The Norwegian *stavkirke* and the *spazio anzi*.
Continuity and discontinuity in social representation and in myth

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Abstract

The *stavkirke* is a medieval church build entirely of wood, common in Norway during the early Christianisation of the country. In a perspective of discontinuity, these churches marked the country's change from Viking paganism to Christianity. An interpretation based on emotional continuity, put forward in this article, sees the *stavkirke* as an important example of the complex transition between paganism, present in the country's farming cultures, and Christianity imposed by the rulers who intended to achieve the unification of the country under a single religion. An analysis of the structure of the church allows the formulation of hypotheses about the confusion of pagan and Christian categories in various parts of the *stavkirke*.
A psychoanalytical reading is given of the relation between continuity and discontinuity, which the authors believe is fundamental to the "spazio anzi", that is, the confusion of categories that enables the mind's unconscious mode to be expressed and then defined in discontinuous, and therefore historical, expressions. The *spazio anzi* is proposed as the dynamic grounding cultural change.

Key words: Medieval, Norway, unconscious, continuity/discontinuity, cultures, collusion.

Introduction

Over twenty years ago we put forward the notion of *spazio anzi* (Carli & Paniccia, 1984) as the dynamic grounded on the confusion of categories, which allows change and underlies social action. "It is the case of the medieval artist who mixes classical motifs and medieval themes or vice versa; it is the case of Christopher Columbus who used mythical elements mixed with current knowledge to justify his exploration. It is this confusion of categories that characterises the idea of "anzi". It embodies an inextricable conjunction of past, present and future that guides the action, giving it that sense of newness and senselessness as it appears to those not involved in the phenomenon in question." (p. 110).
With the idea of *spazio anzi* we wanted to stress the importance, in terms of the adaptation and the dynamic of change, of the confusion of categories governing change in cultural contexts. This change does not necessarily entail development and at any rate it is based on cultural processes marked by collusive dynamics organised by "old" and "new" shared categories. With *spazio anzi* we wanted to stress the importance of continuity in cultural change; a continuity marked by confusion and incoherence where there can be the coexistence of models, ways of interpreting the real, contradictory affective symbolisations evoking ambiguous emotions. It is an ambiguity deriving from the coexistence of aspects that, in the drastic interpretation dictated by discontinuity, are defined as contrasting, incompatible and contradictory; such aspects seem to require a decisive position to be taken and choices to be made.
Confusional continuity is an important part of emotional experience, of the emotional symbolisation of the real. The discontinuity that seeks to mark the differences, the pauses, the before and after in separately defined temporal sequences, tending to be assessed in relation to criteria of progress, is typical of the systems of power that base their identity on being different, original, unmistakable

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and better than others. The world we live in is interwoven with objects, events and thoughts that have the primary purpose of resolving the original ambiguity with which the mind's unconscious mode of being symbolises reality. But it also contains objects, symbols, myths and contexts that retain the features of the original ambiguity. In a work from 2007, one of the present authors proposed the Pulcinella by Domenico Tiepolo (Carli, 2007) as an example of art exalting ambiguity. The Norwegian *stavkirker*[1] that we will discuss in this article, are also to our way of thinking an example of works with high symbolic content, made in categorical confusion and therefore exemplifying the *spazio anzi* and its productive potentialities. It is not only the *stavkirke* that is presented as an ambiguous object; it is also the conflict experienced by historians, archeologists, art critics, architects and visitors to these medieval wooden churches unique in their kind, and used to "make sense of" these Norwegian churches. It is as if the emotional contact with an ambiguous object on the one hand, the scientistic need to overcome ambiguity through empirical research "data" on the other, contributed to the formulation of conflictual hypotheses that can be important examples of what also happens in the fields of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and scientific and cultural debate in these domains. We will come back to this at the end of this article. Let us now look at the *stavkirke*.

The question of the stavkirke

At the time of their construction, which went from 1050 to 1300, there were more than a thousand of these churches, scattered over an area of difficult terrain interspersed amongst dense mountain ranges, fiords, lakes and small flat areas throughout Norway. For climatic reasons, the *stavkirker* that are still visible are located in the center and south of the country, in the area from Trondheim in the north to the coast of the North Sea in the south. They were numerous and small, like the out-of-the-way communities that built them. They flourished and then in 1350 the Black Death struck like a giant broom – according to some it democratised Norway – killing over half the population and eighty percent of the aristocracy. Lands and churches were abandoned; many were lost and fell down. After that, with Danish domination and through German merchants from Bergen who had also brought beautiful wooden saints that the new order expelled from the church, came the Reformation. With the Reformation there had to be pulpits, altars and comfortable pews so the faithful could sit; gone were the times when during the short masses the men stood on the right and the women stood on the left, while only the old and the sick sat on a single bench running around the walls. With the Reformation one stayed in church at length, reading psalms and scriptures; the Bible had been translated and printed. The *stavkirker* were adapted: windows were made, the small high oculi, previously the only opening towards the outside apart from the doors, were almost totally lost, and with them the mystical closed darkness that protected from the cold coming in through those small openings without glass. The 17th and 18th centuries colored and painted all they could, every corner, every pillar, in the feast of rosemaling that today melds so well with its designs and now faded bold colors, with the wood, as at Nore or at Uvdal, where even the great heads sculpted at the top of the support posts have pink cheeks and huge dark eyes. In the 19th century the need was felt for space, the single nave was no longer enough, the churches grew, spreading into a cross plan and the place for the organ was added. To do this they had to dismantle the low porticos that in the middle ages had run all around the building, and that are such a feature of the churches that managed to preserve them. Under that portico people stopped after mass to chat, and the unbaptised stayed there during the service; from that portico the lepers followed the proceedings through a spyhole looking onto the choir, and the 19th century restorations that sought to restore the "real and the authentic", quickly put them back up around the churches that were being restored. An authentic antique portico, harmoniously crooked, shiny from use and pale with time, is to be found in the stavkirke at Rollag. But the most determined enemy, armed with the desire to destroy, arrived in the 19th century, hygienist and conformist, and extended, cleaned out and made usable – in 1851 a law regulated the space according to the

[1] The Norwegian singular is *stavkirke*; the plural in Norwegian *stavkirker*. We prefer the Norwegian term to its English translation "stave church". The reader of this article might understand the reasons for this choice.

number of parishioners – and of the 180 *stavkirker* that had survived the Black Death, fires, wars and tempests, there remained 28, protected by their extreme isolation, or by the particular beauty that seduced some enlightened artists and intellectuals, who bought them, created associations to protect them and sometimes even restored them personally, as the architect Peters Andreas Blix did in the late 1800s with Hopperstad. Since then the *stavkirker* have been preserved as the most important monuments in Norway: the oldest, Urnes, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. This has actually placed them in further danger since Fantoft, demolished in the village of Fortun in Sognefjord and rebuilt in an open air museum near Bergen in order to preserve it better, was burnt down by an arsonist: most probably by a "goth" artist in search of an easy transgression in the 1990s.

They are therefore medieval buildings whose value was recuperated at the same time as or immediately after the movement that aimed to intentionally destroy them. The restoration work changed their face: in the attempt to return to "what was" once, the thing itself had been lost forever. However, there remain some distinctive and fundamental features which can often still be seen in a moving integrity in all the 28 churches still standing.

