

Rethinking God in the Interspace.

Interculturality as a Locus Theologicus

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Exploring interspaces is a risky endeavor. It challenges us to cross, or rather to shift, borders into unfamiliar realms, it forces us to acknowledge that there is 'more' beyond what we know. It is an ambivalent 'more' we discover in the in-between – many move into the unexplored spaces beyond to discover riches (both literally and metaphorically), but for many, the journey ends in a loss – loss of security, loss of means, even loss of life (let me invoke the myth of El Dorado as an experiment in opening up an interspace of invigorating wealth between sterile civilization and lethal wilderness – a deadly experiment for many involved, especially for those innocent).

When theologians venture into interspaces, the ambivalence of the in-between affects headstones of Christian identity: In the interspaces, rivaling myths of origin and originality are discovered (as shown by Roger Vanzila Mushi in his research on Japanese Hidden Christians, who conceive of themselves as 'Ancient Christians', older even than the Catholic Church in Japan – and, hence, more authentic). In the interspaces, traditions turn out to be invented (a particularly illuminative example of a host of other instances is Aron Engberg's account of prayers practiced in a Christian Zionist community in Jerusalem, all introduced by '*Let us pray as Yeshua might have prayed*' – a phrase which simultaneously constructs and undermines lineage and tradition). In the interspaces, power structures and their social implications are made visible in the one Body of Christ (e.g. when Babatunde Adedibu recalls memories of racial exclusion from church communities in the Windrush era in the UK and thus points to borders cutting through the universal brother- und sisterhood in Christ). In the interspaces, identity markers and their functions become less clearly defined (rituals, ceremonies, belief systems are by no means clear-cut affairs in Anne-Christine Hornborg's review of secular spiritualities in contemporary Sweden).¹ The interspaces, then, are more often than not experienced as a threat to Christian identity; in the in-between we seem to lose what it means to be Christian. And yet – or maybe because of the threat – the interspaces challenge us to find new ways

¹ References are made to papers given at the Lund mission studies open seminar, 20th March 2012 and published in this volume of SMT.

of defining Christianity. Out of a loss, we have to find new ways of experiencing, celebrating and conceptualizing God. Being at a loss, we might discover unfamiliar, unknown God-talks. In the interspaces, ambivalence might turn out to be a resource, loss might turn into new, unexpected riches.

In this article I would like to offer a suggestion of what it could mean to talk about interspaces in a theological way. The questions guiding this theological exploration of the interspace are: What are the interspaces we are talking about from a philosophical (more precisely, from a cultural studies) point of view and which implications do they have for our God-talk? How, in which context, have interspaces become a theological challenge and how is this challenge approached theologically? In other, more technical words – how has interculturality become a locus theologicus? I will tackle these questions in three steps. First, I will approach the interspace from a postcolonial perspective and will tentatively map the space in-between. Second, I will trace the challenges posed to theology in the interspace. In a third step, I will offer a constructive suggestion of how we could draw on the interspace as an epistemological resource for theology.²

1. Interspaces – a postcolonial perspective

A postcolonial perspective will help us to describe the ‘nature’ of interspaces, and, as we will see, this ‘nature’ is by no means fixed, stable, or essentialist. The postcolonial situation is marked by a stark critique of eurocentrism – and in close connection to this critique – by a re/construction of postcolonial identities. In postcolonies, these identifications are constructed in clear delineation from colonial attributions; in their opposition, they remain within the binary logic of the colonial discourse, but shift and displace the entanglement of self and other, of colonizer and colonized, as it was constructed before independence. In the postcolonial situation, cultural differences can no longer be hierarchised in the same way as they were by colonial discourses and they can no longer be suppressed in the same way by its military power (which is not to say that there are no identity hierarchies and their very concrete political consequences any more). Hence, the plurality of cultures becomes irrepressible, and has a backwash on Western self-understanding as well: it makes it impossible for the West to conceive of itself as universal. Gianni Vattimo points to this displacement of Western identity as follows:

“The West is living through an explosive situation, not only with regard to other cultural universes (such as the ‘third world’), but internally as well, as an apparently irresistible pluralization renders a unilinear view of the world and history impossible.”³

² In parts, I have already developed the argument of this article in Gruber 2011.

³ Vattimo, 1992, 5.

