



# Modes of religiosity and the history of Jewish rituals

*Interpreting Rituals, Leiden, 29-31 October 2018*

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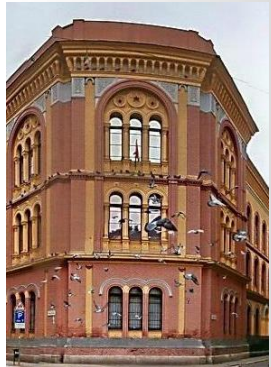
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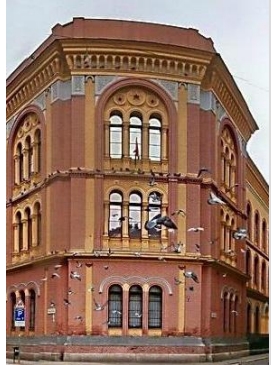
# Overview

- Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): a model of religious rituals
- McCauley and Lawson 2002: unbalanced ritual systems, the “tedium effect” and “splinter groups”
- “Theologically correct” Judaism...  
... and alternatives thereof.



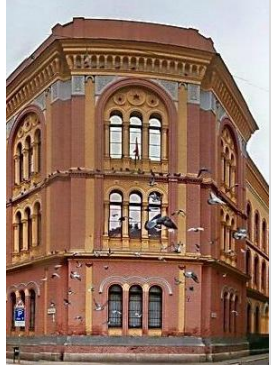
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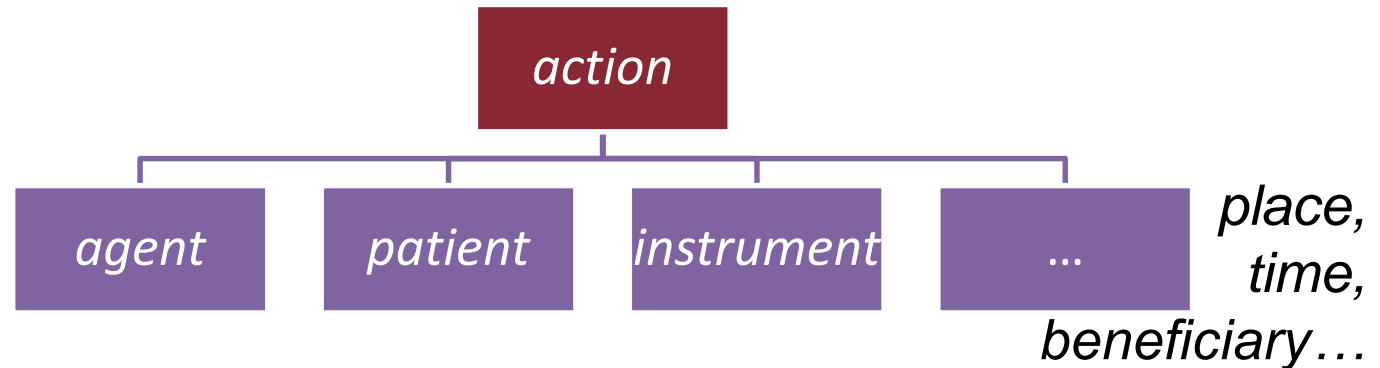
# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Cognitive science of religion:  
approaches religious phenomena as biological phenomena, *viz.* products of the human mind  
(*instead of: historical phenomena, social phenomena, etc.*)
- Religious phenomena =  
everyday phenomena *with a twist*.
- Rituals = actions *with a twist*.
- Twist here: CP superhuman agent present.



# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Cognitive science of religion:
- Rituals = actions *with a twist*.
- Action representation system:

