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JRFM
JOURNAL FOR RELIGION, FILM AND MEDIA

2015
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Marie-Therese Mäder and
Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati (eds.)

Thinking Methods in Media and Religion

SCHÜREN

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JRFM
JOURNAL FOR RELIGION, FILM AND MEDIA

JRFM is a peer-reviewed, open-access, online publication. It offers a platform for scholarly research in the broad field of religion and media, with a particular interest in audiovisual and interactive forms of communication. It engages with the challenges arising from the dynamic development of media technologies and their interaction with religion.

JRFM publishes peer-reviewed articles in English that focus on visual and audiovisual media, feature film, documentary, advertising, interactive internet-based media and other forms of communication in their interdependencies with contemporary or historical forms of religion. It critically reflects on theories and methods, studies on intermediality, phenomenological and comparative approaches to media and religion across different cultures and periods. The main focus lies on contemporary phenomena, but diachronic analysis of the interaction between religion, film and media is also promoted as an essential facet of study.

JRFM is edited by a network of international film, media and religion experts from different countries and with professional experience in research, teaching and publishing in an interdisciplinary setting, linking perspectives from the study of religion and theology, film, media, visual and cultural studies, and sociology. It emerges from the cooperation between different institutions in Europe, particularly the University of Graz and the University of Zurich, and is published in cooperation with Schüren publishing house, Marburg (Germany). It is an online, open-access publication with print-on-demand as an option. It appears twice a year in May and November and encompasses generally 4-6 articles.

If you are interested in publishing in **JRFM**, please visit our website www.jrfm.eu. You will find detailed information about submission, review process and publication. We encourage papers that deepen the questions addressed by the calls for papers and free contributions within the wider profile of the journal.

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In memory of Davide Zordan, our friend and colleague
who contributed much to the field of religion and media
and particularly to the planning of this new journal
but did not live to see its first issue published.

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Marie-Therese Mäder and Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati

Editorial

Inspired by a workshop held at the University of Zurich in November 2014, we inaugurate the *Journal for Religion, Film and Media* (JRFM) with a special issue dedicated to methodology. The field of media and religion is characterised by a multitude of approaches to both religion and media. The choice of communication paradigms and analytical procedures to be used in an investigation of the intertwined relationship of religion and media depends on the sources, the questions we seek to answer and the cultural context. This issue of JRFM presents a range of methodological procedures by highlighting three selected communication models: the first part considers a model that defines communication as an overlap of spaces that mediates meaning-making processes; the second part looks at the employment of a gender lens for investigation of the relationship between media and religion; the final part analyses the interaction between media and religion in the context of various contemporary art productions. While these models have been drawn from a broad range of possible topics, those selected share a common concern: they involve reflection on methodological steps used to analyse interactions always characterised by non-linear and multi-causal relations. Each of the three main sections contains a key article and two responses, with the methodological questions addressed by invited contributors commented upon, discussed critically and developed further by members of the mentioned research groups.

JRFM'S ACADEMIC CONTEXT

JRFM is a project situated at the intersection of a number of research teams that are working on aspects of the interaction of media and religion: *International Research Group Film and Theology*,[1] *Media and Religion*,[2] *Commun(icat)ing Bodies*,[3] and *International Exchange on Media and Religion*.[4]

For two decades the *International Research Group Film and Theology* has been undertaking research in an interdisciplinary setting that encompasses theology, the study of religion, cinema and media, and educational sciences. With a membership that includes scholars from a number of European countries, this research group is responsible for the book series *Film und Theologie*, published by Schüren Verlag in Marburg, Germany, and focuses mainly on feature films. In recent years, greater attention has been given to the reception contexts for fiction films and for other genres such as television series. Furthermore, as a broader discussion of the impact of audiovisual media on religion has been sought, theoretical and methodological questions have increasingly been put at the centre of this exchange. The second team is the research group *Media and Religion*, based at the Centre for Religion, Economy and Politics at the University of Zurich. Its research, which has been running since 2004, has explored religion from the perspective of communication theory, with a particular interest in images, feature and documentary films, music, popular culture and the body. On a theoretical level, the group explores the possibilities for the implementation of theories of communication, of image and seeing, of reception and performativity, and of space and gender within the study of religion. Finally, from 2009 to 2014, scholars from the universities of Graz, Zurich, Hull and Villanova as well as from the Fondazione Bruno Kessler in Trento, Italy, worked together intensively in an investigation of the body and clothing as media that interact with religion. The results of this network, called *Commun(icat)ing Bodies*, have been published in a number of books and articles.[5] The exchange has been continued through the formation of the *International Exchange on Media and Religion*. These four interdisciplinary teams, which all study the medial dimensions of religion and the religious dimensions of media, provide stimulating contexts in which to engage in deep intellectual exchange on particular aspects of the field. They have organised projects by addressing specific subjects, theories or methodological questions and have shared and continue to share the results of those efforts in various formats.

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[1] http://www.film-und-theologie.de [accessed 21 September 2015].

[2] http://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/medien [accessed 21 September 2015].

[3] http://communicating-bodies.net [accessed 21 September 2015].

[4] http://media-religion.net/ [accessed 21 September 2015].

After several years of multi-layered cooperation, the need for a platform to display the results generated by other research projects and produced by individuals interested in similar questions was apparent. JRFM is an initiative open to researchers in any discipline that deals with the interaction of media and religion. The journal emphasises, in particular, inter- and transdisciplinary debates on mediality and the mediatisation of religion, and also the interaction of (audio-)visual and material representation with religion in both past and present.

THREE COMMERCIALS AS A STARTING POINT

The participants at the mentioned workshop held at the University of Zurich in November 2014 were asked to present methodological reflections in relation to three commercials. The three commercials advertised Coca-Cola, Pepsi and the Catholic

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[5] A list of publications can be found on the network's website, see communicating-bodies.net [accessed 21 September 2015].

Church in the United States.[6] These commercials are outlined below as an introduction to the articles by Roger Odin and Mia Lövheim in this issue; Sigrid Schade responded to the selected commercials with a discussion of a video performance by Vera Frenkel who reflects on the impact of commercials in general on everyday life.

The commercials by the two soda producers can be classified as "media using religious communities," whereas in the third commercial the Catholic Church uses media for its purposes as a religious community. Nevertheless, all three ventures pursue a single goal, be it religious or solely commercial: to activate consumers.

To that end the Coca-Cola commercial HAVE A GREAT BREAK[7] depicts a highly sexualised masculine figure (fig. 1) whom a young and equally erotic women (fig. 2) observes as he walks out of the water at a secluded, Caribbean-like beach. While opening and drinking from a can of Coke Light, the woman takes the man for an available sexual object (fig. 3). As he dresses and puts on a clerical collar, it becomes evident that he is a presumably celibate priest. The only body contact between the two actors consists of the priest's placing of the sign of the cross (fig. 4) on the woman's forehead using her drink as holy water or balm.

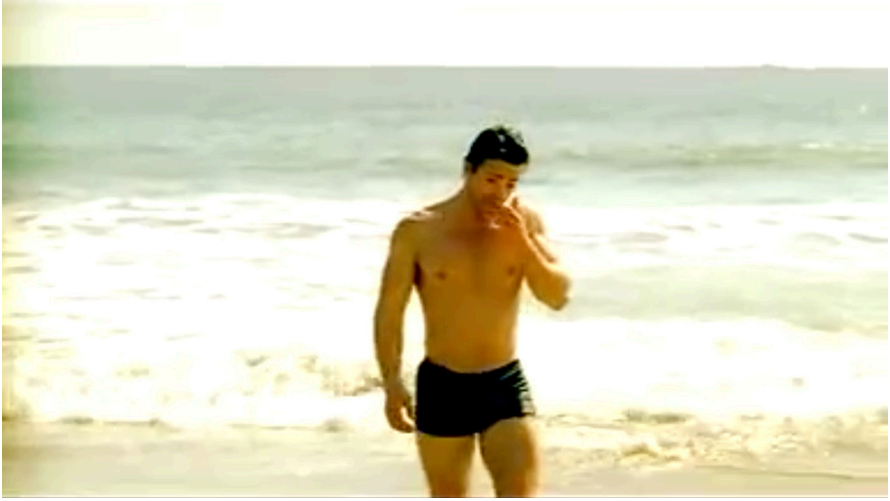

Fig. 1: Sexy priest, HAVE A GREAT BREAK, film still (00:00:09).

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[6] The commercials can be viewed in the Internet. The date of production of both commercials is probably between 2004 and 2008.

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6my9ZNxUL8 [accessed on 29 September 2015].

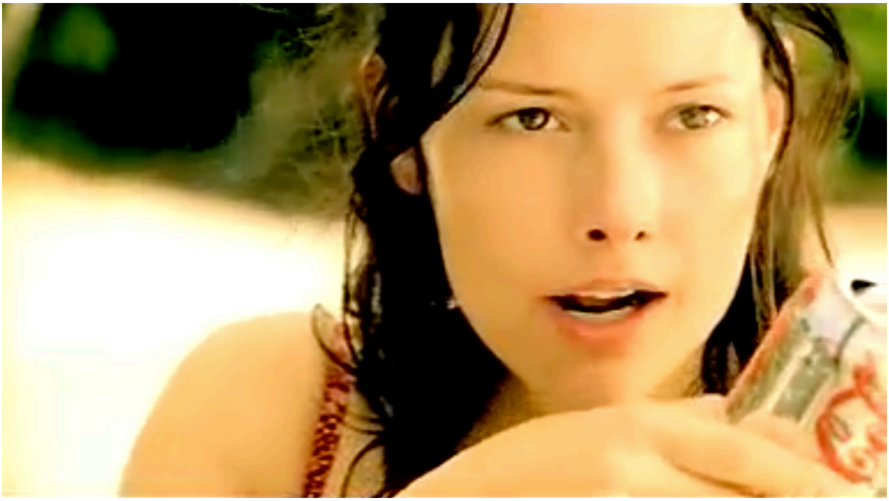

Fig. 2: Sexy women with Coke can, HAVE A GREAT BREAK, film still (00:00:20).

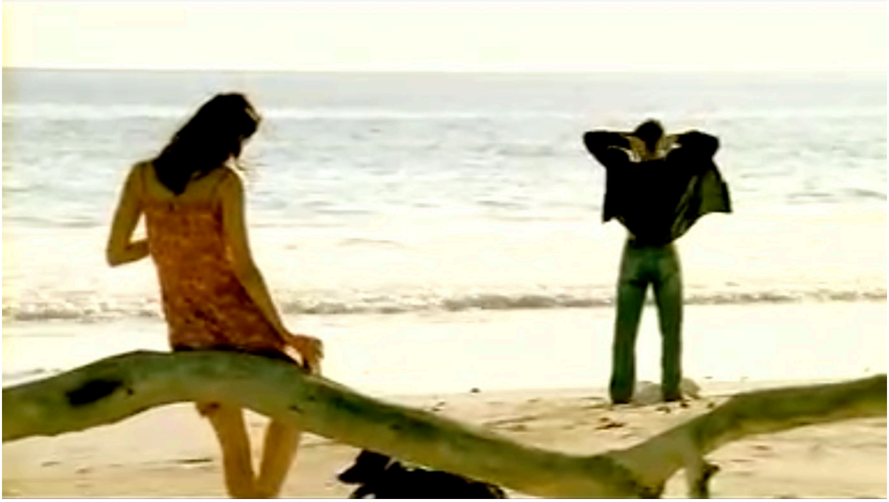

Fig. 3: Delighted observing women, HAVE A GREAT BREAK, film still (00:00:27).

The Pepsi commercial KUNG FU PEPSI CRUSH[8] (fig. 5–8) tells the story of a rite of passage in a Buddhist monastery where all the monks wear the same enigmatic sign on their foreheads, a sign that also adorns the entrance to the monastery. The child novice

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[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nMYFb0WPJk [accessed on 29 September 2015].

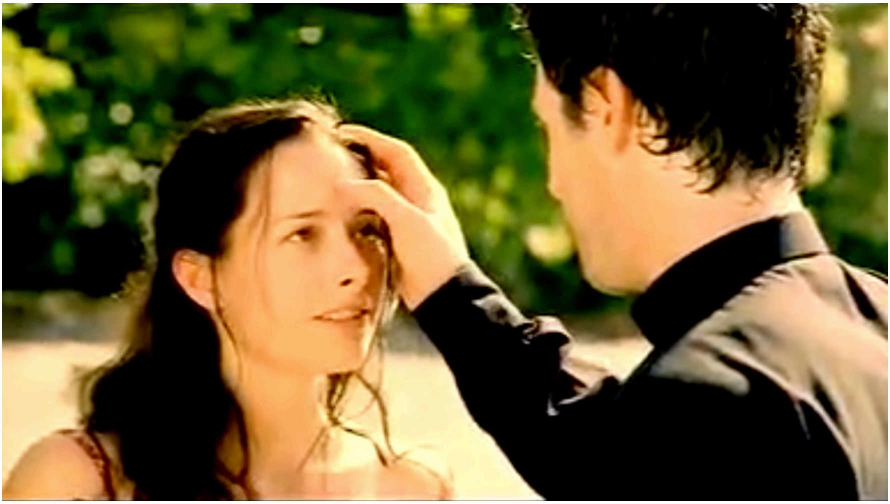

Fig. 4: Sign of a cross, Have a Great Break, film still (00:00:41).

is seen entering the monastery, preparing for life as a monk, at first failing and later, when older, passing tough tests in kung fu. As the final step in his education, he must crush a Pepsi can with his head, inscribing the mark of the pull tab on his forehead. Both commercials play with surprise effects, in which, with a twist in the narration, something unexpected happens. Humour is used to engage the audience and cause

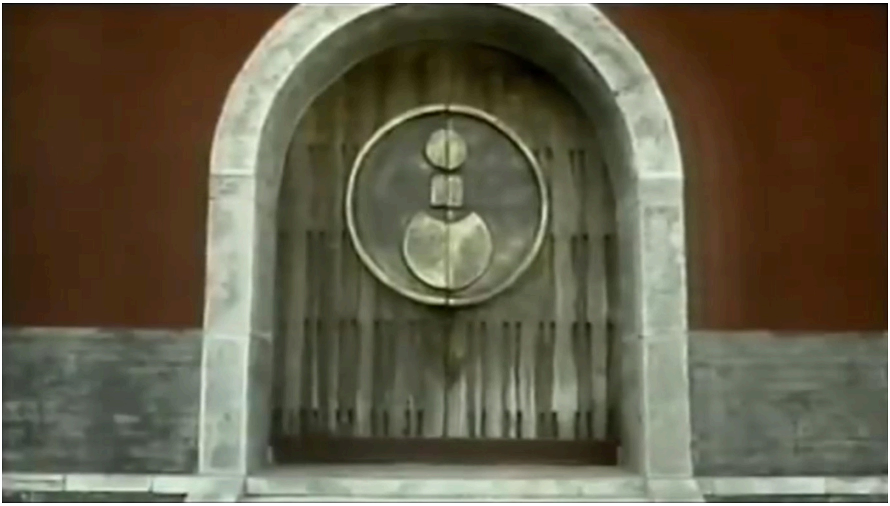

Fig. 5: The sign at the front door of the Buddhist monastery, Kung Fu Pepsi Crush, film still (00:00:09).

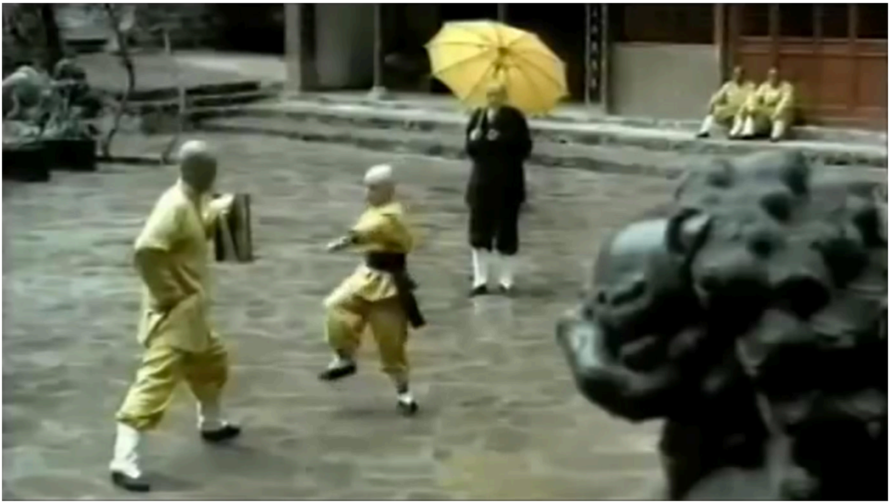

Fig. 6: Rehearsing Kung Fu, Kung Fu Pepsi Crush, film still (00:00:09).

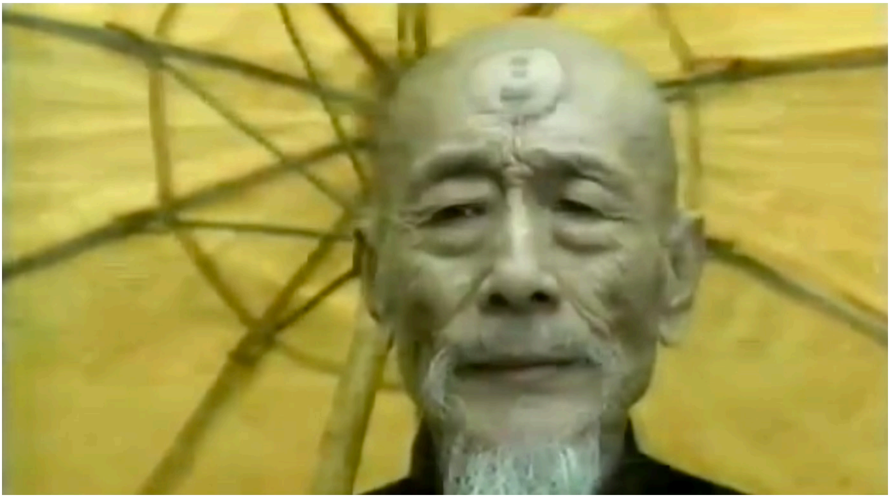

Fig. 7: The master, Kung Fu Pepsi Crush, film still (00:00:21).

them to remember the relevant product. Religious symbolism within the narration makes connections to well-known symbol systems and specific values. Furthermore, both commercials refer to conventionalised film forms: the Have a Great Break commercial refers to music videos and the Kung Fu Pepsi Crush commercial to martial arts films.

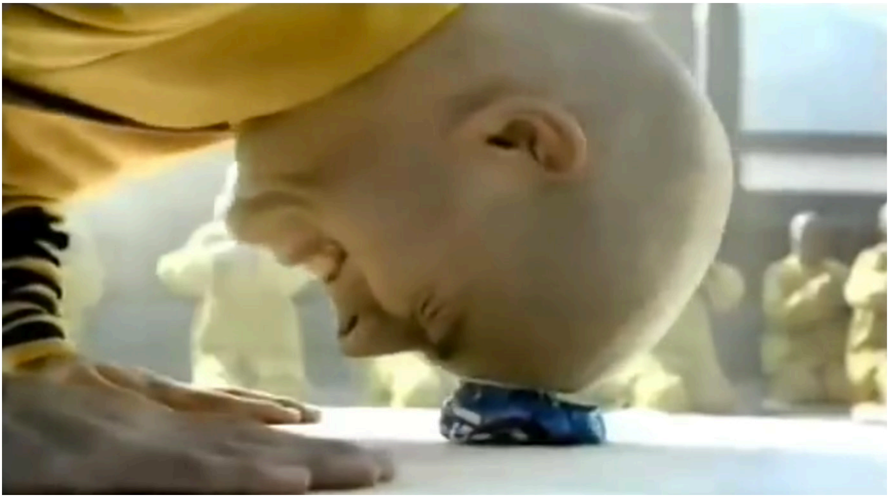

Fig. 8: Crushing Pepsi can with forehead, KUNG FU PEPSI CRUSH, film still (00:00:09).

The CATHOLICS COME HOME video is something different. Its purpose is to move North American Catholics to engage actively in church life. On a visual level the commercial shows a large number of typical Catholic references such as rituals (fig. 9), architecture (St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, for example), art (Michelangelo's fresco in the Sistine Chapel, for example) and a number of popes (fig. 10). The narration highlights

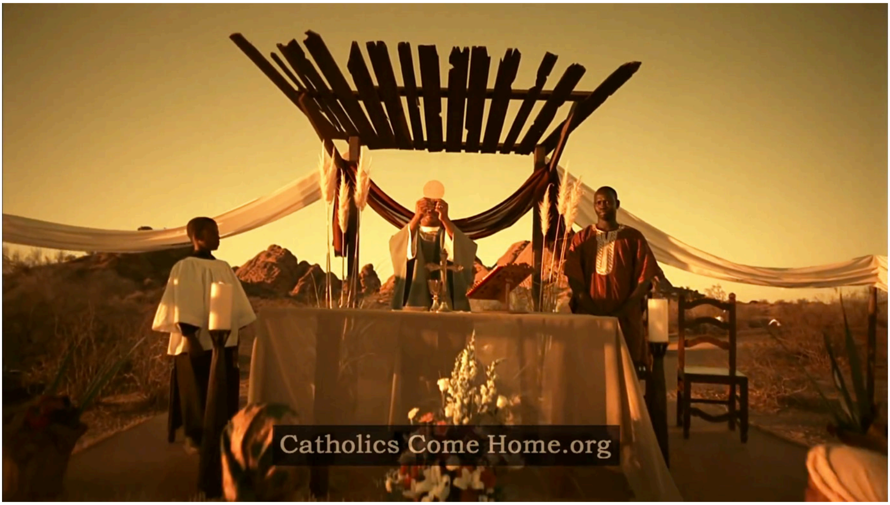

Fig. 9: A Catholic mass being performed likely somewhere in Africa, commercial CATHOLICS COME HOME 2009, film still (00:01:10).

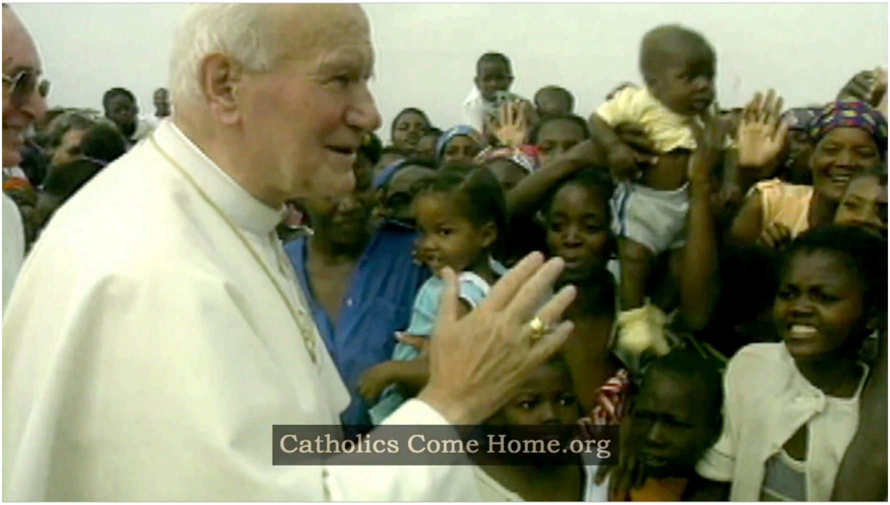

Fig. 10: Pope John Paul II visiting what is probably Africa, commercial CATHOLICS COME HOME 2009, film still (00:01:28).

the ancient, contemporary and global heritage of the organisation by referencing its charitable (fig. 11), educational and health programs.