The cultural plurality emerging out of the postcolonial situation thus discloses the cultural contingency of all constructions of reality and it exposes the limits of knowledge. It thereby questions the epistemological presuppositions of European modernity – it undermines a universal concept of rationality, the sovereignty of the subject and universally conceived meta-narratives. This postcolonial critique of modernity, however, does not aim at new ‘neutral’ narratives, which finally ‘tell the real story’. Rather, it highlights the contingency and particularity of all production of knowledge and identity: Postcolonial deconstruction is, as Gayatri C. Spivak puts it, “... not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced.”⁴ Truths, meanings, identities are not absolute (literally ‘detached’), but are always tied (‘attached’) to a discourse – a system of signs producing and negotiating meaning; there is no ‘outside’ the discourse – “il n’y a pas dehors text”⁵. Moreover, discourses do not exist as abstract ideas in our mind, but they always have a material, graspable dimension: in order to produce meaning, symbols and signs are medialisated and they are staged. An epistemological focus on the production of meaning and knowledge in the performance of materialized symbols constitutes a new paradigm: the cultural turn.

The cultural turn has ramifications for the concept of culture itself. We can no longer maintain an elitist understanding of culture, such as ‘culture as the fine arts’. Culture is not a separate, compartmentalized dimension of society, rather it is the sphere of production and negotiation of meaning with symbols. A classic, often quoted definition of this semiotic concept of culture was formulated by Clifford Geertz:

“Believing ... that [wo]man is an animal suspended in webs of significance [s]he him[her]self has spun, I take culture to be those webs ... and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an *interpretative* in search of meaning.”⁶

The semiotic approach conceptualizes cultures as contextual entities with clear borders to other spheres of meaning production. Cultural anthropology, then, is a hermeneutical science which can ‘read’ the structures of meaning from outside – Clifford Geertz actually talks about the cultural anthropologist as ‘peeping over the shoulders’ into a stranger’s culture.⁷

In the 1980s, the Writing Culture⁸ debate seriously questioned and undermined the idea that we can read the cultural processes of meaning production from an outsider’s neutral viewpoint. Rather than describing cultures, anthropology constructs cultures by describing them, and it thereby creates

⁴ Spivak 1994, 278.

⁵ Derrida 2004, 158f.

⁶ Geertz 1975, 5.

⁷ Geertz 1975, 452.

⁸ Clifford 2008b.

necessarily partial truths: truths which are only partially true, but also truths which are not neutral, but partial and interested.⁹ A key work in this debate was Edward Said's groundbreaking seminal study *Orientalism*, in which he traces the production of the 'Orient' in the western discourse of orientalism.¹⁰

The writing culture debate further complicates the concept of cultural identity: it is not an essence, but a discourse, in which meaning is constantly being negotiated. Cultural identities emerge out of processes of mutual representation:

"Cultural identities are the ... unstable points of identification ..., which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'."¹¹

Emerging out of discourses of negotiation, identity is always closely related to its other; cultures are not independent, but have always already negotiated their identity in delineation from others. Cultural identity is not a given, stable, unchangeable entity, but it is broken by that which it excludes as its other. In cultural identities, the other is present as an excluded, it is inscribed into identity as an absence – an absence which nevertheless remains constitutive for identity. Here, the duality of identity/difference, of inside/outside, of self/other breaks down. The idea of clear and given boundaries between cultures can no longer be maintained: cultures are not pure and independent from each other, but constitute themselves in cultural contacts. Identity is not the opposite of difference, but always marked and informed by differentiations and the ambivalence of the process of emergence itself. Cultural differences are not simply present, but result from processes of differentiation. Cultural identity emerges out of discriminatory practices of cultural identification, by processes of delineation, in which each cultural enunciation embodies the other-within-the-self:

"No culture is full unto itself, no culture is plainly plenitudinous, not only because there are other cultures which contradict its authority, but also because its own symbol-forming activity, its own interpellation in the process of representation, language, signification and meaning-making, always underscores the claim to an originary, holistic, organic identity."¹²

Against this backdrop, cultures cannot be thought of as not autonomous spheres, but they are inseparably intertwined. To put it in a nutshell: cultures are intercultural – cultural identity is forged out of the interspace in intense negotiations.

This complex concept of cultural identity allows us to tentatively map the coordinates of the interspace. The interspace is not a 'third' e/merging out of two distinct entities. With Homi Bhabha,

⁹ Clifford 2008a.

¹⁰ Said 1979.

¹¹ Hall 1990, 226.