They are churches built entirely on wood: *stav* means tree-trunk. The *stavkirker* are churches, places of Christian worship, built with interesting complex techniques, and they have no equals in the any of the other Christian places of the medieval age. It is useful to remember, with Bugge (1993), that wooden buildings, made as dwellings or for worship, used two different "building methods" that were in certain respects, diametrically opposed: the *laft* and the *stav* methods. In the first method the logs are placed horizontally and are cut at the corners so as to make them meet. In the *stav* method the load bearing trunks are vertical and walls themselves are usually made of upright planks. The *laft* method was not native to Norway, but came from the East; easier to make and needing far less massive trunks, it gradually took over from the *stav* method in house building in the country right through the middle ages.

In the second method, the *stav*, the load-bearing function both of the building and, obviously, of the roof, was served by corner posts that acted as the skeleton of the whole structure: the walls with no load-bearing role were often made of thick planks placed vertically or less often, horizontally, with special systems for interlocking both with the vertical load-bearing posts and with each other.

Here is an example of a building constructed with the *laft* method[2]:

[2] All the photos published in this article were taken by the authors on a recent trip to Norway in search of the *stavkirker*, except for the Odin's head in fig.10, taken from Anker Leif, Havran Jiri (photo) (2005).

Fig. 1 – The walls of a medieval farm building, constructed with the *laft* method, located in the Norsk Folkemuseum di Bygdoy (Oslo).

Fig. 2 – Detail of the medieval farm building located in the same Norsk Folkemuseum. The interlocking of e horizontal beams can be seen.

Fig. 3 – The *stavkirke* of Gol, conserved by the Norsk Folkemuseum.

Fig. 3 shows the original *stavkirke* of Gol, a town of five thousand inhabitants situated in the county of Buskerud, at the northern end of the Numedal valley, in an area full of *stavkirker* that can still be visited. The Gol *stavkirke*, moreover, was in a state of complete abandonment when in the late 19th century, it was saved from total destruction by Oscar I (of the house of Bernadotte), King of Sweden and Norway[3] who in 1884 had it restored and placed in the present day Norsk Folkemuseum, along with its private collection of ancient Norwegian buildings. The stav are visible, resting on a stone base that serves to support and isolate the wooden structure from the earth. This was the fundamental technological innovation that, by preventing the posts from rotting, preserved these churches unlike the preceding ones which had posts arranged in the same way but anchored in the earth. The *stav* that can be seen in the photos support the roof of the walkway or portico, which surrounds the whole building. The stav supporting the church proper are visible inside.

[3] As can be seen more clearly below, Norway signed a pact of union with Denmark in 1450; in 1536 the Danish king unilaterally decided to annexe his kingdom to Norway and thus annul the Norwegian kingdom. In 1814 the Danish king was forced, following a losing alliance with Napoleonic France, and after losing a short war against Sweden, to cede Norway to the Swedish king. Norway thus passed from ”union” with Denmark to ”union” with Sweden. It won back its national autonomy only in 1905.

Fig. 4 – The Nore *stavkirke*, in the Numedal valley

Fig. 4 clearly shows the external *stav* supporting the end of the central nave, where there was once the choir, now lost. The end of the nave, built with the *stav* method, is made of the wood salvaged from the choir. Also visible is the part of the *stavkirke* that was added later, the sacristy; this part was constructed using the *laft* method, certainly not as elegant since it loses the sweep conferred by the *stav* method.
Let us take a quick look inside. The *stav* rise at the corners of the church, as if to mark the limits of the “naves” proper in several of these churches, (see for instance at Gol, and also in the churches in the photos below, at Hopperstad and at Burgund), adding to the impression of entering a “sacred forest”, dear to the medieval paganism of those areas.

Fig. 5 – Inside the Gol *stavkirke*, preserved at the Norsk Folkemuseum.

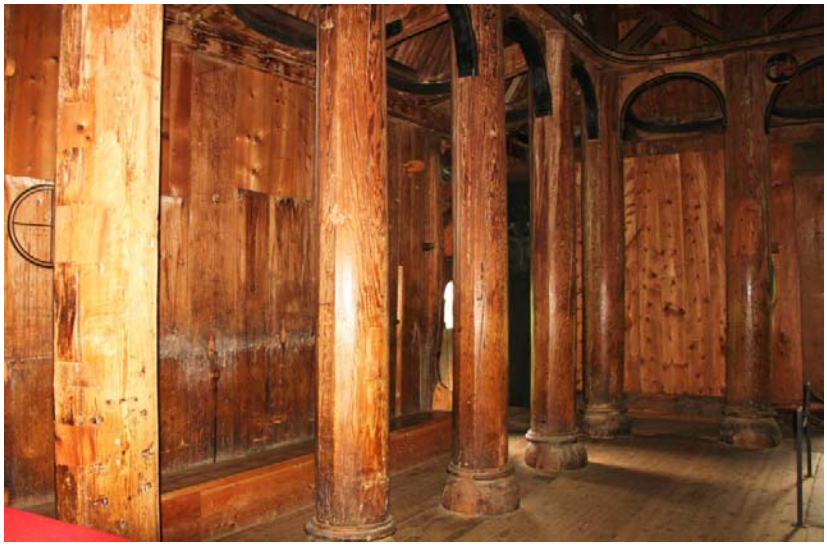

Fig. 6 and 7 – Interior of the Hopperstad *stavkirke,* in the area of the Sognefjord.

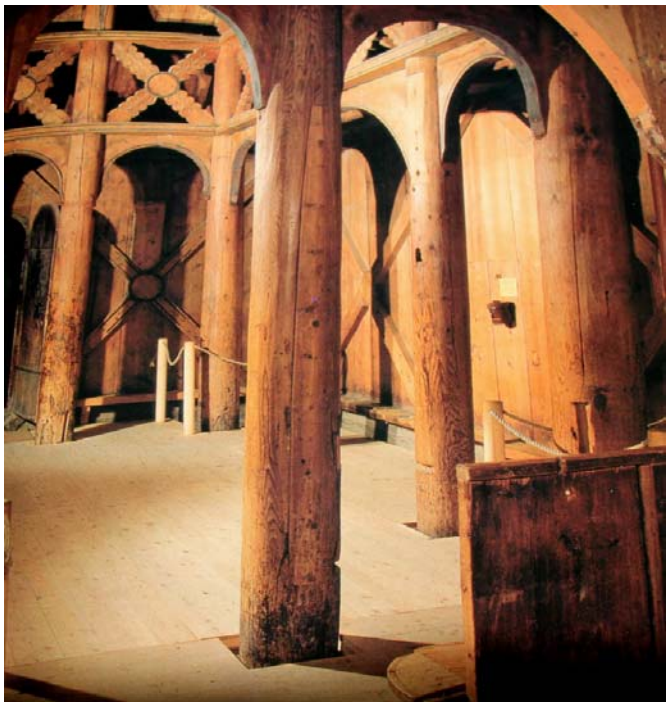

Fig. 8 – The interior of the Borgund *stavkirke*.