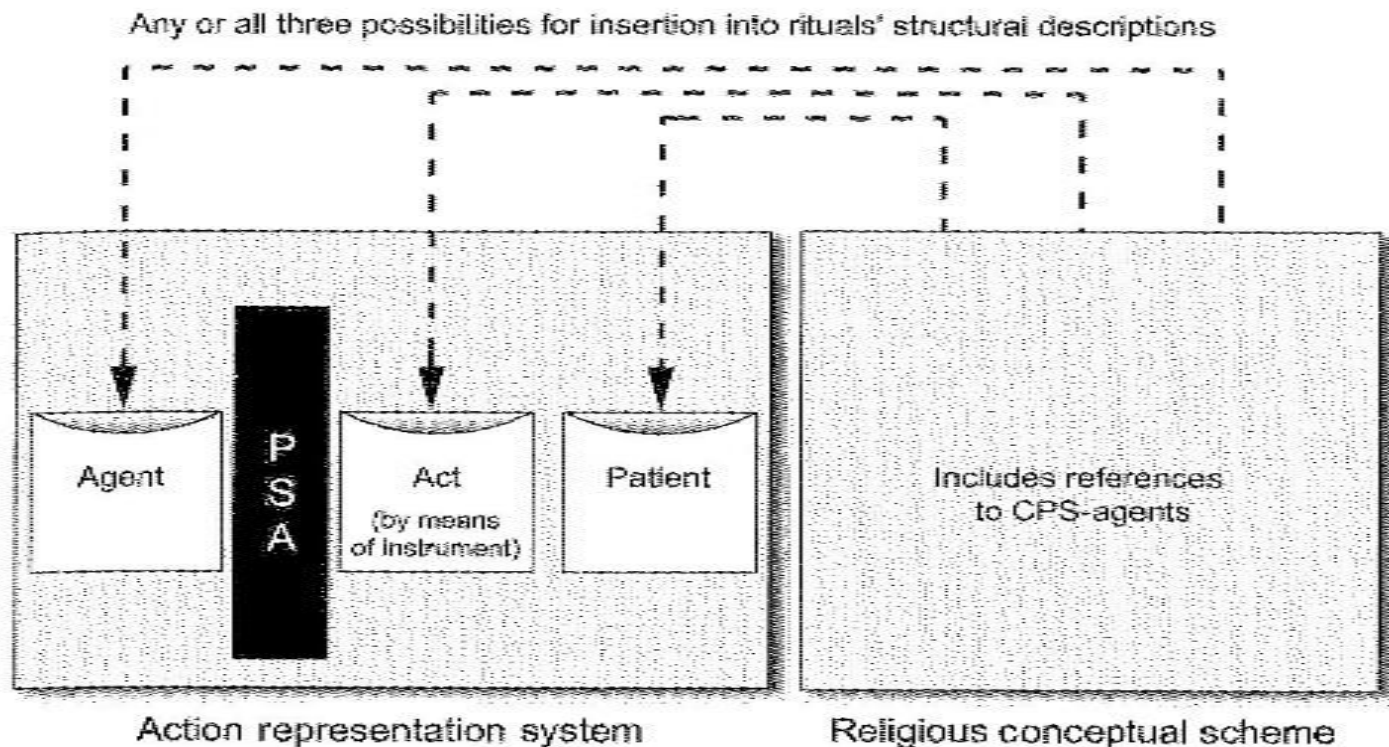


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# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*



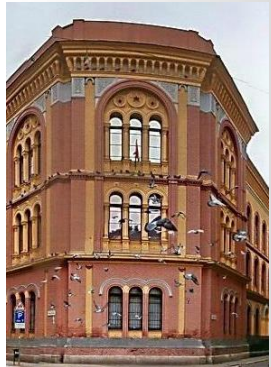
*McCauley and Lawson 2002, p. 27.*



# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Cognitive science of religion – motivation:
- Action representation system universally mirrored by human language:
  - Subject  $\approx$  agent: wilful initiator of the action.
  - Object  $\approx$  patient: passive undergoer of action.
  - Instrument: contributing to the result of the action without will.
  - Etc.

*But in fact more complex than that...*



# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Cognitive science of religion – motivation:

(1) *John broke the window with the hammer.*

(2) *John broke the window.*

(3) *The hammer broke the window.*

(4) *The window was broken.*

(5) *The window was broken by John.*

(6) *The window was broken by the hammer.*

(7) *The window was broken with the hammer.*

(8) \* *The window was broken with John.*

**Syntactic positions:**  
*subject, object, etc.*



**Semantic roles:**  
*agent, patient, etc.*





# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Examples:

*John broke the window with the hammer.*

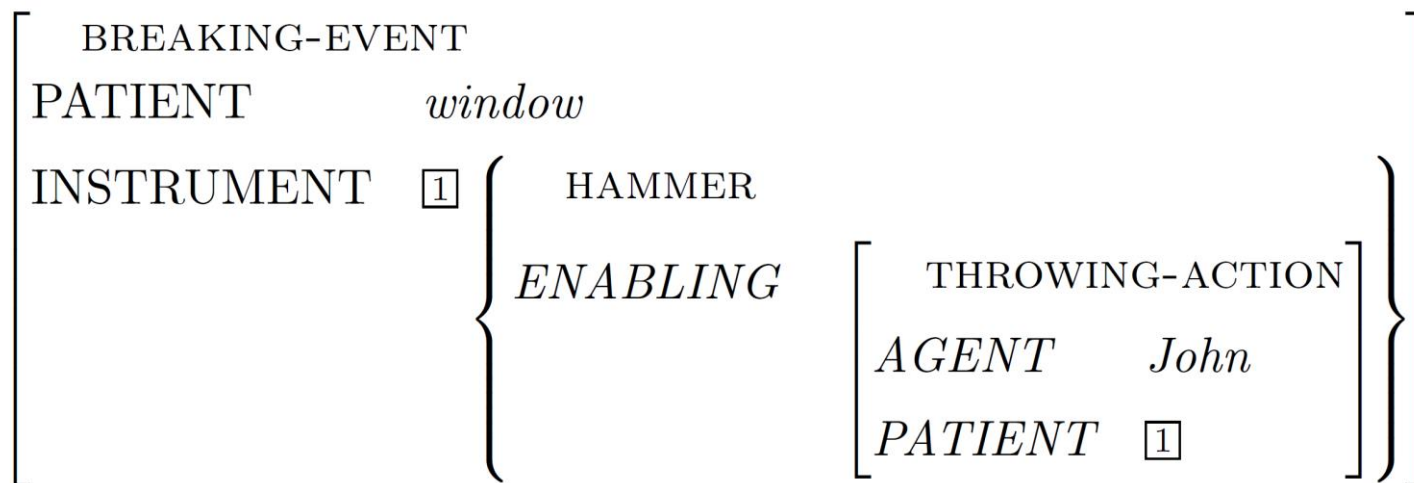
[ BREAKING EVENT	
AGENT	<i>John</i>
PATIENT	<i>window</i>
INSTRUMENT	<i>hammer</i>



# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Examples: a prior, enabling action

*A hammer, thrown by John, breaks the window.*



Biró (2013). 'Is Judaism boring?'



# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Examples: ritual = action with a twist

*John feeds the child.*

*John offers food sacrifice  
to the local deity.*

GIVING-ACTION	
AGENT	<i>John</i>
RECIPIENT	<i>child</i>
PATIENT	<i>food</i>

GIVING-ACTION	
AGENT	<i>John</i>
RECIPIENT	<i>local deity</i>
PATIENT	<i>food</i>