¹² Bhabha 1990, 210.

we take the opposite starting point – the interspace is "the 'third space', which enables other positions to emerge".¹³ The interspace is not an ontological category, it has no spatial dimension, it is not graspable. Rather, it exists only *ex negativo* in cultural differentiations, which create absences of the other in each cultural identity. The in-between of cultures is a *space of difference* and a *space of absence*. It is not situated between two cultures reconciling the differences between them but it is the conflictive space of mutual differentiations. It is embodied by the other-within, which is present as a difference, as an absence. Hence, interculturality as an epistemological category "is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures [...] in a dialectical play of 'recognition'"¹⁴. Instead, the *epistemological insight of the interspace is the articulation of differences* which makes visible the excluded, the unsaid, the hidden, the other within cultural identities.

The interspace is here mapped as a deconstructivist epistemology. Tracing the interspaces of identity constructions is, to take up Spivak's thought, "... not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how [identities] are produced." An interspatial account of identities does not offer a neutral narrative, it does not 'finally tell the real story'. Rather than replacing a narrative of identity with the 'real story', it displaces the entanglement of self and other and thus reveals its contingency. Hence, an interspatial epistemology by no means aims at doing away with identities, nor is it only applicable to marginal, 'weak' identities. Venturing into the interspace undermines borders we perceive to be stable, but it does not dissolve borders. Instead, in articulating differentiations, the interspace makes space for 'other' identity narratives which have been suppressed and 'forgotten' by the hegemonial account. The plurality of narratives rendered visible in the interspace displays the intense negotiations of border drawings and thus undermines any claim for an unquestioned, single authority of an identity narrative. Hence, an interspatial epistemology is a critical approach, which – always in hindsight – traces the constructedness of identities we perceive to be natural. It makes visible that identities are not stable, essentialist entities but discourses emerging out of powerful in- and exclusions and thus questions and subverts the power structures on which these identity constructions are based.

2. Interspaces – a theological challenge

In the interspace, a new narrative of the history of Christianity emerges; different, much more complex stories have to be told. A de/scription – a writing – of Christianity in the interspace can no longer search for an unchangeable, pure essence of what it means to be Christian. Rather, we perform genealogies of Christianity which trace the discourses of its identity construction: these

¹³ Bhabha 1990, 212.

¹⁴ Bhabha 1994, 113f.

genealogies show how Christian identity has been negotiated in different contexts; they make visible how a range of different 'others' have inscribed themselves into Christian identity; they unravel the power plays at play in the construction of its identity and they unbury forgotten and repressed traditions. In short, an interspatial account uncovers a plurality of Christianities – in deconstructivist retrospect, Christianity has always already been forged in the interspace.

At first sight, such an interspatial narrative creates problems for a theological discourse of Christianity. From a theological perspective, Christian identity is the negotiation of the Jesus Christ event which is invested with universality: it is the centre of the Christian belief that Jesus the Christ has universal relevance, that he embodies God and God's universal will of salvation for all human beings. From the very beginning of theological reflection, this universal claim has been expressed and mediated in ecclesiological terms: universality is theologically connected to the one, catholic, apostolic church.

An interspatial deconstruction of Christianity raises problems for this theological discourse on Christian identity: it reveals the contingency of its normative claims, it incorporates plurality into its unity and it locates its catholicity and apostolicity in concrete and disparate contexts. To put it succinctly, the universal claim raised by Christianity is contrasted with and questioned by its particular formulations.

So there are theological issues at stake in the interspace: How – in view of the unavoidable particularity of knowledge and of identity – can we raise a universal claim? How can we outline the unity of disparate, rivaling and even contradictory Christianities? How can we stay faithful to the normative statements of Christian identity after its deconstruction in the interspace? For theology, these are touchstone questions. It conceives of itself as a mediation between the normative statements of Christian tradition and the epistemological paradigm of its respective time. Its major task is a mutual translation between these two poles of its self-understanding, and in order to be faithful to both of them, a theology in the interspace has to outline new ways of thinking about central theological concepts, such as universality, tradition, unity, history, and even God.

In order to tackle this task, it is essential to note the change of genre, the change of language game which occurs when we raise these questions. A theological approach to Christian identity is formulated as a witness; it gives a *testimony of a historical event* – and by focusing on a historical event as the foundation of Christian identity, I draw on the *topos of incarnation* for my further theological argumentation.

