JRFM

JOURNAL FOR RELIGION, FILM AND MEDIA

2018

Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati and Christian Wessely (eds.)

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Contact
JRFM
Institut für Fundamentaltheologie
Heinrichstrasse 78/B/1, A-8010 Graz, Austria
e-mail: jrfm@uni-graz.at

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JRFM

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Dear colleagues,

Since November 15, 2015 we have been publishing the **JRFM**, an open access, peer reviewed journal that offers the possibility to present research in the broad field of religion and media twice a year. **JRFM** is an interdisciplinary project with the goal of further developing the field of religion, film and media. It is rooted in a long-lasting cooperation between several universities in Europe and the United States. **JRFM** is based at the Universities of Graz (KFU) in Austria and of Munich (LMU) in Germany. It is published electronically and as print-on-demand in cooperation with the Schüren Verlag in Marburg.

This volume includes a detailed presentation of **JRFM** and a selection of published articles. We hope it will catch your attention and maybe encourage you to become a reader and/or author.

The enormous impact of digital media has changed not only religion, culture and society, our fields of research, but also the way in which we communicate within the academic community. We decided to launch **JRFM** as an open access platform to improve the visibility of research in media and religion as well as support the connections between different disciplinary approaches to this important and fascinating aspect of research on religion. We are interested in bringing together scientific debates about critical theories, concepts and methodologies with close readings of particular case studies in the contemporary world and history. To be able to offer competent advice and critique to our authors, the members of our editorial board and advisory board represent a wide range of disciplines, academic traditions and cultural specialisations. Furthermore, we use the new digital possibilities to bridge the gap between academic written language and the various media we are focussing on by embedding audio-visual sources and other links in the electronic publication of the articles.

JRFM is committed to fostering a diverse, fair and constructive academic community. In the whole process of producing an issue we follow strict criteria to maintain a high quality of publication, which includes a correct and constructive review process, transparent communication with the authors, professional proofreading and copyediting as well as adherence to our code of conduct for producing and reviewing the articles.

To establish **JRFM** as an open access publication we do not only need excellent authors who explore the many facets of media and religion, but also readers. Therefore, we respectfully ask you to support our project by following the issues and by helping us in distributing **JRFM** through links in libraries and promoting it with colleagues, young researchers, and students.

The policy of publishing in open access in the humanities presents many challenges and questions that have not been answered yet in a satisfactory way. Nevertheless, we use this possibility to highlight the significance and visibility of research in media and religion and to develop a creative and respectful academic communication.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to write us! We look forward to the opportunity to engage in further conversations with you.

Best wishes,

Christian Wessely and Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, Chief Editors

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Presentation of JRFM

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- Editorial
- Main Topic (3-5 articles)
- Open Section (1-3 articles)
- Reviews (Books, Films, Games, Exhibitions etc.)
- Calls For Papers

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JRFM 2016/1 "I Sing The Body Electric". Body, Voice, Technology and Religion
JRFM 2016/2 From Social Criticism to Hope. The Cinema of the Dardenne Brothers
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JRFM 2017/2 Using Media In Religious Studies: Strategies of Representing Religion in Scholarly Approaches
JRFM 2018/1 Trauma, Memory and Religion
JRFM 2018/2 "Who, Being Loved, is Poor?" Material and Media Dimensions of Wedding

FORTHCOMING ISSUES

JRFM 2019/1 Understanding Jesus in Media
JRFM 2019/2 Apocalypse and Authenticity
JRFM 2020/1 Science-Fiction Movies and Religion

ACADEMIC PROFILE

JRFM is an online journal that focuses on the interaction between religion and media, with a particular interest in audio-visual and interactive forms of communication. Edited by a well-established network of international film, media and religion scholars with experience in research, teaching and publishing, it fills a gap within the range of European academic periodicals. The group of editors brings together long-standing cooperations in media analysis, sociology, study of religion and theology. The dominant role of media in contemporary society is closely bound-up with multi-layered relationships with religion. On the one hand media representation, production, reception and consumption present aspects that used to be characteristic of religious communication, on the other hand contemporary religious communities, institutions and traditions integrate the new media possibilities and are transformed by them.

JRFM is an academic exchange platform for research. It engages with the challenges arising from the dynamic development of media technologies and their interaction with religion. The journal presents contributions focussing on (audio-)visual 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, and phenomenological and comparative approaches to media and religion across different cultures and periods.

JRFM is a peer-reviewed, open-access, online publication. It addresses authors and audiences in media, cinema and visual studies, the study of religion, theology, sociology of religion and other disciplines related to religion.

JRFM targets a worldwide academic audience in the study of religion, theology, film and media studies, sociology of religion and media.

ASSESSMENTS OF SCHOLARLY QUALITY

PEER REVIEW PROCESS

All articles are submitted to a review process in two steps: an open review within the Editorial Board and a blind review by external experts (members of the Advisory Board or others).

GUIDELINES FOR PEER-REVIEWERS

Reviewers are expected to comment the articles critically, but constructively, taking into account the standards of academic writing and argumentation. They are invited to make suggestions to improve the quality of the articles, strengthening the argument and its consistency. **JRFM** provides the reviewers with a catalogue of questions to take into account in order to ensure that the review will provide constructive feedback to the authors:

- Are the article and its argumentation relevant?
- Does the article give an innovative, substantial contribution to the field of religion, film and media?
- Are the methodological and theoretical aspects of the article consistent with the questions it deals with?
- Which are the main positive aspects of the article?
- Which are the critical aspects of the article?
- Are there other crucial aspects that may be worth of particular attention?

Every review is expected to conclude with a recommendation by the peer-reviewer. For this purpose, the reviewer can choose one of the following options:

- I recommend that the article should be published in the present form. The article is strong, innovative and contributes in original ways to the contemporary debate.
- I recommend that the article should be published with minor revisions. It provides a very good perspective on the field and can be published with minor revisions by the author. Please clearly identify the revisions you recommend and aspects that need to be improved.
- The article should be reviewed again after substantial revision. The text is promising but cannot be published in the present form. The authors are invited to resubmit their article after substantial revisions. They are strongly encouraged to consider the suggestions made by the reviewers.
- I recommend that the article is to be rejected. The article does not fit to the profile of the journal and/or does not correspond to the required criteria.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PEER-REVIEWERS

- Authors are esteemed as valuable partners for **JRFM**. Every review of an article shall be substantially justified. If necessary, constructive suggestions for improving the quality of the (rejected) work shall be provided.
- The following best practice model should be applied to all reviews:
- Objectivity should be maintained throughout the review process, irrespective of the personal or professional bias of the reviewer. The reviewer may cancel his participation in the review process at any time if he considers himself to be insufficiently expert, professionally biased or personally involved.
- Although reviewers are required to critically evaluate the texts, they shall aim to provide constructive critique. Not only will their review be a suggestion for the journals editors to publish or reject a specific paper, it also should provide guidance on how it might be improved. Please mind that the author may be a younger colleague that may have less experience in publishing and is grateful for any helpful advice from seniors.
- The reviewers shall maintain full confidentiality. Neither will they discuss aspects of the review process with other persons than the editors nor will they actively try to identify the submitter of a paper. They will not take any advantages of the ideas that are discussed in the paper to be reviewed.

PUBLICATION ETHICS

A ethical code for publishers and all involved partner is published here:
http://jrfm.eu/index.php/ojs_jrfm/ethics

Selected Articles 2015–2018

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

1 Lövheim 2010.
2 Lövheim 2014.
3 Hepp/Hjavard/Lundby 2010.
4 Lövheim 2013.

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.

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.

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 reli-

9 Lövheim/Lynch 2011.
10 Meyer 2013.
11 Couldry/Hepp 2013.
12 Hepp 2013, 70.
13 Hepp 2013, 120.

gious 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.

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.

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 ex-

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].

ample 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.

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 con-

22 Todorov 1987.

nected to "marriage and family" as core elements of the "consistent" and "true" values the Church offers in an "unruly" world.

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

23 Mulvey 1975, 6–18.

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.

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]

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 institu-

28 Winston 2013, 165.

29 Gill 2007, 249.

tions 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.

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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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*

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

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].

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.

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

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

on affirmation, rather than employ a demonstrative, rational discourse, and the film works primarily through affective elements (music, visual dynamic).

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

9 Odin 2011, 61.

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.

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

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.

of religion may combine with rejection of the commercial communication space to which the film alludes.

