

European Academy of Religion
EX NIHILO
A “Zero Conference” on Research in the Religious Fields
18-19-20-21 / 06 / 2017
Bologna

Scientology’s Spatial Aesthetics Luigi Berzano

*ART is a word which summarizes
the quality of communication*
L. Ron Hubbard, 1951

Research on Scientology rarely goes into depth about its aesthetic dimension, despite the fact that its founder L. Ron Hubbard’s book about art saw the light in the very years when Scientology was taking shape, and although all this came about during the historical period which was the aesthetic age par excellence. But being contemporaries of the object of their research often conceals from scholars the deeper meaning of what they are studying. Perhaps this is what happened to the analysis of Scientology’s spatial aesthetics.

Here I would like to propose that aesthetic nature belongs specifically and primarily to spiritual and religious forms, such as Scientology, and that social sciences of religion should refer to it in the first place. Only the strict criteria of practicality and rationality make one forget the close relationship between art and religion. Religious experience speaks numinous – rather than everyday - language¹. And when this no longer happens, the first secularisation is produced: space, language and ceremony refer only to the profane instead of belonging to the sacred; indeed, the diminished strength of the aesthetics of religion has

¹ I am not referring to the traditional (from Søren Kierkegaard onwards) view of aesthetics as opposed to ethics. Aesthetic life and ethical life are two fundamental life-stages. “Aesthetic life” is the immediacy of those who live for the moment, in constant seeking, in the imagination - unreconcilable with “ethical life”, which is the dominion of duty and faithfulness.

encouraged the “religion of art” which – according to theories and research – in secular societies constitute a new, substitute, religion.

Today’s development of aesthetics goes well beyond classical theories of the philosophy of the beautiful, venturing into fresh fields with daring innovative experiments. In addition, aesthetics has made its appearance in such unexpected areas as consumption, and territorial and community development. Economics has adopted aesthetics in its events, shows and displays. By now aesthetics is present – even if in latent forms – in biopolitics, mass media studies, epistemology and communication theory.

So many salvation and perfection utopias have emerged all over the place in the symbolic sphere of religions and spiritual movements that it is possible to see the New Age as the latest global movement of emotions after the classical social movements of industrial society. Even among religious and theological studies we can find authors and research dealing with aesthetics – redefined, however, more as a philosophy of emotions than reflection on the essence of the beautiful or the spiritual. The result is impoverishment not only of aesthetics but also of religion itself: religion is not just ethics and beliefs – it is above all *mobilisation* of affection, feelings, sensitivity and what the Greeks called *aisthesis*.

In order to propose a research model for Scientology’s aesthetics it would be useful to examine its thinking and experience vis-à-vis the classical aesthetic tradition. Kant (*Critique of Judgement*) and Hegel (*Aesthetics*) are still of fundamental importance: upon them are constructed the four conceptual pillars of life, form, knowledge and action². The flowering of these four areas took place as a result of new contexts and historical conditions of 1960s transformations: the aesthetics of life acquired a political significance; the aesthetics of form assumed mediatic value; cognitive aesthetics cultivated sceptical worth; and pragmatic aesthetics developed communicative importance. Therefore doing research in these fields means dealing with, respectively, politics, the media, scepticism and communication. To these major areas can be added those of *feeling* and *culture*. The term aesthetics has its origin in *feeling* – the world of sensitivity, affectivity and excitement – to the extent that the most important recent contributions have come from psychologists, philosophers, theologians and writers. It is not possible to understand L. Ron Hubbard’s artistic

² M. Perniola, *L'estetica contemporanea*, il Mulino, 2011.

contribution and philosophical writings on art without collocating them in that more general environment.

1. Ron Hubbard's "aesthetic mind"

L. Ron Hubbard's first writings on art come from 1943, but his most important work saw the light in 1951. There the author theorized that, over and above normal everyday thought, there exists an "aesthetic mind", and it is that level of mental activity which «deals with the nebulous field of art and creation». The author reminds us of the work of Francis Bacon, the first to elaborate the idea of codification according to which every subject can be dealt with systematically on the basis of its own rules.

In a 1950 New Jersey debate with Donald H. Rogers in New Jersey, Hubbard claimed that the definition of art should go beyond that of those days; it could not be incomplete and evasive the closer one got to it. Common notions of art did not involve research into the human mind and spirit, upon which Hubbard was working. On August 30, 1965, he published the HCOB³ "ART" (no 1. in the art series), where, in the section entitled *The Fundamentals of Art*, he proposes a definition of art as a higher form of communication: *ART is a word which summarizes the quality of communication*. Thus art obeys the laws of communication, and the excessive originality of many innovative artists «throws the audience into unfamiliarity and therefore disagreement». Perfection and aesthetics should not be reached at the expense of communication (HCOB, August 30, 1965). Here Hubbard observed that art is "the least codified of human endeavours and the most misunderstood". In the following months and years, using the definition quoted above as his fixed point of departure, he continued to codify the field of art in detail, describing – among other things – art's artistic presentation, its message, rhythm, colour and equipment. These are only some of the subjects written about in Hubbard's book ART, which has since become a point of reference for the work of expert professionals. It is also the basic text for the Hubbard Art Course designed for those who would like to come closer to Scientology's aesthetic concepts and methods.