The churches were built with sophisticated and complex carpentry work; they were in fact situated in “extreme” places, where there were heavy snowfalls during the winter, where the cold brought temperatures many degrees below zero, where extremely strong winds could sweep down, where rains alternated with heat in summer, where in some seasons there was a huge range of nychthemeral temperatures. The building skill of the Norwegians of the period, which derived directly from naval joinery, was solid. It is worth remembering that the *stavkirke* builders were the direct descendants of those who had built the Viking ships. They were both flexible and resistant, capable of facing the roughest seas: they had enabled the Viking sailors in the period between 600 and 1000A.D, to colonise Greenland, Iceland, to conquer Ireland and found Dublin, to settle in Scotland, Normandy and Bretagne, to repeatedly cross the Mediterranean, to sail up the rivers in the interior of Europe to reach deepest Russia, to cross “the north-west passage” and, well before Christopher Columbus, to reach America. Many scholars see the beginning of the Viking decline in 1066, with the defeat at Stamford Bridge. 1060 is the date set to indicate the unification of Norway. The beginning of the construction of the *stavkirke* is around 1050. The sequence of dates is most interesting.

Fig. 9 – The Oseberg ship built in 890 AD and kept in the Viking Ship Museum at Bygdoy (Oslo)

Great builders, the carpenters constructed the *stavkirker* so well that some examples of these buildings have reached us, as we have seen, in spite of the meterological adversities and the neglect of the inhabitants. Almost always without buttresses, normally used to compensate the push downwards of stone churches, apart from the three surviving of the so-called Møre type, the stavkirker have a complex system of internal reinforcements, based mainly on “ledges”: corner structures cut from the part of the tree where the large branches intersect with the trunk or where the trunk widens at the base with large roots emerging from the soil. These are structures that, thanks to the wood fibres in those specific, naturally curved points of the tree, show great resistance. They are the wooden structures also used in Viking ship building. There is therefore a close relationship between the boat builders and the master builder of the *stavkirke*.

Fig. 10 – The roof support in the Borgund *stavkirke*. The ledges are those curved shapes that link the struts of the truss and fix them at the bottom. The curved shape is obtained by joining two ledges. The masks decorating the end of the posts or *stav* can be seen, as in fig. 4.

If one looks at the places chosen to build the still visible wooden churches, or the sites with archeological remains of vanished *stavkirker*, one gets an intense scenographic surprise. They are still isolated, fascinating places: a hill, a clearing, a small flat area on a mountainside, remote little hidden valleys, enchanting places for the traveller in search of *stavkirke*, secret places that provide a significant setting for the charm of the little wooden churches. They are settings, according to archeologists and specialised researchers, where previously there was the *hov*, the small pagan temple for private or public use. The *stav* technique was the same as that used to build the *hov*.

"it is known that these *hov* were *transformed*[4] into Christian churches, since the only alternative for the parish was to *demolish*[5] them and build churches in their place. The parish made do, and what had once been a *sinister*[6] building consecrated to Odin or Thor, was consecrated to the worship of Christ. This process took place respecting all the structural and ornamental features" (Bugge, op. cit., p. 14).

Why should the pagan building be called "sinister"? Why talk about the *stavkirke* as the transformation of the previous building when it is then admitted that to build the Christian church, the first one, the pagan one, was demolished? There is evidence of the first signs of categorical confusion, resolved with contradictions or unjustified condemnation of the past.
The evangelisation of Norway began in the second half of the 9th century and was completed only two hundred years later. It was therefore a very long-term process. This process can be understood if the parallel is seen between Norwegian christianisation and the unification of power. Let us go back to the past. Historians of those countries tell us that the Viking era marks the end of Norwegian pre-history. In the first Viking period, their sea exploits were dictated by the limited amount of arable land, typical of a mountainous country with steep valleys unsuited to farming, and with a harsh climate. The settling of disputes between clans or family groups, the management of the public wealth were organised in Norway (as in other parts of the European world) around two separate institutions; the *ting* or tribal assembly or alternatively the small kingdom. Power was therefore managed through discussion in the assembly, or with its centralisation in the hands of dynastic rulers.
The confrontation between these two cultural models of managing power was bitter and deep. The assembly model, which coincided largely with the pagan religious situation, envisaged the same place being used for assembly and worship. Faith in the gods and the management of the public good were essentially the same thing. In the small kingdoms, on the other hand, the kings could "make" their people follow the religion they themselves embraced. The christianisation of Norway therefore coincided with the conversion of some kings, called "missionaries" by historians; these kings managed to achieve christianisation and at the same time to unify the whole country under their power. Haakon the Good (reigning from 934 to 951), Olaf Trygvasson and Olaf Haraldsson (1015-1030) are recognised as kings capable of promoting or forcing the country's christian conversion. King Olaf Haraldsson died in the battle of Stiklestad, near present day Trondheim, in 1030. His death, described by the first Norwegian christians who felt him to be a martyr, earned him the status of saint. The Church had won its battle. With king Olaf the Saint, the unification of Norway was achieved as well as its christianisation. It was a christianisation that went through violent stages, as when during the reign of Olaf Trygvasson (995-1000) the subjects, most of whom were still pagan, were forced to convert.
We are referring to all this to underline that the christianisation of Norway, which led to the building of the *stavkirker*, was a protracted event that went on for two hundred years, closely interwoven with the affirmation of an absolute central power. It was a deeply conflictual event in the confrontation/transition between paganism, rooted in the cultures of the *ting*, of the assembly and of community sovereignty, and christianity which was the close ally of regal power. The parish priests that founded and used the *stavkirker* were, to certain extent, also royal officials appointed to take charge of the obedience to the central authorities. The builders of the *stavkirker* were, in all

[4] Our italics
[5] Our italics
[6] Our italics

probability, members of the pagan communities, especially on the coast where the *ting* had the role of protecting the farming or fishing communities from raids by pirates, bandits or Viking plunderers returning form their seafaring exploits.
The *stavkirke*, in short, can be regarded as an "object" representing a change of categories from paganism to christianity. Christian cultures tend to describe this change as discontinuity between a pagan "before" and a Christian "after", separated by a clear and definite break. A sort of reification of the break that separates western history into the eras of the Gregorian calendar, BC (before Christ) and AD (after Christ), without a year zero.
However, it is a change that, in its duration and conflictuality, certainly involves phases and dynamics of categorical confusion. It is the same categorical confusion that left signs in many medieval cathedrals all over Europe but that in the *stavkirker* is clearly visible, also in the iconology.

The spazio anzi and categorical confusion

One of the oldest churches in Orvieto and once the city's cathedral, St Juvenal is dedicated to a saint about whom very little is known. He was the first bishop of Narni and is associated, albeit with vague details, to the three martyrs of via Nomentana. Now, the church in Orvieto is said to have been built around the year 1000, on the ruins of a pagan temple. Today, inside the church, there is a plate which we saw in 2007, explaining that the present building was built on the ruins of an Etruscan temple dedicated to the god Tinia, the highest divinity of that population, later assimilated to Zeus and Jupiter. The plate says:

"The church of St Juvenal is one of the most important monuments in Orvieto, it traditionally dates back to 1004, although the presence of older remains and the fact that worship of St Juvenal was widespread in the early middle ages suggests an older origin. The building stands on the western edge of the Orvietan crag, where according to tradition, there was a temple to Jove (in Etruscan, Tinia). Therefore 1004 must be considered the date of reconstruction and not of construction of a church dedicated to Juvenal, the first bishop of Narni, who died there in 376, and who, according to an undated *Life* which is however later than the 7th century, came from Carthage".