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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Stefan Lorenz Sorgner

The Pedigree of Dualistic and Non-Dualistic Media

Grasping Extramedial Meanings

ABSTRACT

The article provides suggestions concerning the cultural relevance and embeddedness of dualist and non-dualist media and demonstrates that the presence or absence of certain types of media has extra-medial relevance that can contain ethical, political, and social meanings. When I am talking about these kinds of dualities I am referring to distinctions like the one between good and evil, mind and body, culture and nature, the material and the immaterial or the organic and the inorganic. The contemporary examples I mention paradigmatically represent the phenomenon in question. However, several other artists, composers and designers are central figures, too, e.g. Patricia Piccinini, Eduardo Kac, Stelarc.

KEYWORDS

media, music, theatre, opera, transhumanism, dualism, non-dualism, ethics, posthumanism, ontology

BIOGRAPHY

Professor Dr. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner teaches philosophy at John Cabot University in Rome and is director and co-founder of the Beyond Humanism Network, Fellow at the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies (IEET) and Research Fellow at the Ewha Institute for the Humanities at Ewha Womans University in Seoul. He is author and editor of more than 10 books, e.g. "Menschenwürde nach Nietzsche" (WBG 2010). Furthermore, he is in great demand as a speaker in all parts of the world (e.g. TEDx; World Humanities Forum) and a regular contact person of national and international journalists and media representatives. (e.g. Die Zeit).

I became fascinated by questions concerning duality and non-duality during my teenage years, when I started to realise how widespread categorical dual distinctions are and that they can be found in various fields and strata of culture and life. When I talk about these kinds of dualities, I am referring to distinctions like those between good and evil, mind and body, culture and nature, the material and the immaterial, and the

organic and the inorganic. These examples are an arbitrary selection; others could be mentioned too. One might wonder what is the problem with these distinctions, for we use them every day and it is at least not immediately clear why employing them might be problematic.

The first problems I recognised, while still a teenager, were related to the distinction between the immaterial mind and the material body. If human beings consist of two such radically separate substances, how is it possible for mind and body to interact? If two substances do not have anything in common, then any kind of interaction seems highly unlikely.[1] I next recognised evaluations of the two substances: the immaterial world was usually related to the good, stability, and unity; the material world was connected with evil, change, and plurality.[2]

This conceptualisation of the world understands as good something that is universally valid. The good that stands for the qualities connected with the good life can be described and is valid for all human beings, as anthropologically all human beings are identical. All possess an immaterial soul that separates them categorically from all other solely natural beings, like apes, dolphins, and elephants.

This way of thinking can still be found in many social contexts, most legal constitutions, and sundry moral laws. Only human beings have dignity or personhood. All solely natural beings like animals are things and hence belong to the same category as stones and plants. This position also applies to German Basic Law. Animals are not seen as things, but legally they are to be treated like things. Only human beings possess dignity. This distinction of human beings implies the categorical duality previously mentioned and is a characteristic of Platonic, Stoic, Christian, and Kantian thinking. It also accompanies paternalistic structures and the violent treatment of monsters, and we all are monsters in one way or the other.[3]

Furthermore, only one concept of the good is supposed to be valid for all human beings. The characteristics of what has been recognised as the good, however, have varied in history. For Plato the cardinal virtues were seen as sole good, and for Aristotle it was a combination of virtues, the good of the body and external virtues. For Stoic thinkers, being virtuous was sufficient for living a good life, and if one possesses one virtue, one immediately possesses all virtues and turns into a moral saint. For Christian thinkers the virtues of love, faith, and hope became relevant, and contemporary Christian philosophers tend to stress that love is all that is needed for living a good life (love and do what you want) – Michael Sandel and Gianni Vattimo are prime examples of this position.[4]

What seems problematic with this point of view is that it does not sufficiently consider that we are all psychophysiological, with radically different drives, wishes, and

1 Sorgner 2007, 46.
2 Sorgner 2010, 193–211.
3 Sorgner 2013, 135–159.
4 See Eissa/Sorgner 2011.

desires. We are all monsters, and it is good for us to live in our monstrous ways. Having realised this, I regard it as important to accept that it is highly likely that any non-formal account of the good will be implausible.[5]

In light of the aforementioned examples of dualistic conceptualisations of the world, which seem highly problematic, I realised that we find analogous dualities in various aspects of our way of grasping the world. More though, it seemed to me that cultural processes usually occur in parallel events. Philosophers conceptualise the world in a dualistic manner and a similar process occurs in ethics or in the media. Is it always the case that historically a certain group, a discipline comes first? I do not know. Nietzsche suggested that music is a discipline in which the processes in question occur rather later than in other fields and disciplines. (Nietzsche, 1967-77, 450-452 = KSA MA, 2, 450-454) Such may be the case, but to my mind the processes do not seem to follow such given paradigms. Change seems to me more chaotic. Sometimes music comes last within the organic process of a culture, but in other circumstances it might come first. This question, however, would need to be discussed separately.

Having reflected upon duality and non-duality for a long time, only recently I managed to connect two insights that I had had for some time but had not seen as connected, on the birth of dualistic thinking and on the dualistic media.

In early August 2013, just before attending the World Congress of Philosophy in Athens, Jaime del Val, to whom I will return below, and I were on the island of Aegina and decided to attend a performance of *The Cyclops* by Euripides, which was being performed in the theatre at Epidaurus. *The Cyclops* is the only complete satyr play to have survived. During the performance, the dualities that had come about during the birth of Ancient Greek drama suddenly became clear, as I was confronted with the architectural prerequisites that had accompanied the institutionalisation of drama during the sixth century BCE.

Originally, there had been no theatre buildings, no stage, and no spectators separated from the stage. Before the institutionalisation of tragedy, there had been only groups of human beings singing and dancing together, without a rigid dualistic spatial separation of actors and audience. Various categorical dualities were introduced only later, during the birth of tragedy.

First, there was the spatial separation between audience and actors. The audience had to remain seated within certain linear and circular fields, which were separated from but also directed towards the circle, or stage, on which the actors were to fulfil their tasks. Secondly, a further distinction was introduced, namely the distinction between chorus and protagonists: on the one hand, there was the chorus, and the task of the chorus was to sing and dance together; on the other hand, there were the individual actors, whose task was to recite their roles. Hence, the duality of audience and actors was amplified with the introduction of the duality of protagonists and

5 Sorgner 2016.

chorus. Thirdly, a dualistic theatre architecture was created, which was responsible for enforcing these dualistic structures. All of these dualities were absent from the festivities that had taken place before the invention and institutionalisation of the theatre, which began with the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens in the sixth century BCE.[6]

I am not suggesting that the establishment of this theatre was the sole event that established dualistic media. It seems plausible to claim, however, that this event was a vital stepping stone for the emergence of dualistic media. Jaime del Val has successfully demonstrated in some of his writings and presentations how this kind of duality was transforming over the further history of the media, but at the same time he has also shown how visual art kept its dualistic directedness or foundational structure.[7]

The same can be noted in the realm of philosophy. Dualistic thinking in the Western tradition was strongly influenced by Plato's thinking of the fifth century BCE. Before Plato, dualistic conceptions could be found in Zoroaster's thought, of the first half of the second millenium BCE, but Plato was key to the introduction of dualistic categories into Western cultural tradition.

In Plato's view, there is a dualism involving the realm of forms and the material world. Even though he introduced a dualism with the distinction between human beings who possess rational souls and animals who do not have such souls, the separation was not yet as rigid as it became later on, for Plato also stressed that there are several types of souls – vegetative, sensitive, and rational. The soul or psyche is responsible for self-movement and hence for life. Consequently, Plato had good reason to attribute souls to plants and animals, as both are capable of directed self-movement. Still, only human beings have a rational soul, and a rational soul is necessary for having the option of entering the realm of forms and grasping the forms, and also for using language and for communicating via language with one another.

The second significant step for the development of dualistic ways of thinking occurred with the Stoics. Stoic philosophy holds that a unified *logos* encloses immaterial human souls, and for the Stoics animals did not have such souls. The main difference from Plato on the issue of duality is that in Plato's case the fact that human beings possess a rational soul is not connected to the evaluation that all human beings ought to be treated equally well. According to Plato social rank depends on the type of metal one has in one's soul, which might be gold, silver, or iron. Stoic philosophers introduced the notion of *humanitas,* which was linked to the equal evaluation of all human beings. This notion was transformed by Cicero into the concept of dignity, which all human beings were supposed to have equally because they possess a rational soul and belong to the human species. Although clearly human beings differ with respect to their talents and capacities, it came to be acknowledged that all human beings ought to be treated well solely because they are members of the human species. Stoic

6 MacDonald/Walton 2011.

7 Jaime del Val's talk "Relational & Multi-Dimensional Perception" demonstrates in a descriptive manner central stepping stones in the history of perception: https://vimeo.com/88375539, 14.4.2016.

philosophers and Cicero did not develop an egalitarian society in the modern sense, but this changed evaluation of human beings did have practical implications for the treatment of slaves in their own society.