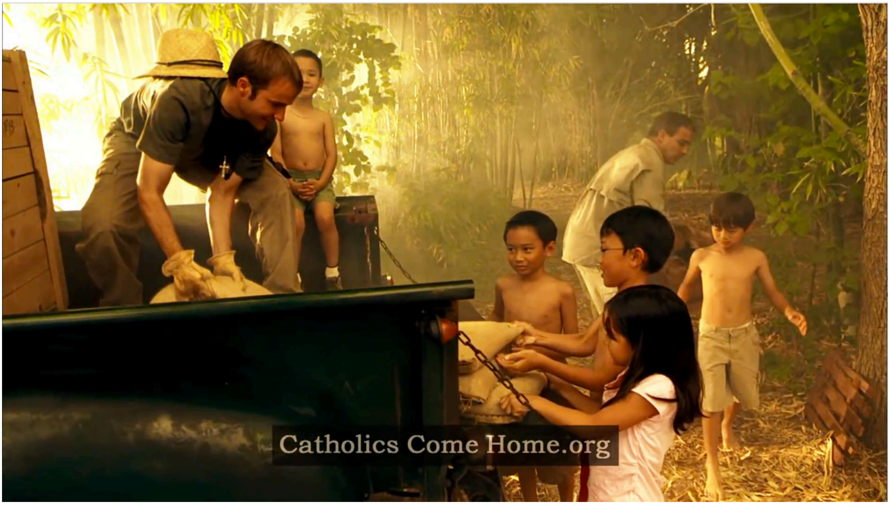

Fig. 11: Charity worker with a crucifix around his neck bringing goods to poor children, commercial CATHOLICS COME HOME 2009, film still (00:00:24).

CATHOLICS COME HOME, a series consisting of several commercials, was produced by a private initiative led by Tom Peterson, a North American media professional, with its goal the "evangelization" of Catholics, according to the homepage of that initiative.[9] Peterson's organisations Virtue Film and Catholics Come Home call the commercials "evangomercials." They were aired, for example, during major college football games and on television (CBS and NBC) in 2011.

These three commercials have been distributed through the Internet on platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo and organisations' homepages. Therefore, their transmission can be seen in light of Marshall McLuhan's "global village" in contemporary culture. All three commercials are products of the US market that can be received worldwide. The values and norms formed in the narration are transmitted within the global Internet community. This network functions, however, in effect as one-way communication, from the United States and to the rest of the world, while the global village McLuhan had in mind was probably more balanced, as a product of information exchange. Nevertheless the three commercials provide fruitful examples for thinking about methods in the field of media and religion.

THINKING METHODS IN MEDIA AND RELIGION

The first section of this first issue of JRFM, entitled *Religion, Media and Communication*, deals with spaces of communication in the field of media and religion. Analysis of a particular communication presupposes a specific approach to the spaces in which that communication takes place. Production, representation and reception/consumption are all considered here as fundamental aspects of communication theory, but with a particular interest in the interaction of production and reception/consumption.

In his contribution, *Religion and Communication Spaces. A Semio-pragmatic Approach*, Roger Odin opens the section by noting the basic distinction between mental and physical spaces of communication. People's ideas and expectations are mental spaces based on experience, whereas the physical spaces of media are found in real places where films are received, such as cinemas, homes or schools. The institutional framing crucially influences reception processes. The experience of watching a film with friends at home differs from the experience of watching that same film surrounded by strangers, and thus alone, in the cinema. With this distinction in mind, Odin seeks to understand how religious spaces of communication operate. In her contribution *Documentary Media and Religious Communities* Marie-Therese Mäder discusses methodology by considering four spaces of communication in the context of religious communities' use of media, with people as active participants in each space, in production, distribution, representation and media communication. In *Methodological Challenges by (New) Media. An Essay on Perspectives and Possible Consequences* Christian Wessely identifies the need for an altered approach to media literacy in an age when linear reception of media is no longer the norm, with interactivity now common in the everyday experience of digital communication.

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[9] http://www.catholicscomehome.org/invite-tom-to-speak/ [accessed 21 September 2015].

The second section looks at the interaction of media and religion through the lens of gender. Two aspects are crucial in this section: media often use religion to subvert or reiterate gender roles, and religion is also understood as a fundamental aspect of gender identities. The section also considers the link between analysis of media and religion and the embedded concept of religion.

In the main contribution in this section, *(Re)Making a Difference. Religion, Mediatisation, and Gender*, Mia Lövheim analyses the representation strategies of two of the commercials, those produced by Catholics Come Home and Coca-Cola, in light of the mediatisation of religion. She shows how gender roles are transmitted and reinforced in these processes by challenging traditional and conventional understandings of religion. In *Staging the Dead. The Material Body as a Medium for Gender and Religion* Anna-Katharina Höpflinger describes how the dead body and the clothing in which it is placed can be used to mediate binary gender schemes, which can also be subverted by death rituals involving the handling of the mortal remains in a Roman Catholic context. Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler's contribution, *Mediality and Materiality in the History of Religion. A Medieval Case Study about Religion and Gender in In-Between Spaces*, focuses on religious infrastructure donated by women in twelfth-century Cairo, and in reconsidering textual and archaeological findings, Beinhauer-Köhler questions the paradigm of the male hegemony over the definition of public space.

The third section, with its interest in contemporary art, considers how art refers to religious motives and constellations not only in single works but also in exhibitions and installations. In contemporary society, religion plays a central role within various branches of artistic production. From a theoretical perspective, the specific relationship between religion and media in contemporary artistic production and reception leaves us to wonder whether religious symbols in contemporary art, in performances and in author films are used for social criticism and whether references to religious traditions might even constitute a new form of religion. What methods might be used to explore this relationship?

In the main contribution in this section, *Religion, Belief and Medial Layering of Communication. Perspectives from Studies in Visual Culture and Artistic Productions*, Sigrid Schade analyses a case of medial layering of communication. Working on visual culture, she explores Vera Frenkel's performance THIS IS YOUR MESSIAH SPEAKING (1990) in which Frenkel criticises consumption culture and generates a media criticism through religious references. In Cross-Media Transmission Processes. Marian Figures in TODO SOBRE MI MADRE (Pedro Almodóvar, ES 1999) Natalie Fritz elucidates how religious concepts and motives are transmitted through films, with meaning-making processes shifted and the dominant reading questioned. Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati's contribution, *Approaching Religious Symbols in the Public Space. Contemporary Art and Museums as Places of Negotiation?*, considers the function of religion as displayed in works of art in exhibitions, analysing the methodological implications of the interaction between the work of art and its audience when the latter is invited to engage actively in the reception process.

By addressing methodology, the editors of the first issue of JRFM intend to encourage and support interdisciplinary scholarly work in which both media and religion are understood as broad and diverse cultural fields with manifold interactions.

The publication of this first issue has only been possible with the financial, conceptual and intellectual support of the Centre for Religion, Economy and Politics (ZRWP), the universities of Graz and Zurich and Schüren Verlag in Marburg. We would like to express our gratitude especially to Annette Schüren, to the participants of the workshop *Thinking Methods* Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler, Mia Lövheim, Roger Odin and Sigrid Schade, to the members of the research group Media and Religion, especially to Anna-Katharina Höpflinger and Natalie Fritz, to Harry Forster for the translation of Roger Odin's contribution, to the proofreaders Rona Johnston and Gudrun Rausch, to Noè Pezzoli for the cover photograph. Finally we would like to thank Christian Wessely for his great support, both as author and as initiator and editor of the whole project.

Zurich, 26 October 2015

Marie-Therese Mäder and Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati

I Religion, Media and Communication

Roger Odin

Religion and Communication Spaces

A Semio-pragmatic Approach

ABSTRACT

Following the reflection initiated in his book *The Spaces of Communication*, Roger Odin suggests a new distinction between physical communication spaces and mental communication spaces (spaces that we have inside us). The suggestion is exemplified by three film analyses dedicated to the relationships between religion and communication.

KEYWORDS

semio-pragmatics, communication, spaces of communication, religion, cinema, advertising, commercials

BIOGRAPHY

Roger Odin is professor emeritus of Communication at Paris 3 University (Sorbonne Nouvelle), where he was the head of the Film and Audiovisual Institute from 1983 until 2003. Theorist of the semio-pragmatic approach (*Cinéma et production de sens*, 1990; *De la fiction*, 2000; *Les espaces de communication*, 2011), he directed a research group examining film documentaries (*L'âge d'or du cinéma documentaire. Europe années 50*, 1997) and initiated research into home movies and amateur films (*Le film de famille*, 1995; *Le cinéma en amateur*, 1999). Today, he is interested in the mobile phone (*Il cinema nell'epoca del videofonino*, 2011; *Téléphone mobile et création, in collaboration with L. Allard et L. Creton*, 2014).

COMMUNICATION SPACES

The notion of communication space, in the form I sought to develop in my previous book,[1] is intended to avoid the aporia related to the notion of context. I define a communication space as a construct designed to select, in a given context, a bundle of constraints that regulate construction of the actants, relations between actants, mode(s) of production of the meanings and affective elements employed, *on the axis*

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[1] Odin 2011.

of relevance chosen by the theorist. The last point is particularly important: by limiting the number of constraints selected, it is the choice of an axis of relevance that allows analysis (in a given context the number of constraints is such that it cannot be controlled).

Up till now the communication spaces I have constructed have been essentially spaces with a *physical* existence (family, archives, television, university, etc.), but to explain what is going on in various communication contexts, it seems necessary to add *mental* spaces[2]. According to René Loureau, "our ego is a bric-à-brac of institutions";[3] one might also say that it is a bric-à-brac of *communication spaces,* some of which are institutions, others not. What I call "mental spaces" are the spaces we carry around with us.

A single example may illustrate this notion. We have in us what one might call a cinematic mental space, corresponding to the projection of a film in a cinema, on a big screen, in the course of a showing of fixed duration. The existence of this space explains the risk of our being frustrated by a film shown on television (or worse still on a mobile phone) and all the subterfuges deployed to remedy such frustration by the producers of programmes (for example, the introductory sequence imitating our entry into the cinema as in La dernière séance, a French TV show presented by Eddy Mitchell, with credits recalling the myth of movies, etc.). The same is true of similar tricks by viewers, setting up home cinemas in the hope of conjuring up (at least in part) the cinema communication space and making the associated psychological effort to build a "mental bubble" enabling them to cut themselves off from the outside environment and enter the film.[4]

I shall now look at three films that explicitly bring into play the religious communication space in terms of what they represent: a film promoting the Roman Catholic Church, Catholics Come Home (2008),[5] and two publicity films, one for Pepsi (Kung Fu Pepsi Crush, 2002–2003),[6] the other for Coke Light (Have a Great Break, 2005).[7] For this analysis, I shall use as the axis of relevance the relations between religion and communication. For what purpose is religion brought into play? How (communication mode problem)? Which audience is being targeted? With what likelihood of success?

It should be borne in mind that the religious communication space may appear in physical form (churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, shrines and so on), bringing into play specific actors (popes, bishops, priests, rabbis, imams, monks), and in mental form. For all believers and non-believers (religion being a cultural phenomenon no one can escape), the religious space is in us, a space made up of institutional organisations, rituals, beliefs (which one may not believe) and rules for behaviour (which one may not obey). We shall also see that we do not all have the same religious space and that it may consequently prove useful to our analysis to construct several religious spaces, depending on the religion under consideration and the cultural tradition of the place where communication is occurring.

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[2] Odin 2015.

[3] Loureau 1970, 48.

[4] "The institution of this 'bubble' allows him to ideally replicate the spatial structure that characterises the movie theater, even in open and practicable environments", Casetti/Sampietro, 2012, 22.

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lX7YXj7MltEProgram [accessed 29 June 2015].

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nMYFb0WPJk [accessed 29 June 2015].

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6my9ZNxUL8 [accessed 29 June 2015].

Catholics Come Home (2008)

The first film sets out to promote the Catholic faith. It is quite long for an advert (two minutes) and divided into two acts, underlined by the commentary and music, and by a break in the sequence of pictures. The discursive mode is clearly dominant, the film taking the form of an illustrated speech. The voice-over is omnipresent, almost pressing in its speedy delivery. It conveys the message the film aims to transport and makes for a consistent whole: without the commentary, we would not be able to connect up the images we are shown (which is not to say that the images are weak).

The first part of the commentary consists of short sentences, all starting with the personal pronoun “we”. The film is quite openly a statement by a community in whose name it speaks. This community is described as a universal family: “Our family is made up every race, we are young and old, rich and poor, men and women, sinners and saints.” The last two terms in this list have a special status: not only do they encompass all the individuals cited in the preceding list, but they also qualify them, dividing them into two categories, with the terms setting them apart as belonging to a religious community. What follows confirms this implicit assumption: it points out the fields in which the community intervenes, with God’s help, fields which, in themselves, do not belong in the religious space: public health, charity work, education, science. One is struck by the explicitly self-congratulatory tone of these statements, which underline the scale of their impact (“We are the largest organization on the planet bringing relief and comfort [...] We educate more children than any other scholarly or religious institution”) and the historically innovative character (“We founded the college system”) of this community in the world. The film emphasises then the communitys part in defending life (as this claim coincides with a picture of a pregnant woman, it may be seen as condemning abortion), marriage and the family. Then it moves on to sentences showing how the community is deeply rooted in the world, in history and religious tradition (in particular the holy scriptures, with the Bible and the Holy Spirit presented as having served as guides for the past 2,000 years). Only at the end of this sequence is the reference of the deictic made explicit: “We are the Catholic church.”

The second part follows directly the Catholic religious axis: it refers to sacraments, mass (celebrated for centuries, every hour and every day), Jesus Christ, Peter, the full lineage of popes who have assembled around them, in love and truth, Catholics and the Catholic faith, which in this uncertain, changing world secures the presence of a powerful truth, permanent and consistent: God's love for his creation.

We shall now turn to the work on sound and image. What is striking is that, contrary to what one might expect, the pictures (apart from the ones concerning popes) have nothing to do with the documentary form. They are more like pictures from a fictional film. Images are suffused with a halo, which makes them slightly unrealistic at the same time as it gives them great emotional force; pictures are composed like paintings (framing, colour, depth of field), often leading to the construction of a micro-narrative that can be summed up in a single word: care, help, teach, or search. Furthermore, there are no sounds to tie the images to reality; on the contrary, music plays throughout, emphatically, even pompously, in some great affective surge that seeks to carry us away. The editing is consistent with this momentum: shots are short but the transitions between them extremely elaborate and smooth, creating the effect of two great flows corresponding to two sequences in the commentary and music. Moreover, none of these sequences is static. The result is a succession of travelling shots, which produces a stirring sense of movement.

I think it is now possible to make a suggestion regarding the target group of this video clip. This film is not out to convince atheists; there are too many religious presuppositions in its pitch. For the same reason, it does not seem to be targeting believers of other faiths; nothing in its discourse is addressed to them. On the contrary, the film conveys many signs of emphathising with those already familiar with the Catholic faith: communication remains inside the Catholic religious (mental) space and the discursive mode combines with the private mode (references to shared history and memory).[8] The commentary indicates a target group: the film addresses those who have moved away from Catholicism ("If you've been away from the Catholic Church we invite you to take another look") and who it would like to bring back into the flock (the last words are "Welcome home"). However, I would suggest that the target group is in fact even more specific: mainly (though not exclusively) those who have turned away to Evangelical churches.

Several features contribute to this assumption: the recurrent presence of pictures of regions where these churches have developed at the expense of the Catholic Church (Mexico, Brazil, more broadly South America, Africa, India); the metaphor of the family as an effective, reassuring community of mutual assistance (the image that Evangelical churches particularly like to project); the insistence on collective ritual (a basic element in the way Evangelical churches operate) and on ceremonial pomp and tradition, going so far as to make the Catholic Church look slightly dated (for example, in the sequence on communion, the priest gives the host to a worshipper, which is rarely the case nowadays as people generally take it themselves). It stops short of the formal features associated with Evangelical communication: the commentary plays on affirmation, rather than employ a demonstrative, rational discourse, and the film works primarily through affective elements (music, visual dynamic).

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[8] By private mode I mean the mode by which a group goes back over its past. Odin 2011, 89.

In a way, the opening scene, with its Mexican dance sequence – quite astonishing for a film made to promote Catholicism – sums up the overarching communication strategy. It depicts the Catholic Church as a happy, joyous community of life in which people take pleasure in celebrating together, but in a rule-based framework; dance is a structured celebration (nothing disorderly), a celebration inviting participants to a communion of bodies in music (a way of bonding the community together), and we all know how important this is in Evangelical ritual.

To conclude, this film plays on exactly the same chords as communication by Evangelical churches, while at the same time underlining the superiority of the Catholic Church; unlike Evangelical churches, the Catholic Church is rooted in a long and prestigious history; it is an institution spanning 2000 years, rich and respected, well organised, its influence reaching all over the world. There is good reason to suppose that within this framework, the communication strategy deployed by the film stands a good chance of working.

The film I have just analysed mainly uses the discursive mode and fits wholly into the Catholic religious space, but the other two both draw on the storytelling mode (with a moral message)[9] and straddle two communication spaces: the story told brings into play the religious space (Buddhist in one case, Roman Catholic in the other), but the moral is altogether somewhere else, in the consumer space. Religion here is merely a vehicle for commercial discourse, urging the viewer to drink Coca Cola or Pepsi.

Kung Fu Pepsi Crush (2002–2003)

The Pepsi film tells the story of a young boy who enters a Buddhist monastery as a novice. The camera focuses on a huge sign resembling a keyhole decorating the gateway of the monastery; the same sign crops up in all sorts of places, in particular on the monks' foreheads. For the first two-thirds of the film we are told nothing that might help us make sense of this sign; all we gather is that it must play an essential part because it recurs so persistently. At a narrative level, we see the boy's first steps in the community, which are difficult but lead to progress. He grows into a young man, successfully completing his initiation trials. The community hails his success and, at the invitation of the master, the monks all open cans of Pepsi in synch, raising them to their lips as one (it should be noted that the little noise as they lift the pull-tab is the only synchronous sound in the film). The initiate follows suit with a big smile to show how happy he is, but the community is expecting more; looking faintly angry, the monks are clearly waiting for something else on the part of the initiate. The latter is at a bit of a loss – much like the viewer, even if it is now abundantly clear that this is a Pepsi advert – unable to grasp what more the community wants of him. Then the camera pans from a close-up on the mark on the master's forehead to the same sign on a banner behind him. The initiate suddenly realises that the sign corresponds exactly to the pull-tab on his Pepsi can; he shouts and head butts the can, flattening it. In doing so, the mark of the pull-tab sign is imprinted on his forehead, much to the satisfaction of his mentor and fellow monks, who rush in to congratulate him.

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[9] Odin 2011, 61.

We may now summarise the communication strategy behind this film, which involves articulating two narrative figures. On the one hand, we have a carefully staged dramatic progression leading to the revelation of an enigma and an unexpected, spectacular, yet funny action in which the product is shown to be the operative factor for integration into the monastic community. On the other hand, there is the confusion between the religious space and the Pepsi space: the monastery is dedicated to Pepsi and to become a full member of the community, one must imprint the Pepsi mark on one's body. The purpose of this assimilation process is, of course, to promote the product, but also to amuse us, to make us laugh. The combination of suspense and laughter acts as a go-between, bonding viewer and product. However, it seems fair to say that for this strategy to work, we must have no difficulty putting the religious space represented here at a certain distance.

We may assume that an audience that does not belong to the Buddhist religious space has no problem with this. What the film shows us does not bring into play the religious space of each viewer; it is merely something exotic. Furthermore, the film, although it represents a religious space, communicates in a cinematic rather than a religious space. The way in which the temple is described, both in what we are shown – the practice of martial arts, the shaving of the young initiate's head, the acrobatic Kung Fu exercises, the trial of breaking bricks – and the manner of showing it – not only the composition, but also the soundtrack with its shouts – reminds us of all the stereotypes that Kung Fu movies have presented on this topic. Lastly, the trick with the pull-tab on the Pepsi can is clearly tongue-in-cheek. Despite this distance we may ask whether the film might not shock someone with genuine Buddhist convictions, in which case its communication strategy would be at odds with the viewer's religious mental space.

Have a Great Break (2005)

This question seems even more crucial when assessing the impact, for communication purposes, of the Coke Light film.

The film starts like a love affair, with a young woman walking her dog on the beach who is thunderstruck on seeing a handsome male emerge from the waves. It then cuts back and forth between the young man and his admirer, who watches him while drinking Coke. This sequence plays (perhaps rather heavily) on the young woman's hungry, lascivious looks, with close-ups of both bodies (mouth, breasts, back), and certain movements (the man pulls up his shorts, does up his belt, the woman begins to expose a breast, raises her skirt) leaving the viewer in no doubt about the powerful sexual charge conveyed by this exchange. As someone pointed out during an oral presentation of the present analysis, the early part of the film is reminiscent of a James Bond movie. The content of the scene and the way it is filmed (the setting, the lighting which sets off the bodies, the view of the sea looking into the sun and dynamic cutting back and forth between close-ups) both contribute to impressing on us a reference to the cinematic space.

All this changes when the young woman and the viewer discover that the handsome young man is a priest. From then on, the Catholic religious space is explicitly brought into play. We see the man putting on his clerical collar and the crestfallen look of the woman. What follows confirms that the action has moved into this space: the priest approaches the young woman, brushes his hand over the Coke can as if it were holy oil and anoints her forehead, making the sign of the cross. Then he walks off and we see the young woman, her face transfigured with joy. The slogan appears: "Coke Light: have a great break." The moral of this short fable can be summarised in two points: drinking Coke Light is better than sex; Coke is a sacrament that makes you calm and really happy.

A viewer belonging to the Catholic religious space will probably see this film as quite simply scandalous.[10] It steals a sacred gesture for the purposes of an advertising campaign. It takes this process much further than the previous film, which set the Buddhist religious space at a distance, treating it as a cinematic space. But in the second film, this is not the case: the religious gesture is made by a man who is no longer the good-looking Bond-style male who walked out of the sea, but a priest, who demonstrates his status with his clerical collar and the gestures he makes. We are clearly no longer in the same communication space.