This is followed by fragmentary information on the life of St Juvenal taken from religious literature, specifically from *Dialogues* by St Gregory the Great (540 – 604), where he is said to have been a martyr, and from the *Istoria dei due santi Giovanali vescovi di Narni* by a 17th century Anon, where there are suddenly two bishop saints, and which contains more anecdotes and miracles. The plate goes on to underline that this saint, of whom little is known, has many places of worship in his name.

"The deep veneration of St Juvenal is witnessed not only by the dedication of the Orvietan church to him, but also of numerous other churches in his honor at Narni, Orte, Magliano and Vallerano. In particular at Orte a "monasterium Sancti Juvenalis" is mentioned in *Liber Pontificalis* which says it was founded by Belisario under Pope Virgil (537-555). In general it is believed that the Christian worship of St Juvenal is located – as has been seen in many similar cases – where previously there had been the pagan worship of Jove".

The plate concludes by indicating the places in the church where many figures of the saint can be seen. In our opinion, this is a clear example of a – failed – attempt to deny continuity, to establish a clear discontinuity between Jove and Juvenal; a discontinuity that sanctions the separation between paganism and christianity, for fear of christianity losing its value. It is interesting to notice that while a clear and unequivocal discontinuity is sought between paganism and christianity, within paganism an undifferentiated continuity is established: Jove was Tinia *in Etruscan*, as if it was a mere linguistic translation, not the assimilation of the Etruscan Tinia to others, the Greek Zeus on the one hand, the Latin Jupiter on the other, in the complex confrontations and reformulations of cultures.
At Le Puy en Velay, in the Auvergne which is full of such Madonnas, the Madonna of Notre Dame, as black as coal, is a nineteenth century evocation of the original, burnt during the Revolution. She has a great many clothes, for all the ritual occasions, displayed in the sacristy; like an Egyptian

divinity, her clothes, of fabric, are often changed, while the statue is made of wood. The original is said to have been donated by Louis IX on his return from a crusade; it would have come from the East. The rumor is that it was an Isis with Horus in her arms, adopted by christianity. It is also claimed that when the original, a hollow wooden statue, was burnt, there emerged a stone inscribed with hieroglyphics. Another of the Madonnas, the one at Notre-Dame de Meymac, is called the Egyptian and has a golden turban; when the revolutionaries attacked the one in Le Puy en Velay it seems they were shouting: let's burn the Egyptian!
The burnt one was replaced by a faithful replica, kept at Notre Dame, based on an engraving of the statue done by an eighteenth century artist who had seen the original. The nineteenth century replica, while trying to make up for the loss, did not dare to reproduce the original in its strange and alarming features, where a woman sitting majestically on a throne, with a long face and a very long nose, frightening eyes staring into space, displaying a child of much smaller proportions than her own, worn like an emblem in the middle of her body. It was the embarrassment of the nineteenth century copier that gave rise to the awkward doll without identity held by the currently venerated Madonna.
But all the modern history of the black Madonnas found in France – especially in Auvergne, Provence and the Pyrenees – is marked by an intense ambivalence: the black Madonna is desired, but at the same time feared, it is not clear what she is. They like her to be as black as coal, just as she came down from antiquity to the early medieval period where she belongs, and in some cases fair Madonnas are even given a good coat of black paint to transform them into Black Madonnas. But at the same time she is not recognised, and in other cases that black skin coming down from the past is painted pink and white since the black is now felt to be foreign. It was the 19th century that painted black Madonnas white and white Madonnas black, without leaving one word written about what was being done. It is a phenomenon that people don't want to talk about, for which there aren't any categories, it is left to emotional experience alone.
In the cathedral one can read embarassing justifications about the black Madonna of Le Puy en Velay, trying to attribute it to orthodoxy: she is black because the vignerons that worshipped her were black, burnt by the sun; she is black from candle smoke. This dark and composite divinity also reached some parts of Italy. A magnificent black Madonna is to be found at Tindari, in Sicily, and there are others on the Alps, for example at Oropa. The report on the restoration of the Madonna of Tindari, found on the site of the sanctuary[7], is very interesting: it appears to be a jumble of stories and hypotheses, of interventions and transformations often designed to make the fascinating statue appear orthodox; it is also thought that the Madonna of Tindari may have been made by a French sculptor, perhaps from Auvergne, who however was also a crusader in the East.
The black Madonnas flourished from about 1050 (a date interestingly close to the start of our *stavkirke*), until the 13th century; most of the remaining statues date from the 12th century. The name used by French art historians explains much more clearly what this is about: *Vierge en majesté*. Madonnas in majesty, mothers more powerful than sons, not loving mothers. The whole set of symbols accompanying these Madonnas, like their being found in hollow trees, in grottos, in damp places or along river banks, in sarcophagi buried in the earth, their choosing the place of worship, becoming suddenly heavy and impossible to move, is related to chthonic divinities and goddesses, both local and Eastern, that were worshipped in those places until about the 5th century, to then disappear and reappear in the 12th, brought back from the crusades, by Saint Louis, returning from Palestine and from Egypt. As for the cathedral of Puy en Velay, to make its roots even more complex, we know that it stands on an ancient Gallic site for the worship of healing stones, and one of them is still there, clearly visible to those who in the grip of fever want to lie on it. The sanctuary of Oropa, too, had a sacred stone, which was prudently destroyed, on which women in search of fertility came to rub their bellies[8].
What interests us is that much of the information available on the Black Madonnas, including the book mentioned regarding Oropa, is complicated reading: the discourse veers continually towards esotericism on the one hand, and religious and scientistic orthodoxy, which gives a banal "explanation", on the other. There is a lack of categories to explore the phenomenon since – this is our hypothesis – it cannot be interpreted only by relying on the facts, but what is needed are

[7] http://www.santuariotindari.it/restauro.htm, consulted on 1 November 2011.
[8] P.Jorio*, Il culto delle Madonne nere. Le primi Madri perdute.* Priuli & Verlucca, Aosta 2008.

emotional and symbolic – and not necessarily esoteric - models of interpretation of the social reality that produces them[9].
In Bretagne the innumerable places of christian worship stand where there once were places of pagan worship, and in some churches the water from a spring still gushes out exactly under the altar as in the Chapel of Saint-Pol at Plouguernau; there are numerous miraculous stones, christianised Gallic steles, as well as saints under whose christian appearance one can still see the older native face. It is also known that the central church, allied with the central government, opposed and limited the powers of the local communities, just as happened in Norway, and that the affirmation of orthodoxy went at the same pace as the victory of the central authorities, which was moreover followed – we wish to stress – by the slow and inexorable extinguishing of religious fervor (Déceneux, 2007; De Beaulieu, 2007).
In more than one *stavkirke* one can still see a series of masks, carved at the top of the upright posts (*stav*). In the *stavkirke* at Hegge, situated in Valdres, these masks have been hidden by those who attend the church, still a place of worship today for the local residents, by a ceiling that "cuts" the uprights at two-thirds height and so also hides the internal part of the roof. They are fascinating masks, one of which shows a grotesque one-eyed face; the other eye is replaced by a wound.

