meaning. The concept of “personal god” should not be reduced to the traditional, theological meaning of the deity only but understood as a “technological” product, a result of myth-making nature of the human mind in pursuing the transcendental in a highly technologized reality. In transmitting an alternative narrative this is precisely the very effect of religious broadcasting: attuning the audience to a monochrome, normative reality, a final worldview that will add the definite article for a “monotheistic”, exclusive deity.

The redundancy of the religious broadcasting

From the beginning⁴⁹, religious broadcasting was conceptualized as a audio-video altar where ritual, space and time were the pillars of this “media-cathedral” the very space that could build the bridge between sacred and profane and lead masses to the ultimate reality, managing the transition from those functional, utilitarian “gods” to the personal, objectivized “god” – a mediated religious construction offered through this powerful medium. Religious broadcasting uses ritual and imagination to maintain the apparent distinction between sacred and profane and to generate alternative narratives. In this regard, the religious broadcasting is presuming a sacerdotal role in representing, mediating and interpreting the relationship between sacred and profane and to generate a new space of appearance. Does the religious broadcast reflect or fail to communicate and represent that symbolic and presumed reality?

As a main presupposition of this paper I will argue that from the perspective of visual representation, negotiation between sacred and profane, constructed reality, meaning production and the practice of mediation, the act of religious broadcasting is ideologically conditioned to generate a non-meaningful religious message.

Acting in a ritualized medium religion is “fated” just to create an alternative mythology that it is even deeply ritualized by the very nature of the media behavior. As reasons for this ritualized mystification I propose the following interpretation framework: the hermetic character of the visual medium is likely to produce a “profanization of the sacred”; the sacramental feature of the image is bound to generate a “coagulation of the meaning”; the determinism of the sacred forms results in a “sacralization of the profane”; the religious mediation is prone to the “objectification of the transcendental” and the commercial component of the sacred manufactures the “commodification of religion”. All these five symptoms of religious broadcasting could be slightly incorporated in what I call the process of ritualized mystification. Here the concept of mystification is understood primarily as a communicational anomaly that generates a constructed hierarchy, an alternate reality experience, and a normative mythology. Furthermore in the language-meaning ecosystem, the secondary meaning of the concept, as synonym for deception and alteration, it is still applicable but only as a transitional denotation.

Profanization of the sacred - Religion is already ritualized by its paradoxical ontology, the negotiation between sacred and profane being managed only by ritual. Coman observed that the ritualization itself appears as “a method of exerting control over the processes of construction and negotiation of views of reality”⁵⁰ and religion always was tempted to generate a particular, normative view of reality. In this context any visual medium can only enhance this natural propensity. In an already

ritualized medium as television, a religious message being communicated through another medium, i.e. religious broadcasting, would inevitably leads to an alteration of both the content and the medium. In other words, not only the religious message is “profanized” by the medium but also the medium is “altered” by its content. Can religious message remain intact in a medium that already is “religious” though in a different way? Each medium engages the audience in different ways and encourages certain patterns of behavior. Is the medium apart from its specific content? McLuhan was deeply convinced that content is not only altered by a specific medium but it is completely metamorphosed into the medium itself, becoming one, indivisible reality. It is the medium not the way of using it that determines the form and course of the content⁵¹.

While McLuhan’s equation seems disturbingly reductionist the propensities of the medium in the religious broadcasting context deserves a careful attention. A “transgression of technological norms”⁵² and a misrepresentation occur indeed in such medium.