There are philosophical theorizations of the historical event which stress the interpretational character of historiography and of history, but still presuppose a moment of immediacy, of absoluteness, of detachedness, *within* the event, *within* history. Paul Ricoeur is one of these

philosophers. In the "Hermeneutics of Testimony"¹⁵, he points to the hermeneutical character of the witness, which is always already an interpretation of a historical event and therefore marked by a hermeneutical break from the event. The event itself, however, Ricoeur maintains, stands outside this chain of broken interpretations. It is detached from the testimonial negotiations of its meaning and provides absolute meaning detached from any interpretational processes:

"The absolute declares itself here and now. In testimony there is an immediacy of the absolute without which there would be nothing to interpret. This immediacy functions as origin, as initium, on this side of which we can go no further. Beginning there, interpretation will be the endless mediation of this immediacy. But without it interpretation will forever be only an interpretation of interpretation. ... Testimony is the anagke stenai of interpretation. A hermeneutic without testimony is condemned to an infinite regress in a perspectivism with neither beginning nor end. ... For the self-manifestation of the absolute here and now indicates the end of the infinite regress of reflection. The absolute shows itself. In this shortcut of the absolute and its presence is constituted an experience of the absolute. It is only about this that testimony testifies."¹⁶

While Ricoeur invests the historical event with absolute meaning (a postulation which, in the end, is itself an interpretational act) and thus cuts short the hermeneutical chain in depriving the event of its contingency, Michel Foucault offers a more radically hermeneutical approach to history and to historical events. Historical events, Foucault says, are not predetermined only to be found and interpreted. Rather than trying to excavate historical meaning detached from its contingencies, historians have to ask different questions – they have to venture into the interspaces of identity constructions and reality formations:

"How can the indivisibility of knowledge and power in the context of interactions and multiple strategies induce both singularities, fixed according to their conditions of acceptability, and a field of possibilities, of openings, indecisions, reversals and possible dislocations which make them fragile, temporary, and which turn these effects into events, nothing more, nothing less than events..."¹⁷

Events are never found to be absolute, detached from their interpretations, but they emerge out of processes of interpretations – Foucault coins the term "eventualizations", "event-makings" to draw our attention to the fact that it is already an interpretational act to perceive a certain historical constellation as an event¹⁸. The event is not predetermined, it is not situated outside the

¹⁵ Ricoeur 1980.

¹⁶ Ricoeur 1980, 144.

¹⁷ Foucault 1997, 60. This essay was originally a lecture given at the French Society of Philosophy on 27 May 1978.

¹⁸ '[Eventualisation] means making visible a singularity at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait or an obviousness that imposes itself uniformly on all. To show that things weren't 'necessary as all that'; it wasn't as a matter of course that mad people came to be regarded as mentally ill; it wasn't self-evident that the only thing to be done with a criminal was to lock them up; it wasn't self-evident that the causes of illness were to be sought through individual examination of bodies; and so on. A breach of self-evidence, of those self-evidences on which our knowledges, acquiescences and

hermeneutical process in order to give rise to interpretations. Instead, it emerges out of discursive practices according to certain conditions of acceptability while at the same time undermining and questioning these conditions, making them fragile and revealing their contingency. Hence, there is no absolute meaning present in history; rather, the event itself is ambivalent and does not exist apart, detached, from its interpretations – its meaning is always already marked by a hermeneutical break, it is broken, absent and withdrawn in its interpretations.

This radically hermeneutical approach to historical events has enormous theological ramifications if theology is to fully acknowledge its own incarnational foundations, if it really takes the starting point of its God-talk in the historical event witnessed and interpreted as incarnation. To expose theology to the irreducible contingency of a historical event bears considerable theological risk. It roots God-talk in the ambivalence of historical events and thus deprives it of any unambiguousness. The hermeneutical break does not separate God's revelation in history from its interpretative testimonies; rather, as a historical event constituted by interpretations, *revelation is an interpretative act*¹⁹, in which God's presence is withdrawn in the hermeneutical break of its interpretations. Hence, the event of revelation does not offer a presence of meaning, but indicates its meaning via a hermeneutical break – its meaning is withdrawn in its interpretations. When we give witness to God as present in history, events happen which do not manifest God's unbroken presence but reveal God's presence as a withdrawal. The hermeneutical character of the historical event undermines the opposition of presence and absence; they are not mutually exclusive but condition each other in the interpretation of the revelatory event: as a historical event constituted by interpretations, revelation takes place as a hermeneutical withdrawal. *God is present by way of God's absence*. For theology to take seriously the contingency and ambivalence of historical events implies that the hermeneutical brokenness of revelation is not a flaw of Christian God-talk undermining an experience of God's presence; rather, it is its very condition, which allows to talk about the presence of God in history in terms of God's absence. The constitutive hermeneutical withdrawal of God's presence does not foreclose theology, but conditions it.²⁰

practices rest, this is the first theoretico-political function of eventalization. It means uncovering the procedure of causal multiplication, analyzing an event according to the multiple processes that constitute it. As a way of lightening the weight of causality, 'eventalization' thus works by constructing around the singular event analyzed as process a 'polygon' or rather a 'polyhedron' of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never properly be taken as finite. One has to proceed by progressive, necessarily incomplete saturation.' Foucault and Lotringer 1996, 277.