Fig. 11 – Mask found in the Hegge *stavkirke*

We know that Odin, the god of war, knowledge, poetry – he is said to have always spoken in verse – and of magic, decided to give up one eye so as to gain the knowledge and wisdom of the giant

[9] An example of the difficulty of organising the discourse into categories is the site http://www.nigrasum.it/, edited by *Centro di Documentazione dei Sacri Monti, Calvari e Complessi devozionali europei* and the *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* of Milan, in collaboration with the *Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Oropa*. This is a data bank of the black Madonnas in Europe, based on *online research* "intentionally" without cirteria, proposed as a sort of "first step" towards a more thorough survey of the information. This allows the authors to remain in a sort of interpretative vaccuum which reminds us of the silence of the parish priests that painted the black Madonnas white or the white madonnas black in the 19th century. And yet the site was opened in concomitance with the international conference on "Nigra sum. Culti, santuari e immagini delle Madonne Nere d'Europa"**,** held in 2008 at Oropa and at Crea with the participation of over 20 speakers from all over the world.

Mimir who guarded its fountain; that is why he was also called the one-eyed god. This other mask decorates one of the uprights in the *stavkirke* at Heddal.

Fig. 12 – Mask in the Heddal *stavkirke.*

But images re-evoking pagan myths and rites are also found in the magnificent locks on the portals, full of symbolism where in the wrought iron volutes, dragons heads are often linked to small human heads, as in the lock of *stavkirke* of Reinli, in Valdres. The church's young custodian, who would later tell us she was a History of Art student, pointed them out to us shyly saying the names of Odin and Thor. Moreover she was amazed that we seemd to recognise them, since she expected us to be carried away by the single, dominant Greek-Roman mythology assimilated to the christian world, in the idea of an incompatibility of worlds where the "winner" cannot but ignore and obtusely deny the "loser". Later, in the *stavkirke* of Eidsborg the woman showing us around, mentioning Odin whose traces were found in the foundations, said that it was very hard work to get christianity to take root. We then told her about the church of St Juvenal, in Orvieto, and about the previous temple to the Etruscan Tinia assimilated to the Roman Jove: fortunately, we too have a fertile and intricate pagan past, even though she thought it was far more straightforward. We were realising that, in the "Norwegian" perspective, the cultures we were identified with seemed to be the pagan cultures in the eyes of the writer of the plate in St Juvenal: continuous and progressive, from Greek-Roman antiquity to christianity.

Fig. 13 – Lock of a portal in the Reinli *stavkirke* Reinli, in Valdres

Then there are the wooden decorations of the *stavkirke*, especially those of the magnificent entrance doors. Among others there are the famous decorations on the northern outside wall of the Urnes *stavkirke*, the oldest of those left, built in about 1130. The decorations were on the entrance to the previous church, of the 11th century.

Fig. 14 – Urnes s*tavkirke*: decoration of the portal belonging to the previous *stavkirke.*

The decorations are, according to the experts, of Celtic origin. That decorative style had probably been seen and studied in the British Isles or in Ireland. The figures, elegantly deformed by the

lengthening and interlocking with each other, are more than similar, for instance, to the miniatures in the Book of Kells; the monks of the Kells monastery knew the Viking invasions very well. One of the theories about the book is that it was illuminated in the scriptorium of Lindisfarne, in the north of England, and then taken to Kells for safekeeping: the Viking era is considered to have begun with the sacking of that monastery in 790. Another theory is that it was written at Iona, and then taken suddenly to Kells, fleeing from the Vikings who certainly had the chance not only to see, but also to take possession of, some work similar to the book. Remember that the Vikings were anything but rough: for example they had the most advanced navigation instruments of the time. This was a case of christian symbolism passing into the pagan world, to then come back to the christian world, in one of those fertile and intense to-and-fro movements that Baltrusaits talked so much about. With an admirable reworking of the Celtic style, the local inlayers gave the world one of the most famous works of the Nordic medieval period. Urnes, a little church hidden away at the end of an arm of the Sognefjord, could be reached only by sea until a few decades ago.

Fig. 15 – Urnes *stavkirke*

A few quotes on the Urnes portal which was probably carved around 1050.

“The process that led to the level of perfection of Urnes, must have lasted more than a century; the roots of our *stav* portals are therefore to be sought in the distant past, dating back to pagan or semipagan times. This kind of decoration developed on Norwegian soil, moving further and further away from its original inspiration; they can be found not only in the *stavkirker*, but are also in evidence in the minor arts of the period.” (Bugge, op. cit., p. 49).

“The portals reveal, in miniature, the tension – and also the truce – between the decorous christian present and a harsh pagan past, just like the *stavkirker* themselves” (Bugge, op. cit., p. 50).

But other decorative elements are a witness to the complex cultures that led to the construction of the *stavkirker*. What can we say, for example, of the “dragons”, “good” and “evil”, that crowd the portals, in combat? And what about the dragons that stand out against the sky on the roofs of some *stavkirker*?

Fig. 16 - Borgund *stavkirke*

Fig. 17 – Dragon in the Lom s*tavkirke*

Fig. 18 – Dragon in the Gol *stavkirke*, preserved at Norsk Folkemuseum

According to current interpretations, the dragons in the decorations carved on the portals like those on the roofs played a protective role: they kept threatening spirits and the adverse forces of nature away from the temple. They seem to be beneficent dragons of the air of eastern origin, rather than maleficent dragons of the earth coming from the west. However, on the doors the two dragons so often found on the upright posts in the act of attacking a third dragon on the architrave, or the dragon Fáfnir guarding the treasure, shown more rarely (see for instance the Hylestad portal in the Oslo History Museum), or the dragon that Saint Marguerite is fighting in the beautiful painted wooden face in the *stavkirke* of Torpo, suggest a less straightforward symbolism, where ambiguity is insinuated even in the distinction between good and evil. We said that the current interpretation is that they were the custodians of the place in a defensive sense; but one cannot help thinking, especially in linking them to the heads at the top of the wooden pillars, that they may be, not a defence against threatening spirits, but rather the expression of the temple's lively vitality, pervaded by friendly spirits and by the positive forces of nature. These heads at the top of the posts have been subjected to interpretations attempting to "domesticate" them, the most explicit of which says that the ancient gods were thus forced to support and be subjected to the house of the one true God. As we can see, many of the elements in the *stavkirke* can be regarded as actual "transitional objects" between paganism and Christianity.

Two different readings of the stavkirke

We have mentioned the hypothesis, supported by Gunnar Bugge, on the continuity between paganism and Christianity that inspired the builders of the *stavkirke*. This continuity was perhaps not explicitly desired, and is at any rate intrinsic to the cultures of those who in building the places of worship for the new religion, used tools, materials, places, symbolisations, and atmospheres very closely related to the old gods. If ewe look at the etymology of the word paganism: it derives from the Latin *pagus* meaning village, place inhabited by the rural population. A village constructed on a hill, using the protection – offered by nature – from the raids and pillage often carried out by dangerous armies passing through; *pagos*, in Greek means hill, top of a mountain. It reminds us of Areopagus, or rock of Ares, in Athens. On a hilltop stood the sacred places of rural populations, the places where "idolatrous" rites were performed. With the coming of christianity, according to etymologists, paganism characterised the populations that resisted conversion to the monotheistic religion. These people, often rural, withdrew secretly to the hilltop to offer sacrifices to their ancient divinities. In this perspective, the Norwegian *stavkirke* can be seen as a place characterised by categorical confusion, where the signs of the new christian god confusedly overlap traces of the old religion, symbols of the sacred wood, atmospheres that might allude to belief in the ancient divinities. The *stavkirke*, considered from this angle, is *at the same time* a place of christian worship and a place of pagan worship, melded confusedly on the emotional plane, even though the church was explicitly a place of christian worship.
In his analysis of the *stavkirker*, Leif Anker (2005), an expert from Oslo, a specialist in the relation between the stavkirker and stone churches in the Norwegian and nordic middle ages, repeatedly and categorically rejects the continuity with paganism. He looks critically at the symbolic value, an expression of the Norwegian nation, that the *stavkirker* took on in the 19th century.
Let us quote a passage from Anker's work, interesting for the purposes of the issue we are dealing with:

"The consensus about the stave churches' being a distinctive Nordic – not to say Norwegian – style of construction has held firmly and remains strong even today. The roof constructions have been compared to Viking ships, while the magnificent portals and other wood carvings have been seen as vestiges of surviving paganism. The oldest preserved stave churches are dated from a time when contemporary written references to the country's history are few and therefore ambiguous. As a result, the stave churches have often been attributed a role as transitional bridge builders from pagan times to the Christian, Roman Catholic, High Middle Ages, and this is how they are far too often presented to the general public by the tourist industry, popular science books and journals, and also by a number of guides in the churches themselves. On a par with National Romanticism's pictorial history, such as the wedding procession in

Hardanger, replete with a stave church and bright sun rising above Folgefonna Mountain in the background, the tale of the stave church as a bygone archetype and bearer of ancient pagan heritage is still fascinating for listeners. Romantic imagery of this type teases one's fantasy and turns the distant past into a tangible reality, materialized in the form of a stave church.
But is this depiction correct? The answer is a clear and resounding no." (Anker, op. cit., p. 11).

The same author, in the caption explaining the mask of the "one-eyed" god found, as we have seen, in the Hegge church, says:

"The mask with the protruding tongue and one closed eye is not a tribute to Odin, but rather one of a number of grotesque figures that were quite common in medieval ecclesiastic sculpture and book illumination." (Anker, op. cit., p. 259).

Saying that "grotesque" figures like the *stav* masks, are also to be found in other sculptures or medieval miniatures, is enough to invalidate the hypothesis that the masks are confused images of paganism present in the builders, sculptors, inlayers and decorators of *stavkirker* as well as of other artisans that worked on the cathedrals in the middle ages? What do the "grotesque" figures in medieval French or English cathedrals represent? The whims of the carvers working on the cathedrals? Or signs of a categorical confusion that, even in regions that have been christianised for a long time, pervaded the builders of sacred sites.
It is interesting to notice that Anker rests his criticisms on "scientific " studies based on historical research, archeological findings, use of sophisticated methods such as for the dating of the logs in the *stavkirker*, stylistic findings and a deep propensity for classification, making him correct and renew stylistic catalogues not only in churches, but also in the portals and in works of sculpture and in various manufactured goods present there. What does all this lead to? It is interesting to see the conclusion of these long, meticulous studies:

"Nevertheless, a glance at the first Sogn – Valdres portals reveals a mixture of local and foreign impulses, where European Romanesque forms and motifs are superimposed onto local traits such as the composition of the portal. There is every reason to suspect that the same mechanisms have also come into play in the development of stave church architecture in Norway. But to what extent, and which traits are local, which come from other outside areas, and which resulted as a synthesis of crossing impulses and established traditions at different points in time – *all of this is unknown*[10]." (Anker, op. cit., p. 99).

Even the author most contrary to categorical confusion ends up, in his conclusion, speaking about the confusion between themes and local motifs, on the one hand, and influence of Romanesque themes and motifs of European origin, and on the other the carving of the portals as well as the architecture like that of the *stavkirker.* The author, it is important to notice, uses the same categories (confusion of *themes* or forms and *motifs*) proposed by Panofsky in his "Studies of iconology" and used by us as a basis to the theory of *spazi anzi* mentioned above.
One might ask why it seems so difficult, for those presenting "scientific" studies on the *stavkirker*, to accept their ambiguity. Is it to then reach the conclusion that these phenomena are still unknown, in view of their deep and entangled ambiguity? An answer to this question leads one to ask with what attitudes the scholars studying the field of artistic phenomena, as well as of psychology, deal with the issue of continuity – discontinuity in the relation between mind and reality.

Continuity and discontinuity in mental processes

Matte Blanco (1975), in a development of Freudian thought on the unconscious system, proposed two "modes of being" of the mind: the *dividing and heterogeneous mode of being* and the *homogeneous and indivisible mode*. It is worth thinking about these two names, referring to "conscious, scientific, usual" thought on the one hand, and to "unconscious" thought, on the other. Even with a superficial recognition, it can be seen that "conscious" thought is characterised by

[10] Our italics

actions, that of separating (dividing) and of creating differences (heterogeneous); the mind's "unconscious" mode of being, in contrast, is marked by aspects of state, and therefore of immobility: the absence of differences within it (homogeneous) and indivisibility. If you look closely, these diversities, which are important in order to grasp the sense of the discourse that we want to propose here, can be summed up in two precise features: the mind's conscious mode of being presides over the establishment of relations between differences; the differences are created by thought itself. This means that the conscious mind is, by its very nature, a mind that "measures" differences, that proposes relations that can be related to some appearance: an object of reality is more appreciable, desirable and has a higher value than one that is different from the first; the differences may be of kind, or generation, of racial origin, of cultures between different individuals. Remember, on this point, the differentiation proposed by Stevens (1962) between the possible measurement scales, nominal, ordinal, interval, or ratio. Unconscious thought, on the other hand, does not admit measurements of any type unless it is infinite, in which everything is assimilated, and homogenised in a dimension that, by preventing heterogeneity, plunges as the Chilean psychoanalyst said, into a state of non existence. And this is because perceptive "life", adaptation to reality, are founded on living beings' competence to generate differences, and therefore to relate to the environment by differentiating it, creating a discontinuity inside it. From interesting research on sensory deprivation done in the 1950s and '60s, we know that removing differences in perceptive stimuli causes degeneration of the constancy of perception and inability to deal with a dividing elaboration of the stimuli, with the subsequent appearance of hallucinations, delirious states of mind, and serious emotional disorders that can result in an actual syndrome of depersonalisation. Our mind "feeds" on differences and relations between differences. The presence of an unconscious mind, not interacting with the dividing and heterogeneous mind, would not allow mental life.

But the unconscious mind, in interaction with the dividing, heterogeneous function, performs important functions. In fact, it allows affective symbolisation of the objects that we construct with the dividing, heterogeneous function. Through the symbolic and at the same time emotional valence of objects, on the other hand, the human mind is able to amplify the use of the symbolic component of reality, and also to construct modes of relating that are mainly based on the symbolic-affective dynamic attributed to the "objects" themselves.

Dividing, heterogeneous thought defines discontinuity: through, for example, the temporal dimension of "before" and "after", or through the discontinuity of differences: for example differences of kind, generational differences, differences of religion, of values, and of cultures. A discontinuity used, moreover, as a conventional categorical aspect (for example, before and after Christ, as we said above); but also as the affective-symbolic-emotional dimension that contributes to the creation of stereotypes, prejudices, often violent destructive actions against "diversity", symbolised as a problem. Suffice it to think of the "false lying gods"[11] of the Commedia, or of the numerous Nativity scenes where the sacred shelter is resting on the remains of pagan antiquity, which with their disintegration, indicate their defeat and the now obsolete time of paganism.