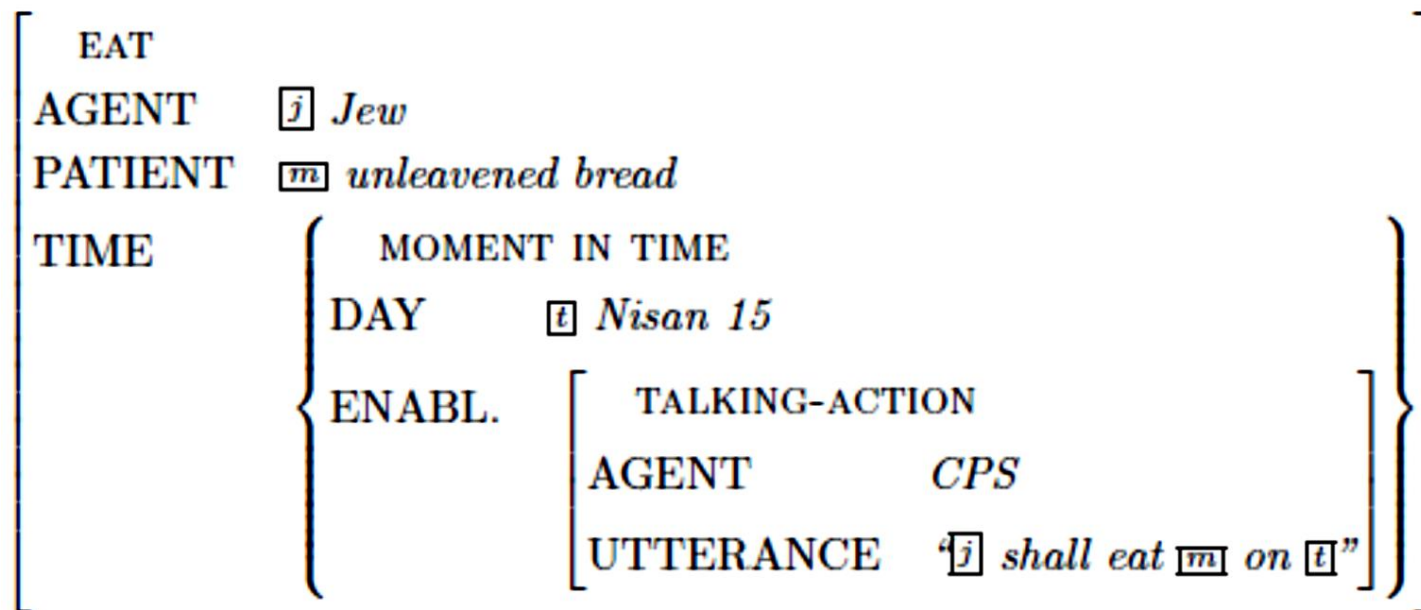
Biró (2013). 'Is Judaism boring?'



# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Examples from Judaism:

*Eating matzah on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan*



Biró (2013). 'Is Judaism boring?'



# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Examples from Judaism:

## *Immersion in the mikveh*

IMMERSION							
AGENT	<i>woman or convert</i>						
INSTRUMENT	<table><tr><td>WATER</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>QUANTITY</td><td><i>40 seah</i></td></tr><tr><td>SOURCE</td><td><i>natural</i></td></tr></table>	WATER		QUANTITY	<i>40 seah</i>	SOURCE	<i>natural</i>
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Biró (2013). 'Is Judaism boring?'