The third central step in dualistic thinking took place with Descartes. Where ancient thinkers within the Platonic tradition had acknowledged that there are a variety of different souls, Descartes put dualism on an even more solid footing by distinguishing between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, with only human beings participating in both. Animals and all other solely natural objects belong only to the realm of *res extensa*.

Such thinking was developed further within Kantianism, in which the same ontological distinction as in Descartes' philosophy can be found. Kant focussed more, however, on the ethical relevance and implications and developed a complex ethics and political philosophy that is still the core of German Basic Law. As a result, it is legally forbidden to treat another person as solely a means, which presupposes a radically dualistic distinction between objects and subjects. Furthermore, this influence is the reason for German Basic Law's claim that only human beings possess dignity and that animals and all other solely natural entities are to be treated as things. This separation also presupposes the highly problematic categorically dualistic ontological separation we found in Descartes' philosophy.

After Kant, Nietzsche moved beyond the dualistic history of Western philosophy. All the consequences of his approach have not yet been grasped by many scholars, thinkers, and philosophers today, but together with Nietzsche, Wagner, Darwin, and Jung initiated the cultural move towards a non-dualistic way of thinking. Consequently, it is possible to assert that with these cultural movements humanism has come or is coming to an end. Here I take humanism as a worldview founded upon the affirmation of categorical dualities. In light of the plausibility of these reflections on the development of dualistic thinking, I can stress that the development of Plato's philosophy has most probably been the corner stone of Western culture as a dualistic culture. Peter Sloterdijk, who identifies the beginnings of humanism with the age of Stoic philosophy, and Ihab Hassan, who stresses the close connections of the beginnings of the Enlightenment with the beginnings of humanism, are surely right in claiming that strong versions of dualisms can be found in the philosophies of the Stoics and of Descartes,[8] but we should not overlook the central importance of Plato's philosophy for this development.

Given that there are cultural movements beyond dualities, it seems appropriate to stress that we are moving beyond humanism into a posthuman age. We have also been able to recognise that an important dualistic media had been created about one hundred years before the dualistic way of thinking was developed in the field of philosophical reflection. Given that dualism had come in the media before it emerged in philosophy, we can speculate that the media artists ought to have been first to rec-

8 See Sloterdijk 2009 and Hassan 1977.

ognise the violence, dangers, and implausibilities connected to dualistic approaches. Was this the case? Dadaism, stochastic music as developed by Iannis Xenakis, and postdramatic theatre provide three examples of arts in which non-dualistic elements can be found. In the discussion that follows, I present four examples of how non-dualistic media can occur and in what respect they can be deemed non-dualistic media. I consider here media artists Kevin Warwick, Dale Herigstad, Neil Harbisson, and Jaime del Val, using the term "media artist" in a rather loose sense, for Kevin Warwick, for example, is more of a pioneer of engineering or an inventor. However, the devices I deal with are striking examples of moving beyond dualistic media.

I mention Warwick's work because it is dissolving the categorical dualities of mind and body and of the organic body and inorganic things. One of his many inventions can reveal to us a possible direction in which many developments might move. Warwick developed a brain-computer interface by means of which his nervous system was connected via a computer to the Internet while he was in New York. The signals he was sending out were transported via the Internet to a mechanical arm in his laboratory at the University of Reading, in the United Kingdom. He was able to move this arm so that it could touch or grab another thing, and the sensors in the fingertips of the mechanical arm sent the sensory input back via a computer and the Internet to Warwick's brain and nervous system as he sat in a room in Columbia University in New York, where he was able to feel his mechanical fingertips touching an object at the University of Reading. He did not first try this experiment on animals, but took the risk of establishing this feedback mechanism using his own brain. The success of the experiment provides us with grounds to suggest that the former rigid categorical separation of mind and body or of organic and inorganic no longer holds.

Dale Herigstad is a media designer (e.g. the Spielberg movie "Minority Report") and inventor and a four-time Emmy winner . When we met recently at a TEDx event in Rome and discussed our most recent projects, it was evident that although Herigstad and I come from completely different fields, our work is moving in similar directions. Herigstad spoke to me of the long-dominant dualist concepts in media and described moving beyond dualistic media in his own work on three-dimensional media. He has recently developed a mobile phone app that makes it possible to move the content of a computer screen into a 3-D space and simultaneously watch television. Currently 3-D television and 3-D spectacles are required. This development is only one step away from his ultimate goal, namely glasses that can be placed in front of your eyes without your eyes able to see their limits, placing you in a 3-D world in which you can move around and gain experiences. When you turn around you will be able to see what lies behind and around you, so you will have the visual impression of being in a different zone. This vision goes far beyond the traditional media setup, where the spectator is placed in front of a television or a computer screen with a clear separation between user and screen, which are therefore in a permanent dualistic relationship. A further

step would be to use contact lenses instead of glasses or even devices implanted into the eyes to engage 3-D computer applications.

Human eyeborg Neil Harbisson is a colour-blind artist who, with the help of an engineer, developed a device that enables him to hear colours. Technology has thus given him synaesthesia, a capacity quite a few artists appear to have possessed, including Wassily Kandinsky, Vladimir Nabokov, Franz Liszt, Olivier Messiaen, and Alexander Scriabin. Harbisson creates his compositions from his new way of experiencing colour and sound.

Last but not least is pangender cyborg Jaime del Val, whose most recent metabody project seems one of the most promising ways of moving beyond dualist media. Here I wish to refer briefly to one of his metaformances, available on YouTube and therefore easily accessed. Del Val developed a device that consists of several cameras placed on different parts of his body. A projector in front of his chest and loudspeakers on his back allow transmission of the altered and amplified sounds he makes. Of the many philosophically challenging aspects related to this metaformance, I will refer here to three specifically.

First, the non-duality of ontology is revealed as part of this metaformance. The Christian and Kantian traditions categorically distinguished between objects and subjects. This distinction is dissolved through this metaformance. The cameras portray small aspects of his body. For example, an unusual perspective on his thumb, a post-anatomical perspective, is projected onto the walls around him. However, one is affected by whatever surrounds one, and therefore the first small perspectives become amplified, with any slow movement becoming faster, and this projection feeds back onto del Val. He interacts with himself, for he moves and via the projections of his movements, he alters his future movements. Permanent interaction results in a process of amorphous becoming. This metaformance is a strong criticism of the rigid subject and object distinction of dualistic ontologies.

Secondly, the cameras' perspectives are, as noted, unusual, for they do not divide up the body into traditional anatomical parts. Thereby the contingency of anatomical classification is revealed, for it is possible to classify the body in many different modes. Hence, the post-anatomical perspectives that are part of this metaformance break down encrusted linguistic structures, revealing the contingency of categories and, thereby, opening new fields of becoming.

Thirdly, the post-anatomical perspectives, supported by sounds presented by del Val's metabody, challenge the traditional dualistic conception of sexual relationships. Dualistic concepts of sexuality reduce sexual relationships to the genitals, classified in binary fashion. The post-anatomical perspectives and corresponding sounds make evident that sexuality can be present in an unusual way of perceiving an ear, shoulder, or leg, or in the way we approach a foot, or in being confronted with a new sound,

such a scream or a shout. The enormous multiplicity of possible relationships can be grasped as sexual and connected to intense feelings of gratification. Hence, this metaformance also enables us to move beyond a binary concept of sex towards metasex. These brief descriptions of movements beyond dualistic media are only brief hints of how the death of dualist media can be understood.

The four media artist-scientists represent not only four movements from dualist media towards non-dualist media but also different varieties of these developments. In stressing ontological non-duality, ethical plurality, and perspectivism within his artistic works, Jaime del Val represents a metahumanist version. With their projects including a strong affirmation of the use of technologies, Kevin Warwick and Neil Harbisson are more closely connected to transhumanism. In light of his emphasis on non-duality in his digital media projects, Dale Herigstad is most closely connected to posthumanism. Thus, the various creators discussed here represent a broad survey of what it can mean to transcend dualist, humanist art.

My principal goal for this article was to provide suggestions concerning the cultural relevance and embeddedness of dualist and non-dualist media and to demonstrate that the presence or absence of certain types of media has extramedial relevance that can contain ethical, political, and social meanings. The processes to which I have referred are neither final nor completed. I have sought merely to suggest ways we might grasp the extramedial meanings of dualist and non-dualist media.

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Walter Lesch

Realistic Humanism

Luc Dardenne as a Philosopher and Filmmaker

ABSTRACT

Luc Dardenne is not only a successful filmmaker together with his brother Jean-Pierre. He is also a stimulating philosopher who has reflected on the influence of Emmanuel Levinas on the brothers' cinematic work. This article shows typical constellations of film and philosophy and focuses on the special contribution of a Levinasian perspective on face-to-face encounters, violence and compassion as central topics in the films of the Dardennes. Luc Dardenne has developed his philosophical approach in his diaries and in the essay *The Human Affair*, published in 2012. This text can be used as a key for an understanding of the film Le gamin au vélo (The Kid with a Bike, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, FR/BE/IT 2011).