Objectification of the transcendent – By definition religion is a ritualized practice of mediation that organizes, negotiates and facilitates the relationship between the individuals and the transcendental via “particular sensational forms”. The process of mediation not only leads to the objectification of a transcendental power that cannot be otherwise accessed or experienced, its appearance being dependent on a current modes of representation but also emphasize that mediation itself is better understood in sacralized form by its religious audience⁵³. Like ritual, the icon has an integrator role, bounding audience in a social construct. The icon serves as a symbol for order, providing a sense of origin, destiny and participation in that order, furnishing a context where the individuals can locate themselves⁵⁴. The sacred image is the very tool that can mediate between sacred and profane and religious broadcasting generates religious icons in order to mediate this relationship. We no longer see the image as “transparent, windows of the world” but more like a sort of signs that represent a constructed appearance. Behind this process of mediation is concealed “an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification”⁵⁵. The image is not what appears to be but what was constructed to represent. By representing the sacred religious in a profane medium religious broadcasting break the first ontological rule of the religion, the “commandment” to keep the sacred and profane apart. The second most important commandment is “do not produce graven images”. This could be defined as the objectification of the transcendent, a banalization of religion.

Coagulation of the meaning - Religion was described as a “closed” mass opposed to the “open” ones. The temple, the cast, the church and the dogma were always too restrictive in terms of participation of the open masses. For this reason at the heart of every universal or national religion there is a strong yearning to surpass the traditional limits in order to

attracting and convincing *all*⁵⁶. Transmitting this sacred reality through media representation could be interpreted as a transformation from closed to open mass communication too. The broadcasting ritual has to be meaningful, especially in this age of “new visibility”⁵⁷ and must construct and generate a certain reality if the audiences are to be “spelt” in this magic ritual of representation. However, there are many who perceive the use of the mass media in religious communication as an inherent contradiction in terms⁵⁸.

Television deals with direct communication with specific referents points and visual images that could lock ideas in place, coagulating the meaning. The visual images became more definitive, more interpretive and normative than verbal images, thus imposing a limitation upon the audience, affecting the possibility of disbelief⁵⁹. This is why the narrative should remain ambivalent and not imposes an normative representation of reality. In direct contrast with the visual image the sacred text employs a different form of communication, an indirect contact where the vagueness of the language, ambiguity of the writing and possibility of doubt permit individuals to see things in a new perspective, to germinate new ideas that can be transferred into the culture.

Sacralization of the profane – There is an interaction of symbol, thought and action that characterizes sacred forms. This is made possible through media that give sacred forms material expression; therefore sacred meanings being not “free-floating signifiers”⁶⁰. The content of the media includes images, sounds, objects, spaces, practices, events, etc. and in this context media enable communication about, and interaction with, these forms. But once these sacred forms became visible their communicative structure draw the audience into a powerful identification with what they arrive to experience as normative reality. Being constructed and mediated through a religious medium these sacred forms have the ability to polarize the audience, impose a particular interpretation about the reality and make social and political life subject more to emotional identification than to critical analysis. Religious broadcasting could generate sacred representations that are Manichean, reductionist and fully loaded with definitive meaning. The religious narrative is transfigured in a sort of “media events”; not real time events as in the literal meaning of Dayan & Katz, but myth-events or spiritual, transformative events that are actualized and experimented by the ritual.

They are supposed to have the similar effect of the “live events”: to interrupt the routine and to intervene in the normal flow of individuals’ lives, “proposing exceptional things to think about, to witness, to do”⁶¹. Under their power the normal codes and conventions of the ordinary life are treated as profane, legitimizing the sacred as the only paradigm. This leads to a monopolization of the mundane routine. This is when the sacralization of the profane occurs.

Commodification of religion – The interrelation between religion and market economy has always been conspicuous. An economic approach to religion will take into account that sacred and profane are not easy to deal with in the “marketplace of the gods”, the areas where secular and religious “currencies” interfere are exchanged⁶². In this marketplace the religious symbols and institutions are converted into marketable and consumable commodity. The commodification of religion it can be understood as an interactive and iterative relationship between religion and market “involving both market force commodifying religion and religious institution taking part in marketplace and consuming culture”⁶³. Not only goods but even gods too are a marketable category, carefully managed by the mediators of such commodities. There are several features of this religious-cultural phenomenon: a) religious commodities are closely associated with the production of narratives, symbols and events; they can be easily turned into currency; b) these commodities are produced, controlled and manipulated institutionally by religious organizations; c) they are permeated by sensational and sacred meanings – it is this sacred quality that distinct a religious commodity from a profane object; d) religious commodities are mediated through ritual, festivals, celebrations, the opportunity for sacred to being transferred to business exchange; e) they are channeled to public via mass media. Using the power of the media religious commodities became part of everyday religion⁶⁴. The commercialization of the symbols, narratives and the reproduction of the sacred images through a mass mediated marketplace as religious television it leads not only to commodification of religion but also to the commercialization of the meaning.