³ HCOB: Hubbard Communication Office Bulletin. The HCOBs are all written by L. Ron Hubbard with red ink on white paper. They are collected in the Red Volumes and are autonomous works with their own date and title. They can be part of thematic collections or books or reference packs for study courses.

According to Scientology, art is the quality of a particular wave involving all of an individual's 57 perceptions⁴. This product of communication vibrations can be found in paintings, in music, sculpture, literature, theatre and in the buildings we perceive and define as "beautiful". Art is the specific vibration leading to survival in the physical universe which goes beyond the eight dynamics indicated by Hubbard – the ninth survival dynamic preceding the tenth, which is ethics. Both, being outside the physical universe, enter it by means of artistic creation. (PDC second lecture)⁵. This ninth dynamic transcending the physical universe explains the absence, in the history of art, of a definition of art and aesthetics based on artistic works, thus the effect (the artistic product) rather than studying its cause.

2. *The Church of Scientology's spatial aesthetics*

Hubbard's elevated vision of art contrasts with the widespread assessment that Scientology Churches have stylistic characteristics which are exaggeratedly North American: monumental buildings, impressive settings for meetings,

⁴ They are the 57 human perceptions. "Scientology 0-8. The book of basics", by L. Ron Hubbard, New Era Publications International, Copenhagen, 2007; page 166.

⁵ PDC: Philadelphia Doctorate Course. The reference to the 9th and 10th Dynamics is contained in the second lecture of the Course held on December 1, 1952 and titled "E-meter, demonstration", published by Golden Era Productions, Los Angeles, California, 2003.

The reference to the 9th and 10th dynamics in that lecture is in the context of a lecture on the *Hubbard Electrometer*, specifically to ascertain the capacity of a person to create and destroy. People who can only create and not also capable to destroy are "crazy", like those who are capable only to destroy and never create.

"... theoretical sanity of this individual depends on being able to create and destroy anything, not just in terms of illusion..."

It is, nevertheless, a philosophy of life impossible in this universe (create and destroy everything). Use it as philosophy of life lead to the insanity as, according to Hubbard, happened to Nietzsche, who went crazy because of thinkingness rather than syphilis, *"...and so will anybody go mad that tries to use that as a philosophy of life, for the good reason that it is too unlimited in the absence of a knowledge of this universe to be executable. It' can't be executed."*

If would exist a person capable to apply it as philosophy of life, that person would go out of bounds (*unlimited*). This person would be outside the known physical universe *"... finds himself associated with a group and has actually what could be consider to be the Ninth Dynamic, which would be aesthetics, and the Tenth Dynamic, which would probably be ethics..."*

I thank professor Fabrizio d'Agostini for these strict bibliographic indications and for the direction in the interpretation of the 9th and 10th Dynamics.

enormous plasticized backdrops, wall-to-wall carpets, fiberglass, naturalistic pictures of subjects which are often fantastic or surreal, and large photographs – typically of Hubbard himself.

Every Scientology church aims to give form and life to Hubbard’s vision, and to be a place of worship, seeking and spiritual freedom; each once is the cornerstone of a new, better, world. This is why it tends towards majestic churches. «Once cathedrals were built with the materials, and according to the styles, of the age. Today there are new styles and technologies. They all reflect the civilisation and sensibility of their time. So too do Scientology churches»⁶.

Every Scientology building is set in time, with various criteria for its construction and for thinking about its future; but, as one interviewee noted, there is no hubris about how long it will last. Of course the building will last longer than the life of its faithful, of whom it represents the last trace. Even the builders of Gothic cathedrals left some trace of themselves in time so that their lives and message would be inscribed in stone for generations to come. Even Biblical tradition does not condemn this desire to leave some trace of oneself. According to the Torah one’s name, symbolizing the role one plays in history, should not be linked to an object in space (one should not “make a name for oneself” but should rather be given it by others); it is a divine promise that it will be kept alive throughout history.

No space in a church is just any old space in the world’s enormous extent and vacuum: it is a point of reference, almost as if it were the “world-centre”, in accordance with all religions’ visions where each sacred building is meant to be an *imago mundi* and aims to reflect the world in itself⁷. This symbolic value can be seen in all sacred architecture: a foray into the world of transcendence to introduce new elements into the natural world. But sacred buildings add a third actor to the man-nature relationship: mystery, the transcendent, God.