KEYWORDS

humanism, realism, responsibility, Levinas, moral philosophy, aesthetics

BIOGRAPHY

Walter Lesch is Professor of Ethics at the Université catholique de Louvain in Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium). The main focus of his research is social ethics (at the Faculty of Theology) and moral philosophy (at the Institute of Philosophy). His areas of interest are fundamental issues of ethics, political philosophy (especially questions concerning migration), gender studies in the context of religion, and representations of religious phenomena in the media.

In his book on the Dardenne brothers, Philip Mosley puts in a nutshell the complexity of their carefully constructed artistic and cinematic work, which he characterises appropriately as an expression of "responsible realism".[1] This emphasises the realistic dimension of the brothers' achievement that should not be misunderstood as a unilateral celebration of social misery and marginalisation. One of the signatures of today's reality is the films' setting, the suburban land-

1 Mosley 2013. See also Mai 2010.

scape of an old industrial region in Wallonia,[2] an area where people have to cope with the transformation of economy and society. But this does not mean that the films carry an unequivocal ideological message of committed art. Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne are interested in individuals as they really are, with their hopes and fears, ambitions and destructive tendencies. This realism becomes "responsible" because of the directors' interest in the ethical challenge of facing difficulties and despair without abandoning the necessity of looking for orientation and paths towards a better future. The Dardennes' characters are often lost in situations of hopelessness and in traumatic experiences,[3] but the spectators are invited to follow them as they struggle for dignity and the improvement of their living conditions without any guarantee of success. The characters are neither angels nor demons. They are depicted as more or less restlessly searching people who are trying to make sense of a complicated life without referring to big theories such as philosophical, political or religious traditions.

With the help of a philosophical reading of the films, this article tries to suggest a hermeneutical key that gives access to the notion of "realistic humanism",[4] which is, of course, not very far from Mosley's fully appropriate label of "responsible realism" for the Dardennes' films. The focus on humanism is inspired by Luc Dardenne's book *The Human Affair*.[5] Even though this text does not explicitly make a link to the entirety of the films, it can be read as the most coherent presentation of the sources mentioned in Luc Dardenne's two published diaries,[6] which cover the period of the brothers' activities since the beginning of their shift from documentaries to fiction films.

A preliminary remark is necessary in order to avoid the false impression that Luc Dardenne is the intellectual and Jean-Pierre Dardenne is the more practical part of the duo. On various occasions, they have shown that they are both equally involved in preparing and realising their films – an impressive embodiment of the dialectics of proximity and otherness. The fact is that Luc Dardenne (born in 1954) is a former student of the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Louvain, whereas his brother (born in 1951) studied dramatic arts at the Theatre and Film Academy IAD (*Institut des arts de diffusion*), a college of art founded in 1959 in Brussels and later transferred to Louvain-la-Neuve. As screenwriters for their films, the brothers collaborate closely and are primarily interested in

2 See Dillet/Puri 2013.

3 See Lesch 2013.

4 This expression also refers to the title of Putman's book (1990), where the notion of realism with a human face implies the epistemological position according to which the world cannot be described from a God's eye view. Values and facts are entangled and can be accessed only through the communicative action of finite human beings.

5 Dardenne 2012.

6 Dardenne 2005; Dardenne 2015.

the way they want to write their scenarios and work with the crew. Although they do not use a philosophical background as an explicit starting point, the discussion of philosophical and literary references plays an important part in Luc Dardenne's diaries and justifies the spectators' interest in these sources. In an interview with Nathan Reneaud in 2014, Luc Dardenne said, with great understatement, that he was not sure if he could be called a philosopher.[7] Such cautious self-definition should be used much more often by professional philosophers, who are not always able to produce original philosophical ideas as does Dardenne. In comparison with many academic writers, Luc Dardenne can be considered an independent, profound and convincing thinker, and can therefore legitimately be called a philosopher.

PHILOSOPHY AND FILM: AN OBVIOUS AND COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP

Since the invention of the seventh art, films have regularly attracted philosophers who are fascinated by their powerful representations of reality and by the stimulating imagining of worlds that help the spectators escape their reality. Both tendencies have been present from the very beginning: films are tools of realistic discoveries of the world as it is, and they can function as magical machines of enchantment, entertainment and escapism. Each of these functions is seen as problematic from different points of view. Popular films are often criticised as superficial distractions from the adequate perception of things. Similar controversies are also known in the area of literature and other arts.

Some philosophers look for inspiration in films, and some film directors look for conceptual tools in philosophy. As far as ethical issues are concerned, the American philosopher Stanley Cavell is among the protagonists of a new wave of philosophical investigation of cinema. In his analysis of Hollywood comedies, he coins a term for what he identifies as a specific genre of films: the "comedy of remarriage" that shows the search for happiness by couples as they separate and get together again. Their stories can be read as serious studies of respect for the needs of the other and of the inevitable problems of the naive dream of marital harmony. Known as a filmmaker interested in philosophy, Luc Dardenne has been invited to connect to Cavell's theory,[8] but the link seems to be less intense than critics inspired by Cavell might have hoped.[9]

7 Cf. Reneaud 2014.

8 Cavell 1981. In his interview with Nathan Reneaud, Luc Dardenne mentions his participation in a seminar about Cavell and admits that he has some difficulty with the author's concepts (Reneaud 2014). See also Dardenne 2015, 180.

9 See Pianezza 2012.

Instead, the Dardenne brothers represent a different approach to the encounter between philosophy and cinema. Their intellectual inspiration comes from the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), who is certainly not known for writing on the cinema, because cinema was not part of his research – on the contrary, Levinas severely criticises art in general. Nevertheless and paradoxically, he has influenced numerous scholars who develop – mostly from the perspective of ethics – the links between his particular philosophical approach and a better understanding of what happens in many films.[10] This strange constellation is even more mysterious when we look at the austerity of Levinasian language, which requires a very careful reading of his sophisticated texts, where no concessions are made to the popular communication of films.[11] Nevertheless, the connection between the two discourses has been established because of some powerful visual metaphors in the philosopher's work that unintentionally create a bridge between the visual art of the cinema and the ethical core of abstract writings.

Levinas is one of the great thinkers of the contradictions and catastrophes of the twentieth century. As a Jew born in Kaunas (formerly in Russia, today in Lithuania), he personally experienced the violence of political regimes in the East and West. After his studies in France and Germany, he became a French citizen in 1931 and was a prisoner of the Germans during World War II. Many members of his family were killed by the Nazis. It was the trauma of the Shoah that motivated Levinas to develop a philosophy that tries to understand the crimes of human beings who are capable of the worst. He sees the origin of moral responsibility in the encounter with the other whose face expresses vulnerability and reminds us of the biblical commandment "You shall not murder" (Exod. 20:13). The nakedness of the other person's face reveals the possibility of her destruction as well as recognition of her existence. This visual contact creates a morally relevant connection from which no human being can escape. One person becomes the hostage of the other's demand, without any possibility of hiding from it. It is only the existence of a third-person perspective that helps us arrive at objective rules of justice.

Levinas's prominent use of a vocabulary rooted in optical phenomena in his philosophical ethics has made him a major reference point in the area of film studies. With the powerful mise-en-scène of the self chosen by the other in the brutality of being taken hostage, Levinas offers a provocative and highly contro-

10 See Downing/Saxton 2010; Girgus 2010; Lengyel 2015.

11 Levinas's main philosophical concepts can be found in his two major books: Levinas 1969 and Levinas 1978. For a concise and reliable introduction to Levinas's philosophical universe, see Morgan 2011. For a first contact with his major ideas, see Levinas 1985, a dense interview presenting the most relevant topics in an accessible way.

versial way of thinking about concepts like otherness, totality and infinity, and of translating these abstract notions into everyday experiences.

LUC DARDENNE, LOUVAIN AND LEVINAS

The Dardenne brothers, and particularly Luc, have contributed much to the relevance of Levinas in the world of cinema. This is not surprising as Luc's years as a student of philosophy at the University of Louvain[12] put him in touch with this thinker, who is very influential in Louvain intellectual circles because of the long-standing tradition of phenomenological research in the context of the Husserl archives.[13] In 1976, when Levinas was still less known in France (even though this was the year of his retirement from the Sorbonne), the University of Louvain awarded him an honorary doctorate. Dardenne had the opportunity to meet Levinas when he came to Louvain-la-Neuve in 1980 for a series of lectures on the topic of death and during his time as a visiting professor, when he held the Mercier Chair.