Conclusions

In this paper I tried to explore the sensitive position of religious broadcasting in negotiating the relationship between sacred and profane and its audience. Using a medium saturated by implicit religion it is difficult to produce and communicate a meaningful message. Religious broadcasting expresses itself through sacred forms. In managing to keep the binary opposition between religion and secular intact the performers of this sacred cult need to reinforce a particular image of the transcendent objectifying a spiritual power that is difficult to access and impossible to experience through the mediation: “on television God is a vague and subordinate character”⁶⁵, not only apparent but “functionally no longer necessary”⁶⁶. This is why the icon or the sacred image, a constructed symbolic form, is used as objectification of the transcendent and the leading mythology. For many television functions as a fetish⁶⁷ full of implicit religion, generating narratives that function as “a kind of primitive sacred canopy” and relaying on themes⁶⁸ which relate directly to those fundamental, universal paradigms, “the root paradigms”⁶⁹ targeting the

inner core of life's meaning, chasing after the most metaphysical needs, in this way managing to keep alive "the rumor of God"⁷⁰. In a sense television itself constitutes a religion. In all its forms, cultural, vocational, technological, organizational or financial television is better understood when represented under the category of religion⁷¹. In generating automated "momentary gods" and being involved in producing of "functional gods" and eventually paving the way for a "personal god", television is already acting as the guardian of sacred fire. However, in spite of this inherent religiosity the possibility of making it more obvious religious is assumed tacitly by a special form of media - religious broadcasting. Although in the process of religious broadcasting the content is regarded sacred and the medium just a profane but a technological necessity. This distinction exists only in the sphere of the imaginary. Actually, media and mediation always constitute "inherently unstable and ambiguous condition of possibility for religious signifying practices"⁷². How audiences recognize, accept or reject this "religious spelling" as a medium to imagine the world, others, and selves is a matter of empirical analysis, which is not my purpose here. However nobody would dispute this powerful outcome of the mediated representation, especially in the religious area. I proposed as such the concept of "ritualized mystification" as an exploratory tool to guide this theoretical enquiry about the effect of religious broadcasting in a mediated context. More precisely, this type of mystification could be experienced in five representational instances: coagulation of the meaning, profanization of the sacred, commodification of religion, sacralization of the profane, and objectification of transcendental. Ending with Horsfield's observation⁷³ "Given the dominant functions of television in status conferral and image creation, religious uses of television may more effectively be achieved through secular programing than through religious programs" I would postulate that religious broadcasting should reinvent itself if a religious message communicated through this medium can properly create meaning for its audience.

Notes:

1. This can be seen at <http://www.paikstudios.com/gallery/1.html> [accessed August 11, 2013]
2. Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5-6.
3. Daniel A. Stout, *Media and Religion: Foundations of an Emerging Field* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.
4. Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2006), 9.
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24. Durkheim, 55
25. Eric W. Rothenbuhler, *Ritual Communication: From Everyday Conversation to Mediated Ceremony* (London: Sage, 1998), xiii.
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31. Wagner, 80.
32. Antonin Artaud, "Sorcery and Cinema" in *The Religion and Film Reader*, ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Brent S. Plate (London: Routledge, 2007), 55.
33. Bible, Genesis 28,12-19.
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35. Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2013), 26.

36. Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit si ritual. O perspectiva antropologica* (Iasi: Polirom, 2003), 34.
37. Goethals, 7.
38. Hoover 2006, Rothenbuhler 1998, Couldry 2003, Coman 2003, Horsfield 1984.
39. Eliade, 25.
40. Angela Zito, "Can Television Mediate Religious Experience? The Theology of Jean of Arcadia", in *Religion: Beyond Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 736.
41. The example of a cyberspace wedding is quite relevant here: the ceremonial event is not on the other side of the screen or camera but in media space itself; the rite did not transpire behind the medium, but within it.
42. Aupers, 694.
43. Cassirer, 19.
44. Cassirer, 20.
45. Coman, 2005; Rothenbuhler, 1998; Couldry, 2002.
46. Mihai Coman, "Cultural Anthropology and Mass Media: A Processual approach" in *Media Anthropology*, ed. Eric W. Rothenbuhler and Mihai Coman (London: Sage, 2005), 48.
47. Coman, *Mass media, mit si ritual. O perspectiva antropologica*, 34.
48. Cassirer, 20.
49. The history of religious broadcasting can be traced back to modern revivalism as developed in the 19th century North America (Frankl Razelle, *Televangelism: The Marketing of Popular Religion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), to the so called "frontier evangelism" which always advertised a simple and direct message "carefully packed for maximum effect" (Stewart M. Hoover, "Ten Myths About Religious Broadcasting", in *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions*, ed. Robert Abelman and Stewart M. Hoover (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1990), 24.
50. Coman, *Mass media, mit si ritual. O perspectiva antropologica*, 52.
51. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 8.
52. Stefan Bratosin and Mihaela A. Tudor, "New Media and Communicating the Sacred", in *PR Trend. New Media: Challenges and Perspectives*, eds. Delia Balaban, Ioan Hosu and Meda Mucundorfeanu (Mittweida: Hochschulverlag, 2013), 35. See also Stefan Bratosin, "Church in the Public Sphere: Production of Meaning between Rational and Irrational", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* vol. 13 issue 38 (2014): 3-20.
53. Meyer, 15-16.
54. Goethals, 33-34.
55. Thomas W. J. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 8.
56. Elias Canetti, *Masele si puterea* (Bucuresti: Nemira, 2009), 19-21.
57. John B. Thompson, *The Media and the Modernity. A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).
58. Peter G. Horsfield, *Religious Television: The American Experience* (New York: Longman, 1984), 69.
59. Derek C. Weber, "Making Graven Images", in *Opportunities and Limitations in Religious Broadcasting*, ed. Peter Elvy (Edinburgh: The Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 1991), 154.
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61. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.
62. Larry Witham, *Marketplace of the Gods. How Economics Explains Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 195.
63. Pattana Kitiarsa, "Toward a Sociology of Religious Commodification", in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Brian S. Turner (New Jersey: Wiley, 2010), 565.
64. Kitiarsa, 571.
65. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).
66. Chris Arthur, *Religion and the Media: An Introductory Reader* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 1993), 4.
67. Schultze Quentin J., "Television Drama as a Sacred Text", in *Channels of Belief: Religion and American Commercial Television*, ed. John P. Ferré (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990). 19.
68. According to Biernatzki in *Roots of Acceptance: The Intercultural Communication of Religious Meanings*, by William E. Biernatzki, S.J. (Inculturation: Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures, No. XIII. Rome: Gregorian University Press for the Cultures and Religions Centre, Gregorian University, 1991 and cited by Arthur (1993), the reason why Dallas was able to attract audiences throughout the world lay in its dependence on primordial themes that can be found in many cultures. The primordial themes of Dallas, he argues, echo those of the book of Genesis.
69. "Root paradigms" is a concept developed by Victor Turner in his influential work, *Dramas, fields, and metaphors: symbolic action in human society* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).
70. Arthur, 10-11.
71. Jay Newman, *Religion vs. Television: Competitors in Cultural Context* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 102.
72. Jeremy Stolow, "Religion and/as Media", *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (2005): 125.
73. Horsefield, 180.

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