Building a church or choosing a building and converting it into a church – as often happens with Scientology Churches – possesses the same anthropological and existential wealth as *dwelling*. In his volume *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* (Building, Living, Thinking), Martin Heidegger traces the etymology of the German verb *bauen* (to build) back to the meaning “I am”⁸. Building, living and being are three facets of the same human reality and experience. *Living*,

⁶ Interview IV. The five qualitative interviews were carried out for this talk by members of the Church of Scientology of Turin.

⁷ For the concepts of “*imago mundi*” and “cosmogony” see Iliade M., *Il sacro e il profano*, pp. 41-45; 50-53.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, quoted by David Banon, Déborah Derhy, *Lo spirito dell’architettura. Dialogo o Babele?* Edizioni Qiqajon, 2014, p. 16.

inhabiting or dwelling mean the way people are on earth. Being a human means living and existing on earth as a mortal creature. The essence of building is to prepare a dwelling-space for gods and mortals, heaven and earth. Even a Scientology Church, apart from its architectural environment, is an image of artistic, spiritual, human action: the sacrality therein indicates what is “more” deriving from a multiple set of elements such as painting, music, rituals and – above all – architecture.

Many analyses have been carried out in relation to Scientology Churches’ impressiveness, forgetful of the fact that sacred spaces obey their function of orienting the faithful and breaking up the homogeneousness of the profane space. Every building, whether sacred or profane, organizes space in relation to other space-time elements. Everything done in a sacred space refers to the *beyond*, and every action celebrated therein evokes eschatological realisation of mystery and individual and collective future. The individual dimension of purification from all the elements of one’s “reactive mind” behind fear, insecurity and irrational behaviour prevails in the Church of Scientology: it is stretching towards illumination and reaching the *clear* state.

Once it is completed the building expresses its vocation and the part it aims to pay in space and time. «Every Church is, in the first place, a collective project allowing the assembly and involvement of different people - in spite of their differences - so that they all feel moved by the building.... Every Church aims to offer answers to human anguish, defining an objective to reach - to which all actions and everything which deviates from it are sacrificed»⁹.

3. *Spatial aesthetics and function*

The six sacred spaces in every Church of Scientology represent its symbolic and spiritual structure. The *chapel* is where public religious functions such as attributing names to the newly-born, weddings, funerals, ordination of ministers and Sunday sermons (which anybody who so desires may attend) are celebrated. There too a special kind of spiritual consultancy called “group processing” is dispensed, in which a Scientology minister helps a group to grow in spiritual knowledge. Scientology’s community events and important anniversaries are celebrated in the *auditorium*, which is also made available to groups and associations in the community where the Church of Scientology is located. The *Public Information Centre* is where anybody who wants to know

⁹ Interview II.

more can find out everything possible about L. Ron Hubbard, Dianetics and what Scientology has to offer individuals, groups and society. Five hundred videos and various *displays* present the Church of Scientology's principles, practices, beliefs and social activities. The Purification Program is administered in the *Purification Program Centre*; it is the first step on the "Bridge Towards Total Liberty". The Purification Program frees the individual from the negative effects of toxic substances and prepares him/her to take the next steps towards spiritual liberation. Ministers give individual spiritual consultancy in the *individual spiritual consultancy rooms*; called *auditing*, it is one of the two central practices on the spiritual-discovery itinerary. The *study halls* allow everybody to study Scientology - the second path towards knowledge and spiritual freedom.

4. *Diffusion of Scientology. Forms of membership*

a. *Circle of the community*

In Italy there are 12 Churches of Scientology, located in Brescia, Cagliari, Catania, Firenze, Milano, Monza, Novara, Padova, Pordenone, Roma, Torino and Verona. The National Italian Church is located in Vimodrone, near Milano and is the ecclesiastical institution that ensures compliance to the legacy and practices developed by L. Ron Hubbard, Founder of the religion. The management of these churches involves 965 staff members (religious workers). In addition, there are in Italy 220 staff members working in 20 missions that are present throughout the territory.

Aside from official church staff, there are about 50 members that are in-charge of various groups engaged in social activities, drug prevention campaigns, restoration of moral values and Civil Protection. There are also about 60 Scientology Ministers, providing spiritual counseling, though they are not on staff in any church or mission.