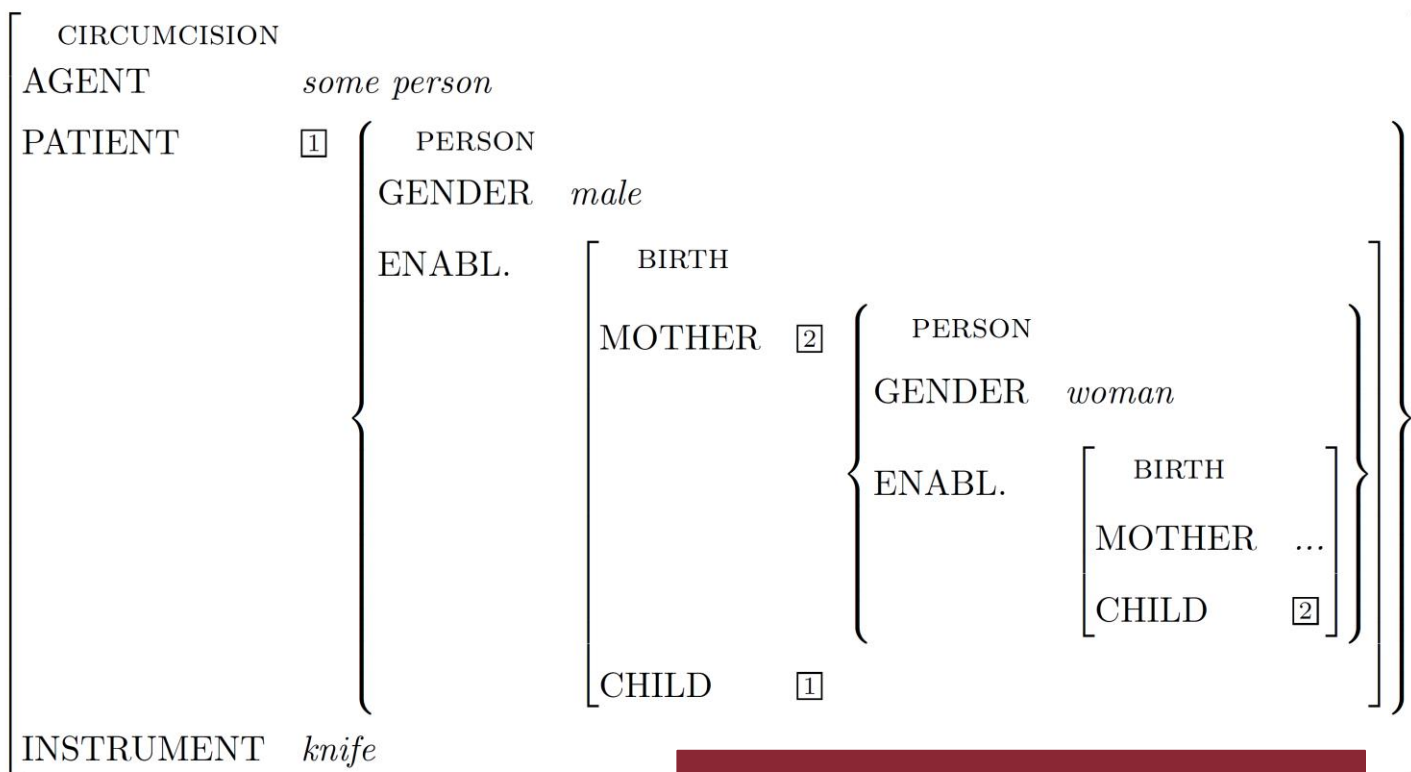
***Where is the  
superhuman agent?***





# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- Examples from Judaism: *circumcision*



Biró (2013). 'Is Judaism boring?'

***Where is the  
superhuman agent?***



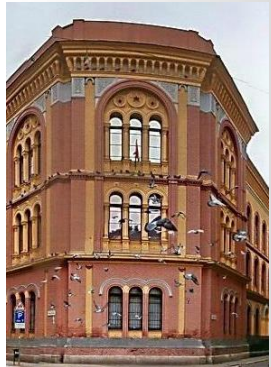
# Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

(Biró 2013, 'Is Judaism boring?' ; *and elsewhere*)

## Lawson & McCauley 1990 applied to Judaism:

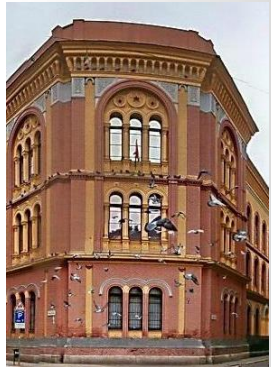
- requires references to time and place,
- requires negations for prohibitions
- requires *enabling states of affairs*  
(instead of / beside *enabling rituals*)
- + prior narratives (enabling non-ritualistic past actions)
- ...

Many actions considered as Jewish rituals  
lack a superhuman agent in their structure!



# Overview

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- “Theologically correct” Judaism...  
... and alternatives thereof.



# McCauley and Lawson 2002

## Types of rituals:

- Form:

*special agent*



*special patient*

*special instrument*

- Sensual pageantry:

*high*



*low*

- Frequency:

*low*



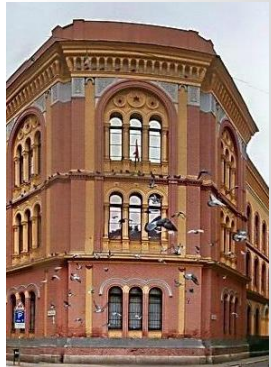
*high*

# Harvey Whitehouse



## Modes of religiosity:

- Fieldwork on Pomio Kivung in Dadul village (a cargo cult in Papua New Guinea)
- Observes a “splinter group outburst” with new high-arousal rituals.
- *Doctrinal modes* vs. *imagistic mode*.
- “The Pomio Kivung ritual system is unusual in that it includes *no* special agent rituals.” (McCauley and Lawson 2002: 180)







# McCauley and Lawson 2002

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# McCauley and Lawson 2002

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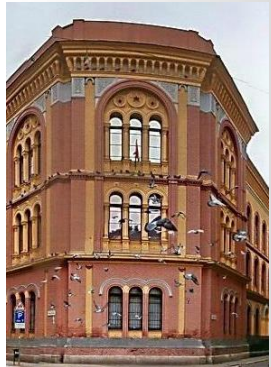
*low*