Discontinuity envisages a profound distinction between the christian God and the pagan gods, as well as between the christian, the islamic and the jewish God in the case of the three monotheist religions, but also discontinuity between monotheistic and polytheistic religions, like hinduism.

[11] Dante, in the first canto of the Divine Comedy, meets Virgil who introduces himself thus:

He answered me: "Not man; man once I was,
And both my parents were of Lombardy,
And Mantuans by country both of them.

'Sub Julio' was I born though it was late,
And lived at Rome under the good Augustus
During the time of false and lying gods.

A poet was I, and I sang that just
Son of Anchises, who came forth from Troy,
After that Ilion the superb was burned.

Profound distinctions are made, in drastic terms, between the catholic, orthodox, protestant and evangelical religions in their various branches. It is interesting to notice that catholic christianity was introduced to Norway thanks to the missionary kings, in a span of two centuries, the 9th and 10th centuries AD. The union with Denmark, established on equal terms by the Norwegian and Danish kingdoms in 1450, was transformed into a Danish domination over Norway in 1536. In 1537 the evangelical religion was forcibly introduced to Norway, and is still the state religion, though there is freedom of worship for those belonging to other religions. But today the catholics are only 1.3% of the population. “Religious” discontinuity has been the reason behind devastating wars, abuses, and violence of every kind.

If one looks at the continuity of “religiosity” as a value, however, one can understand that discontinuity is often only a pretext to act out questions of power and control. There are experiences of ”religiosity” that, also in “real” experience, overcome the discontinuity imposed by factors of orthodoxy and the wielding of power: think, just as an example, of the community of Taizé, of the great attempt at reconciliation between the different religions that inspired its founder, frère Roger.

While discontinuity envisages clear boundaries with no in-between alternatives, continuity envisages categorical confusion that is not only tolerated but valorised; it envisages the challenging of clear lines of differentiation, of unquestionable assessments about priorities, of dominance, of superiority and therefore of acts of intransigent faith and irreversible choices. While discontinuity is the area of certainties, continuity is the area of the ambiguity of uncertainty. But also the area of evolution, of change, of possibility and of potentiality

Now, discontinuity and continuity are the mind’s modes of being, and therefore modes of reading reality. They are mental categories with which reality is emotionally symbolised. This is important for us, because it helps to understand how provisory and relative is the use of the discontinuous and continuous categorical modes of analysing reality.

Scientific research tries to evolve and develop in the area of discontinuity. It is psychoanalysis, with its competence to analyse the mind’s emotional mode, that opens the way for research in the area of continuity. And it is interesting to underline that psychoanalysis uses for its research, the evidential paradigm (Ginzburg, 1986); namely abductive logic, typical of historical methodology. It is also important to notice that abductive logic constructs hypotheses, unlike deductive and inductive logic which prove hypotheses.

Now, it is commonly believed that only the procedure capable of proving hypotheses deserves the name “scientific”. This is all part of the beliefs based on discontinuity. But the construction of hypotheses is equally important for the growth of science especially of psychology. It is usually said that the hypotheses constructed with abductive logic then have to be proved. Yes, but how can ”constructed” hypotheses be proved? This is a most important point. Our idea is that, in psychology, *hypotheses constructed abductively can be proved in the clinical relationship*. This means that the “proving” of the hypotheses, especially in clinical psychology, is part of a procedure related more to continuity than to discontinuity. It is a precedure that consults the other person as well as the one who proposed the hypothesis itself.

Let us return to the *stavkirker*. Specifically to Anker’s denunciation about the exhaltation of the *stavkirke* by 19th century Norwegian nationalism; an exhaltation devoid of a “scientific” basis of facts, classifications, dates, typologies, archeological details. One might ask, why did nineteenth century Norwegian nationalism choose to idealise *none other than* the *stavkirke*, as the symbol of Norway? Let us try to give an answer to this question, by constructing a hypothesis to interpret the event. Norway achieved national unification around the middle of the 11th century. A unity based on the long “prehistoric” past and on the Viking period. In 1450 Norway, as we have seen, made a treaty with Denmark that rapidly became a Danish domination, until 1536; this domination culminated with the imposition of the protestant religion. The subjection of Norway, firstly to Denmark and then to Sweden from 1814, lasted until 1905. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that Norway won back its national independence and its political autonomy. In the 19th century, Norway saw the growth of independence movements aiming to reawaken the national consciousness and win independence. These movements exhalted the *stavkirke*, insofar as it could represent a Norwegian trait, *organised around the continuity between paganism and catholicism,* a continuity that lasted two hundred years and that in the *stavkirker* had the symbol of autochthonous Norwegian roots. This hypothesis emerged from our repeated visits to the Norwegian stavkirker that

had survived neglect, fires, and destruction often willed by those responsible for the parishes and communities that preferred the comfortable new heated churches suited to a large number of people. We can also understand the “comfort” factor that led to the building of new churches in the communities scattered throughout the vast Norwegian territory. It should be asked why the building of the new churches was systematically preceded by the dismantling and destruction of the old *stavkirke.* In books studying the story of our wooden churches from the historical and archeological point of view, there is no satisfactory answer to this question. It is as if, over the centuries, there had developed in the parish priests and the local religious communities a sort of “hatred” towards the *stavkirke*, and a strong urge to destroy them. Why? An episode that happened during our visit to the *stavkirke* of Hegge might be illuminating: we knew that, at the top of the beams in this church, there are interesting masks, including that of the “possible Odin”. These masks are not visible inside the church because they are covered by a ceiling that lowers the height of the nave, hiding the upper part of the roof and the tops of the *stav*. At the entrance to the church there is a staircase that leads to the upper part of the portal and allows the splendid decorations of the portal to be seen close up. From this small landing there is a door leading to the area above the new ceiling of the *stavkirke*: we went towards this door, since there was no notice prohibiting it in evidence. An elegant gentleman, with a clerical appearance, while describing the church to some young people, had seen us going up the stairs; he rushed towards us with an air of anxious rebuke to warn us it was forbidden to enter the area where the masks could be seen. We didn’t ask for explanations which the man would probably not have been able to give us clearly, but the impression was that of a ban, still in force in *stavkirke* used as a parish church, on “seeing” those figures that are easy to associate with paganism. Let us get back to our question: why, for so many years, was there a sort of destructive action against the *stavkirker*? Looking for these churches, seeing them face to face, their unusual appearance, their charm, glimpsing their ambiguous aspect, even after centuries of restorations and overlaid decorations, admiring the scenically fascinating places where they churches stand, enjoying the solitude that often accompanies a visit to these places, smelling the tar covering the outside to protect the beams from bad weather and the intense smell of wood inside, hearing the squeak that ever since its construction has accompanied the visitors’ steps as they walks on the floorboards covering the wooden foundations, all this evokes emotions related to an experience of *spazio anzi*. The *stavkirke* is the synthesis of the *spazio anzi*, of the continuity between pre-christian, pre-historic, Viking worlds and the christian world. A continuity that seems to be achieved in the *stavkirke*. The *stavkirke* is an ancient “church”, but it brings to life different worlds in continuity with each other; it makes one think of the sacred wood, evoked by the dense series of logs, conjuring up the trees from which the logs were taken; it makes the imagination go back to those who attended it at the beginning of the first millennium, people capable of living in harsh natural surroundings, in isolated places far from the civilisation of central and southern Europe, but at the same time capable of elegance, of a taste for decoration and irony: all qualities that can be found in the *stavkirke*.