Another prime example is the Jesus-Christ-event, a historical incident which by many of Jesus' and our contemporaries has not been perceived as an event at all.

¹⁹ Hoff 2007, 126.

²⁰ For Michel de Certeau, this negative, never-to-be-resolved dialectic of manifestation and withdrawal is the foundational grammar of Christian God-talk, "The early documents of the Christ event give us in writing only the reverse side of what is essential. They all speak of an event which they efface by substituting different consequences for it. But they manifest the nature of this event by virtue of the fact that they refer to it as that

As witness of a historical event, theology is a hermeneutical-constructive language game. Christian God-talk is performed by way of interpretations. It does not have an established ground from which to speak because its founding event is always already withdrawn in testimonial theologies – speaking about it implies concealing it in a broken, never-quite-full interpretation. It does not have an unchangeable language because its testimonies are interpretations and, therefore, transformations. Not having our own place to stand on, we can perform our God-Talk only by standing on other places and drawing on their languages in order to interpret, negotiate and express the meaning of the founding event of our faith. In this displacement of others' languages, we produce a multitude of interpretations, a plurality of Christianities. Hence, a closer look shows that a de/description of Christianity in the interspace does not actually contradict a theological narrative of Christian identity. The challenges posed by an interspatial deconstruction are met by a theological outline: It is also at the very core of Christian tradition to acknowledge the contingency and plurality of its God-talk.

In terms of identity politics, such an outline of identity is risky. When Christian identity lives up to the ambiguity and contingency of its normative founding event, it produces internal heterogeneity and blurred borders to other identities and thus jeopardizes two fundamental interests of all identity politics: in general, identity narratives strive to emerge out of the interspace with clear-cut borders and stable homogeneity. Against this backdrop, theology has to negotiate a tension: it has to construct a functioning Christian identity which nevertheless does not betray its normative ambivalence.

In tackling this tension, theology has two options. One option is to ignore its constitutive contingency and ambivalence. In not making visible the interpretativity of the theological language game, the heterogeneity of Christian identity is reduced and an unambiguous identity can be produced. However, such a problematically unproblematic construction of Christian identity cannot live up to the theological norm negotiated in the witness of incarnation. It is not able to balance the witness of the presence of God in history with God's absence in its interpretative testimonies. It runs the risk of pretending to have God at its disposal and of taking the place of what it set out to represent. A theology which does not make visible its own contingency does not point to the presence of God via God's absence, but reduces God to its specific, particular and limited God-talk. Moreover, such an identity construction cannot react productively to an interspatial deconstruction of the history of Christianity. It cannot integrate such a critique constructively in its theological narrative, but can only oppose it in a binary logic of true/false. Such a default rendering a non-theological approach as false

which 'permits' new possibilities. ... The Christian language begins with the disappearance of its 'author'. ... Thus the event is lost precisely in what it authorizes. It somehow dies to its own historical specificity, but this happens in the very discoveries which it provokes." de Certeau 2007, 144.

undercuts the self-understanding of theology as a mediation between the normative statements of tradition with the epistemological paradigm of its respective time.

The other option for theology is to make its contingent interpretativity the starting point of its God-talk. We then set out to construct a theology which makes visible the hermeneutical break of its epistemology – of its knowledge of God – also in the way it speaks about God. We have to outline a theological epistemology which reflects, represents and displays in its God-talk its constitutive particularity and perceptivity.

3. Interspaces – a locus theologicus

In order to do so, the problems outlined by an interspatial approach to Christian identity can be turned into a theological resource. In order not to ignore the hermeneutical break in the theological language game, the breaks, fissures and ambiguities of Christian identities unburied by a critique in the interspace gain theological quality. The conflictive plurality of Christianity discovered in the interspace thus becomes a constructive orientation of Christian God-talk. If not repressed and concealed, it displays the contingency of Christian identity and thus maps an epistemological ground for a theology which neither ignores the interpretational character of the theological language game nor the deconstructivist epistemology of the interspace. The interspace offers a locus for a theological epistemology which does not hide the deconstructivist and theological breaks of Christian identity.