Would the film work outside the Catholic space? We should start by pointing out that for a viewer to get the point he or she needs to be able to recognise a priest by his garb (which is probably not a major problem even for someone far removed from the Catholic space) and to be familiar with the ritual of anointing, which is perhaps more problematic. Any viewer would nevertheless grasp that this is a reference to the religious space. Someone belonging to a religious space other than Catholicism would most likely be deeply shocked as well by a religious gesture being hijacked for commercial ends.

How then would convinced atheists react? They might enter into the communication game started by the film, but this is by no means certain. There is nothing critical about the way in which the film takes religion onboard. Quite the contrary. The narrative uses it to talk up the merits of Coke Light. So rejection of this implicit apologia of religion may combine with rejection of the commercial communication space to which the film alludes.

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[10] In Belgium, a consumer group lodged a complaint about this film with the Jury d'Ethique Publicitaire in February 2005, but the case was dismissed.

In short, it seems to me that the communication strategy of this film stands little chance of achieving its aims.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, analysing a film from the point of view of communication requires us to take into account the mental communication spaces at work in the context in which communication plays out. So it is up to the analyst to construct them, on the basis both of the clues the film provides as to the space in which it is supposed to operate, and of what can be known about the spaces in which it will have to circulate. It is then possible to form hypotheses, which will need to be confirmed (or invalidated) by field studies.

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Marie-Therese Mäder

Documentary Media and Religious Communities

ABSTRACT

The article considers four spaces where media processes involve religious communities and agents: the spaces of production, of representation, of media communication, and of distribution network and institutional framework for circulation. These three spaces systematise the research question posed to the specific source. Furthermore the concept documentary media as viewed from a semio-pragmatic perspective is introduced. Discussion of the commercial series I'M A MORMON shows how different modes define documentary media according to the three spaces.

KEYWORDS

documentary media, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, self-representation, spaces of communication, religious communities

BIOGRAPHY

Marie-Therese Mäder is a teaching and research associate at the Centre for Religion, Economy and Politics and a member of the research group Media and Religion at the University of Zürich, Switzerland. Her monograph *Die Reise als Suche nach Orientierung*, published in 2012, explores the interface between film and religion in arthouse cinema. In 2015, she is a visiting scholar at the Comparative Media Studies/Writing department (CMS/W) at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States. Her current research deals with audio-visual media and their interactions with the (self-) representation strategies of religious communities in documentary media with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a case study.

The public appearance of religious groups in the media has many different purposes, but one thing is clear: if you want to be noticed, you need to be present. Many religious communities have active agents in media production, as producers, directors and in front of or behind the camera. The religious institutions themselves often employ different kinds of media for diverse purposes, such as education, mission, information, exchange or self-representation. Likewise, members of religious communities use media for various reasons. For example, their consumption of the media in their leisure time may have no obvious relation to their religious affiliation, but they may watch a specific film because the narration is compatible with the norms of their community. The field of media and religious communities is broad and complex. How can we deal methodologically with such a vast array of possible questions in light of the layers of interaction between religious communities, their representation in the media and the media? How do religious communities use media and how do the media represent religious communities?

The diversity of cases calls for a diversity of methods. But before I am able to discuss methods, I need to choose what I exactly want to examine and which questions are appropriate. This *axis of analysis* defines which theories and methods are suitable in light of the sources and the research question. On a systematic level, every *axis of analysis* is placed within at least one of four spaces in which the media are situated and which will be discussed in the following. With the definition of these four "spaces of communication", I aim to systematise possible strategies for analysing the field. Methodologically, the concept of spaces of communication (espaces de communication) draws from the work of French communication scholar Roger Odin (2011). He explains that this semio-pragmatic communication model is non-communicative because the two spaces of sender and receiver are separated ("Il s'agit donc d'un modèle de non-communication").[1] Despite their separation, they are connected in representation.

Odin also mentions the constraints that influence these communication processes, which I divide into (1) the *space of production* and (4) the *space of media communication* which define (2) the space of *representation*. These three spaces depend heavily on (3) the *space of distribution network and institutional framework for circulation,* a kind of connection between sender and receiver, between *the space of production* and *the space of media communication*, with each production reaching its audience through different transmission networks, for example television or the Internet. The following table summarises this discussion of the four spaces of communication (fig. 1).

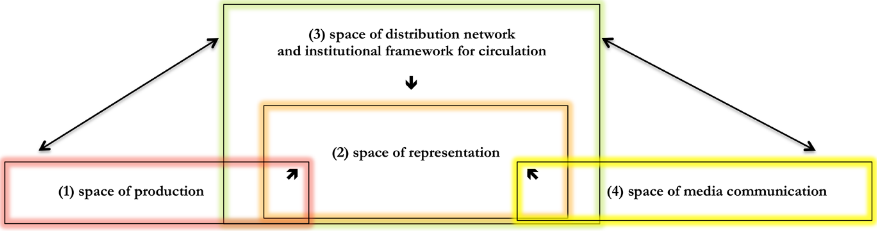
(3) space of distribution network
and institutional framework for circulation
(2) space of representation
(1) space of production
(4) space of media communication

Fig. 1: The four spaces of communication

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[1] Odin 2011, 19.

Each space raises specific questions. For the space of production we might ask: Who are the producers? What kind of representational strategies are deployed and why? For the space of media communication, we might ask: For which audience is the source intended? Which communicative goal do the media pursue? There are several spaces of media communication when a single source of representation received by many different spectators in a plurality of contexts. One noteworthy situation in which this is not the case is with pictures or films shot with mobile phones. The producer and the receiver overlap when the material is kept private in the "ego space of communication".[2] Then the whole process of media transmission is considered in the space of the distribution network and the institutional framework for circulation. Such networks are examined by asking where and by whom the media sources are distributed. And finally, stylistic and narrative questions interrogate the representation: From which perspective is the story told? What kind of stylistic means are used? How is the sound? How are gender differences depicted? Neither the questions nor the situations are predetermined by this model with its four spaces; they can be adjusted and extended.

But something that touches every space is that in each space people are involved as active agents. As soon as media sources are produced, distributed, circulated and received, they become into a phenomenon under constant construction. The active agents include the media sources, which participate in diverse meaning-making communication processes. And the different spaces overlap: production and circulation often take place within the same institutional framework; producers may also take part in the reception process; the audience may influence production and circulation processes. But the differentiation of these spaces on a systematic level makes it possible to compare the individual sources with one another and to identify the communication and construction strategies employed with regard to religion. Nevertheless, the focus on communication spaces of religions raises the need for further diversification.

As soon as we consider a concrete example in the realm of religion, the discussion becomes even more complex. Specific cultural settings, sources and, therefore, methodological approaches need to be taken into account because of the variety of institutions and agents involved. To address some of the issues raised by case studies, I will use the example of the commercial series entitled I'M A MORMON. The series has been distributed – and produced – by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) since 2010. Initially, these 174 single commercials were part of a bigger image campaign in which the church was relaunched in the media with a new and refreshed appearance. The distribution of this campaign has been focused on the Internet in particular[3].

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[2] Odin 2014, 21.

[3] Goodstein 2011, Haws 2013.

The aesthetic strategy is similar in every episode, which provides a recognition factor. The actors are socially diverse, but all are photogenic, pleasant, efficient, and successful in their occupations. And they are integrated into a "common" everyday life. They are shown with their families and at work. In both areas we see enthusiastic people performing designated roles, and, remarkably, no information is provided about their religious affiliation. Only at the end of the two to four minutes of every commercial we do hear and see the protagonists provide a kind of self-definition into the camera, as in the example of Mehrsa Bybee from 2011: "I'm an immigrant, I'm a not so tough law professor, I'm a mother, I'm someone who needs at least six hours of sleep – and I am not getting it. I am a psychiatrist to three of the cutest girls in the world. My name is Mehrsa and I'm a Mormon."

The spaces of communication for the current example can be further *modified* in the light of the agents involved. The space of production induces an advertising mode that is operated by the LDS for the *I'm a Mormon* campaign. In this sense, it is also an identity-building mode for the church, which is represented by specific members. In the space of media communication, both members and non-members are addressed. For the first group the commercials work as self-affirmation; for the latter they form and transmit an image of open-minded, smart, successful, progressive and likeable Mormon members who function as role models for their community. Their mode in the production space is performative, as they are performing their role as LDS members in front of a camera for an audience. And finally, a documentary mode comes into play, which influences the space of production and media communication. It is crucial that the protagonists are credible and authentic for then the viewers will believe their statements and trust the attitudes and values that they represent. The documentary mode touches all four spaces at the same time and therefore deserves some further consideration.

The documentary mode provides information about the world in the form of an argument that the audience believes. And at the same time, as there is no objective information, the documentary mode is accompanied by a moral mode that creates values, which are often less obviously detectable. Questions beginning with "how" will often illuminate the displayed values, whereas typical "w"- questions, which begin with "what, who, when or where", the facts of the documentary mode.

The concept of "documentary media" draws from the semio-pragmatic model of communication spaces previously discussed. Rather than adopt the binary categories "fiction" and "non-fiction", we are encouraged through semio-pragmatics to construct the variety of situations in which communication takes place. One of these situations allows for a "documentary" (reading) mode. In the *I'm a Mormon* commercials, the impression is given that those who are portrayed – members of the Mormon church – are expressing their own opinions, imparting their own experiences, and providing their own insights about their attitudes toward life. The actors can even be contacted through social media, as the addresses displayed at the end of each film suggest.

In a semio-pragmatic model, the spectators engagement with a documentary mode is independent from the producer's aim. Nevertheless, the production side seeks to influence the reception. Imagine you produce a documentary and nobody believes that the story is true. Therefore, the use of internal and external reading instructions comes into play. They follow certain conventions that help and at the same time influence the spectators in classifying what they see. Internal reading instructions could, for example, apply conventional codes referring to subgenres of documentary media like reality series, television series, documentaries and commercials, while at the same time leaving space for play with the stylistic convention of genres.

As I have shown, there are many spaces in the field of media and religion that can be explored. How we do so depends on our question. From quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to analysis of sources and context, there is a broad range of possible procedures. But the intersection and interplay between the spaces and their relationships with the representation need to be taken into account within each research process in the field of media and religion.

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Christian Wessely

Methodological Challenges by (New) Media

An Essay on Perspectives and Possible Consequences

ABSTRACT

The classical concept of media analysis depends to a large extent on linearity, but modern interactive media are mostly non-linear. Roger Odin has suggested a method for working with such interactive media; however, the approach he suggests creates a new problem. What would be an appropriate way to deal with the dilemma of balancing sufficient intersubjectivity and concessions to non-linearity?

KEYWORDS

media analysis, communication spaces, media literacy, concept of meaning

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1965, Christian Wessely attended a College for Agriculture before studying Catholic Theology at the University of Graz. His doctoral thesis discussed the utilization of mythological structures in the entertainment industry (*Von Star Wars, Ultima und Doom*, 1996) whereas his habilitation dealt with the position of the deacon within Catholic ecclesiology (*Gekommen, um zu dienen*, 2004). His main research areas are film, new media and computer games. He is currently chair of the Institute for Fundamental Theology at the University of Graz, Austria.

Prior to any possible definition of meaning there must be an experience that induces the impression of immediate meaning for the individual. Such an experience has the potential to shape or even completely change one's life and is usually denoted as "religious" or "spiritual". However, "meaning" is not something the individual defines all by itself. Every possible meaning of "meaning" is necessarily relational due to the fact that "meaning" always involves a certain objectivity. Claims to provide meaning involve not only personal purpose, but also a connection of this purpose to the environment the individual is embedded in. Therefore, if one experiences an "instance" that gives the *impression of meaning* to one's individual life, one is initially subject to a pre-lingual event, but one is bound to reflect on it in order to integrate it into one's own life and to convey it to anyone else. Consequently, meaning is intrinsically tied to communication, hence to media.[1]

We are encountering a new situation in the age of digital media. First and foremost, mobile devices are more and more considered a natural extension of our selves, which leads to immediate medialization. Everyone is – at least potentially – always not only consumer but also producer at the same time.[2] Secondly, new media are dynamic. Movies have alternative scenes and endings that can be chosen from the DVD; a contemporary computer game usually does not provide the exact same situation twice; a Facebook page or a blog evolves unpredictably. This is a challenge because our tried and tested tools for media analysis are strongly bound to a linear understanding of media products, while interactive media are non-linear by definition. Roger Odin has written a remarkable book on alternative methods of analysis[3] – but his approach raises some questions, too.

PERCEPTION MECHANISMS AND THE VISUAL IMAGE

The lifestyle dictated by Western European and North American mainstream culture depends on audio-visual impressions. All through the day the individual is embedded in a continuous stream of sounds and pictures, of video clips and songs, of billboards and newsflashes – forming a field of perception that has hardly anything to do with the biological reasons for which the sensory organs have developed.[4] Even at night, the sound of the TV from the adjacent flat or music from the street can be heard, and advertising illuminates our bedrooms, leaving an imprint on our subconscious that is inevitable.

Having evolved in a hostile environment and consequently adapted to survive, *our eyes and ears are instruments that we trust*.[5] We know of course that we are subject to misperception from time to time; however, audio-visual perception is something we take seriously and base our decisions on. Doubt, if any, arises in second place.[6]

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[1] According to Harry Pross (1970), one has to distinguish between primary media that do not require any technical devices, secondary media that need such devices for transmission but not reception, and tertiary media that need such devices for transmitting and receiving a certain content. This essay is about the second and third types.

[2] Yet, this promise, which makes what was considered as "Web 2.0" some years ago incredibly attractive, is by no means fulfilled. Most participants are consumers only and contribute solely very short messages and/or pictures. The overuse of "selfies" and pictures of one's food could be worth a master's thesis; even so, the upload/download ratio of a really important platform like YouTube or Facebook is around 1:10.

[3] Odin 2011.

[4] Lamb 2011, 64–69.

[5] This goes, of course, for our complete sensorial apparatus; however, sight and hearing are more important for survival due to their ability to cover large distances, whereas touch, smell and taste only operate at the closest range. Hence, sight and sound have been more crucial for the larger part of humankind´s history.

[6] Much has been written about this, but Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, especially the chapter *Truth and Convention* is probably among the best texts on this subject; Gombrich 2004, 55–78.

But the requirements for perception have changed, especially in the last century. The audio-visual impression is no longer restricted to what is part of our natural environment; in fact, this seems to be only a minor part nowadays. The urban citizen's environment is dominated by artificial sounds and images. And although in the vast majority of them are unimportant, they are perceived as essential because they trigger the primal mechanisms that have not changed over the last hundreds of thousands of years.

And one more important thing: For the first time in history, humans are able to see and hear the exact same pictures and sounds even though the individuals perceiving them may live in different places and at different times. It is possible to define the basis for the interpretation of the world in an almost normative way by supplying all audiences with the same pictures and sounds, which subsequently become part of their literacy: each picture is interpreted on the basis of pictures that have been seen before. Even though a text evokes pictures and other sensorial impressions too, these stay individual and, consequently, different. The text line "They soon found thirteen [barrels] with room enough for a dwarf in each"[7] and the movie sequence showing the dwarves climbing into thirteen barrels[8] both deal with the same part of Tolkien's opus; yet they are different. The former evokes an individual imagination; the latter presents an image with a normative claim. The viewer of the film sequence is suspended from making a creative contribution; instead a finished set demands to be accepted as reality, achieving an immediate effect: it shapes the reality of the viewer before any reflexive notion kicks in.[9]

A CONNECTION TO WHAT IS USUALLY CALLED "RELIGION"

It would obviously be inappropriate to summarise only the Western and Middle Eastern traditions of the monotheistic denominations as "religion" per se. Thus it is necessary to find a different, more abstract and more general definition. F. Heiler has suggested defining as a religion any notion that includes a personal experience of transcending one´s own contingency towards a different entity that is experienced as a non-me; that allows the individual to realise that others are sharing similar experiences and to find ways to express this experience collectively; that enables one to reflect about these experiences systematically and with regard to human existence generally, and that demands a set of behaviours that defines the framework for the actions of the individual based on these terms.[10] Basically, Heiler sketches the four cornerstones of any "relation to a transcendence" (be it personal or impersonal), rites, revelation, tradition, and ethics. Nowadays, it is often assumed that religion developed as a consequence of social interaction and cultural requirements. Religion would then be rated as a self-evolving regulatory mechanism that has its reason and meaning in the framework of a certain historical context, but will be overcome in the course of history.[11]

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[7] Tolkien 2012, 203 (my translation).

[8] The Hobbit. The Desolation of Smaug (Peter Jackson, NZ/US 2013).

[9] As James Monaco (2006, 160) wrote, "In this context, film does not suggest anything: It rather makes a declarative statement." (my translation).

[10] Heiler 1961, 562–564.

Yet religion has at least one root beyond such cultural and linguistic limitations. H. Verweyen pointed out the importance of the concept of the primal distinction between the self and the other.[12] Since the self is conscious of its own existence, as Descartes showed, and this constitution of the self is not directly connected to language in the first place,[13] we must consider the following: communication is subordinate to an act of self-awareness that is not subject to any linguistic influence; thus, communication is an act of transcending the self towards the other (be it human individual or "deity").[14] Consequently, every communication is the first *visible* trace of a religious act, and since humans cannot exist without communicating, these religious traces are deeply embedded in the nature of human beings themselves.

Now if one experiences something one finds deeply touching and capable of changing one's life, may not be communicating this may not be easy at all: due to the limits of our language and expression skills and due to the fact that this experience does not have any equivalent in the mind of the other individual, one has to resort to analogies, thus sketching a framework that is well known to the other and from which they can draw their own conclusions. In expressing these analogies by means of an audio-visual medium, the subject is able to present a very close approximation to their own framework, but the clearer and more well-defined the picture gets, the harder it will be for the receiver to close up since they have their own "pictorial literacy."[15]

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[11] E.g. Dawkins 2007.

[12] Verweyen 1991, 233ff.

[13] I strongly object to the thesis that the ultimate core of our self is the result of a linguistic construction. Kick a doorframe – the "ouch" feeling does not need to be articulated in any way. The self feels that 'it hurts me to kick a solid object' initially and may (probably will) reflect on this feeling afterwards. The act of reflection is without any doubt inseparably intertwined with language, but the primary experience of the "suffering self" is not.

[14] Usually, three types of "transcendence" are to be distinguished: a "minor" one that denotes my inner borders and the possibility to cross these, as e.g. in memorizing something and some place; a "medium" one that denotes the same for another individual, and a "major" one that denotes the relation of the self to the totally different other. Cf. Knoblauch 2009, 56–69; Luckmann 1991, 164–183; Schütz/Luckmann 1990 (1984), 39–177.

[15] "Literacy" means the ability to comprehend texts and to be able to write texts oneself, which goes far beyond the sheer ability to know the "values" of letters, to have a defined pool of words and to know some basic grammar rules. "Pictorial literacy" would mean knowing and understanding the narrations that constitute contemporary society and its features, especially in their visual and auditive expressions. That means that art and art history would be absolutely crucial access points to any valid interpretation of the self and its standing in the world. Yet, since all human beings grow up in different environments with different access to and interest for art, this form of literacy is inseparably bound to a concept that encompasses the education of society, which played – in turn – a central role in the age of enlightenment. Cf. Lessing 1997.

CONSEQUENCES

It appears that our classic analytical approaches to media such as movies may still be useful in that context, but that a new, additional approach is needed to cope with the challenges of the dynamics of interactive media.

Roger Odin's concept of "individual" communication spaces that are defined separately for each individual and each product is intriguing, and probably the best choice if one wants to compare one's own results for different films or different interpretations over time. However, its limit is reached with the exchange of results between researchers. Each of them has the right to choose their own set of spaces and to choose the triad of *actant*, *operator* and *axis of Relevance*. Since there is no possibility of logically preferring one approach over another, what would common ground look like? Science's dependence on logical coherence, intersubjectivity and repeatability creates rather than solves the respective problems. Hence the need for a set of rules that would allow us to describe the aforementioned approach by way of a cogent conclusion, which would shift but not solve the general problem.

An important aspect of this issue was addressed by Nicole Mahne in 2007.[16] Mahne tried to apply the classic approach of narratology to what she calls 'Hyperfiction'[17] (i.e. interactive media) and stated that due to the inevitable use of metalepses, the user experienced an ontological change: the impression of integration of narration and life through interactivity. Thus, any reflexion process changes the reference frame of the "consumer" (be it researcher or private individual). Consequently, any analysis would have to fall back on the elementary categories any individual will always experience: time (although not in the form of a consistent continuum but merely in dissected separate nodes) and space (although not in the form of a consistent big picture but merely in sets of symbolic forms).

At the moment, I do not see any convincing solution for this problem. However, my first approach would be to demand *media literacy* as a subject in all educational facilities. Knowing that structures – especially mythological structures like Campbell's *Hero's Journey*[18] – are spellbinding, yet unable to encompass a majority of contemporary media, we must establish a common set of "pictures" (symbols) and "processes" (time nodes) that denote a mandatory set of values. Only if we learn about the correspondence of our inner reference to any other and learn to interpret the impressions we gain in the media universe within to this framework from early childhood, can we possibly achieve a consensus about various interpretations and various ways of integrating them into our lives. And that, I think, is what all media analysis is ultimately about.

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[16] Mahne 2007.

[17] Mahne 2007, 110–125.

[18] Campbell 2009; cf. Wessely 1996.

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FILMOGRAPHY

THE HOBBIT: THE DESOLATION OF SMAUG (Peter Jackson, NZ/US 2013).

II Religion, Media and Gender

Mia Lövheim

(Re)Making a Difference

Religion, Mediatisation and Gender

ABSTRACT

This article presents and discusses how mediatisation as a theory can be used to analyse two commercial videos, one promoting the organisation Catholics Come Home and the other Coca Cola. A core question in the current debate on mediatisation and religion concerns if and how mediatisation changes not only the social forms of communication about religion but also the meaning of religion in society. The issue in focus for the analysis is whether these videos mirror attributes and roles traditionally associated with men and women within religious institutions or offer an alternative to these. By using gender as a lens, we can see that mediatisation challenges religious institutions to adapt their narratives and symbols to commercial media culture, but that also within this new setting some traditional female gender norms seem to remain or even become reinforced.