Even if Luc Dardenne mentions other great philosophical writers he admires, especially Cornelius Castoriadis, Ernst Bloch and Hannah Arendt, Levinas has without a doubt influenced him most. Luc approached Levinas in Paris about a documentary on Bloch (not yet realised) and was deeply impressed by their conversation, which opened his eyes to the difficulty of acting as a free and responsible person. When Levinas died in December 1995, the Dardennes were busy with LA PROMESSE (THE PROMISE, BE/LU/FR 1996), the first film in which they fully apply their very personal style, after a great number of documentaries and two fictional features that they themselves consider failures. In January 1996, Luc Dardenne noted in his diary that Levinas died while they were shooting their film. Without this philosopher's radical interpretation of the face-to-face encounter and the relevance of the human face, they would not have imagined their scenario as they did.[14] In the film, Igor discovers his moral responsibility in the corrupt world of his father, Roger, who rents out apartments to illegal immigrants. One of them, Amidou, has an accident from which he will not recover. Igor promises to take care of his wife, Assita, and their baby. It is the encounter with the injured Amidou's face that allows Igor to find a way out

12 The Catholic University of Louvain was officially split into Dutch-speaking and French-speaking parts in 1968. After the formal separation, the Institute of Philosophy remained in the old Flemish town for one more decade until the final relocation of the Institut supérieur de philosophie to Louvain-la-Neuve in Wallonia in 1978. Luc Dardenne wrote his dissertation for the licentiate degree in 1979, about Castoriadis's Imaginary Institution of Society, under the supervision of Jean Ladrière. Dardenne published a detailed review of this book in the Revue philosophique de Louvain (Dardenne 1981). The Dardennes were artists in residence at the University of Louvain (UCL) in 2006, and received honorary doctorates at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) in 2010.

13 Levinas is one of the authors who introduced Husserl and Heidegger to the French public.

14 Dardenne 2005, 56.

of a world of lies and exploitation and to connect with the different cultural values that shape the life of Amidou's widow. The last scene shows Igor finally telling Assita the truth about her husband's death and confessing his complicity in Roger's ruthless behavior.

The brothers have stuck faithfully to their Levinasian ethics of filmmaking as their international recognition has grown. Luc Dardenne is interviewed in two significant sequences in Yoram Ron's documentary ABSENT GOD: EMMANUEL LEVINAS AND THE HUMANISM OF THE OTHER (IL/FR/BE 2014).[15] His appearance in the documentary stresses not only the cultural impact of Levinas in the context of the cinema, but also Dardenne's capacity to use a philosophical language to make explicit his and his brother's ambition to make a good film. Their success at the Cannes Festival since 1996, the two Palmes d'Or they have received (for ROSETTA (FR/BE 1999) and L'ENFANT (THE CHILD, FR/BE 2005)), and other prestigious awards confirm the possibility of a coherent œuvre outside mainstream cinema and without popular ideological references.

Before his acceptance in secular contexts by a larger public, Levinas received international attention mainly from scholars of religion who were attracted by his Jewish background and the biblical and Talmudic references in his work. In spite of the legitimate reading of his philosophy by people interested in the intersection of philosophy and religion, Levinas explicitly defined himself as a secular philosopher. His ethical theory insists on the priority of the experience of responsibility and goodness, which can open up a path to the religious sense of transcendence. But this does not work the other way round: a prefabricated idea of God does not open us up to the encounter with the other who is the concrete person we meet face-to-face, and always exceeds the closed totality of a worldview.

The same criticism of totality can be found in Levinas's sceptical view of aesthetics and works of art that cannot be occasions of authentic experience if they imprison the spectator in the illusion of perfection and absoluteness without taking into account the rough reality of human relations. In a certain sense, Levinas is not only the ethical but also the aesthetical thinker to whom the Dardennes feel closer than to any other writer. In an article published in 2007, Sarah Cooper has convincingly shown how we can read Levinas with the Dardenne brothers and vice versa.[16] Her careful analysis, which covers the period from THE PROMISE (1996) to THE CHILD (2005), is fully confirmed by the films and publications since 2007. "The Dardenne brothers", Cooper writes, "exchange death for life in the refusal to repeat radical acts of the suppression of alterity. … Halting the repetition of literal or symbolic killing extends to

15 This remarkable independent film has not found large distribution so far; it can be rented or bought on Vimeo: https://vimeo.com/ondemand/absentgodeng/99223052 [accessed 4 April 2016].

16 Cooper 2007.

the spectator's place before the image, whose distance from the experiences viewed from camera positions of extreme proximity is precisely the creation of a space of responsibility."[17] The camera's closeness to the characters does not diminish the distance between us and them; it makes the recognition of otherness possible whenever the spectator is lost in an unbearable reality and is at the same time challenged by an ethical imperative, for we can hardly remain indifferent to what we see.

In the corpus of texts we should consult to make the interaction of Luc Dardenne's two roles as filmmaker and philosopher plausible, one publication gives more weight to the second of these roles: his philosophical essay *The Human Affair*, published in 2013. The author starts with Nietzsche's declaration of God's death, which changes our relation to our own death and leaves us alone with our anxiety. From the very beginning of an individual life, we are condemned to death and can respond in two ways to this intimidating expectation: with violent reaction towards all the other mortal beings with whom we struggle for a decent place in life, or with empathy for the humanism of the other, who captures our attention and our responsibility. In the second case, the common destiny of the fragile human condition opens a space of care and consolation, a moral behaviour beyond the destructive battle for egotistic self-preservation.

Societies built on fear will always trigger violence and mistrust. A truly human civilisation is only possible within the framework of an education that opens minds to trust and solidarity and thus shows the indestructible core of every person. Such sentences sound like the naive and well-meaning advice of moralistic idealists in a precarious and destructive world in which only survival counts. This is exactly the point where cinema becomes a serious partner for philosophical reflexion, because films can provide the laboratories for testing the chances of a realistic humanism.

EMPATHY FOR The Kid with a Bike

Even if Luc Dardenne does not suggest a kind of applied philosophy in his essay, he makes a clear connection with his identity as a filmmaker and screenwriter in the preface of the book. The preface is written as a letter addressed to Maurice Olender, the editor of the series *La librairie du XXIe siècle*, in which the essay is published. The author writes that his reflections started in the context of the preparations for the film Le gamin au vélo (The Kid with a Bike, FR/BE/IT 2011), which the brothers began to discuss in 2007. The plot is the amazing story of a young boy called Cyril, who was abandoned by Guy, his father, and is looking for

17 Cooper 2007, 85.

someone who can appease the violent forces that are about to destroy him.[18] By chance, the boy meets Samantha, a local hairdresser, who becomes a witness to Cyril's despair and decides to support the boy by offering him recognition, love and consolation. She succeeds in finding Cyril's bike, which his father had sold to make money, and brings it back to the boy, who has been placed in a children's home and now gets permission to visit Samantha at weekends. This is their first film shot during the summer months, and so THE KID WITH A BIKE (2011) is different from other Dardenne films because of its brighter and more colourful mood. The filmmakers even introduce music (Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 5), which had been banned from their soundtrack for a long time.

Samantha's character remains enigmatic if we want to know exactly why she is willing to be there for Cyril.[19] According to the standards of common morality and rational calculation, nothing obliges her to accept such an important change in her life. But she simply does so, and gives a chance to the improbable appearance of human goodness that can help overcome fear and violence. She even sacrifices her relationship with her boyfriend, who does not appreciate the intrusion of the boy into the life of the couple. She also makes an effort to convince Cyril's father to act in a more responsible way, but has to accept that his refusal is definite.

The story of Cyril and Samantha is one example among many of an experience of goodness threatened constantly by the lack of compassion for others. Cyril is seriously tempted to find a substitute for his missing father in the criminal gang led by a dealer who uses him for an attack on a newsagent. The robbery fails when the newsagent's son Martin appears and is also assaulted by Cyril. Martin is unable to accept Cyril's apology in a victim-offender mediation and later finds an opportunity for revenge. In a dangerous pursuit, he hits Cyril with a stone, leaving him unconscious. When Martin's father joins the scene, he thinks that his son has killed Cyril and is ready to hide the crime to protect his son. To their surprise, however, Cyril gets back on his feet and leaves.