This adds up to 1295 people who, every week, engage in various activities, making it possible for churches and missions to deal with the spiritual advancement of its devotees - seven days a week, 365 days a year.

b. *Active members*

The number of Scientology members coming weekly to receive spiritual services in the churches, (i.e. the study of the Scriptures and spiritual counseling

provided by ministers of the religion) average to about 2.900 a week. In addition, there are about 10.000 who come for the same reasons, but not so regularly.

c. Sympathizers

About 250.000 individuals receive periodically by mail the Church of Scientology info letter of their area. There are as well some annual events which involve non-scientologists. One of these is the Happiness Marathon, which is held in Torino: last year, at the third edition, it was organized by 100 persons and attended by 500. Scientology Churches organize every year charity events as well as other artistic, cultural and informative events which, altogether, involve about 1000 more persons.

5. Scientology evolution

The peculiar evolution of Scientology is reflected by taking into account the many activities - sometimes secular - that are sponsored by the various churches since years. Many scientologists work every week for the improvement of their community with social education campaigns and betterment programs that are inspired by the discoveries and works of the Founder L. Ron Hubbard. The main are:

- Educational campaign against the use of drugs, which reaches thousands of young people. Every week Italian volunteers engage in various types of activities, distributing info flyers on both, short and long-term effect of the most common drugs such as marijuana, hashish, ecstasy, cocaine, heroin, etc..
- The public information campaign on human rights, informing on the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration by distributing flyers and posting public utility video announcements.
- Some scientologists are more interested mental health abuses, and have created the CCDU, a non-profit organization that informs public opinion and authorities with the purpose of defending citizens - both inside and outside of psychiatry.
- PRO.CIVI.CO.S - acronym for Protezione Civile della Comunità di Scientology, was founded in 2001. It is made of volunteers that are ready to operate in case of emergencies, in coordination with the National Civil Protection. They have helped after the 2002 earthquake in Molise, in Sri

Lanka after the 2004 tsunami, in Abruzzo after the 2009 earthquake and during the last seismic event that devastated Amatrice and the adjacent villages.

The number of people involved is ever-growing, as well as the number of persons that are reached and informed on these subjects. Every year over 450.000 individual receive information material or watch public service announcements carrying the message of Scientology campaigns.

This figure does not include the persons visiting the official Italian web-sites such as: www.scientologyreligion.it, www.ironhubbard.it, www.scientology.it, www.dianetics.it; as well as those of individual churches and main missions, or the official sites of specific campaigns - Torino and Milano Pro Civicos, no-drug and human rights.

In addition to the above, various web sites are available online concerning the activities promoted by associations which are different, and legally separated, from the Church of Scientology but are nonetheless inspired by the secular works of L. Ron Hubbard, in the fields of drug re-habilitation (seven centers in Italy called *Narconon*), recovery of criminals (*Criminon*), literacy programs using the study technology developed by L. Ron Hubbard, or the website of *The Way to Happiness Foundation* which disseminate the non-confessional moral code contained in the Hubbard's work *The Way to Happiness*, and WISE (*World Institute of Scientology Enterprises*), promoting the management technology developed by Hubbard.

An important and recent form of Scientology evolution is visible in the promotion of conventions and study seminars in cooperation with university institutions. The most recent one was held in the Piemonte Regional Council Palace on December 1 and 2, 2016: it was titled "Forms of contemporary atheism". Organized by the Observatory on Religious Pluralism of the Buddhist Information Center and by the National Church of Scientology of Italy, the convention discussed atheism with the intent of giving a scientific contribution to religion science, with the attendance and contribution of several scholars and researchers. Atheism was defined by Canadian philosopher Richard Kearney to identify the attitude of re-found religious belief starting from a condition of uncertainty and research. The interest in modern spirituality is to re-find the divine starting from atheism. The very same quote from Nietzsche: «God is dead: we, men, killed Him and must now be worth what we did» implies the assumption of responsibility and the need to take upon us the

problem of the impossibility to find the ultimate and definitive meaning of life and the universe. This condition may only be faced if one feels a “pietas” for the weakness of human condition, thus opening one’s heart to others as they too share the same finite-ness. The convention’s proceedings are being printed right now, and they represent another Scientology contribution to the development of scientific arguments pertaining to the deep changes of contemporary religions.

Luigi Berzano
Turin University

Diffusion of Scientology

Three forms of membership

1- Circle of the community

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Religious workers of the 13 churches | 965 |
| Religious workers of the 20 missions: | 220 |
| Volunteers In Charge of the social activities: | 50 |
| Scientology Ministers delivering spiritual counseling outside the churches and missions: | 60 |
| | <u>Total: 1295</u> |

2- Ambit of the active members

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Scientologists attending the religious services weekly: | 2.900 |
| Scientologists attending the religious services in more than one year: | 10.000 |
| | <u>Total: 12.900</u> |

3- Ambit of the sympathizers

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Non-Scientologists involved in yearly events: | 1.500 |
| People receiving the mag of the churches of their zone: | 250.000 |
| | <u>Total: 251.500</u> |

GRAND TOTAL: 265.695