KEYWORDS

mediatisation, gender, commercial videos, religious media, banal religion, hybrid event

BIOGRAPHY

Mia Lövheim is professor of Sociology of Religion at the Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University, Sweden. Her research has focused on religious and gender identity among youth, particularly in online discussion groups and blogs, and on religion in the lives of youth. More recently she has studied representations of religion in the Swedish daily press, within the projects *The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere: A Comparative Study of the Five Nordic Countries* (NOREL), *The Resurgence of Religion?! A Study of Religion and Modernity in Sweden with the Daily Press as Case* and the comparative Scandinavian project *Engaging with Conflicts in Mediatized Religious Environments* (CoMRel). She is a steering group member of the Linneaus Center of Excellence and research programme *The Impact of Religion: Challenges to Society, Law and Democracy at Uppsala University*. She has been the coordinator of the *Nordic Network for Media* and Religion and is currently Vice-President of the *International Society for Media, Religion and Culture* (ISMRC). Her recent publications include *Mediatization and Religion. Nordic Perspectives* (edited with S. Hjarvard), 2012 and *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*, editor, 2013.

We live in a media-saturated world, and the communication of religion is no exception to this experience. Mediated images and texts have become part of the very fabric with which we construct a sense of meaning and of our place in the world. Current research among Swedish youth[1] shows that the media, primarily television, is the main arena where religion is encountered in everyday life. What this shift in places and forms of experiencing religion means for the role that religion might play in the lives of individuals as well as in society at large is one of the most demanding questions in current research in studies of religion and society.

Video films produced and screened in order to present a particular product have for several decades been a common form of visual communication in contemporary society and culture. However, the use of this genre to communicate religious messages is still unusual enough to trigger curiosity and perhaps criticism. Does religion, with its connotations of tradition and transcendent beings and values, really go together with commercial messages and modern media technology? And what happens to the message and values of religion when it takes the form of a short, visual video-film screened in a setting outside the religious community?

MEDIATISATION AND RELIGION

The questions raised above lie at the heart of the theory and debate about the mediatisation of religion, which during the latest decade has become a strong current in the international research field of media, religion and culture.[2] A basic definition of mediatisation is as the process by which mediation, conceived as the performance of social and cultural activities through technical media, increasingly has come to saturate everyday life and thus become "part of the very fabric" of society and culture.[3] I will in the following present three approaches to mediatisation and religion and reflect on how they can be used to analyse the commercial videos that are the topic of this special issue. A core question in the current debate on mediatisation and religion is whether and how mediatisation changes not only the social forms for communication about religion but also the meaning of religion in society. In this article, I will address this question via the topic of gender. Previous studies of religion in film and television have shown that gender is an important dimension for analysing how this kind of mediation might challenge traditional views of the roles of men and women within religion by introducing new topics and questions.[4]

Stig Hjarvard, professor at the Department of Media, Cognition and Communication at the University of Copenhagen, initiated the use of mediatisation theory for the study of religion.[5] Following the characterisation of various approaches to mediatisation, Hjarvard's approach can be characterised as primarily "institutional".[6] This means it focuses on the implications of the increasing independence of media as an institution in society during the 20th century with regard to not only other institutions, such as the political, legal and economic systems, but also the increasing integration of the media's logic or ways of working into all other forms of social interaction. Hjarvard refers to media's logic as "the institutional, aesthetic and technological modus operandi of the media" and discusses how this affects patterns of distribution of symbolic resources as well as enabling and structuring human communication.[7] Religion, like the media, is approached as a social institution, characterised by belief in a supernatural agency and governed by a particular set of formal and informal rules, and serving certain social functions in society.

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[1] Lövheim 2010.

[2] Lövheim 2014.

[3] Hepp/Hjavard/Lundby 2010.

[4] Lövheim 2013.

Hjarvard argues that mediatisation over time changes religion in three primary ways:

- Media become the primary source of information about religious and spiritual issues in society.
- Media transform religious content by moulding it according to genres of journalism, entertainment and fiction.
- Media become the main social and cultural environments for moral and spiritual guidance and sense of community.

The consequence is that mediatisation undermines the authority of religious institutions and contributes to individualised forms of religion. Religion does not disappear from society, but the social forms of religion that thrive in late-modern society are primarily individualised, bricolage-like forms that are dependent on other institutions, such as public media organisations or commercial companies, for maintaining their service and legitimacy.

Hjarvard has presented three varieties of mediatisated religion, which differ with regard to the control exercised by religious actors over the form of media, and thus the degree to which the general tendencies of mediatisation affect religion.[8]

- *Religious media*: refers to media organisations and practices primarily controlled and performed by religious actors, such as Christian dailies, Islamic satellite television or the Web portal http://www.catholicscomehome.org/.
- *Journalism on religion*: refers to how primarily news media bring religion into the political public sphere. In this genre, religious symbols and actors are mainly used as sources and have to accommodate to criteria such as news value.

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[5] Hjarvard 2011.

[6] Couldry/Hepp 2013.

[7] Hjarvard 2011, 123.

[8] Hjarvard 2012.

- *Banal religion:* this form of mediatised religion primarily refers to how entertainment media make religion visible in the cultural public sphere. Hjarvard defines banal religion as texts and practices of institutionalised religion merged with elements from folk religion and popular conceptions, emotions, and practices referring to a supernatural or spiritual dimension of life.

Hjarvard's mediatisation approach has been criticised for not sufficiently taking into account the cultural and national context in which the various forms of mediatised religion appear and for accentuating the difference between religion and media as social and cultural institutions too strongly.[9] As argued by Meyer,[10] new forms of mediatisation change religious values and forms, but these changes must be studied as an outcome of the interplay between newly introduced and previous forms of communication – such as teachings, practices and social relationships – in a particular religious context as well as a particular media form. Furthermore, religion does not necessarily lose its significance in society and for individuals by becoming mediatised, and religious actors might make use of the media's affordances to communicate their message in contemporary society. One conclusion from these debates is that the institutional perspective on mediatisation that Hjarvard presents seems most valid for studies of the category "journalism on religion," and mostly so in highly modernised and secularised countries with a previously dominant Christian church, as in Northern or Western Europe. However, for studies of "banal religion" or "religious media", the theory is less useful. I wish to present two approaches to mediatisation from this debate that are more relevant to the media cases that are the topic of this issue.

The German media scholar Andreas Hepp's theory of "cultures of mediatization" is an example of a "social-constructivist" approach to the study of mediatisation.[11] Cultures of mediatisation are those "whose primary meaning resources are mediated through technical communication media, and which are 'moulded' by these processes in specifically different ways".[12] Religion, as such a culture, becomes a form of "deterritorialized communitization", characterised by "a mediatized construction of tradition".[13] The primary sources for religious beliefs and belonging are mediated through technical communication media, which implys a certain "pressure" on communication and thus also on the potential for action. How particular technical communication media shape communication and human agency is, however, the outcome of relationships between various actors within a specific context.

Hepp identifies the popular-religious spiritual sphere and fundamentalist movements as forms of mediatised religion in that they to a high degree articulate religious beliefs and belonging within the framework of a mediatised common culture. His empirical analysis (with Victoria Krönert) of the Catholic World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne[14] shows how mediatisation creates new conditions even for established religious institutions like the Catholic Church. The World Youth Day is described as a "hybrid event" in which elements of locally based traditional religion blend with aspects of "popular media events" shaped by consumer culture. Mediatisation is thus conceived of as the interplay between aspects of religious tradition and of contemporary media culture in the production, representation and appropriation of the event, involving various social actors – Catholic Church officials, media companies and individual participants.

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[9] Lövheim/Lynch 2011.

[10] Meyer 2013.

[11] Couldry/Hepp 2013.

[12] Hepp 2013, 70.

[13] Hepp 2013, 120.

The American media scholar Lynn Schofield Clark has applied and adjusted Hjarvard's theory of the mediatisation of religion in an analysis of the circulation and reception of a wedding video uploaded on YouTube.[15] Here, she focuses on how digital and mobile media are contributing to social change by enabling new forms of participation, remediation and bricolage of, for example, religious symbols and rituals. She suggests a definition of mediatization as "…the process by which collective uses of communication media extend the development of independent media industries and their circulation of narratives, contribute to new forms of action and interaction in the social world and give shape to how we think of humanity and our place in the world".[16] A further application of mediatisation theory to the study of film is Line Nybro Petersen's[17] analysis of how Danish female fans use THE TWILIGHT SAGA (2008, 2009, 2010) as a new space for negotiating religious and gender conventions. In line with Schofield Clark's definition, she argues that mediatisation means a new possibility for audiences to become active participants in media narratives, but also offers a space in which ordinary life experiences can become re-constructed by being connected to spiritual and supernatural themes charged with strong emotional feelings.

These approaches present an understanding of mediatisation as the interplay between new forms of media technology and genres, the institutional and cultural context of religious symbols and practices that are mediated, and the position and intentions of individual actors. Thus, they allow for an understanding of mediatisation of religion as a process in which technical communication media *augments* certain processes of religious change – in particular a re-construction of tradition and a personalisation of religiosity.

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[14] Hepp/Krönert 2010.

[15] Clark 2011.

[16] Clark 2011, 170.

[17] Peterson 2013.

MEDIATISED RELIGION AND GENDER

In the following, I will provide a brief analysis of two examples of commercial videos that draw on religious symbols and settings. I will use a basic form of narrative analysis[18] and discuss how the events, conventions and characters depicted in the videos can be analysed starting from the approach to mediatisation outlined above. My particular focus in the analysis of the videos will be on issues of gender. If mediatisation can be seen as a process enhancing changes in not only social interaction but also the meaning of, for example, religious narratives and symbols occurring in society and culture, then my question is in what way these videos mirror attributes and roles traditionally associated with men and women within religious institutions or offer an alternative to these. I understand a feminist media analysis[19] to be concerned, first, with problematising stereotypical views of gender in media texts and cultures, secondly, with highlighting and critically analysing social, cultural and religious structures that assign women and men different positions, value, and agency and, finally, with looking for signs of alternative representations and empowerment in the representations and practices studied. It is, however, important to note that in this analysis of commercial videos we are dealing with media texts but not with their reception. Thus, my analysis will concern the level of representations of religion and gender in the videos and possible changes or ambiguities in these that can be attributed to the process of mediatisation.

(RE)MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE VIDEOS

Of the three commercial videos selected for this journal issue, I will focus on the video presenting the organisation Catholics Come Home[20] and on the advertisement for Coca Cola.[21] The first of these videos, Catholics Come Home, is a presentation of Catholics across the world practising their religion, or conducting various forms of outreach work as doctors, teachers, volunteer workers and scientists, or living a happy, nuclear family life. Images and the voice-over in conjunction present the Catholic Church as connected to tradition, family values, and as a safe haven in an unruly world. The second video on Coca Cola features a short scene where a young man is getting dressed on a sunny beach while being watched by a young woman walking by and sipping a can of Coca Cola Light. The videos are further described in the introduction to this special issue.

Using Hjarvard's categorisation of various forms of mediatised religion discussed above, the video promoting the Catholic organisation can be categorised as an example of "religious media" in that it is produced by a religious institution that uses the language and form of short, commercial videos to articulate its message in a mediatised society. The video promoting Coca Cola can be seen as an example of the category of "banal religion" in mixing elements from established religious traditions, such as the priest's collar and the sign of the cross, with popular religious elements and a tacit understanding of what is "religious" – such as the allusion to sexual moral teachings within Catholicism.

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[18] Hodkinson 2013, 70.

[19] Gill 2007.

[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lX7YXj7MltEProgram [accessed 07 June 2015].

[21] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6my9ZNxUL8 [accessed 07 June 2015].

A narrative analysis focuses on the conventions and characters that are used to construct a story within media texts such as films, advertisments and documentaries. A further important element is the order in which events are presented. A standard plot structure in narratives consists of a state of equilibrium that is disrupted in some way and eventually reinstated in a slightly different form.[22] A first thing that characterises both of the videos is how they aim at *making a difference*. Both of them use religion to make an effect of presenting something different – meaning unexpected – that is happening, which is then connected to the "product": Coca Cola or the Catholic Church. In the Coca Cola video, religious symbols such as the sign of the cross and representatives of religious authorities such as the priest are used to evoke connotations of something set apart from and different from the pleasures and practices of the ordinary world. We can see this idea of religion, or rather a religious approach to the world, as something different played out in how the videos portray the "unexpected" behaviour of the man in the Coca Cola commercial, as will be discussed below. Difference is also a strong theme in the video promoting the Catholic Church, but here the Church is presented as offering something different in the sense of better or other than what the voice-over depicts as the "unruly" secular world. A second aspect in narrative analysis concerns the range of character types the story uses. Both the video promoting the organisation Catholics Come Home and the Coca Cola commercial involve various gendered characters.

A strong feature in the CATHOLICS COME HOME commercial are the themes of inclusion and equality. The video uses words and images that express and emphasise the Catholic Church as "one family". The voice over declares: "we are young and old... men and women, sinners and saints..." while images of people of various age, ethnicity, nationality and gender are displayed on the screen. However, it is also very clear that this pluralist and inclusive family is represented by traditional gender roles and values. Women are depicted as teachers and mothers, and men as scientists and doctors. It is also obvious in the images that men represent what the voice over refers to as the "unbroken line of shepherds guiding the Church with love and truth". The video reinforces the traditional Catholic gender roles, particularly with visual elements, presenting the Catholic Church as a "safe haven" and women's role as connected to “marriage and family” as core elements of the “consistent” and “true” values the Church offers in an “unruly” world.

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[22] Todorov 1987.

The Coca Cola commercial’s opening scene of an attractive man getting dressed after a swim is presumably shot through the gaze of the young woman encountering this sight while walking on a sunny beach. In this, the video reverses the conventional “male gaze” in films that subjects women to a heterosexual male’s desire and control.[23] This is accomplished by the camera’s focus on the woman’s sexual desire, represented by her yearning eyes, her movements including the eager consumption of the drink, and the inciting music. The unexpected twist at the end of the commercial takes place when the attractive man on the beach turns out to be a priest, as signalled by his white priest’s collar. The man/priest approaches the girl, but instead of responding to the attraction signalled by her with the expected kiss, he offers her a blessing by making the sign of the cross on her forehead. As he walks away, the girl is shown left with the can of Coca Cola and an expression of confusion. This disruption or twist in the narrative is constructed through a combination of unconventional and conventional themes, where the commercial plays not only with heterosexual gender conventions – the attraction between men and women – but also with the convention or tacit understanding of Christian people as conservative and restrained in terms of sexual morals.

MEDIATISATION AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE: (RE)MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

According to Hjarvard’s theory of the mediatisation of religion, instances of “banal religion”, such as commercial videos, challenge the power of religious institutions and belief systems to define and control the meaning of religious symbols as these become used and circulated in new contexts and for other purposes. In line with this theory, we could interpret these videos as an example of how religion changes in contemporary society from institution and dogma to a more personalised, bricolage form of religion where symbols and practices can be used for purposes such as promoting popular drinks.

However, as the discussion about the theory has shown, mediatisation of religion is a complex process in which the cultural and religious context in which a media text is situated also plays a part. Of the approaches presented above, Hepp and Krönert’s analysis of the Catholic World Youth Day represents an interesting point of departure for interpreting the commercial CATHOLICS COME HOME. In Hjarvard’s presentation, “religious media” represents a category where religious institutions gradually come to adapt to the media logic, which leads to individualisation and the weakening of the normative, collective aspects of religion. Hepp and Krönert’s social interaction perspective allows a more sophisticated analysis of how religious institutions, here the Catholic Church, play a part in this process. CATHOLICS COME HOME can be seen as a type of “hybrid event” similar to the World Youth Day, where elements of traditional Catholic faith are mixed with aspects of “popular media events” shaped by consumer culture. Hepp and Krönert[24] conclude in their analysis that the use of Pope Benedict XVI as a “brand symbol” in this event was crucial for linking these different aspects into one media event that “worked” for all of the participants. In the Catholics Come Home commercial, it is interesting to see how the voice-over in particular, but also some of the images, seeks to present an “individualistic” and “pluralistic” message of inclusiveness and variety attuned to the value of individual choice in late modern culture. At the same time, the message, conveyed not least by the images, presents the Church as something different – the “consistent” and “true” haven in an unruly world. Here, the representation of gender plays a key part. Following the French sociologist of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger[25], it is this combined focus on the individual and on religion as a “chain of memory” that make, for example, pilgrimage such an attractive and lasting religious practice in highly modernised societies. In a similar way as Hepp and Krönert conclude, we can see in this video how the outcome of this process of mediatisation for religion incorporates not only increased pluralism and individualisation of belief, but also aspects of controlling and preserving religious values by establishing a form of “deterritorial religious community” in which individual, collective and traditional aspects are merged – through media technology.

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[23] Mulvey 1975, 6–18.

The American anthropologist Elizabeth Bird argues that TV drama presents an “open-ended religiosity” that draws on an assumption of faith “although leaving vague the question of exactly in what”.[26] As discussed above, Clark and Nybro Petersen argue that mediatisation, primarily the genres of entertainment films and videos circulated on You Tube, can open spaces for the circulation of alternative narratives on religion. The “open-ended” character of religion as presented in these forms of media allows viewers to engage with religious themes in new ways and to negotiate and re-construct gender norms and values that they encounter in everyday life.

The Coca Cola commercial can be seen as such a space that allows play with religious and gender conventions in a way other than in “religious media”, as represented by the commercial for Catholics Come Home. Media scholar Diane Winston discusses how a traditional gendered, religious dichotomy between the pious woman as the “Madonna” and the wordly woman as the “whore” is challenged when female characters are portrayed as both spiritual leaders and sexually active beings, such as the character Grace Hanadarko in SAVING GRACE (Nancy Miller, US 2007–2010) or Kara in the series BATTLESTAR GALACTICA (Glen A. Larson/Ronald D. Moore, US 2003–2009).[27]

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[24] Hepp/Krönert 2010, 274.

[25] Hervieu-Léger 2010.

[26] Bird 2009, 25.

[27] Butler/Winston 2009.

Post-feminist media analysis studies emphasise the potential for resistance and empowerment within this play with stereotypes of femininity such as sexual attraction and fashion. However, despite these signs of a blurring and perhaps challenging of traditional female and male attributes, other traditional norms of femininity remain, such as beauty and heterosexual (male) attraction. As Winston points out, without these conventional female attributes of attraction "the package would be a harder sell".[28] This insight shows that an analysis of the potential for alternative representations of gender and religion in entertainment media needs to take into consideration the interplay between commercial interests and media logics. As argued by British media scholar Rosalind Gill,[29] the ideals of individual choice and sexual competence as connected to consumption and self-regulation in, for example, in the TV-series Sex and the City (1998–2004) introduce new gender regimes rather than represent a potential for women's agency.

CONCLUSION

The Catholics Come Home and Coca Cola commercials illustrate the ambiguity of mediatisation as a process changing traditional or conventional understandings of religion.

In this article, I have presented two approaches to the mediatisation of religion that represent an important complement to the emphasis on the structuring influence of the media in Stig Hjarvard's original presentation of the theory. These approaches allow an analysis of mediatisation as a process where the impact of a particular media technology and genre on religion is related to an analysis of how religious actors, institutions such as the Catholic Church but also individual users, negotiate and make use of the media to communicate their messages. Both commercials show how mediatisation challenges the control of religious institutions over narratives and symbols. In a mediatised world, religious institutions adapt to the forms and rules for communication and interaction used by media institutions, and media institutions as well as commercial companies use religious symbols in order to communicate other values than might have been intended by religious institutions. Both of the commercials show that this situation holds a potential for changing traditional religious teachings, values and positions. The Catholic Church needs to incorporate the values of individual choice and plurality into their image of the Church, and the practice and value of sexual abstinence for a higher good in religious teachings is used to play with gender conventions to create attention for a popular drink.

By using gender as a lens for an analysis of the potentials for religious change in mediatisation, we can also see how, despite the reduced control of religious institutions over their narratives and symbols, some values and norms seem to remain and even become reinforced. Both of the commercial videos show how women in particular are characterised through roles and attributes that reinforce their position in the family or in caring professions or as dependent on male attention for their value. Furthermore, we have seen how such characteristics of women can be used to reinstate a conventional model of the relationship between men and women or the position of the Catholic Church in society: the man/priest in the Coca Cola commercial remains in control of his own and the girl's sexuality, and the women in CATHOLICS COME HOME become symbols of the "consistent" and "true" character of the Catholic Church. This underlines that mediatisation of religion as a theory also needs to take into consideration the logics of commercial interests, as well as relations of power between different groups in society.

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[28] Winston 2013, 165.

[29] Gill 2007, 249.

This article has attempted to show how mediatisation as a theory can be developed to understand the role of religion in contemporary society. A focus on gender sharpens our understanding of how mediatisation interacts with other transformations regarding the way religion is articulated and practised in society. To analyse further how these complex interactions between media as technology and institution, religious institutions and individual actors, and cultural values and norms contribute to the re-making of religion in contemporary society is an intriguing challenge ahead of us.

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Anna-Katharina Höpflinger

Staging the Dead

The Material Body as a Medium for Gender and Religion

ABSTRACT

The body is one of the basic media that form and communicate gender. How important gender is for the perception of an individual becomes especially clear by looking at the exhibition of a dead body. Having nothing left other than the body, the deceased are reduced to characteristics that seem to be the basis of a specific culture. However, in religious contexts the exhibition of mortal remains can also be used to overcome gender differentiations. In this article, I will focus on Central Europe, and argue that material presentations are an authoritative means of forming concepts of gender and religion.

KEYWORDS

gender, body, death, material religion, ossuaries, european history of religion

BIOGRAPHY

Anna-Katharina Höpflinger is a research and teaching assistant at the Centre for Religion, Economy and Politics (ZRWP) at the University of Zurich. Since completing her PhD in the Study of Religion, she has developed research projects in the field of media and religion, particularly focussing on the body, clothing, and gender. She also is interested in religions in the ancient world and in European history.

Media, religion and gender are interlinked in very different ways. As Mia Lövheim has shown, these connections must be understood as processes embedded in specific cultural contexts.[1] While Lövheim focuses on contemporary, primarily social media and their forming of religion and gender, I want to step back from technological development and see if it is possible to scrutinise functional similarities in more traditional forms of religion. Lövheim uses the term "mediatisation" for processes surrounding media, stressing the activity, the complexity, and the relevance of the context of media communication. She defines mediatisation as a shift from religious institutions to popular mass media in matters of the authority to form and communicate world views.[2] From this point of view, media become an important agent of religious change. They support and form so-called "banal religion". "Banal religion" should be understood in the sense that media form religious knowledge, but not in an elaborate or coherent or institutionalised way, and often not in a way noticed as religious by the people using them. In the following, I will appropriate the term mediatisation and use the example of the exhibition of mortal remains in Central Europe to look at possible interrelations between gender and religion. This example is useful for examining mediatisation, because while it is embedded in an institutionalised and traditional sort of religion, similar processes can be spotted as in the so-called "banal religion". The dead body and its staging become the base of world views, practices and narratives that go beyond official statements of a religious institution. In this process, as I will argue, the body takes over the role of the main medium for communicating world views.[3] In the following, I will focus on the forming of ideas of gender through the dead body. The basis of my response is the assumption that gender ideas and norms are often not written down as "laws", but instead are frequently communicated visually and materially. In my example, it is the body that adopts the role of framing normative notions of the world.[4] Human interaction is focused on this single medium that takes over the main role of communicating gender. As the main agent, the body condenses the expectations and concepts regarding gender and religion. So, in the following, I understand mediatisation not so much as a shift, but as a compaction process of cultural meaning by one specific medium. These compaction processes are temporary and relate to specific contexts, in this instance the dead body, for only a short time and in a specific spatial setting.