Above, the interspace has been mapped as a space of difference and a space of absence. It has to be stressed again that the space in-between is not a tangible third emerging out of two distinct entities. Rather, the interspace is formed by discourses of cultural differentiations, by which the excluded other inscribes itself deeply as an absence into one's own identity. As a space of absence, the space in-between is graspable only by the differences between identifications. The epistemological value of the interspace, then, is the articulation of differences which reveal the excluded and silenced within identifications.

Against this backdrop, differences become indispensable for a theology in the interspace. If the differences inscribed into Christianity are not concealed but articulated, they can point to the unsaid and excluded in each of its identifications and make visible the interpretational character of the testimonies for the Christ event. The articulation of differences thus discloses the unavoidable particularity of Christian testimonies. But how can we use differences for a theology in the interspace? A dialectic approach which aims for an overcoming, an 'Aufhebung' proves to be inadequate since it undercuts the complexity of both the theological and the postcolonial levels of

reflection. From a postcolonial perspective, the interspace is not a space modeled on the ideal of *e pluribus unum*. Rather than resolving differences, the space in-between emerges out of differentiations. Theologically speaking, a dialectical perspective can conceive of differences between particular testimonies only in terms of a lack to be overcome by sublating the differences into one universal image of God. It thereby dismisses the fundamental hermeneutical break of all God-talk.

Rather than drawing on such a dialectic logic of 'both – and', an interspatial theology employs a logic of 'neither-nor', in which the particularities of each 'Christianity' giving witness to the presence of God refers to a deeper absence. Michel de Certeau outlines such a logic of an interspatial Christian God-talk:

"It is not the logic of 'the one or the other'. (This kind of structure situates the 'truth' as one of two contrary terms: for example, either circumcised or uncircumcised; either Jew or Greek; either Jewish or heathen; either clean or unclean; ...) It is not the logic of 'the one and the other'. (This 'logic' pretends to overcome differences, to give a synthesizing statement, to reconcile all the former positions within a new and particular truth.) It is the logic of 'neither the one nor the other'. (For example: neither Jewish nor heathen; neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, but spiritually circumcised; neither clean nor unclean, but pure in heart; neither the tradition of the Pharisees nor the power of Pilate, but the reference to another kind of 'truth'; ...) This dialogue is a movement. It creates, proportioned to a given term and to its juxtaposed contrary, a third hypothesis but without determining it. It opens a future but without fixing that future."²¹

When theologies make visible their respective particularity, their plural witnesses do not add up to an "epistemological catholicity"²²; their different perspectives are not united into an unproblematic presence. Articulating differences in the logic of 'neither-nor', Christian God-talks disclose that "it is impossible for any one to be the whole, the 'central', or the unique authority"²³ and thereby reveal their founding event *ex negativo*, referring to its presence via a withdrawal:

"Thus, the initial event becomes an *inter-locution*: something *said-between*, implied by all the Christian languages but given by no one of them. Not that it is untouchable and taboo. But the founder disappears; he is impossible to grasp and 'hold', to the extent that he is incorporated and takes on meaning in a plurality of 'Christian' experiences, operations, discoveries, and inventions. ... The Christian event is thus an *inter-locution* ... insofar as it is neither said nor given anywhere in particular, except in the form of those interrelations constituted by the network of expressions which would not exist without it. ... With this ... expression - 'not without' – we have the most modest, and also the most rigorous, formulation of the relation between the plurality of Christian languages and the 'inter-locution' which they designate. It is, if you will, the negative side of a truth objectively announced in the manner of an absence."²⁴

In articulating differences – *in the interspace* – particular theologies make space for the present absence of God. The interspace, then, turns into a locus theologicus, a theological resource, which

²¹ de Certeau 2007, 154.

²² Cf. Seckler 1988, 102f.

²³ de Certeau 2007, 148.

²⁴ de Certeau 2007, 145f.

guides and informs our way of knowing and conceptualizing God. Hence, I sketch an interspatial approach to theology not as an independent theological discipline, but as an epistemological project informing our God-talk across the disciplines. As a theological epistemology, this approach is not outlined as an *interspatial theology*, but rather as a *theology in the interspace*, a *theology done in an interspatial way*. I use 'interspatial' not as an adjective added to theology but as an adverb informing the way we *do* theology – in order to express how we *do* theology, how we talk about God – namely in such a way that we make visible our fundamental shortcomings of doing so.

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