- Frequency:

*low*



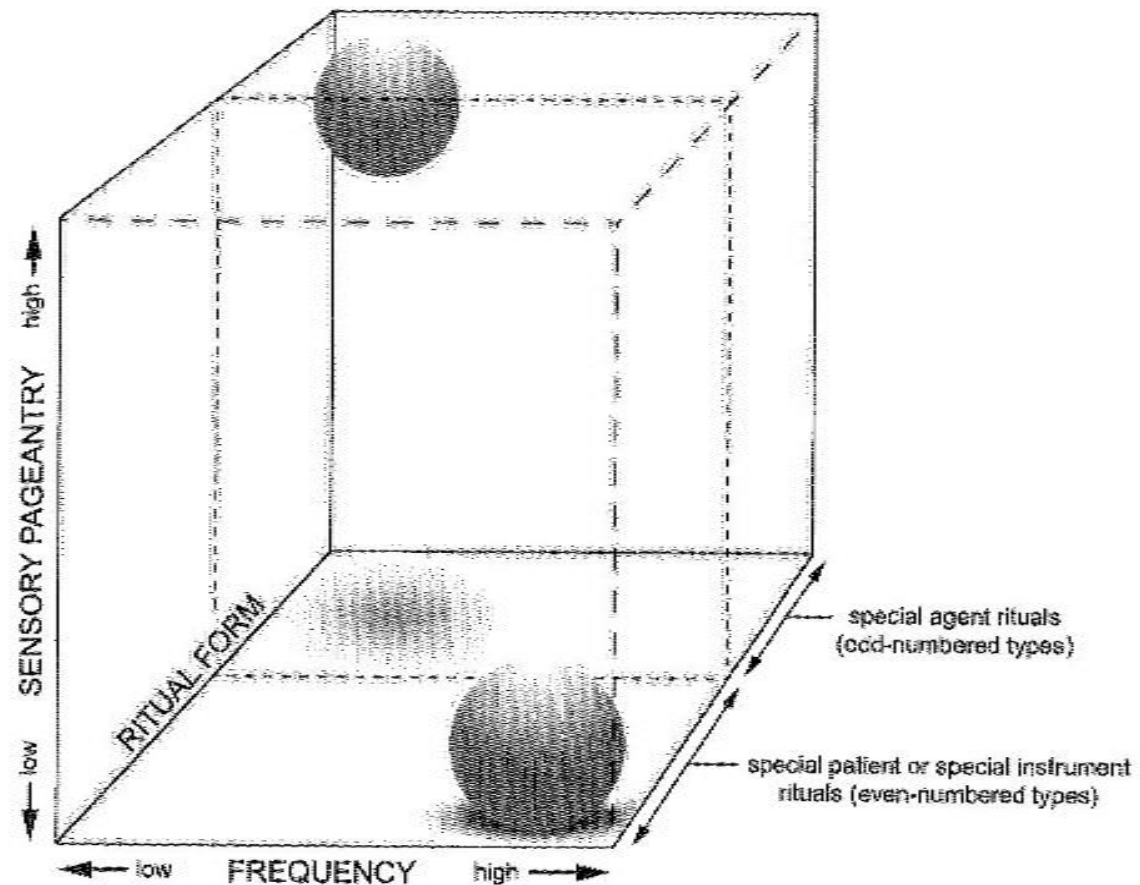
*high*

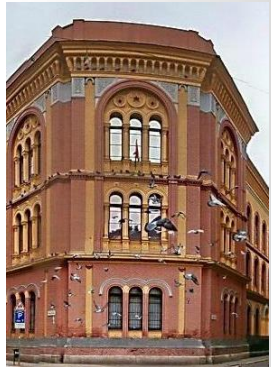


# McCauley and Lawson 2002

## A balanced ritual system:

McCauley & Lawson  
2002, p. 203.