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[1] Lövheim 2013, 1–14.

To work out the role of the body in condensing world views, I will use a material religion approach.[5] The basis of the following observations is field research. Together with the photographer Yves Müller, during two years (2013–2015) I visited ossuaries and cemetery chapels in Switzerland and adjoining countries. Following a cultural studies approach, we focused on the contemporary usage of these chapels, the representation of mortal remains, and the normative regulations that are connected with such staging of the dead.[6]

Due to space constraints, I will operate in the following on a methodological level with the (heuristic) categories "individual" and "collective" and ask how gender is formed on a bodily level to communicate ideas about an individual person as well as a collective.[7]

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[2] See Hjarvard/Lövheim 2012.

[3] See Coakley 1997, 1–12; Zito 2011, 18–25.

[4] See Wegenstein 2014, 127–149.

[5] See Morgan 2010, 1–18.

[6] These categories relate to the so-called "circuit of culture", elaborated by Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall and their colleagues at the Open University in London 1997. The circuit was designed to work out cultural processes and divides the analysis into questions regarding production, consumption, representation, regulation, and identity, see Du Gay/Hall 1997.

The first portion will concern the importance of gender for the exhibiting of an individual dead body. The second will delve into the context of this exhibition, and will inquire into the collective staging of the dead. Finally, I will generalise the observations of the case study, emphasising the importance of material media for constructions of gender in a religious context.

THE LIFELESS BODY AS GENDERED

During fieldwork on Roman Catholic charnel houses in Switzerland, we visited a range of ossuary chapels, where the deceased are laid out for their relatives and friends to see them one last time (fig. 1).[8] The mortal remains (if they are not cremated) are exhibited as if the person were still alive. They are nicely dressed and coifed in a gendered way, either in their "Sunday best" or in special burial gowns. The burial dresses for women are decorated with lace or trim, while the men's clothing is generally plainer and sometimes decorated with a collar or bow tie (fig. 2). Clothing, as one of the most important remaining material media, is the main code used to communicate gender differentiations, which are based on culturally shared ideas of gender (e.g. the male as plainer and somehow more earnest, the female as more playful and decorated).

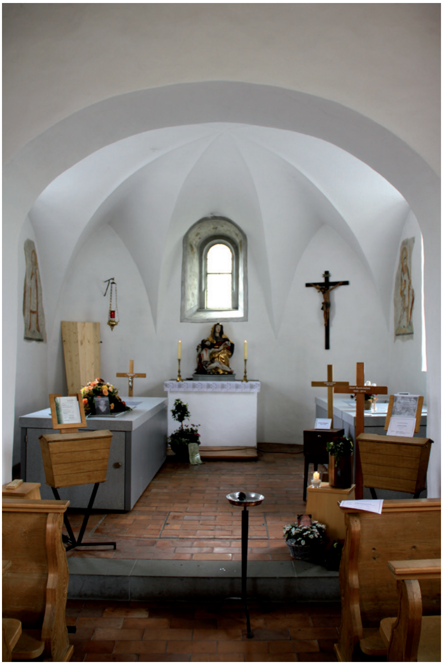

Fig. 1: A public laying out in the Roman Catholic ossuary chapel in Alpnach, Switzerland. The deceased are lying in catafalques (CH 2014) © Yves Müller.

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[7] The separation of these two categories is widely debated, see Elias 2001.

[8] See Hauser 1994, for burials from 1700–1900 in Switzerland; Zihlmann 1982, for mourning practices in Central Switzerland in the 1920s; and Roost Vischer 1999, for today's burial practices.

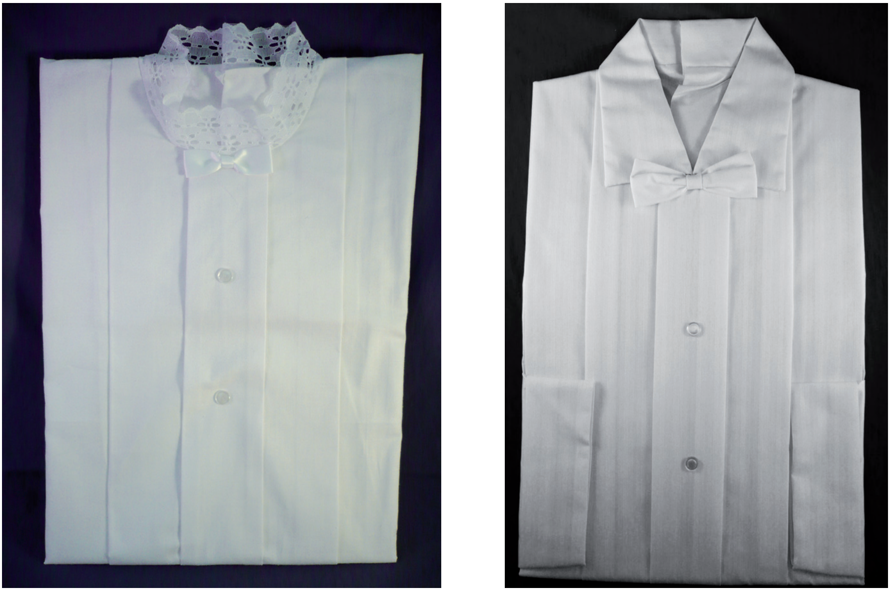

Fig. 2: Very similar, but nevertheless different, burial dress for women (left) and for men (right) © Urnesa AG.

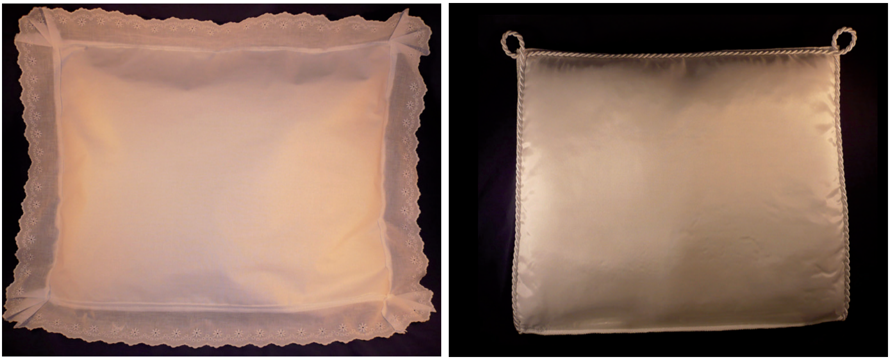

Fig. 3: Coffin pillows for women (left) and men (right) © Urnesa AG.

That the body is dressed and thereby gendered seems quite common for the Western[9] world, but it is surprising that this representation of gender is usual even if the body is not in view of the public, but put directly in an (afterwards closed) coffin and then buried or cremated. Nearly all burial dresses I found were gendered, with only a small minority unisex. Gender seems to be so important for this last presentation that even other objects around the corpses are presented as gendered. For example, the pillows under the head of the deceased person can be bought in female and male styles (flower prints for women, rhombi for men, fig. 3).[10] These examples show that a gendered exhibition seems to be important for this last presentation of the body. But why is this practice of gendering the dead and the materials around them so common? I would argue that death reduces the body and its representation to the cultural concepts that are thought to be essential for a person, her/his attributive identity[11] and a specific culture. The body itself is interpreted as passive in death, with the social actions around it coming from the living. The possibilities for communicating the individual characteristics of dead persons (besides talking or writing about them) are limited. The material medium (as a medium that persists) becomes especially prominent in forming and communicating ideas about the dead body. That lifeless bodies are represented so prominently as gendered supports Mia Lövheim's view that gender is "at the heart" of Western culture.[12] Gender in the form of the binary differentiation into male and female belongs in Western cultures to the main characteristics of an individual: a non-gendered individual is in fact "almost impossible for our imagination to accept".[13] So, to summarise, gender is so tightly connected to a person that it is staged prominently even after death, while other characteristics (such as profession, ethnicity or hobbies) are normally (at least in Switzerland) not central to the representation of the dead body.

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[9] I understand "Western" in the following not in a geographical sense, but in the sense of a lifestyle and way of thinking that is influenced by late capitalism, consumerism and globalisation.

OVERCOMING GENDER THROUGH DEATH

The above mentioned publicly exhibited bodies are nowadays usually displayed in specific chapels, which replace the exhibition of the mortal remains at home, a practice that was common, at least in Central Europe, until around the middle of the 20th century. Sometimes these chapels are newly built, but often, especially in the case of Switzerland and Austria, old ossuary chapels have been converted into display chapels. Ossuary chapels have been built since the Middle Ages to collect the bones of the deceased, which were exhumed after a number of years because of the shortage of space in cemeteries.[14] Some of these ossuaries still display the bones and skulls of the previous generations. For example, in Steinen (Schwyz, Switzerland, fig. 4), the mortal remains are laid out in front of an impressive wall made of human skulls and bones. While the freshly deceased person is gendered, the collective of the older mortal remains is exhibited in a non-gendered way, communicating the social equality (with regard to age, gender, social standing, wealth etc.) of the mortal remains.[15]

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[10] For another example, see the website of the company Urnesa from Switzerland: http://www.urnesa.ch/sortiment/bestattungswaesche/kissenbezuege/index.php [accessed 15 March 2015].

[11] I would define "identity" in our example as a self attributed onto the dead body in the sense of "a symbolic project that gives […] a guiding orientation to ourselves, to other people, and to broader society" (Elliott 2001, 4).

[12] Lövheim 2013, 2.

[13] Le Guin 2007, 85.

[14] For charnel houses in general see Koudounaris 2011, for ossuaries in Germany: Zilkens 1983, for those in Austria: Westerhoff 1989, for Switzerland: Odermatt-Bürgi 1976.

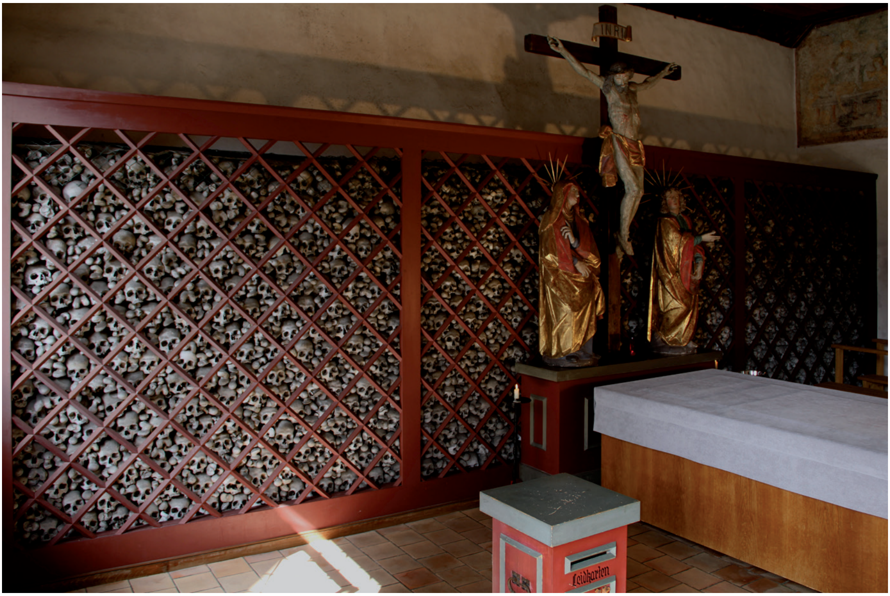

Fig. 4: The catafalque for the display of the dead bodies stands in front of the non-gendered collection of bones from past generations. Ossuary of Steinen (CH 2014) © Yves Müller.

In contrast to the individually exhibited dead bodies, the skull collections in ossuary chapels can visually emphasise a gender equality. The skulls are recognisable as woman, man, boy or girl only for experts or if they are painted with the names of the deceased. Accordingly, specific religious contexts, as I would argue, overcome socially communicated gender concepts. The lifeless body is still gendered if the focus remains upon the individual in a personal manner, but gender becomes irrelevant when the focus is placed more on the collective, as in the case of the ossuaries, where the deceased are thought of as poor souls for whom the living should pray. The idea of the poor souls in purgatory was linked at least until the beginning of the 20th century to a *memento mori* demand for the living: They should live their life – so the emic perspective – in a religiously correct way. Gender separations seem to be less important than the normative guidelines to live a proper religious lives that the masses of bones communicate visually. To summarise this second observation: the argument can be made, using the approach of the sociologist Stefan Hirschauer, that gender is a continuous negotiation process.[16] Gender can, depending on the context, step back behind other cultural attributions and can even become, in specific mediatisations, irrelevant. In our case this works via material communication in a religious context.

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[15] We can find *memento mori* slogans referring to this social equality in the ossuaries of Alvaschein/Mistail (CH), Naters (CH), Rickenbach (CH), Villmergen (CH) and Wildschönau-Oberau (AT).

CONCLUSION: THE MATERIAL BODY AS A MEDIUM FOR GENDER AND RELIGION

I have chosen the example of the exhibition of the dead because the end of life proves useful when thinking about the basic categories of culture understood as "shared meanings".[17] These shared meanings are communicated through social practices and different media "which carry meaning and value for us, which need to be *meaningfully interpreted by* others, or which *depend on meaning* for their effective operation. Culture, in this sense, permeates all of society".[18]

Using the example of the exhibition of mortal remains, I wanted to follow Mia Lövheim's argument that gender is a methodological lens for elaborating different mediatisation processes. In the example above, the body in a religious setting becomes the main medium for forming and communicating gender.[19] The dead body cannot be detached from materiality, and we can observe very different processes of communication through these material mortal remains. If the individual aspect is emphasised, the genderisation seems to be important. As a result, gender is interrelated with an individual's identity and the memory of this person. If the focus is on the underlining of collectivity, gender falls behind other semantics. In this second case, the function of the exhibition is not related to an individual memory, but much more to a normative demand to live in a certain (religiously virtuous) way. To conclude these observations: Religion can include and exclude gender differentiations, whereby dominant social expectations and ideas can be underlined or challenged. In our case, both happen through the body as the main (and a material) medium. Therefore, the material body can become a medium for communicating the importance of gender, but also a medium for overcoming such dichotomic gender separations, depending on not only the specific context and on cultural conventions, but also the function (in our case an emphasis on the individual or the collective) that the public presentation of the lifeless body adopts.

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[16] See Hirschauer 2001, 214.

[17] Hall 2013, xvii.

[18] Hall 2013, xix. Emphasis in the original.

[19] McGuire 1990, 284.

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Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler

Mediality and Materiality in the History of Religions

A Medieval Case Study about Religion and Gender in In-Between Spaces

ABSTRACT

The article discusses possible terminologies for labelling historical materials. Drawing on the history of the city of Cairo around the 12th century – to the Fatimid era and to later Ayyubid times – it looks at the documents of three religions on religious infrastructure donated by women. This reveals women's ability to shape the public sphere. At least to a certain extent, the segregation of the sexes and the concept of the harem are questionable. This topic requires the reconstruction and re-reading of fragmental materials. Methodological reflections are helpful for dealing with different sources, mostly combinations of texts and archaeology, embedded in the current debate about material culture and media as well as materialization and mediation. It might seem anachronistic, but to specify these categories it is useful to compare this example with a contemporary study by Mia Lövheim on female Internet bloggers. In both cases we find women as self-confident agents in public spaces.

KEYWORDS

media, materiality, materials, sources, architecture, new media, Islam, Cairo, women, gender, Judaism, Christianity, public sphere, in-between-spaces

BIOGRAPHY

Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler is professor for History of Religions at the Philipps University Marburg, Germany. She connects Islamic studies with projects on visual and material culture, especially religious architecture: *Moscheen in Deutschland* (with Claus Leggewie, 2009); *Religiöse Blicke – Blicke auf das Religiöse* (with Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati and Joachim Valentin, 2010); *Gelenkte Blicke. Visuelle Kulturen im Islam,* 2011; *Viele Religionen – ein Raum?!* (with Bernadette Schwarz-Boenneke and Mirko Roth, 2015).

MEDIA IN HISTORY OF RELIGIONS?

The following case study will shed light on methodological and theoretical questions about media in history – which were once spoken of as "sources"[1], such as textual or archaeological sources. In medieval Cairo, the female patronage of religious infrastructure grew significantly. But reconstructing the traces of these patrons in the city's public sphere is not easy and requires a combination of the study of texts and archaeology. Thus, questions arise about the heuristic quality of the term "media" when used as an umbrella term for all sorts of sources in pre-modern times as well. Might it be more useful, alternatively, to speak of "materials", considering the term's metaphorical link to materiality, especially when dealing with manuscripts and buildings as physical traces of commemorative cultures?

The historical case to be discussed has surprising parallels to Lövheim's empirical work on new media,[2] but no one would use the term "media" to characterise historical sources. My contribution here is a discussion of how historical and contemporary fields might be connected by the character of data that represents constructions of religion and gender. This is not an anachronistic approach. It tries to give different terms rights of their own, independent of metaphorical biases such as that media are dynamic and modern or that sources are a reliable basis for historical knowledge.

In the background of this discussion stands observation of in-between spaces:[3] religious as well as gender cultures are seen as not totally segregated; moreover, the modes of bridging religions, gender and public and private spheres come into view. Should historical sources be connected in a similar way?

SPACES AND AGENCIES OF WOMEN WITH DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS IN MEDIEVAL CAIRO

Around the 12th century, Cairo's inhabitants varied as much in ethnicity as in religion or denomination. That said, the whole of society practised one gender regime and it did not make a huge difference if one was a Jew, Christian or Muslim. Many people lived with close family or clan ties. To a certain extent, architecture suggests separate spheres for the sexes, but the norm of segregating and banning women in a harem seems more and more to be a stereotype – be it as a classical Islamic ideal or a 19th century scientific topos.[4]

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[1] The option to return to the term "sources", a term that was overthrown in debates on new cultural history, will not be reflected here. The term is only used here for pragmatic purposes. See Burke 2004.

[2] Lövheim 2013, 153–168. She deals with female and female Muslim bloggers on the Internet. In her empirical study, the Internet and new media are seen as means of communication and social mediation: young women act as agents in new public spaces aside from traditional religion with fewer options to represent their religious identity. As in the following example, media, gender and religion are connected.

[3] Wirth 2012, 7–34, 11, 18–19. Homi K. Babha's topos of a third space and Juri Lotman's semiosphere describe similar models of cultural fluidity.

And here we find the interesting parallels to Lövheim's observations. It must be asked, not only for contemporary but for historical research as well, how strict the separation of official and individual religion, or of a public sphere for men and a private sphere for women, ever was.[5] My studies have looked at the agency to finance buildings and modes of perception of written signs on architecture, as well as responsibilities in authorship and access to texts. In doing so, we find no female author, but women appeared in public – in person or via their donations.

BUILDINGS AS PART OF MATERIAL CULTURE[6]

Even if I can provide only some superficial insights here, women appear as sponsors of buildings in a broader multi-religious context. This contradicts every stereotype we know: women as passive members of families, as ruled by men, as living in the background in their harems, as not leaving their home and as not taking part in official affairs in public. In fact, the opposite was the case, especially among the wealthier and politically active families in all three religions. Jonathan Bloom has examined Cairo's graveyards – which are a most important field when we look at the spheres of male and female from antiquity to Islam – and found that women always played an important role in burial ceremonies as mourners and also as ritual specialists for remembering the deceased in their regular visits to the graveyards. Bloom's article "The Mosque of the Qarafa in Cairo" (1987)[7] deals with an important mosque complex at a central place in a huge cemetery. From around the year 1000, the women of the ruler's family acted there as patrons of buildings such as family tombs. Stephan Humphreys then widened the scope in his article "Women as Patrons of Religious Architecture in Ayyubid Damascus" (1994)[8]: When in the 13th century it became popular for the wealthy to act as patrons religious infrastructure in the Near East, women were well represented as sponsors of public buildings.

Even if the gender aspect was not part of her study, with *Writing Signs. The Fatimid Public Text* (1998) Irene Bierman opened our eyes to inscriptions on public buildings. She followed the signs of male politicians, califs, sultans and viziers who marked their terrain within the city.[9] In these cases, the media are connected: One could and sometimes still can read such texts on city gates and the walls of mosques – written information and architecture are linked. But in most cases of women's patronage of buildings, one element is lost. The buildings have long been destroyed; they can be reconstructed only from clues in historical texts.

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[4] Cortese/Calderini 2006, 41, 232–233. See also 64, 187–188 on interconfessional and interreligious marriages.

[5] Lövheim 2013, 153–154.

[6] Material culture found entry into the work of history and history of religions much later than texts. The material culture of the Fatimids is therefore well known mainly to art historians. There exist examples of tableware showing pictorial representations of humans and animals. Here we find female musicians, although the sex of many figures can hardly be identified with any certainty. Seipel 1998, 106.

[7] Bloom 1987, 7–18.

[8] Humphreys 1994, 35–54.

[9] Bierman 1998.

TEXTS

It is common knowledge that the written imperial history was the work of male authors. These historians, like the influential Mamluk authors al-Maqrizi (–1442) and al-Qalqashandi (–1418) as well as their predecessors, like al-Qudaᶜi (–1062) mentioned below, dealt with the history of dynasties, had a background as state officials and wrote mainly about califs, sultans, viziers, Coptic patriarchs and Jewish representatives.[10] Here, women were rarely represented if they were not involved directly in state affairs. Even then, it is difficult to identify them, given that it was a matter of status for a woman's identity to be hidden. Even the most influential woman in Fatimid history, the sister and successor of al-Hakim (–1021), who reigned in the 1020s, is known only by her official title *sitt al-mulk* (–1023), "mistress regent". The note on the founder of an important building in Cairo's topography, the afore mentioned al-Qarafa-mosque, is similar:

> This is the mosque known today as the Jamiᶜ al-Uliya [the Congregational Mosque of the Friends of God]. It is in the Qarafa al-Kubra […] Al-Qudaᶜi said: Qur'an recitators (qurrā) used to gather there. Then the new congregational mosque (al-masjid al-jāmiᶜ) was built there. Al-Sayyida al-Muᶜizziya built it in the year 366 [976]. She was the mother of al-ᶜAziz bi-llah Nizar, the son of Muᶜizz li-Din Allah. She was an Arab slave called "Warbling" (taghrīd), but named Darzan.[11]

The patron's name is *sayyida al-al-Muᶜizziya*, i.e. the "Lady al-Muᶜizz", named after her husband, who reigned at the end of the 10th century. In this function, she has no name of her own. But apart from her name, the historians al-Qudaᶜi and al-Maqrizi gave as much information about her family relations as they could. She began her rise to power as a slave girl with different proper names. Sayyida al-al-Muᶜizziya herself thus represents a life in the in-between space both inside and outside the inner circle of power.