In THE KID WITH A BIKE (2011), the integrity of human life is at stake because of a high level of aggression and hatred that does not provide suitable conditions for human flourishing and forgiveness. The film shows people who risk killing others intentionally or accidentally and who themselves can become victims of the uncontrollable behaviour of others. In this constant struggle, people are alone in their vulnerability. According to Luc Dardenne, the solitude of the hu-

18 Dardenne 2012, 7–9.

19 See Pippin 2015 for an in-depth discussion of the difficulty of understanding what the Dardennes' characters do: try to imagine what the characters will do after a Dardenne film ends. We are not able to do so because objectively the characters themselves do not have any certainty about what could happen next. "This is not a sign of some flaw or absence in their character, some lack of sufficiently stable dispositions to project into the future. Or it is that, but not merely that. It is at bottom an objective problem" (Pippin 2015, 783).

man affair is God's affair as well, insofar as divine authority does not intervene in the human jungle of violence where individuals can be eliminated like figures in video games. After God's death, human beings have to find a way to live without eternal consolation.[20] This is the human condition shared by believers and non-believers. They both see reality with a limited range of vision, analogically speaking through the lens of a body camera and not from the privileged and secure vantage of a God's eye view.

CONCLUSION

Samantha's altruism could be read as an unbelievable modern fairy tale. Cynics may do so, and disregard it. As a philosopher and filmmaker Luc Dardenne succeeds in the twofold task of thinking and showing the possibility of a humanism exposed to destructiveness and the vulnerable face of the other. This face is the only authority that can repeat the commandment "You shall not murder".[21] The fundamental choice of non-violence is the only hope humanity has when it comes to avoiding the abyss of mortal strategies of selfish survival and brutal domination.

From The Promise (1996) to La Fille inconnue (The Unknown Girl, BE/FR 2016), the Dardenne brothers have successfully undermined the mainstream film industry and suggested a new look at its ethical foundations. They leave spectators with more questions than answers because the vulnerability of the face of the other does not tell us precisely what to do and which rules to develop and to apply. Ethics as a *prima philosophia* in the Levinasian sense is at a different level from a normative moral philosophy with its obligation to differentiate argumentatively. According to Levinas, ethics cannot tell exactly which rules should be applied – with the exception of the most fundamental norm, "You shall not murder". By making us think about what makes us human, Levinas as well as the Dardennes offer a secular version of the sacred.[22] According to Arthur Rimbaud, as quoted by Luc Dardenne, "morality is the weakness of the brain".[23] We should begin to learn that morality can become a responsible attitude when it is no longer a boring moralizing stance but the freedom to change the logic of domination. In this concrete and secular sense, ethics is open to

20 Dardenne 2012, 9.

21 See Aubenas 2008.

22 For a revisiting of the category of the "sacred" as an ethical equivalent of dignity, see Joas 2013. In Levinasian terms, the notion of sacredness should be differentiated from what he calls holiness. Sanctity or holiness is related to personal otherness, whereas sacredness is also used for objects, which do not demand the same unconditional respect we owe to a human being. In the context of ordinary language, both terms are strange because of their religious background. They are certainly helpful as markers of alterity.

23 Dardenne 2012, 140.

transcendence, in going beyond what is evident and looking behind the film images ("au dos de nos images"), even those shot for the best films,[24] for the pure image as a trace of that which remains invisible.

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne have the extraordinary gift of being able to bring us closer to the emergence of ethics without preaching a set of rules. If the vertigo of responsibility cannot be completely avoided in a world of fragility and suffering, the brothers nevertheless offer a glimpse of hope in the encounter with redeeming otherness that opens the self to the joy of life.[25] This is the artistic gift of humanism without illusions and of realism without cynicism. If there is any message in the Dardenne universe, it is more moral than political.[26] This is the difference between their reference to Levinas and the way Jean-Luc Godard uses the philosopher in order to make a political statement. In Godard's film NOTRE MUSIQUE (OUR MUSIC, FR/CH 2004), Levinas is directly quoted in order to condemn violence and injustice.[27] One of his texts is being read by the Israeli journalist Judith Lerner as she visits Sarajevo and the Mostar bridge. We see her with a copy of the paperback edition of Levinas's book *Entre nous*, a collection of essays dealing with the ethical priority of the other.[28] Unlike in Godard's film, in which Levinas is quoted directly verbally and visually, his presence in the films of the Dardennes' cannot be pinpointed to a particular scene. Instead, his influence is expressed subtly, yet insistently, in the humanist attitude that pervades the brothers' whole œuvre. In the films by the Dardennes, the philosophical inspiration creates an entanglement of ethics and aesthetics because the visual language becomes an experimental expression of the moral values that are at stake. There is no need to quote philosophical books because realistic humanism is an attitude that can convince without big theories.

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24 The Dardenne brothers clearly belong to a secular culture. It is therefore correct not to study them in a "postsecular perspective", which implies a quest for alternative spiritual experiences. See the contributions in Bradatan/Ungureanu 2014.

25 Dardenne 2012, 189–190.

26 Luc Dardenne interviewed by De Jonghe/Soudan 2012.

27 Atterton/Calarco 2010, ix.

28 Levinas 1993.

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Ken Derry/Daniel White Hodge/Laurel Zwissler/
Stanley Talbert/Matthew J. Cressler/Jon Ivan Gill

Bulletproof Love: Luke Cage (2016) and Religion

ABSTRACT

There are many ways to think about religion and popular culture. One method is to ask where and when we see what might be commonly understood as "religious tradition(s)" explicitly on display. Another is to think about superhero narratives themselves as "religious", using this term as a conceptual tool for categorizing and thereby better understanding particular dimensions of human experience. This article takes a variety of approaches to understanding religion in relation to the recent television series LUKE CAGE (Netflix, US 2016). These approaches take their hermeneutical cues from a range of disciplines, including studies of the Bible; Hip Hop; gender; Black Theology; African American religion; and philosophy. The results of this analysis highlight the polysemic nature of popular culture in general, and of superhero stories in particular. Like religious traditions themselves, the show is complex and contradictory: it is both progressive and reactionary; emphasizes community and valorizes an individual; critiques and endorses Christianity; subverts and promotes violence. Depending on the questions asked, LUKE CAGE (2016) provides a range of very different answers.

KEYWORDS

African American, superhero, violence, Marvel, popular culture, gender, television, Netflix

BIOGRAPHIES

Ken Derry is Associate Professor, Teaching Stream, in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Toronto, Canada. His academic work explores the relations between religion and violence, particularly in literature and film. Ken has published essays on subjects ranging from The Epistle of Barnabas to The Wizard of Oz to the work of Indigenous writer Thomas King to the use of humor in teaching religion. He is married and has three cats.

Daniel White Hodge is the Director of the Center for Youth Ministry Studies and Associate Professor of Youth Ministry & Popular Culture at North Park University in Chicago. Currently, his research and community engagement explore the intersections of faith, critical race theory, justice, Hip Hop culture, and emerging multi-ethnic millennial culture. His three current books are Heaven Has A Ghetto: The Missiological Gospel & Theology of Tupac Amaru Shakur (VDM 2009), The Soul Of Hip Hop: Rimbs, Timbs, & A Cultural Theology (IVP 2010), and Hip Hop's Hostile Gospel: A Post Soul Theological Exploration (Brill, Academic 2017). He is currently working on a co-authored book with Irene Cho (Fuller Youth Institute) titled, Between God & Kanye: Youth Ministry in a Post-Civil Rights Era (IVP Academic 2018).

Laurel Zwissler is an assistant professor of Religion at Central Michigan University, USA. Her forthcoming book, Religious, Feminist, Activist: Cosmologies of Interconnection (University of Nebraska), focuses on global justice activists and investigates contemporary intersections between religion, gender, and politics, relating these to theoretical debates about religion in the public sphere. She is now building on this work with ethnographic research within the North American fair-trade movement, as well as occasional visits with contemporary Witchcraft communities.

Stanley Talbert is a Ph.D. student at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York where he studies Systematic Theology and African American Studies. He is the author of "Unveiling Radical Love: A Theological Reflection on Radical Love in the Age of Ferguson," in Reconciliation Reconsidered (Abilene Christian University Press, 2016). He has published articles on theology, race, and culture in The Huffington Post, Ebony, and the African American Lectionary. Stanley hopes to leave a legacy of radical love that witnesses to God, his family, and the profound traditions of freedom fighters.

Matthew J. Cressler is assistant professor of religious studies at the College of Charleston, South Carolina. His first book, Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration (forthcoming NYU Press, November 2017), tells the story of African Americans who converted to Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth century and then, beginning in the late 1960s, initiated a revolution in Catholic identity and practice as they participated in the Black Power movement. His teaching interests include African American religions; religion in America; Black Nationalism; American identity; race, religion and politics; and theory in the study of religion.

Jon Ivan Gill is an avid scholar of Whiteheadian process thought, metaphysics, cultural studies, aesthetics, existentialist philosophy, and constructive & secular theology. His creative tangent ranges from underground hip-hop culture to cryptic lyrics he pens in rap, poetry, journal refereeing, book reviews, and academic essays & critiques. He earned his PhD. candidate in "Philosophy of Religion and Theology" at Claremont Graduate University. Jon's staunch support of a truly philosophical and theological trans-disciplinary discourse involves the inclusion of everything from aesthetic atheism and religious pluralism to subversive use of the arts.