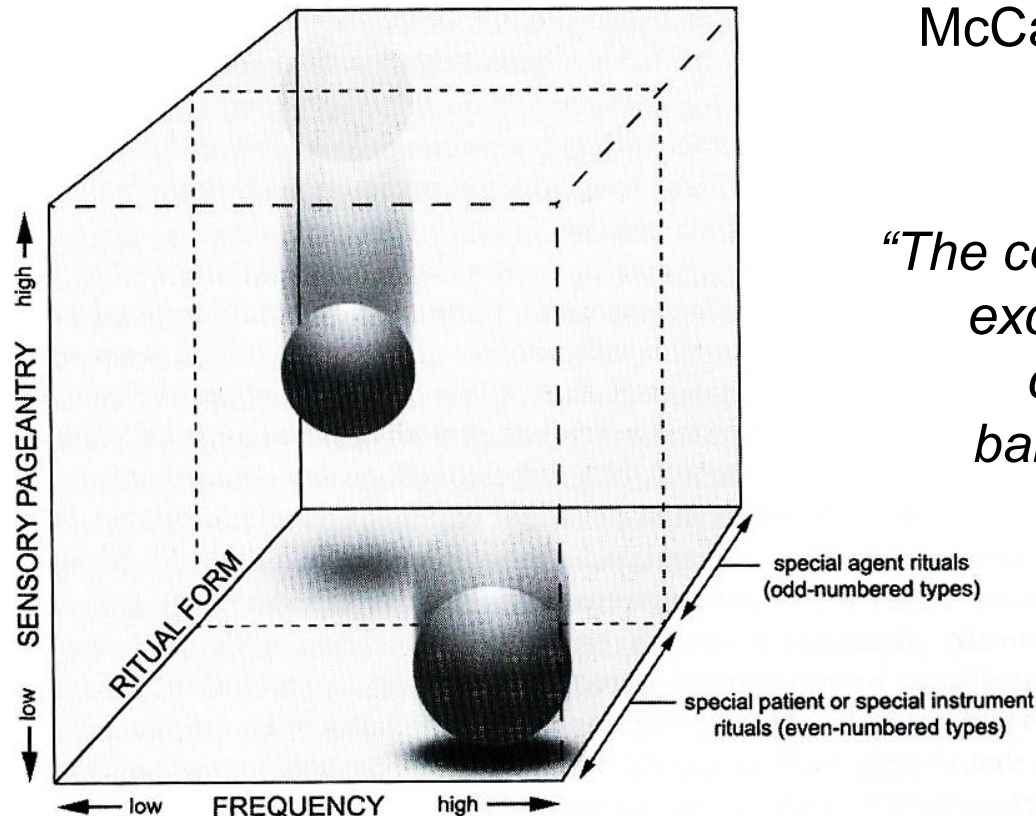


# McCauley and Lawson 2002

## The “tedium effect” and “splinter groups”:

McCauley & Lawson  
2002, p. 207.

*“The consequences of  
excess conceptual  
control: deflated  
balanced system.”*