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[10] Taqī d-Dīn Abū l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad ibn ᶜAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawāᶜiẓ wa-l-iᶜtibār fi-l-ḫiṭaṭ wa-l-āṯār*, 2 vol. (Beirut: Dār Sādir, new edition around 1992). Taqī d-Dīn Abū l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad ibn ᶜAlī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Ittiᶜāẓ al-ḥunafā' bi-aḫbār al-a'imma al-Fāṭimiyīn al-ḫulafā'*, ed. Ğamāl ad-Dīn aš-Šayyāl, 3 vol. (Cairo: al-Mağlis al-aᶜlā li-š-šu'ūn al-Islāmīya, 1967–1973). Al-Qalqašandī, *Kitāb Ṣubḥ al-aᶜšā fi-ṣ-ṣināᶜat al-inšā'*, 14 vol. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīya 1913–1919). Both Mamluk authors use important Fatimid or Ayyubid sources, like al-Qudaᶜi (–1062) or Ibn at-Tuwair (1220), whose works can be reconstructed via these Mamluk texts.

[11] Maqrizi quoted in Bloom 1987, 7.

Sponsoring religious buildings was not a privilege of the ruling elite. At least one Coptic woman supported the renovation of a church, wrote Abu Salih, a probably Coptic author of a history of the churches in Egypt up to the 12th century:

> In the Hamrâ also is the church of Saint Onuphrius, the holy man, the pilgrim, the contemplative, which was restored by a woman named Turfah, according to the testimony of an [inscribed] board which was put up at the door of it, near the well which is now filled up: and through this door the women entered.[12]

She must have been a wealthy woman if she had the funds to sponsor a renovation and to leave an epigraph. Her status did not prevent her name being mentioned. Her name could be seen by everyone, by men as well, even if the site of the inscription marked a door for women.

Another important genre of texts is formed by the contracts for selling and inheriting houses. The famous Geniza documents from the synagogue in the antique settlement of Fustat in southern Cairo refer to several women as owners, heirs and donors of buildings used for caritative purposes. Jewish women were explicitly allowed to possess wealth – like women in Islamic law. It is obvious to everybody who has seen photographs of these documents that we must speak of "materials" when we refer to the thousands of small papers stored for centuries in a closet. Solomon Goitein worked on the Geniza documents of a legal character concerning houses, some of them dedicated to the support of synagogues or the poor, probably from the profits made from renting apartments:

> This parceling of a house into some sections devoted to pious purposes and others given to various relatives or other persons is well illustrated by the deathbed declaration of a woman made in November 1006, in which she willed one-sixth of her house to each of the two synagogues of Fustat and another three-sixths to a brother, a niece, and a girl (in order to enable her to marry). The value of one-twelfth had already been spent for repairs, and the remaining twelfth was earmarked for the transportation of the testator's body to Palestine for interment in the Holy City.
>
> In or around 1161 a woman donated one-quarter of a house, which she held in partnership with another proprietor, 'to the poor' and one-sixth to a person not described as her relative.[13]

MEDIALITY OR MATERIALITY?

How are we to deal with these written clues about buildings? Parallel to Lövheim's context of "new media", we can assume that the historical patronage of architecture was a "medium":[14] it was a specific communication technique as well as a demonstration of identity. It was important to set signs for the inner religious community as well as in the inter-religious context of the pluralist metropolis. The signs could be read as public statements of powerful women who wanted to demonstrate their agency within their families and left traces thereof outside their homes, sometimes even without being clearly identified by their names. Moreover, the signs must be read as signs of piety and praise to Allah. Charity work was well established in all three religions, and the donors were male and female.

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[12] Ibn al-Mukaffa^{c} 1968, 111.

[13] Goitein 1983, 89.

Finally, patronage of religious institutions was by no means a way to draw lines between religions, within one religion or between the sexes. On the contrary, it was important for the communities to remember all these donations in their official historiographies, Muslim or Coptic,[15] shaping commemorative processes by means of cultural techniques of writing. In this sense, architecture and written texts both worked as media. This focus on the complex collective processes corresponds with the debate on practices of media as mediation.[16] Reflections on materialisation as describing communication processes and collective imaginaries within material cultures can be found pointing in the same direction.[17]

Apart from these analogies, it is still useful to separate media and materials in one aspect, namely that of mere materiality. The medieval Egyptian manuscripts cited above are available today in modern editions. This is a modern form of representation that is different from the original one. This shift has to be kept in mind, as the literary scholars Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Uwe Wirth have argued.[18] Gumbrecht reflects on the presence of texts in a physical haptic sense with impressions of immediacy in the process of reading. It makes an enormous difference whether one reads a line on a computer screen or a thousand-year-old paper manuscript. Wirth discusses the outer appearance of a text in columns with pre- and paratexts that influence the perception of readers and thus the understanding of the text. David Morgan and others have discussed visual cultures in the field of the study of religions. The most interesting conclusion is that many cultures do not distinguish between subject and object as modern science does.[19] This is similar to Gumbrecht's argument about the possible immediacy of perceiving a text.

The manuscripts mentioned here all had a small readerships, mainly within a class of state officials and politicians. Being handwritten, they possessed a certain value to their readers, who probably studied them very carefully. To a great extent, they served political and juridical interests, presenting the property of different religious and ethnic groups with a sense of immediacy.

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[14] Lövheim 2013, 154–155.

[15] The Jews seem to have had a different historiography, storing legal documents not to remember their actors but as religious texts to praise God.

[16] Lövheim 2013, 156.

[17] Meyer/Morgan/Paine/Plate 2014, 105–110.

[18] Gumbrecht 2004. Wirth 2012, 7–34, 19–30.

[19] Morgan 2005, 33.

The term “material” points out the presence in those manuscripts. To speak of a “medium” would risk shrouding this aspect. While media are similar in their function as vehicles of ideas and signs of communication, some materials do not aim to mediate, but to materialise an idea immediately.

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III Religion, Media and the Arts

Sigrid Schade

Religion, Belief and Medial Layering of Communication

Perspectives from Studies in Visual Culture and Artistic Productions

ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the relationship between religious practices, belief and the media based on the medial layering of communication. The arguments are situated within the fields of studies in visual culture and cultural studies, reflecting on the role of art as a specific medium in the Western religious tradition. Vera Frenkel's video THIS IS YOUR MESSIAH SPEAKING (1990) is reviewed as a critical inquiry into religious practices and the media structures of communication.

KEYWORDS

studies in visual culture, cultural studies, art religion, contemporary art as critical inquiry, medial layering of communication

BIOGRAPHY

Sigrid Schade is head of the Institute for Cultural Studies at the Zurich University of the Arts since 2002. She studied Art History, Empirical Cultural Studies and German Language in Tübingen in the 1970s. She finished her PhD on the representations of witches in the 16th century in 1982, and her Habilitation in 1994 at the University of Oldenburg. She has taught as a professor at the Humboldt-University Berlin, the Universities of Tübingen, Zurich and Bremen, at the last mentioned from 1994–2005 (Homepage: http://blog.zhdk.ch/sigridschade).

STUDIES IN VISUAL CULTURE(S) – NEITHER A DISCIPLINE NOR A METHOD

Studies in visual culture – in which studies of the media and film within religious contexts should have their place – represent not a discipline but a transdisciplinary field of approaches towards an analysis of visual cultural practices, production and circulation.[1]

"Visual studies" or "studies in visual culture" are terms that until recently have been used mainly in Anglo-American academia, in which they were institutionalised much earlier than in the German-speaking countries, where even now only few exceptions have found a place within academic institutions. One of the Anglo-American representatives of studies in visual culture often quoted would be, for example, W.T.J. Mitchell.[2] Contradictory arguments and the different concepts of visual (culture) studies circulating in the United States will not be discussed in this paper.[3]

Since the term "visual culture" signifies the subject of an approach as well as the approach[4], Silke Wenk and I decided to use the term "studies in visual culture(s)" as a description of the research activity and its German translation within the academic community in the German-speaking countries.[5]

Most authors involved, including those who are Anglo-American, have defined their research field as a form of cultural studies within – and sometimes extending and transcending – the traditional academic discipline of art history. They acknowledge that "art", understood as artistic production, is not a separate element but belongs to a wider concept of visual production that overlaps and is superimposed on other forms of visual culture. They could draw on social art history (or new art history), which elaborated on the processes of transfer, translation and reading of images through histories and societies as can be found in iconological and iconographical approaches (Erwin Panofsky) and in the ideas of a repertoire of images and of cultural memory (Aby Warburg).

Over the last five to ten years discourse connected with studies in visual cultures has developed that in German academia today usually falls under the term "Bildwissenschaft" or in the plural form "Bildwissenschaften".[6] It does not yet exist in a comparable sense in English, although representatives of picture or image theory sometimes also are subsumed under "Bildwissenschaft" by German colleagues, whereas in the Anglo-American academic community, they might be considered part of visual culture studies or visual studies. The German debate around "Bildwissenschaften" shows a belated reaction to the transdisciplinary opening of the field of "art" and claims to transgress traditional art history, dealing not only with art but also with popular and mass media. Yet, this perspective is mainly motivated by installing "Bildwissenschaft" as the new dominant academic paradigm or discipline over other disciplinary fields which are accused of lacking the "essence" of images and their specific qualities. This also implies that "Bildwissenschaften" focus on the meaning of the single, singular image and its author, the artist, instead of on series of images or the moving images that nowadays usually circulate in mass media.[7]

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[1] Parts of this article are based on the book *Studien zur visuellen Kultur. Einführung in ein transdisziplinäres Forschungsfeld* (Studies in Visual Culture. Introduction into a Transdisciplinary Field of Research), which I wrote together with my colleague Silke Wenk, Professor at the University in Oldenburg. Schade/Wenk 2011.

[2] He is one of the authors who critically reflects on the discussions within the field of visual studies including his own concept and argument for a "pictorial turn". See Mitchell 2005, 336–365, in which he summarises his earlier comments and a lecture which he gave in the context of a conference held at the Clark Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts in 2001.

[3] Other terms that have been used were "visual theory" (Bryson/Michael/Moxey 1991), and "picture theory" (Mitchell, 1994). A summary of methodological approaches can be found in the article by Silke Wenk with Rebecca Krebs (2007, 3–13).

[4] Mirzoeff 2002, 3–23; also generally Elkins 2003; Cherry 2005, 3–23; Dikovitskaya 2006.

[5] Schade/Wenk 2011, 56–57.

[6] The main protagonists are Gottfried Böhm and Hans Belting (2007).

At least in the German academic community, art history has been one of the disciplines most resistant of challenges raised by cultural, gender and postcolonial studies, the movements behind or accompanying the concepts of studies in visual cultures. Yet some of the questions concerning the basics of structural analysis of possible elements of visual culture(s) – "artwork" being just one of these – are now being raised also in art history. It is influenced by other disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary discourses that deal with the cultural meaning and power of images/pictures in the age of globalisation and digital image circulation, such as visual studies, film studies, media studies, and image or imaging sciences.

Within the discourse of studies in visual culture questions are being asked that address the relationships between word and image and between image and gaze as well as the interrelations of image(s), bodies, subjectivities and culture(s) and their visible and invisible relationships with other signifying systems. Last but not least, they address the methodological relationships between literature, or language studies (to which the linguistic turn is ascribed), and art history's and aesthetics' legacies.

Gender studies, and its aims, perspectives and theoretical debates, have changed extensively the world of academic disciplines during at least the last 25 to 30 years. It is exactly these issues – relationship between word and image, and between image and gaze as well as the interrelations of image(s), bodies, subjectivities and culture(s) – that have been, and still are, at the centre of attention in gender studies since they are crucial concepts in constructing and repeating, but also with the potential to change a gendered world.[8] It comes as no surprise that one of the focuses of gender studies has become the discussion of the visible and the invisible within the structures of signification and showing. Questions have arisen concerning the powerful effects of showing and at the same time making invisible. The reflection on signifying practices has proved that it is not possible to identify a "visual culture" as a culture of the visible only. Therefore, a critical reflection on studies in visual culture would always assume that the danger in talking about visual culture(s) lies in implicit essentialism, a criticism which has been formulated for example by Mieke Bal. She argues that studies in visual culture seem to promote "[…] a kind of visual essentialism that either proclaims the visual 'difference' – read 'purity' – of images or expresses a desire to stake out the turf of visuality against other media or semiotic systems."[9]

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[7] Schade 2008, 31–51; Schade: Bildwissenschaften and the Absence of Women: http://blog.zhdk.ch/sigridschade/files/2013/07/Billwissenschaft_and_the_absence_of_women_27_7_09_000.pdf [accessed 27 September 2015].

[8] See Härtel/Schade 2002, 9–16.

So the approaches of studies in visual culture(s) have to be aware and take into account that their subject is embedded in a wider field of cultural practices, not because they have to reflect on other practices and their interrelations with other signifying systems as well, but in order to include approaches appropriate for analysing the interrelated effects. Therefore, Silke Wenk and I refer in *Studies in Visual Culture. Introduction into a Transdisciplinary Research Field*[10] to Mieke Bal's criticism regarding the idea of a given methodology or of a methodological toolbox: "[…] by selecting an object, you question a field. […] its methods (are not) sitting in a toolbox waiting to be applied; they too, are part of the exploration. You do not apply one method; you conduct a meeting between several, a meeting in which the object participates, so that, together, objects and methods can become a new, not firmly delineated field."[11] For her, this procedure is adequate with regards to interdisciplinary approaches: "[…] interdisciplinarity in the humanities, necessary, exciting, serious, must seek its heuristic and methodological basis in concepts rather than in methods."[12] Thinking in and with *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities* – the title of her book,[13] – offers the reflective flexibility needed within such research:

> […] concepts can become a third partner in the otherwise totally unverifiable and symbiotic interaction between critic and object. This is most useful, especially when the critic has no disciplinary traditions to fall back on and the object no canonical or historical status. Concepts can only do this work, the methodological work that disciplinary traditions used to do, on one condition: that they are kept under scrutiny through confrontation with, not application to, the cultural objects being examined, for these objects themselves are amenable to change and apt to illuminate historical and cultural differences.[14]

Mieke Bal's concept of working with travelling concepts within cultural analysis instead of with methods takes into account that the approach is always affected by the object and its material and vice versa. Her and Norman Bryson's plea for such an approach can be subsumed under "semiological inquiry" in which studies in visual culture participate.[15]

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[9] Bal 2003, 5–32.

[10] Schade/Wenk 2011.

[11] Bal 2007, 66–67.

[12] Bal 2007, 2.

[13] Bal 2002.

[14] Bal 2007, 4–5.

[15] Bal/Bryson 1991, 176–208.

CULTURAL STUDIES AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Cultural studies (in German one would speak of "Kulturwissenschaften") or cultural analyses – in the late 20th century – has become a field for studies in cultural practices concerning habits in daily life, cult rites, low and high cultures, on artists' productions, consumer culture and mass media.[16] Since the term "culture" has itself been identified as a problematic concept promoting an essentialist reading, cultural studies have aimed to prove the imaginary structure of such a concept in which an Other is always constructed, often more implicitly than explicitly, from the point of view of the dominant discourse. So the use of the term "cultural practices" takes into account that definable "cultures" are always effects of changing processes in the structure and the "cultural imaginary" of the discourses they rely on.[17] When we consider the transcultural effects of migrations of people, the circulation of material and news in the consumer culture and the Internet in a globalised economy and a world of multiple wars, it is even more absurd to speak of cultures as defined entities.

From the perspective of cultural studies, the frames and conditions for constructing religious communities are no different from those for building communities on the grounds of other imaginary concepts (nations, societies, groups, families, "gender", class, "race"). The point of departure for modern and contemporary cultural studies or cultural analysis – elaborated in detail by feminist and postcolonial studies – was the acknowledgement that all these categories were never naturally given but had been used as essentialist naturalisations of cultural conventions and constructions. The results of this research matched and inherited ethnological methodological approaches towards religious practices in diverse cultures.

Moreover, research in cultural studies has shown that cultural fields such as politics, work, economy, public or private life, religion, leisure and others can be separated or analysed separately only hypothetically because they continuously overlap in daily life. Practices from these different fields are usually intertwined and interlinked. A practice within a specific field transferred into another will be part of continually ongoing and changing signification processes.

The claim of a cultural studies' perspective would be that religion(s) – religious rites, cult(s) or culture(s) – are subcategories of culture(s). Religious practices obviously are part or specifications of other cultural practices. With other cultural practices, they have in common ways of including or excluding members in order to constitute communities to which they might want to belong or to be able or allowed to belong or not. And secular cultural practices have in common with religious ones that belief in the benefits of whatever these practices promise is essential for inclusion.

Religion(s) is a term comparable to others such as society, art or subjectivity. They all have in common that they are abstract ideas which can be observed and analysed only by diverse facets: institutions, habitudes, conventions, rituals, symbols, practices, images, prayers, and by the discourses they might produce and by their effects. The term "religion" seems appropriate only in the sense of a systematised concept claiming to include the entirety of symbols, codes, practices, beliefs, rites, liturgies and narratives that constitute a specific religion. Considering how Christian religion functions in Western culture, it must be admitted that not a single individual who has been raised as or calls themselves a Christian can be considered to be participating in the whole set of such facets or its complete knowledge. The access to holy and spiritual wisdom is/was often limited or restricted to specific mediators, such as priests, and the consistent practising of religion in fact usually is/has been deficient. Consistent practice is not necessary for belonging to a religion and this is even more true in secularised versions of religions nowadays.

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[16] Schade/Wenk 2011, 57–56.

[17] Schade/Wenk 2011, 58.

The elements of such practices are based on processes of repetition, convention, habits, imagination, identification and belief. These processes cannot be analysed without a concept of how imagination and communication function in constituting relationships between individuals and communities, thus processing subjectivity and the feeling of belonging or not belonging to communities (of believers).

MEDIA IN RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS, RELIGION AS A MEDIUM, ART AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Visual culture in the West has been strongly linked to religious rites. The academic discipline of Western art history and its debates on the meanings and functions of visual culture and visual practices within Christian religion and its facets cannot be summarised appropriately in a short article.

I refer to a few of its topics only, like Christian iconography and symbolism, which formed an elaborate theological system of representation in the Middle Ages. The use of (audio-)visual culture within religious contexts led to liturgies synthesising staging, listening, preaching, singing etc., and sculpted and painted images in churches constructed in symbolical forms, reflecting the narratives of the holy texts and the codes of liturgies. Mediating theology, belief and the power of the church, the practices of Christian religion can be regarded as a refined composite of media – a term used nowadays in media studies. Images are subject to medial layering or re-mediation throughout their use. Their final reference is God, the holy and/or the spiritual, in themselves concepts that can be grasped and represented only through allegories and metaphors and their diverse mediatisation. Visual culture is an integral part of religious practices. It is also a medium of religion, the holy or the spiritual (as is everything else) and refers to meanings beyond what it shows.

Thinking about strategies for making others believe takes into account that communication is always rooted in medial structures. Knowledge or experience (of the world) can only be accessed through language and media, which, however, are never quite sufficient for the task. Yet the deep longing for and the belief in an immediate access to knowledge or experience (or in most cases a mixture) is also embedded in the media, as they usually make themselves invisible or unremarkable, thus suggesting a natural and direct access to meaning in the act of communication.

Some media seem to be more powerful than others. The Christian church has always included rituals and rites in its practices, for example using relics or suggesting concepts like transubstantiation, which from a philosophical and ethnological perspective can be defined as a form of contagious magic.[18] From the perspective of semiology, one could classify them as signs with an indexical quality, a term introduced by Charles Sanders Peirce[19] which in media studies would be applied to analogous media that have stored traces of the original object represented (as in analogue photography or sound recording). These medial characteristics are related to strategies producing "evidence".[20] Signs or media promising a contagious contact with their objects, holy or not, can be described as media to which a corporeal mark of the symbolised is attributed.

Altogether the media composites the churches impose on their audiences in order to turn them into believing communities are models for all kinds of medial strategies and formats that overwhelm the senses. Nowadays audiences are addressed by digital visual culture and the circulation of signs – be they images or words or moving images, or films – on the Internet. Churches make use of them as they always have made use of the newest media technologies – starting with illuminated books and illustrated printing. Churches nowadays also adopt the strategies and aesthetics of video clips and commercials.

"Art", on the other hand, is a specific concept of visual culture in the West, having been conceptualised no later than the Renaissance with references to Neoplatonic authors of antiquity, lasting until today. Art in this sense has become a religion in itself. Throughout Western art history (as a field of research), religious concepts of art have developed, such as the idea of the artist as *alter deus* and the artwork as a parallel creation.[21] The concept of an art religion – as it was conceived in the 18th and 19th centuries[22] – shows its effects even today when art markets rely on groups of believers and "stakeholder" artists are celebrated as or stage themselves as priests or martyrs of their religion.[23] Art has become a field in which the audience is promised access to spiritual experiences directly through artworks. The spiritual in art – a main objective for example of modern abstract art – has, thus, become an ersatz religious concept.[24] Translated into modern technical or media terms, artists are considered to be “mediums” – seismographs or other technical recorders of the spiritual.[25]

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[18] Walker 2000.

[19] Peirce 2000.

[20] Schade/Wenk 2011, 98–104.

[21] Feminist art history has clearly shown that this concept is gendered.

[22] Auerochs 1999.

[23] Bätschmann 1997.

ART AS CRITICAL CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROMISES OF MEDIA AND RELIGION, AND THEIR EFFECTS: VERA FRENKEL’S VIDEO THIS IS YOUR MESSIAH SPEAKING (1990).

Unlike to art production, which sees itself in the quasi-religious tradition, modern and contemporary artists have developed artistic practices as critical means of inquiry into the functioning of powerful discourses of culture(s) and into the structures of communication which remain unknown to the individuals subjected to them. Using the means, the materials and the medial tools of art – itself part of the communication processes – their research and inquiry take forms other than in the humanities, yet their practice also can be regarded as a conceptual and methodological approach to analysis of (visual) culture(s). Medial self-reflection makes it possible to question the unconscious interactions between image and gaze, self and other, not only on the level of technical apparatus and machines but also on the level of the mental apparatus of perception, in the context of the long tradition of applying to body images in visual art the meanings of gestures, miming, movement etc. “The body” is affected by such productive mechanisms even in those aspects that (in retrospect) cannot be completely grasped medially. Media technologies and their applications (in correspondence with technical and social implications) are always also objects and locations of fantasy and desire – thus creating another field for media-related artistic interventions.