Annual conferences of large academic societies are typically, by their very nature, slow to respond to current events. The logistics in putting together such meetings are incredibly complex, the result being that the planning of sessions begins up to a year before the meeting takes place. To its credit, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) has been sensitive to this issue, and has endeavored to open up ways in which scholars can offer analyses of more recent phenomena. At the November 2016 meeting of the AAR in San Antonio, Texas, for example, several sessions were offered in response to the results of the U.S. presidential election that had taken place just slightly more than a week earlier.

With this sense of timeliness in mind, members of the AAR's Religion, Film, and Visual Culture (RFVC) group approached the director of the annual meeting, Dr. Robert Puckett, about scheduling a last-minute roundtable discussion of the first season of the superhero series Luke Cage (Netflix, US 2016), released in October 2016.[1] Not only is Luke the first Black superhero to be featured in his own comic book *and* his own television show, but the Netflix portrayal of him in a hoodie, being shot at by police (fig. 1), was clearly meant to resonate instantly with critically important, and deeply troubling, of-the-moment occurrences. He is, in the words of *Rolling Stone*'s Rob Sheffield, "the first Black Lives Matter superhero".[2]

Fig. 1: Film still, "DWYCK", Luke Cage (2016), S01/E09, 19:10.

1 In this regard the authors would like to thank Dr. Syed Adnan Hussain (of St. Mary's University in Halifax), one of the members of the Religion, Film, and Visual Culture group, for the inspiration to propose this session.

2 Sheffield 2016.

Puckett, a self-proclaimed Marvel nerd, agreed to the session, which came to feature six scholars from several groups within the AAR in addition to RFVC: Anthropology of Religion; Black Theology; Critical Approaches to Hip-Hop and Religion; and Religion and Popular Culture. Many of the participants had never encountered one another before, and so the roundtable became an opportunity to cross disciplinary lines, to bring together a diverse range of voices and perspectives, and to meet some seriously excellent people.

The diversity of our roundtable panel fit well with one of our broad critical aims, which was to demonstrate that there are many ways to think about religion and popular culture. One starting point is to ask where and when we see what might be commonly understood as "religious tradition(s)" explicitly on display. Regarding superhero narratives, this question invites us to analyze ostensibly religious images and tropes in various media incarnations including comics, film, and television. Such analysis could include, for instance, identifying characters modeled on religious archetypes, such as Jewish messianic figures, Buddhist arhats, or Anishinaabe tricksters. It could also include allusions to religious texts such as the Qur'an, the Bhagavad Gita, or the Bible.

Another direction we might take would be to think about superhero narratives themselves as "religious" in some way. Following after theorists such as Jonathan Z. Smith, Talal Asad, and Tomoko Masuzawa, if we regard "religion" as a conceptual tool that scholars use to categorize and thereby better understand particular dimensions of human experience, we can begin to recognize the ways in which superhero narratives (and the worlds they create) may serve some of the functions typically reserved for "the religious".[3] This hermeneutic can illuminate aspects of such narratives that might otherwise go unnoticed.

This article takes a variety of approaches to understanding religion in relation to Luke Cage (2016). Doing so highlights the polysemic nature of popular culture in general, and of superhero stories in particular. Like religious traditions themselves, the show is complex and contradictory: it is both progressive and reactionary; emphasizes community and valorizes an individual; critiques and endorses Christianity; subverts and promotes violence. Depending on the questions you ask, Luke Cage (2016) provides many, many different answers.

"SENSATIONAL ORIGIN ISSUE!"

The character of Luke Cage was created in 1972 by two white men, Archie Goodwin and John Romita, Sr., in the spirit of the Blaxpoitation films of the time. He first appeared in *Luke Cage, Hero For Hire #*1 (fig. 2), written by Goodwin and Roy Thomas, and drawn by George Tuska. Born Carl Lucas, Luke is framed by his old

3 Smith 1982; see also Asad 1993; Masuzawa 2005.

friend Willis Stryker, ending up in Seagate Prison. He is tormented by a sadistic white guard, Albert "Billy Bob" Rackham, and volunteers for an experiment run by Dr. Noah Burstein in exchange for early release. Rackham sabotages the experiment in an effort to kill Carl, causing an explosion. But as is the way in comics, things go bizarrely awry – Rackham is killed instead and Carl emerges from the wreckage with super strength, breaking out of prison and changing his name to Luke Cage. Cautious about whom he can trust, he makes few close friends; an early one is Claire Temple, who helps Luke when he's hurt and who dates him for a while.

All of these details are repeated in the 13-episode Netflix series, which unlike the original comics was made by Black artists, including creator and showrunner Cheo Hodari Coker. Despite some of the big picture similarities to Luke's original incarnation, these artists made many changes to his character, bringing him into the 21st century and out of white stereotypes. He is much quieter, and more thoughtful and reserved; instead of shouting bombastically and punching supervillains, he reads books and eschews violence. Pointedly unlike his comic book self, the Netflix Luke refuses to be paid for helping people, preferring to earn his living as a janitor in Pop's barbershop. Changes were also made to his childhood: no longer raised in Harlem by a police-detective father, Luke is now from Georgia and the son of a philandering preacher. In the television show, therefore, he is an outsider in Harlem, working to help people he has only recently come to know and love. Claire, too, undergoes important shifts as her character is translated from the comics: she is now a Hispanic nurse, instead of a Black doctor (fig. 3).

Fig. 2 (l.): John Romita Sr., cover artwork, *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire* #1 (June 1972) © Marvel Comics.

Fig. 3 (r.): George Tuska, interior artwork, *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire* #2 (August 1972) © Marvel Comics.

The reasons why Harlem needs Luke's help are laid out in two main story arcs: the first seven episodes of the series focus on local gangster Cornell "Cottonmouth" Stokes and his cousin Mariah Dillard, a corrupt local councilwoman. Together they unsuccessfully attempt to recover first from the betrayal of an underling during a weapons deal with a rival gang, and then from the crippling damage that Luke inflicts on Cornell's organization. As Luke's vigilante activities against Harlem's criminal world gather steam, he finds himself the focus of a police investigation, led by Detective Misty Knight.

The second arc of the series begins when Mariah kills Cornell in a rage over his accusation that she "wanted" the sexual abuse she suffered as a young girl. At this point the mysterious "Diamondback" – Cornell's powerful unseen supplier – emerges from the shadows. He reveals himself to be Willis Stryker, who is not only Luke's childhood friend and betrayer but also, it turns out, his half-brother. During the final six episodes Mariah gradually steps into her dead cousin's crime-boss shoes, while Diamondback repeatedly tries to kill Luke for what he sees as the unforgiveable sin of being the publically "accepted" son, rather than the one whose origin was a shameful secret. Luke finally defeats a super-suited Diamondback in a street battle, and ends the series by giving himself up to the police as an escaped convict.

"DISHWASHER LAZARUS"

Our consideration of religion and LUKE CAGE (2016) begins with this question: what kind of a hero is Luke? The second time that we see him use his powers, it is to protect a young boy when one of Cornell's henchmen, Tone, shoots up Pop's barbershop (E02; fig 4).[4] When the shooting is done, Luke does not charge out of the shop to punish the gunman; he instead stays to help the injured and check on Pop, who tragically has been killed. Much of LUKE CAGE (2016) focuses on the lead character's transformation from escaped convict to hero, as he is pushed and inspired by circumstances and people (particularly Pop and Claire Temple) to emerge from hiding and use his powers to help others. But even as this emergence takes place, Luke continues to help by shielding victims to *prevent* harm, as much as (if not more than) he hits villains to *inflict* harm: he stands in front of the injured corrupt police detective, Rafael Scarfe, when Cornell's men try to run him over (E06); he protects Misty from being shot during the hostage crisis at Harlem's Paradise (E10–11); and he covers a police officer with his body when that man's partner starts firing at Luke (fig. 1).

4 All references to LUKE CAGE are to the first season of the series, which as of this writing is the only season that has aired.

Fig. 4: Film still, "Code of the Streets", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E02, 42:31.