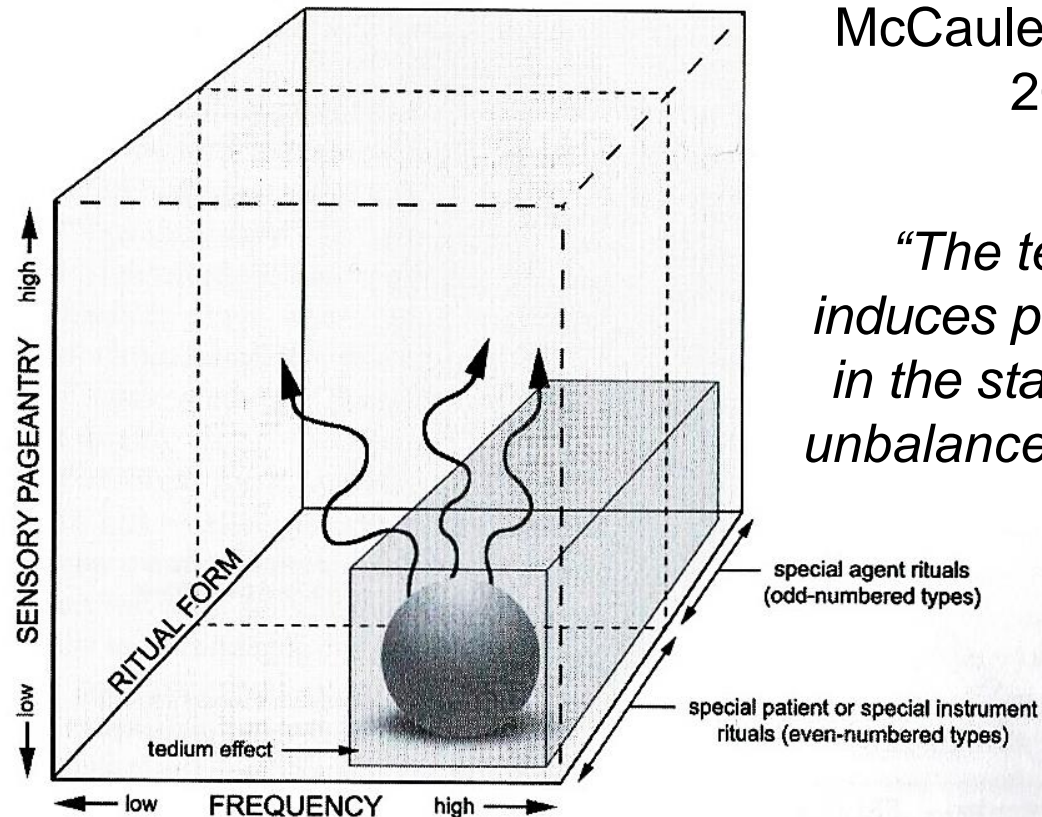


# McCauley and Lawson 2002

## The “tedium effect” and “splinter groups”:

McCauley & Lawson  
2002, p. 185.

*“The tedium effect  
induces perturbations  
in the stable stage of  
unbalanced systems.”*







# Hypothesis

Judaism lacks a balanced ritual system,

therefore:

- *tedium effects?*
- *splinter groups?*

*Well, yes and no.*

*It is more complicated than that.*

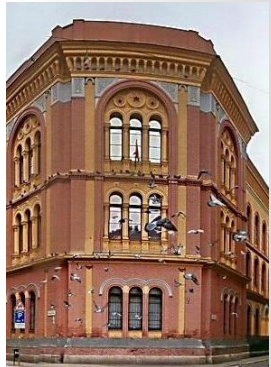


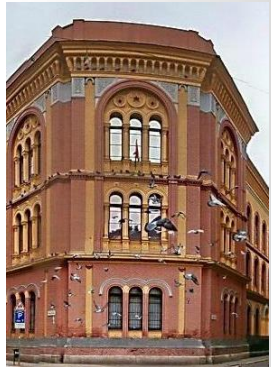
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... and alternatives thereof.**

# “Modes of Judaism”

- Theologically (halakhically) correct
- Folk religion
- Popular interpretations of Judaism
- “Splinter groups”
- Revising the theory





# The hasidic tish:

*A high-arousal and special-agent GIVING-EVENT.*



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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99\\_%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%95%D7%98%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%90%D7%9F\\_%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%AA\\_%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9F\\_%D7%94%D7%98%D7%94%D7%95%D7%A8.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99_%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%95%D7%98%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%90%D7%9F_%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%AA_%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9F_%D7%94%D7%98%D7%94%D7%95%D7%A8.jpg)





# The hasidic tish:

*A high-arousal and  
special-agent GIVING-EVENT.*



GIVING EVENT

AGENT  
RECIPIENT  
PATIENT

*rebbe  
hasid  
food*

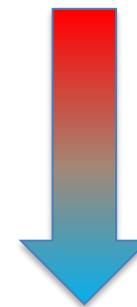
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boyan\\_tish,\\_Sukkot\\_2009.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boyan_tish,_Sukkot_2009.jpg)  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99\\_%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%95%D7%98%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%90%D7%9F\\_%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%AA\\_%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9F\\_%D7%94%D7%98%D7%94%D7%95%D7%A8.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99_%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%95%D7%98%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%90%D7%9F_%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%AA_%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9F_%D7%94%D7%98%D7%94%D7%95%D7%A8.jpg)





# The changing / re-interpreted role of the rabbi

- Is the rabbi a “Jewish priest”?
- Is the rabbi a “Jewish phd”?
- Priestly blessing pronounced by post-war non-orthodox Hungarian rabbis:
  - József Schweitzer (1922-2015)
  - Alfréd Schöner (1948-)
  - István Darvas (1974-)



*special  
instrument*

*special  
agent*



*Thank you for your attention!*

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