In the following paragraph I will introduce the video This Is Your Messiah Speaking (1990) by the Canadian artist Vera Frenkel[26], an example of such interventions, which represents a reflection on the history of media as a history of its linguistic associations, as a history of the failure or betrayal of its messianic promises, and, finally, as a challenge to viewers to arrive at a clear understanding of these relationships.

Frenkel created the videotape and the first installation of This Is Your Messiah Speaking while an artist-in-residence at Newcastle Polytechnic in 1989/90.[27] The decisive factor in the concept was a new shopping mall – the “Metrocentre” – built on a former industrial site outside the town. The Metrocentre was made up of theme parks – Little Greece, Little Italy, Little England – that simulated urban representations of local and immigrant cultures; it also featured Disneyland-like amusement parks. In the Metroland amusement park, Frenkel found carousels, clowns, and artificial palm trees provided for children accompanying their shopping parents. Queues of people lined up in the main atrium to view a World War I fighter plane, as a Salvation Army band played alongside. A "Redemption Store" completed the ensemble. This mall's blend of war glorification, religion, consumerism, profiteering, and promises of eternal salvation prompted the conception of the video and later the installation.

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[24] Schade 2009, 146–167.

[25] Schade 2011.

[26] Schade 2013, 120–153.

[27] The video is available on DVD: Of Memory and Displacement: Vera Frenkel Collected Works (Toronto, 2005), http://www.vtape.org/.

I read the 1990 video as a history of media condensed to nine minutes and fifty seconds and encompassing sign language and spoken language, the handwritten and the printed word (with elements of both the narrative and the poetic genres), music, sounds, and moving pictures (both with and without sound). Along with gong strokes, footsteps and other such noises, children's crying, and music, the entire video is accompanied by a voice-over.[28] Whatever the setting, those who watch and listen to the video undoubtedly feel they are being addressed directly: "This Is *Your* Messiah Speaking".

The video begins with a dual image. The viewer sees or looks down on what is possibly a blackboard (the limited field of vision prevents identification until later in the work, when the surface becomes recognisable as a floor) on which English words handwritten in white paint are running from the bottom to the top of the screen; superimposed on this first image is a transparent overlay with more handwriting. Two hands appear at the upper edge of the screen, as if holding the board or the overlay, or as if pointing towards the text. It is only subsequently that the viewer might make the association with the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, especially when the text, which is rhythmically divided into stanzas, ends with the imperative: "Do shop around." Simultaneously, a voice can be heard speaking, apparently from a face (Frenkel herself) shown in a frontal shot. Throughout the video, the mouth of this face moves in synch with the voice-over; both slow down occasionally as the video shifts into slow motion. Later in the video, the voice and the face are dissociated. The video begins by addressing its viewers both orally and in a written text – "Don't worry. No one will ever force you to do anything you don't want to do" – in an almost hypnotic repetition. A chime sounds (a modulated piano) and the spoken and written words are then translated, like a refrain, by a sign language interpreter who appears on the screen.

The video continues with a view of legs clothed in trousers and boots walking across the lettered blackboard/floor, while the spoken text is translated into sign language and/or displayed as written captions or subtitles – stylistic elements that evoke silent film. The interpreter's face is usually seen from the front, directly facing the viewer, while her facial expressions – integral components of her communications in sign language—are supplemented by the gestures she makes with her hands. The interpreter's face and hands are brightly lit, while her body, clad in black, is almost entirely absorbed by the black background (fig. 1 and 2).

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[28] The voice-over text is published in Schade 2013, 131–133.

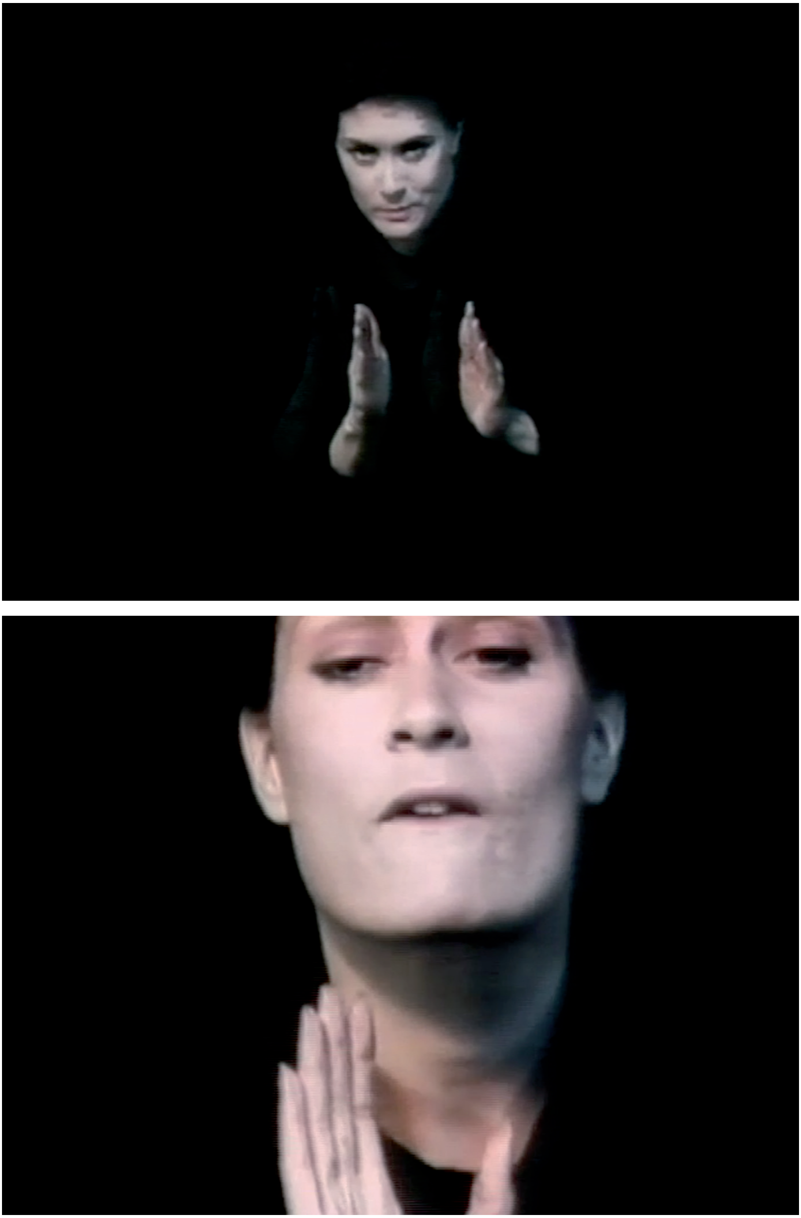

Fig. 1 and 2: Vera Frenkel, This Is Your Messiah Speaking, video stills, 1990, ASL signer Norah Kennedy © Vera Frenkel.

Frenkel employs a number of tactics to dislodge what is ordinarily considered a natural connection between speaker and what is spoken. The pairing of the voice (speaking in a phonetically perceptible language that lends itself to literal interpretation) with the sign language of the deaf (a silent, visually perceptible language) is a brilliant means of dissociating the body from language. Speech, paradoxically, is illustrated visually, while at the same time, it is not.

The elementary equality of linguistic expression in sign and in spoken language forces the viewers of the video to constantly shift their mode of reading according to the media of expression combined. Moving between listening and looking, it becomes evident that the two modes of perception interact and interfere with one another, insofar as an aural sign is always already linked to a visual representation, while a visual sign evokes phonemes; otherwise, they would not be signs, in Ferdinand de Saussure's sense of the concept.

In the case of the "talking face", the narrative voice-over can be only provisionally assigned to it or to the mouth as the source of the articulation. This is due to the fragmentation, the disruptions, and the close-up enlargement of the face, rendered anonymous and androgynous by the black cloth covering the speaker's hair. The talking mouth sometimes occupies the entire visual field. The shots of a talking mouth in such extreme close-up demonstrate the physical effort involved in producing phonemes through the integrated actions of tongue, teeth, and lips, to the point that bubbles of saliva are formed. Viewed in slow motion, the act of speaking and speech itself become eerie processes that assume almost monstrous features. The effect is a disconnect between the effort of speaking and the content of speech.

The voice adopts several different narrative positions layered one upon the other, referring to other narrators and narratives. Running through the entire video is the question of who is speaking at any given time. Who is the Messiah? Who are the saviours whose messages we are hearing? The gap between the face and what is being spoken becomes increasingly wide, as represented by the open, devouring mouth. Oral speech is emitted from the dangerously gaping chasm of the mouth, where monstrous teeth, tongue, and lips produce sounds that are inevitably perceived as threatening. It is here that one is reminded of Flusser's account: "Hordes of words arise within me almost without pause. They clamour for order, insist on my direction, demand articulation."[29] Flusser is referring to himself here, describing his mouth as a space occupied by an enemy force that in a sense pries open his lips from within, compelling him to speak.

But what is the effect of infusing "joyful tidings" – a message of salvation, no less – with menace? Among other things, it draws our attention to the "mis-speaking" (the German word for which, *versprechen*, means both promising and mis-speaking) of speech and of language itself. Messages of salvation are thus likened to enemy forces occupying subjects and their bodies. In this way, THIS IS YOUR MESSIAH SPEAKING evokes the deeper meanings within the nexus of speech, exchange value, fetishism, the symbolic order (into which is inscribed a constitutive deficiency) and promises of salvation.

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[29] Flusser 1999, 219.

THIS IS YOUR MESSIAH SPEAKING is one of Frenkel's works that has acquired a profusion of diverse connotations by being situated in a variety of public spaces, where each new architectural, mediatic, and social context altered the work in terms of both its representation and its reception. A video that is already inevitably perceived as a "media composite" is therefore amplified through constant new associations with other composites of media.

In a text about her own trans-disciplinary practice, published in 2005 in an issue of the journal *Intermédialités* dedicated to the theme of re-mediation,[30] Frenkel lists the Messiah project as one of the chief examples of media migration in her work: in an overt sense, given the movement from one medium to another in the project, but also because the concepts and visual worlds, as they wander from performance to video to computer animation, through story-telling, photography, and printed image and text, and due to the multiple layering, irritatingly assume new meanings, and yet still resemble themselves, albeit in an uncanny resemblance. [31]

Her multimedia presentations make the interfaces, boundaries, and frameworks of the various media visible as such; she reveals their functioning as media, which ultimately means they function as a language that has to deny its medial quality in order to be perceived as natural. Frenkel's works of art explode the imaginary contract with which visual media bind their viewers to their content and also the naturalising character of speech and writing. Moreover, collectively her works reveal, as Marshall McLuhan stated, that what appears in media are other media and, consequently, that what appears in media is also their own history. Understanding the history and functioning of media does not mean believing in its promises, but rather, as Vera Frenkel says, recognising its unsettling effects:[32] the articulation of words whose promises and mis-speaking continue to produce effects on the history of human societies, and the disastrous role repeatedly played in this respect by faith or hope in salvation.

The idea of the endlessly postponed arrival of a messiah bearing happiness, salvation and abundance, and the assurance that want on earth can be eradicated both at will and instantaneously through consumption are combined in such a way by Frenkel that this ostensibly simple message is transformed into a persistent irritation for the viewers in light of their unconscious desires and their entrapment in such promises of deliverance.

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[30] See Frenkel 2005, 149.

[31] Frenkel 2005, 149: "Something survives; something changes, and forces of chance help to bind these elements into a new entity from which emanates the uncanniness of an apparent but indescribable family resemblance."

[32] McLuhan 1964, 23: "This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the 'content' of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph."

The video's criticism is thus directed not only at consumer culture, but also at the notion of an anticipated "millennium", a "thousand-year reign" and at expectations of messianic salvation in general, as well as at the various ways in which such expectations have been culturally and historically articulated. No serious alternatives to consumerism are proposed, but when old fantasies of salvation are reconfigured as new promises of happiness, the old and the new promises mutually reveal each other's true nature.

Frenkel's video is a mise-en-scène, as it were, of the seductive advertising strategy of a messiah competing for preference over other saviours ("choose the Messiah with the right credentials"). The unconscious entrapment of the viewers begins with that assurance that they will not be told what to do ("Don't worry. No one will ever force you to do anything you don't want to do."). Nonetheless, the "false Messiah" inveigles them to go shopping. Ultimately, the video is about the interpellation of subjects (via inclusion or exclusion) into linguistic and other communities by means of various media, and also about their sharing in the promised happiness and commodities ("Or someone will shop for you").

Frenkel's translation of a criticism of consumption into a criticism of media leads to her question "Whose stories are we living after all?" Her criticism of media is not, however, a criticism of the (new) media, but rather instructions for their intelligent use, which means, above all, not having blind faith in them. In Frenkel's case, this means using media as artistic means for critical reflection and analysis of (visual) cultures and cultural practices, among which religion would be crucial. To believe in its core is to believe in words, languages, symbolic systems and whatever they seem to promise.

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Natalie Fritz

Cross-media Transmission Processes

Marian Figures in TODO SOBRE MI MADRE (Pedro Almodóvar, ES 1999)

ABSTRACT

This paper builds on aspects of the cultural studies perspective that understands art itself as a method of cultural analysis. This will be exemplified by focusing on how film as a cultural technique for framing and reframing the world, using its different audiovisual devices of representation, is an important contemporary *agens* in the process of transmitting religious motifs and concepts. The paper highlights how Pedro Almodóvar skillfully stimulates the audience to reflect on the polysemy and polyvalence of motifs by not only referring explicitly to iconographic traditions, but also playing with aesthetic conventions.

KEYWORDS

film as method, cross-media transmission processes, framing/reframing, polysemy/polyvalence of motives, tradition, innovation

BIOGRAPHY

Natalie Fritz has a Master's Degree in Religious Studies and is currently writing her doctoral thesis on the motif of the Holy Family in contemporary arthouse cinema. Her principal research interest is currently the field of media (especially film) and religion, involving aspects such as gender and family concepts, cross-media transmission processes, visual studies and media theory. Her latest publications include *Images Travelling through Time and Media: De-and Reconstruction of the Holy Family in contemporary Independent Cinema*, 2015. She has written a number of articles on media and religion and coedited (with C. Martig and F. Perini-Pfister) the volume *Nur für reife Erwachsene. Katholische Filmarbeit in der Schweiz*, 2011.

MEANING-MAKING PROCESSES AND THEIR RELATION TO POWER

The title TODO SOBRE MI MADRE is paradigmatic of Almodóvar's recurring reflection on social transformations as the result of transmission processes and, even more important to him, how these transformations affect the concept of the individual and its authenticity. In TODO SOBRE MI MADRE, Almodóvar literally creates a multi-faceted image of motherhood, on the one hand referring explicitly to an iconographic tradition of Mary, Mother of God, and on the other hand adapting these aesthetic conventions to alternative mother figures to intentionally irritate the audience. By doing this, Almodóvar shows that the specific meaning of a popular motif that is – through the process of transmission – bound to specific aesthetic conventions, is also a result of negotiations and has no exclusive character. Thus the meaning of a specific motif can only be interpreted in the wider context of its production, distribution and reception.[1]

From this perspective, it is intriguing to realise how many similarities can be detected between Almodóvar's work and the work of Vera Frenkel. Like Frenkel in her work of art THIS IS YOUR MESSIAH SPEAKING (1990/91), Almodóvar resituates a religious motif in a contemporary, apparently unusual context. By meshing a dense net of cross-media references on different levels, he clearly marks the interpretative frame and emphasises the dominant reading of the motif in a particular tradition.[2] But, by putting into perspective alternative readings that may be subversive, Almodóvar (and Frenkel) stimulate the audience to rethink meaning-making processes in the wider context of power politics.

In this sense, art creates an opportunity to critically analyse how religious and political powers use media to establish their claim to power by allocating specific meaning to motifs that are constitutive for a society and the individuals within.[3] One could say those who are able to control the production and the distribution of *images*[4] are equally in the position to establish a dominant reading which is intended to legitimise the system as a whole and to maintain its leadership.

MULTI-FACETED MOTHERHOOD

In TODO SOBRE MI MADRE, Almodóvar refines his alternative concept of motherhood that he has already sketched in previous works.[5] It is the story of Manuela, (Cecilia

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[1] Media studies scholars Rainer Winter and Sebastian Nestler (2010) refer to the importance of "reading" a film not as a hermetic product, but as a phenomenon that was created in a specific context with specific intentions for an audience, in short, as a product that interacts with society; within this process its meaning is negotiated. Evidently their approach is based on classical cultural studies considerations concerning communication processes as presented in Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding or Stuart Hall's and Paul Du Gay's theoretic model of the Circuit of Culture. This "thick reading" of films is, however, a relative new approach in the broader field of film studies.

[2] Almodóvar was raised in La Mancha and Extremadura, rural areas in central Spain, where Catholicism permeated all aspects of life and hence Catholic imagery was omnipresent. See e.g.: Zeul, 2010. Under the influence of Franco's dictatorship, a conservative National Catholicism arose that profoundly shaped Spanish society. See: Camino 2010, 627.

[3] See e.g. Schade/Wenk 2011, 125–132.

[4] Here the term "image" is used in a broad sense, as a term for different kinds of visual representations, which include mental, physical (artifacts such paintings, etchings etc.) and virtual images (film).

[5] E. g. TACONES LEJANOS (ES 1991), LA FLOR DE MI SECRETO (ES 1995).

Roth), a nurse whose beloved son Esteban (Eloy Azorín) is tragically run over in front of her. She then tries to find her ex-husband, father of Esteban, to inform him about the accident. On her search, she makes friends with Rosa (Penélope Cruz), a young, pregnant and HIV-positive nun. Manuela decides to stand by Rosa and when Rosa dies during the delivery, Manuela adopts the baby boy and names him, as Rosa wished, Esteban. Almodóvar interprets the state of being a mother not as exclusive biological but rather social. It may be one aspect of an individual's identity but, because in Almodóvar's world gender is in a Butlerian sense[6] a performative act, tightly connected to culturally differing, normative discourses, it is not bound to a particular sex or gender but expresses itself by the way a person acts. In this sense, motherhood is freed from obviously natural constraints and can be understood as an expression of a specific behaviour. Mercedes Camino describes this approach to motherhood as follows: "[...] in TODO SOBRE MI MADRE blood is consciously superseded by the bonds created through contact and solidarity, with the final 'Dedicatoria' suggesting that maternity needs not be restricted to the bonds of physical motherhood."[7]

To explain his idea of motherhood, Almodóvar introduces Manuela and her son Esteban sitting in front of the TV eating and chatting. Their dialogue highlights the significant aspects of the Almodóvarian motherhood concept:

> Manuela: Please, eat. You have to put on some weight. You never know if you have to walk the streets to support me.
> Esteban: For that I need no extra kilos but a big dick.
> Manuela: Who taught you to talk like this?
> Esteban: You asked.
> Manuela: That was a joke!
> Esteban: And you?
> Manuela: What?
> Esteban: Would you be able to prostitute yourself for me?
> Manuela: I have already done almost everything possible for you.[8]

The will to do everything for another person, this absolute devotion, grace and charity that are perceptible here, is visually reinforced by the explicit link to the iconography of the *ideal mother*, the Mother of God, who is often associated with the aforementioned attributes.[9] Almodóvar adapts the iconographic style to play with the audience's expectations. A woman cradling a child is on first glance identified as a mother (see fig. 1).

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[6] Judith Butler understands sex and gender as discursive acts. Categories like "male" or "female" are thus social constructions that refer to specific normative concepts of power. By "doing" gender, acting in a socially accepted "female" or "male" way, the individual seeks to construct a coherent identity. See Butler 1991.

[7] Camino 2010, 632.

[8] TODO SOBRE MI MADRE, 00:03:24–00:03:52, translated by author.

[9] See e.g. Belting 2004 or Rubin 2009.

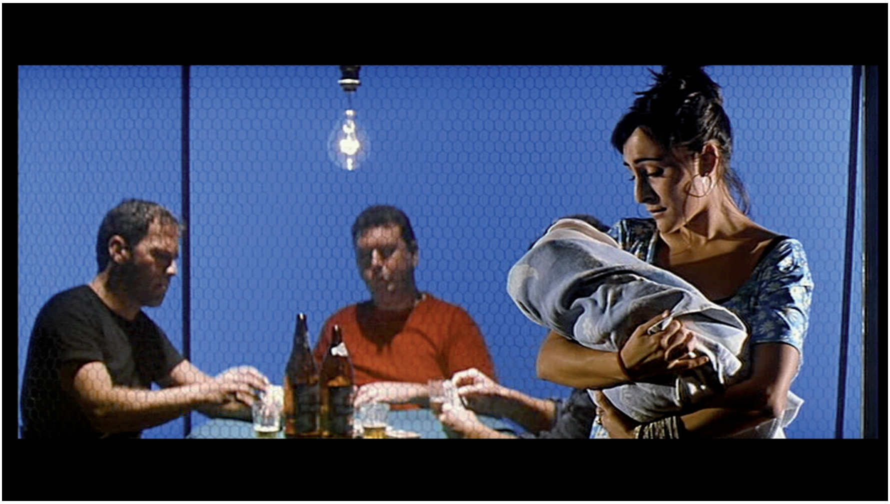

Fig. 1: The woman on the right is not what she seems to be (Todo sobre mi madre, 00:10:43).

In the narrative context, however, it becomes clear that this woman, Nina, is an actress playing Stella Kowalski in Tennessee Williams' drama *A Streetcar named Desire*.[10] So, she is neither the mother of the baby doll (!) on stage nor a mother as Nina. As an actress, Nina is able to switch professionally between different identities. Even though she seems to act convincingly, it is just a theatrical role. One could say that Almodóvar uses Nina to demonstrate that, like the Catholic Mother Mary, she is just the subject of projection related to specific social discourses and cultural contexts. The association with motherhood functions primarily on an aesthetic level, because every recipient tries to make sense of a specific representation by reverting to a particular cultural background knowledge,[11] which here is intentionally directed by Almodóvar towards Marian iconography. During the development of the story line this intention becomes even more explicit and Almodóvar works in a scene where a purported Chagall painting showing *The Madonna of the Village* can be recognised (fig. 2).

Here again, the aesthetic realisation makes the logical link to motherhood. But within the context one understands how skilfully Almodóvar plays with aesthetic conventions and the dominant readings associated with them. The Chagall *Madonna* is a fake made by a mother who does not act very motherly at all, threatening her daughter Rosa, the nun, not to leave for El Salvador but to stay for her father's sake. The forgery in this context can be read as a reflection on authenticity and its relation to identity concepts and in a wider sense again on meaning-making processes.[12] Almo-

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[10] *A Streetcar Named Desire* itself is a drama about family, identity and authenticity.

[11] See Schade/Wenk 2011, 120–128.