This continuity and this feeling of estrangement can be relived both by visiting the larger *stavkirker*, and by discovering the smaller churches, hidden away in isolated silent valleys. Thus one feels the emotion of Heddal, the great “cathedral” of the *stavkirker*, located today in the vicinity of a modern highway, or the enthusiasm for the little Eidsborg, reached along a tortuous deserted road leading to a tiny village amidst the mountains, near a lake. The smallest of the *stavkirker* is found at Undredal: a small remote valley that starts from one of the many branches of the Sognfjord. This valley produces the famous Norwegian cheese made of goats milk, *geitost*, ever present on the table at a Norwegian breakfast. Until 1991 the valley could be reached only by sea.

Fig. 19 –The Heddal *stavkirke*

Fig. 20 – The Eidsborg *stavkirke*

Fig. 21 – The small *stavkirke* at Undredal

The spazio anzi and categorical confusion are necessary for change

If the hypothesis presented here is valid, that is, that the *stavkirke* is the realisation of the *spazio anzi*, the expression of categorical confusion that accompanied the transition from paganism to christianity among Norwegians, then it can be stated that it was thanks to this period of confusion, which took concrete form in the building of the *stavkirke*, that Norway was able to arrive at christianity. This means that the categorical confusion accompanies change and makes it possible. We can describe the changes that occur in social systems or in single individuals, through signs of discontinuity: my childhood in the sixties; the first republic. These are conventions that may be useful as historical or personal references, but that do not represent the emotional, collusive and cultural affairs in which historical or personal evolution comes about. Discontinuity serves to signal the changes that have occurred, but it is far less useful for defining and telling how the changes happen. Changes leave signs that are rarely consistent with discontinuity. In this a strong parallelism can be found between objectual expressions of the *spazio anzi*, dream world, emotional experiences, social relations, clinical psychology relations including the psychoanalytical relationship. We are constantly faced with the ambiguity deriving from categorical confusion. We know that, in categorical confusion, those that acquire meaning are the transformations that can reconcile within themselves contradictions, opposites, and incompatibilities. Think, and this is only one of many possible examples, of the transition from a polytheistic religiosity and a monotheistic religion: did this change really take place in the cultures characterising the monotheistic religions? Can it be said that faith in a single god has definitely been established, marking a clear discontinuity from the religious cultures that admitted many gods and used their manifold characteristics to organise the most varied relations with the divinities? Do we remember the relatively recent abolition in the catholic church of saints like St.George who fought the dragon, to free the princess? The same St George and the same princess so admirably portrayed by Pisanello in the church of Sant'Anastasia, in Verona. As for the presence of the dragon in history, do we think it is totally unrelated to the infinite dragons that have close relations with each other and with humans, in places very distant in space and in time in human history, including the dragons of the *stavkirker*?
It is precisely in the possibility of thinking about ambiguity, of being able to valorise categorical confusion, that change is constructed. Continuity allows people to be protagonists of change, while discontinuity subjects and systematises the changes, as if they were marked by clear boundaries. In history, this contrast between discontinuity and continuity has had important periods of

development, for example with the history of costumes, of attitudes, with the historical movement called *École des Annales*.
Psychoanalytical work is based on the ambiguity of the emotional relationship, on the ambiguity of experiences, on their expression which is always different and problematic, typical of the polysemic language involved in the psychoanalytical experience. Confusing experiences with facts seems to reassure novice psychotherapists, as well as the vain attempt to make experiences depend on facts. “I’m angry with that person (the experience), because he behaved badly towards me (the fact, the event)”. Experiences and therefore emotions are the expression of the homogeneous, indivisible mode of being, proposed by Matte Blanco; they can never refer to an event, to a single aspect of reality. When we have the illusion of being able to analyse experiences as discontinuous dimensions, referring to discontinuous events, we are losing the sense of the emotional relation. This is the difficulty of psychoanalytical work: it eludes our dividing mental functioning, the creator of differences, to plunge us into indefiniteness and ambiguity.
The *stavkirke* and dreams are the same thing. They are “products” of the mind or of human action, expressions of emotional continuity that is offered as the “basso continuo” in baroque music, in relation to the melody which expects discontinuity. Some art critics insist on such discontinuity for the *stavkirke*, however without succeeding in this way in giving the building a historical sense.
We have proposed many times in the domain of clinical psychology and of psychotherapy, the distinction which for us is fundamental, between diagnosis and attention to the relationship. Diagnosis, in the relation between psychiatrist and patient, represents the effort to identify a discontinuity. With a diagnosis relations between symptoms are established, designed to define a specific pathogenic form. In medicine the diagnosis is the result of the mind’s heterogeneous, dividing process. This is so also in psychiatry, while remembering the basic distinction between aetiopathogenetic diagnosis and a diagnosis based on symptoms. The psychiatrist, thanks to the diagnosis, manages to establish the person’s pathogenic form and to prescribe the most suitable medication for the form. The diagnosis, in other words, is the act underlying the psychiatric function of “deficit correction”. A diagnosis is also possible for the *stavkirke*: for example a diagnosis based on the distinction between “original” parts and parts “added” over the centuries; or the diagnosis on the *stavkirke*’s “state of health”, on the remedies needed, on the strategies of restoration and preservation of the artifact. But the diagnosis tells us little about the fascinating, ambiguous meaning of the stavkirke; it tells us little about the charm that these churches made of logs exert over visitors, whether they be foreigners or Norwegians. The diagnosis cannot explain the emotional dynamic aroused by the *stavkirke* in those who relate to it. Attention to the relational dynamic, on the other hand, helps to capture the ambiguous, contradictory, confused and at the same time emotional sense that the relation takes on. We are therefore confronted with continuity: a continuity that can take an emotional hold and cause senseless, bewildering confusion; a continuity that can be thought about, through emotional thought that does not expect to classify, to create precise and complex discontinuity, but to draw sense from the emotions by using categories useful for this purpose. Such categories are capable of not classifying but of giving meaning to the relational process; they are categories that, in the clinical psychology relationship, are related to perversion, splitting, but also to expectation, to the friend-foe pattern, to diffidence, and to denial. One could go on at length. The important thing is to understand the difference between the diagnostic framework and the use of clinical categories serving to make sense of the relation. The same applies to the relation with an artistic artifact: the *stavkirke*, a medieval cathedral or a 14th century Venetian “gold-ground” plate. The “technical” diagnostic approaches to the state of conservation, which are attributionist, and more generally structuralist, are very useful for the knowledge and conservation of the work, of a work that can give information about a specific artistic period, of stylistic influences, contents, and also about the myths and rites of art. What is not understood with this way of proceeding, is the relation between the work and the culture, between the work and the single individuals that established a relationship with it. The “diagnosers” of the *stavkirke* seem to feel a sort of irritation in seeing what a deep and ambiguous emotion the Norwegian church can arouse. Accepting the emotional complexity of relating means abandoning diagnostic certainties, the certainties of discontinuity and of clear and distinct ideas; it means venturing into emotional ambiguity, for example the fascination that many of us still feel for paganism, for emotionally going beyond monotheism, for finding the close but confused relation that exists between religiosity and the elements of nature.

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