[12] If we understand authenticity from a cultural studies perspective as the result of allocations evoked by a particular way of acting, whether we perceive an identity in its performance as authentic or

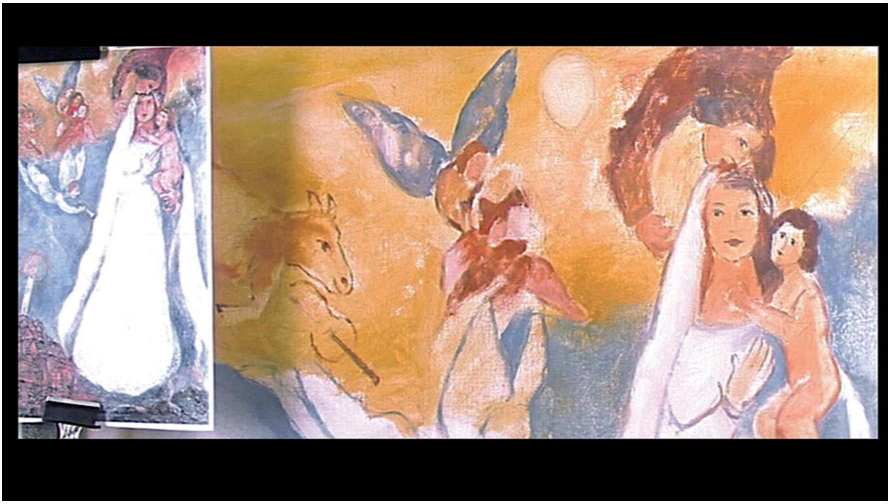

Fig. 2: The forgery of *The Madonna of the Village* (Marc Chagall, 1938–42) serves as a metaphor for a decontextualised interpretation (Todo sobre mi madre, 00:33:44).

dóvar throws light on the fact that the dominant reading does not automatically have to be the right one, it is just one of many possibilities. In the end, meaning depends on the context a specific motif is shown in.

CONCLUSION

Approaching the society and the world critically by means of film or art is indeed a technique for framing the world as it is and for reframing it by questioning dominant readings and revealing alternatives. By referring to different realisations of a motif in diverse media, Almodóvar demonstrates that the meaning of a particular aesthetic representation strategy depends on the media's typical qualities and is not fixed, but a result of constant negotiation during a specific transmission process. He thus critically analyses meaning-making processes and simultaneously justifies his concept of a multifaceted motherhood adaptable to everyone: if the qualities like absolute devotion, grace or charity are attributed to the ideal mother Mary, consequently, every person who behaves in this way becomes a mother. The references to the aesthetic conventions serve Almodóvar by emphasising that identity and authenticity are, like meaning, fluid constructions in a constantly changing setting. Or as La Agrado, the film's transsexual supporting actress explains, showing her diverse plastic surgery

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not depends on the context. The more people perceive one's acting to be authentic, the more the individual believes in its truth. Concerning the relationship between individual identity and authenticity see e.g. Taylor 1991, also Butler 1991.

modifications: "[…] Because you are more authentic, the more you resemble what you've dreamed of being."[13]

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TACONES LEJANOS (Pedro Almódovar, ES 1991).
TODO SOBRE MI MADRE (Pedro Almódovar, ES 1999).

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[13] "… porque una es más auténtica cuanto más se parece a lo que ha soñado de si mísma." La Agrado in TODO SOBRE MI MADRE, 01:15:17–01:15:20.

Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati

Approaching Religious Symbols in the Public Space

Contemporary Art and Museums as Places of Negotiation?

ABSTRACT

This essay responds to Sigrid Schade's contribution by outlining the multilayered meaning-making processes deployed by the use of religious symbolism in visual culture. Referring in a concise way to a selected example of contemporary art, it drafts possible methodological approaches to a challenging field of research.

KEYWORDS

religious symbols, public space, arts, museum, tradition, visual culture

BIOGRAPHY

Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati is a professor of the Study of Religion at the University of Zurich and director of the interdisciplinary Centre for Religion, Economy and Politics (ZRWP). In 1996, she received her PhD and in 2002, she completed her Habilitation in the Study of Religion at the University of Zürich. Since 2004 she has held a Swiss National Science Foundation Professorship. In the same year, she founded the reseach group 'Media and Religion' (www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/medien). Her main teaching and research interest focuses on theories and methods of the study of religion, space and gender theories in the study of religion, the interaction between religion, visual communication and media, the role of religion in the public space and religious traditions in the European history of religions and in the contemporary world. Her latest publications include *Religion in Cultural Imaginary. Exploration in Visual and Material Practices,* 2015, and *Religious Representation in Place. Exploring Meaningful Spaces at the Intersection of the Humanities and Sciences,* 2014, coedited with Mark K. George.

Depending on the period and culture as well as on the socio-political context, the relationship between visual representation and religion has been articulated in a broad range of fashions. From the paradigm of art as a religious practice to a radical criticism of religion by visual means (Vera Frenkel's THIS IS YOUR MESSIAH SPEAKING, discussed by Sigrid Schade, is a good example in this context),[1] the history of religion and contemporary society offer many cases of this multifaceted interdependency. Today, questions about the role, the significance, the challenges, and the problems of visual representations of religion(s) in the public space are strongly interlaced with the presence and interaction of divergent religions and world views (including agnosticism and atheism) within democracies.[2] Furthermore, religious symbolism from very different religious traditions across cultures and times recurs in many places, not only within religious institutions. Explicit visual references to religion can be found in different social spheres and are used in manifold ways: in commercials and advertising, in fashion, in different domains of popular culture (from songs to cartoons), in mainstream movies and art house films and in contemporary arts. The various references to religious symbols, narratives, and practices are presented following religious conventions and iconographies quite faithfully, which allows for immediate identification, although very often the religious references are extrapolated from the original context, reinterpreted and alienated from religious practice.[3]

To grasp the manifold recurrence of religious symbols in visual culture, several approaches can be illuminating: for instance, secularisation, desecularisation and mediatisation theories elucidate some aspects of this intricate field. The basic concepts of the various secularisation theories help to describe and conceptualise the use of religious symbols outside the (fluid) boundaries of religious institutions as an interaction between different social spheres.[4] With the assumption of a desecularisation approach, it is possible to focus on the growing occurrence of religious symbols in the public sphere as a consequence of the increasing significance of religious institutions and practices of groups and individuals. In this approach, religion is generally associated with migration, social change and conflicts.[5] Consequently, visual representation that aims to emphasise the increasing presence of religion focuses on visible markers of belonging to particular religious communities. Moreover, the debate about mediatisation draws attention to the dominant role of (visual) media in the circulation of religion. Media do not just "transport" religious symbols, they also shape and reshape them, creating new forms of religious representations and practices that can be initiated by traditional religious organisations and/or by individuals or other social agencies.[6]

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[1] See Schade 2015.

[2] See as an example Beinhauer-Köhler/Roth/Schwarz-Boenneke 2015. See also Baumann/Tunger-Zanetti 2011, 151–188.

[3] Cf. Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015 (with several case studies by different authors).

[4] See Bhargava 2011, 92–113; Calhoun 2011, 75–91; Mendieta/VanAntwerpen 2011, 1–14.

[5] See, as an example for a very influential position, Casanova 1994. Cf. also Ziebertz 2011, 1–17.

[6] See Lövheim 2015 and Hjarvard 2011, 119–135; Herbert 2011, 626–648; Hoover 2011, 610–625; Meyer/Moors 2006, 1–25. R. Ruard Ganzevoort introduces the concept of deinstitutionalisation of religion to describe the use of religion in media and popular culture: Ganzevoort 2011, 95–119.

It is not surprising that different theoretical paradigms can be combined to explore the quite complex relationship between the visibility of religion in contemporary public spheres that encompasses spaces (in a physical, social and symbolic sense, like cities, common urban ground, places of worship, museums, and temporary installations), public political debates and the broad range of media that characterise the contemporary world. But even when different approaches and theoretical horizons are combined, some aspects remain diffuse.

Drawing on this debate, I would like to highlight the following methodological questions: First, what is "religion" in this context? Second, how can the meaning-making processes generated by references to religion by visual means be understood from an academic, descriptive perspective? More or less consciously, religion is used in different ways and with various connotations. Religion recurs as a general category in common language for indicating private practices, an issue with a political agenda. It can be an official denomination of a group or used in emic perspective to describe personal belief. And, of course, it is also a scientific term discussed in innumerable academic streams and schools. Secularisation and desecularisation theorists are mainly interested in the relationship between religious institutions and their increasing or decreasing influence in society, while the mediatisation approach conceives religion more as a set of symbols and practices that may be associated with religious institutions but can be also independent and free from structured religious organisation. Therefore, although all deal with "religion", they focus on distinct aspects. In this already quite intricate field, broadening the perspective by including visual communication poses further challenges. Images do not generally contain the term "religion"; they operate with visual signs that refer in some ways to religious communities, traditions, knowledge or imaginary. Visual communication has its own logic and needs specific approaches. Meaning-making processes are dynamic and in the tension between production and reception different, even contrasting significances can arise. Therefore, religious images are understood as dynamic processes that encompass production, representation and multi-layered, sometimes contrasting reception processes.[7]

In this essay, I delineate possible methodological approaches to the significance of visual religious references within the public sphere by considering the specific case of contemporary art and museums.[8] As an example we consider *Proposition de détour* by Su-Mei Tse from 2008 (fig. 1), which offers a good case study for the interaction of art, museum and religious symbols.

In a first step, the work of art is considered as an independent *representation* that is consistent with itself. It is an industrially printed wool carpet with a diameter of 900 cm and reproduces, in reduced size, the eight central rows of the famous 13th century labyrinth in Chartres cathedral. The reference to that labyrinth is given by the shape

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[7] See Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015, 251–276.

[8] On the relationship between religion and museum see the special issue of Religion in Europe 2011; Bräunlein 2004; Buggeln 2012; Carol 2007.

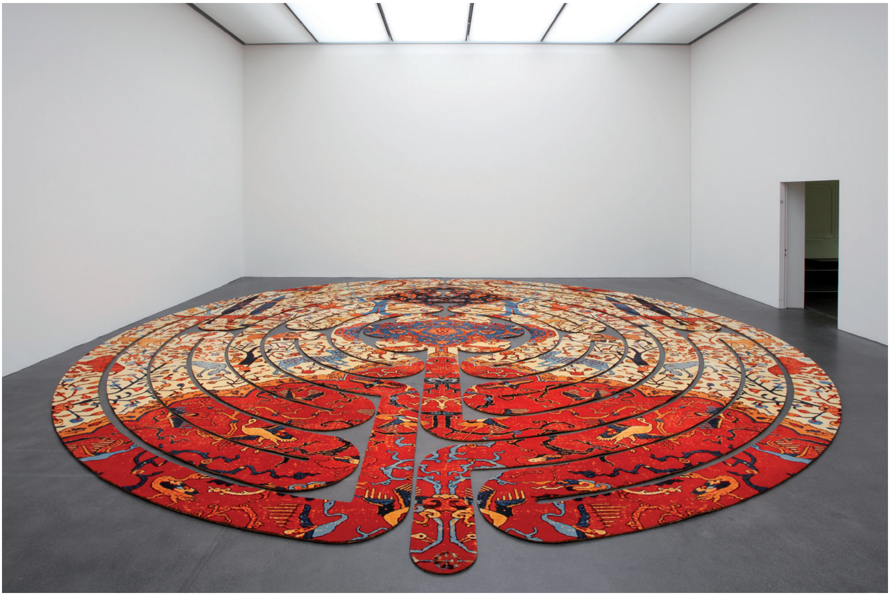

Fig.1: Su-Mei Tse, *Proposition de détour*, 2008, printed wool carpet, diameter 900 cm, here in a exhibition in the Museum of Art Lucerne, Switzerland in 2010 © Kunstmuseum Lucerne, photograph: Andri Stadler.

the industrial carpet is cut into. The quotation of the Chartres labyrinth is explicit and, accordingly, so is the reference to (medieval) Christianity. Labyrinths, found in Christian churches since the 4th century, were associated with the image of the world as a place of sin and of purification as well as a path to salvation.[9] The Chartres labyrinth has been reproduced in many parts of the world. In this sense, *Proposition de détour* reiterates a Christian symbol within an already existing tradition of reproduction of this obligatory path. The design, in contrast, depicts an oriental paradise garden taken from a Persian carpet of the early 16th century (Safavid Period, ca. 1520–1530).[10] The religious reference is to Islam. This work merges symbols from different religious traditions, a Christian labyrinth and an Islamic paradise, combining the oriental carpet tradition with the act of walking a labyrinth in a cathedral. A common thread that reinforces this unique link may be given by references to salvation ideas and concepts of life after death in both the labyrinth of Chartres and the textile representation of a Persian paradise. Through this playful connection, the references to the religious symbol systems in the work of art are materialised, on the one hand, on the level of representation and, on the other hand, on the level of performance: the original use of the labyrinth is in effect reiterated in the white cube atmosphere of the art museum. From the perspective of *production* it is relevant to consider the multicultural background of the artist, born in 1973 and living today in Paris and Luxembourg. Seen in the context of her whole work, *Proposition de détour* translates cultural differences and stereotypes into a visual-spatial dimension and challenges them, asking the question "what might be a universal language?"[11] This challenging question is handed over to the audience.

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[9] Cf. Kern 1999, 207–227.

[10] Fischer 2010, 112–113.

Here, we consider the perspective of *reception* in the particular case of an exhibition in 2010 at which *Proposition de détour* was displayed.[12] The visitors to the museum were invited to walk on this labyrinth-carpet and to perform what used to be a religious practice that, within the museum space, is estranged from its original context. Depending on their cultural knowledge and religious orientation, different visitors may have approached this work – which has been displayed in many countries – in various ways. The very use of such a general shape as a labyrinth opens possible references to other religious practices and ideological orientations as well. One person may walk on the labyrinth-carpet associating it with a Christian pilgrimage, while another will take the walking in the museum as a playful way to interact with this work of art of an internationally established artist. People who are familiar with Persian rugs or Islamic concepts of paradise will put this aspect in the foreground. In any case, the contrasts merged in this work of art can hardly be ignored, for instance the formally harmonic fusion of Christian and Islamic symbolism, or the suggested association between the cold stone of a cathedral floor and the experience of a soft, warm wool carpet, or the habit of viewing works of art in museums from a secure distance and the invitation to touch with one's own feet a precious contemporary artefact. The reception process, in this case, stresses the bodily dimension of experiencing a work of art. The suggested reception of the merged religious symbols is realised in the ideal case by means of a visual-spatial performance.

Depending on the factual reception process in which visitors are engaged, Su-Mai Tse's *Proposition de détour* may act as a religious and/or an artistic response to contemporary, often conflicting diversities of beliefs and orientations. By merging differences, the work of art challenges the audience and engages it in an active interpretation process.

The engagement of this kind of interacting with religious references in contemporary arts and museums through a communicative approach highlights new dimensions of dealing with religion in the public space. Selected symbols, narratives or practices are extrapolated from communities and traditions and put on stage in new media and public places. This alienation does not transform the meaning-making processes in a unique direction but invites the audience to take an active role as interpreter; when religion is exhibited, complex communication processes take place. Therefore, religion can be seen, for instance, as a valuable part of a common national heritage or as part of a basic artistic means of expression.

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[11] Cf. http://peterblumgallery.com/exhibitions/su-mei-tse-proposition-de-d-tour/press_release [accessed 14 May 2015].

[12] Signs of life, Museum of Art Lucerne: http://www.kunstmuseumluzern.ch/ausstellungen/lebenszeichen-altes-wissen-in-der-zeitgenossischen-kunst [accessed 14 May 2015].

In the context of the art museum, the significance of religious symbolism is negotiated and open to manifold interpretations in which various actors – producers, works of art and receivers – are involved. Within these communication processes, references to religion may assume an existential significance for individuals and groups, or be read as cultural or political statements, as elements of personal belief, as common practice, or as a matter of cultural identity.

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JRFM 2016, 2/1
PREVIEW

“I Sing the Body Electric”

Body, Voice, Technology and Religion

In the May 2016 issue of JRFM, the relationship between body, voice, technology, and religion is discussed from an interdisciplinary perspective using approaches from musicology, philosophy, and religious studies.

The body and being embodied are fundamental modes of our existence. We rely on body to interact with each other and our environment through corporal language or sensations. As bodies, we often communicate with our voice. Voice extends the body, it also represents a human being outside of his/her body, for example by being recorded on a storage device. As embodied beings, we use technology to extend the reach of our voice beyond time and space. The technological extension of the voice can therefore be seen as an extension of body. Technology separates the voice from bodily organs and in doing so, it replaces the body, it takes the body’s place. This separation raises anthropological questions: Which anthropological ideas are formed by such a separation of body and voice? Is a voice without a human body still part of a person? And how does it influence anthropological concepts if the original producer of the voice is technology itself rather than a human body?

In religious contexts, this interrelation between body, voice, anthropological questions, and technology is crucial. Religion is intertwined with technologies and techniques of body and voice. Visions of divine entities are often characterized using technologies that (re)produce voices and sounds. For example in Christianity, the voice of the Old Testament God is thought of as trembling like thunder. Or, Jesus, the Word of God, becomes, according to the gospel of John, body and has performative qualities: through the Word all things were made. Also the interaction between humans and transcendental realms can be expressed by means of techniques and metaphors of sound and voice. “To sing is to pray twice” is an old saying suggesting that singing expresses bodily joy or sorrow. Religious practices and spiritual feelings often resonate with and emerge out of bodily sensations and experiences.

This issue of JRFM deals with the interrelation between body, voice, technology, and religion with selected articles from different disciplines. Particularly, it focuses on the anthropological dimensions of this interaction, by considering the role of technology in producing and reproducing voices. Contributions from philosophy and musicology are combined with religious studies perspectives.

JRFM 2016, 2/2
CALL FOR PAPERS

From Social Criticism to Hope

The Cinema of the Dardenne Brothers

The November 2016 issue of JRFM explores the possibilities of cinema to relate to the world, and its capacity to express social criticism and the hope for a better world through stories and images.

In particular, this issue focuses on the œuvre of the Dardenne Brothers and their specific style of "responsible realism" (Philip Mosley), from their first documentaries in the 1970s to their feature films. Their attention to individual characters within their socio-economic context allows for empathy with their individual struggles, and at the same time points out the larger structural problems restrict them. This criticism of social conditions is transcended by a vision of hope and the possibility for transformation, both individually and socially. The Dardennes represent a valuable case for the study of the social commitment of cinema because their clear vision of the problematic issues within their Belgian context (and more broadly speaking, the industrialized North-Atlantic sphere) is grounded in a particular filmic style. From the perspective of the study of religions and theology, their cinema is interesting for a variety of reasons, such as the ethical challenge to assume, individually and socially, responsibility for the other; the persistence on the possibility of transformation within the conditions of the world as a form of secularized religion; the way in which images, sound and narrative are used to carefully observe a particular situation while, at the same time, transcending its specificity.

This issue then pursues two goals: first, the analysis and evaluation of the critically acclaimed, rich work of the Dardenne Brothers from the perspective of the study of religions and theology; and second, departing from this analysis of the Dardennes' cinema and through the comparison of their work to that of other socially committed filmmakers in relation to the broader debates about realist filmmaking, a more fundamental reflection on the relationship between cinema and "reality" and the questions of responsibility and hope that may emerge from it.

Therefore we invite articles that focus on:

- issues of style, filmic language and narrative in the filmic representation of social criticism;
- specific social justice issues and their representation in the cinema of the Dardenne Brothers;
- the Dardennes’ cinema as a unique possibility of relating to the world in a form of secular religious practice;
- hope as a religious and/or secularized, political principle in the films of the Dardennes;
- the analysis of specific films of the Dardenne Brothers with regard to the relationship between filmmaking, social responsibility, and possibilities for transformation;
- comparison between the stylistic and narrative approach of the Dardennes and other filmmakers;
- the social context of the filmmakers and its influence on their work;
- theoretical reflections on the relationship between reality, aesthetic creation, social commitment, and a transformative imaginary in the work of the Dardennes and beyond;
- other topics related to the overall theme of this issue.

Articles of 25,000-30,000 characters (including spaces) should be posted online for peer review by August 31th, 2016 on the journal homepage www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register. The publication is scheduled for November 2016. For any questions regarding the call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact Stefanie Knauss (stefanie.knauss@gmail.com).

JRFM 2017, 3/1
CALL FOR PAPERS

Comics and Animated Cartoons

The May 2017 issue of JRFM deals with a topic rarely discussed in the study of religion, theology and media studies: comics and animated cartoons.

The complex history of comics dates back to figural book illuminations, such as in the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Dances of Death* in the High Middle Ages. However, when school education became compulsory and reading an outward sign of education, the reputation of sequentially arranged illustrations, partially annotated with speech bubbles (banners), declined. Accordingly, a person who relied on the narrative expression of figural sequences was considered to be illiterate. In the 19th century, Rodolphe Töpfer and Wilhelm Busch paved the way for a renewal of autonomous picture sequences, with the picture being the essential component and the text the explanatory feature. By the end of the 19th century, comic strips had begun to establish themselves in the daily press, and from the 1920s onward, comic culture experienced its first remarkable upswing. Many contemporary popular comic characters can be traced back to this time, most of whom have had a surprising cultural impact. Today, comics are a mass phenomenon.

In theology and in the study of religion, an analysis of the use of religious motifs in comics is far from being complete. Many comics utilize traditional religious motifs and symbols (e.g. Thor as deity, the pentangle as symbol). Protagonists in comics often take on – in their own (and sometimes twisted) way – a savior-like figure who brings salvation (for whatever reason) into an evil (hostile) world. Many narratives also address fundamental and existential human questions. They do not necessarily offer answers to such questions but can provide these questions with a context of hope. Narratives also open up a space to allow for the audience to identify with the characters leaving traces – or imprints – in the audience's everyday lives. As such, comics can have an impact on and become important in a range of socio-cultural contexts and questions: questions of violence, radicalization, a means of empowerment, or a way of uncovering hidden meanings.

So far, the difference between comics and comic book movie adaptations has received insufficient attention. It is also necessary to differentiate between animated and live-action movies based on comic books. Both use the original literary source in different ways to achieve a desired effect for the audience. In a narrower sense, one of the most important questions is how “encodings of religious presences” (Armin Nassehi) are formally performed in comics and comic book movie adaptations. In keeping with the traditional theoretical problem of the translation of absence and presence and the staging of the indirect, this aspect holds religious potential.

We invite articles that focus on:

- theoretical reflections on the history of comics in the context of religious systems;
- comics and their movie adaptations as a means of expressing existential questions such as ethical categories, suffering, and tribulations as well as love, mercy and hope;
- issues of style, filmic language and narrative in comic book adaptations, especially the differences between animated and staged picturization;
- the comparison between the stylistic and narrative approach of selected comics, especially of Western and Eastern provenance (e.g. Mattel vs. Manga/Anime tradition);
- other topics related to the overall theme of this issue.

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