There are other ways in which Luke submits to violence of different types, rather than leading with his fists. When his landlords are being threatened, he first asks the four men to stop being disrespectful, and then stands still while one of them hits Luke in the face and shatters his own hand (E01).[5] After Cornell threatens to expose Luke as a fugitive, he decides to leave Harlem, before Claire convinces him to stay and fight back (E07). He tells the two officers who stop him that he just wants to walk and mind his own business (E09). Despite his innocence he does not resist being taken back to prison at the end of the series (E13). Even during his climactic battle with Diamondback, who is wearing a suit that makes him at least as strong as Luke, he simply decides to stop trading blows: "I'm not doing this any more.... You want me dead? Then kill me" (E13).[6]

This is unusual behavior for a superhero. We are used to seeing these characters – despite their ostensive commitment to peace – embracing violence with much more enthusiasm than Luke does. As Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence have argued in several works,[7] superheroes most often embody a troubling perspective – derived originally from certain biblical responses to crisis – that they have termed "zealous nationalism".[8] This perspective is rooted in moral dualism, as a lone savior driven by a commitment to justice is faced with

5 This is in fact the first time that we see Luke's powers in action.

6 As it turns out Luke is employing a rope-a-dope strategy, letting Diamondback wear his suit out beating on him before being dispatched by our hero with three quick hits. Still, the fact is that Luke wins by submitting to violence.

7 See, e.g., Jewett/Lawrence 1977, 2002, 2003, and 2010.

8 For a concise account of both zealous nationalism and prophetic realism (which is discussed below), and the biblical origins of each perspective, see Jewett/Lawrence 2003, 44–54.

corrupt and/or ineffective laws and so becomes a vigilante in order to save the community by destroying the evildoers who threaten it.[9] There are some elements of this perspective in LUKE CAGE (2016), especially regarding problems with the police and Luke's justification for using violence to make Harlem safer.[10] But Luke never directly or even inadvertently kills anyone, and even after seeing Cornell let out of jail (E07) he still hands Diamondback over to the authorities when their fight is done (E13) – and, again, he gives *himself* up to the police in the end.

In many ways, in fact, LUKE CAGE (2016) appears to represent the opposing worldview – also biblically rooted – which Jewett and Lawrence refer to as "prophetic realism". Instead of wishing for a solitary hero who ignores the law to save everyone from evil, this perspective recognizes human complexity and valorizes communities working together to improve their situation using due process. This focus on community is evident throughout the series, from the importance of Pop's barbershop as a refuge and meeting place, to the fact that Luke has no mask or "superhero" identity: he is always Luke Cage and he openly helps, and often needs the help of, the people around him.[11] He also tries to *understand* the people who are hurting Harlem, and the series itself slowly peels off the masks of the villains – Cornell Stokes, Mariah Dillard, Willis Stryker – to show us the painful histories that have shaped their current identities and actions.[12]

9 Examples of American cinematic superheroes who embody zealous nationalism include the protagonists of BATMAN (Tim Burton, US 1989), SPIDER-MAN (Sam Raimi, US 2002), SUPERMAN RETURNS (Bryan Singer, US 2006), IRON MAN (Jon Favreau, US 2008), THE DARK KNIGHT RISES (Christopher Nolan, GB/US 2012), and MAN OF STEEL (Zack Snyder, GB/US 2013).

10 In this regard one of the most zealous moments in the series comes after Pop's funeral (E05), when Misty is upbraiding Luke for antagonizing Cornell and saying that she will get him "the right way", that "the system will win". Luke is having none of it: "Forget the system. Arrests lead to indictments, and indictments lead to pleas. There's always a bigger fish. A bigger angle. A slap on the wrist. And boom. Right back in business. I ain't going for that." This conversation is an example of the wonderfully complex, shifting dynamics of LUKE CAGE (2016), given that Luke as noted below does end up trusting the "system" in several respects, while Misty moves further into vigilante territory: she attacks Claire during an official interrogation (E08) and circumvents police protocol when trying to protect a key witness against Mariah, which leads to the witness's death and Mariah's freedom (E13).

11 In his eulogy for Pop, Luke admits that he used to be "selfish" in his responses to violence, and that Pop taught him a critical lesson: "If we try to protect only ourselves, without looking out for those people closest to us, then we lose" (E05). He concludes the eulogy by affirming, "I don't believe in Harlem. I believe in the people who make Harlem what it is." This faith is returned at several points in the series, notably when many of Harlem's people put on hoodies with holes in them to help Luke evade the police, and when they all start chanting "Luke! Luke! Luke!" during his final fight with Diamondback (E13).

12 Pop too worked to understand the value and humanity of all people, regardless of their past. As Luke notes in his eulogy, "Pop saw the shine in everyone that walked into his barbershop. . . . He made them feel better about the world, and themselves. We have to strive on a daily basis to do the same for each other" (E05).

The most striking way in which LUKE CAGE (2016) fails to do this very thing involves Willis Stryker, who is portrayed as cartoonishly evil. The attempt to understand his horrifying behavior is weak and unsatisfying; simply having a thoughtless and hypocritical father hardly accounts for Stryker's murderous rampages. And the parental indifference he experienced in no way comes close to the horrors

One other feature of Luke's character stands out as unique in a way that is connected to prophetic realism: his role as a Christ-figure. While a great many superheroes also symbolize Jesus, they do so while waving the flag of zealous nationalism. There are by no means any universally agreed parameters for identifying cinematic Christ-figures, but Lloyd Baugh's influential *Imaging the Divine* (1997) offers a useful starting point.[13] And while he does not even mention superheroes, almost all of his criteria are in fact part of standard superhero tropes: they are saviors with mysterious origins; they perform miracles; they suffer and bleed; they have devoted followers or helpers; and they are committed to justice, which often leads to conflicts with authorities. In addition many heroes are often scapegoated, and it has become increasingly common for them to die and resurrect, sometimes literally. In film the Christ-like nature of these (literal or figurative) deaths is often indicated by showing the hero in a crucifixion pose.[14]

Luke meets all of these Christ-figure criteria. Initially no one knows who he is or where he is from. He has miraculous strength and seems impervious to harm, although he suffers and bleeds when shot by the Judas bullet. He is helped by several people, including Pop, Claire, Misty, and (in a great cameo) Method Man. His sense of justice is what compels him to finally step out of the shadows to protect the community.[15] He struggles against several authorities including the police, Mariah, and Cornell. He is falsely accused of killing both Cornell and a police officer. He is not prone to crucifixion poses, although he possibly appears in one after he has been shot by Diamondback and is helped by Claire and Dr. Burstein, his arms across their shoulders (fig. 5). More directly, after his eulogy for Pop he is shown walking with a neon crucifix over his shoulder and a street lamp halo (fig. 6); during the opening a crucifix is projected onto Luke's back (fig. 8); and at the very end of the series, as Luke is being driven out of New York by the police, he passes by a brightly lit "Jesus Saves" cross (fig. 7). Finally, we see Luke "resurrected" at least twice: after Dr. Burstein's Seagate Prison

suffered by Cornell and Mariah, who are shown to us as infinitely more complex, conflicted, and interesting adults than Stryker. That said, to its credit the series remarkably does not end with the standard climactic/apocalyptic superhero battle between mimetic enemies. It certainly appears to be going in this direction, especially when the penultimate episode ends with Diamondback in a super-suit confronting his half-brother Luke. But this fight is actually quite brief and ends very near the start the final episode, leaving a great deal of time for people to simply have conversations about what is next for themselves, for others, and for the community.

13 The criteria for identifying Christ-figures listed in this paragraph come specifically from chapter six of Baugh's text ("Essential Dimensions and Typical Guises of the Christ-figure"). There are of course any number of criteria not mentioned by Baugh that could be used instead; see, e.g., Kozlovic 2004. Also, as noted below, many objections have been raised regarding the ways in which Christ-figures are generally identified and interpreted.

14 The one criterion mentioned by Baugh that appears least often in superhero films is prayer, although this is not unheard of (e.g., Superman's very Gethsemane-esque visit to a church in MAN OF STEEL [2013]). In keeping with this pattern, prayer is arguably the one Christ-figure requirement from Baugh's list that Luke does not clearly fulfill – although he does give a eulogy for Pop in a church (E05).

15 Referring to his role as the savior of Harlem, Angelica Jade Bastién (2016) says that she has come to think of Luke as "Hood Jesus".

experiment explodes, giving Luke his powers and leading everyone to think he is dead (E04);[16] and when he appears to actually die for a moment while being treated for the Judas wounds but is brought back to life when Claire throws a live electrical hot plate into the acid bath that contains him (E10).

Fig. 5: Film still, "DWYCK", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E09, 41:49.

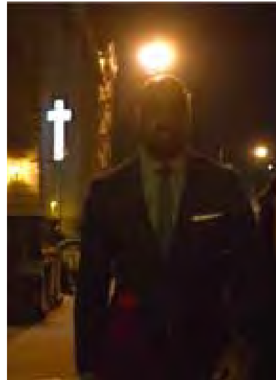

Fig. 6: Film still, "Just to Get a Rep", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E05, 48:47.

Fig. 7: Film still, "You Know My Steez", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E13, 43:35.

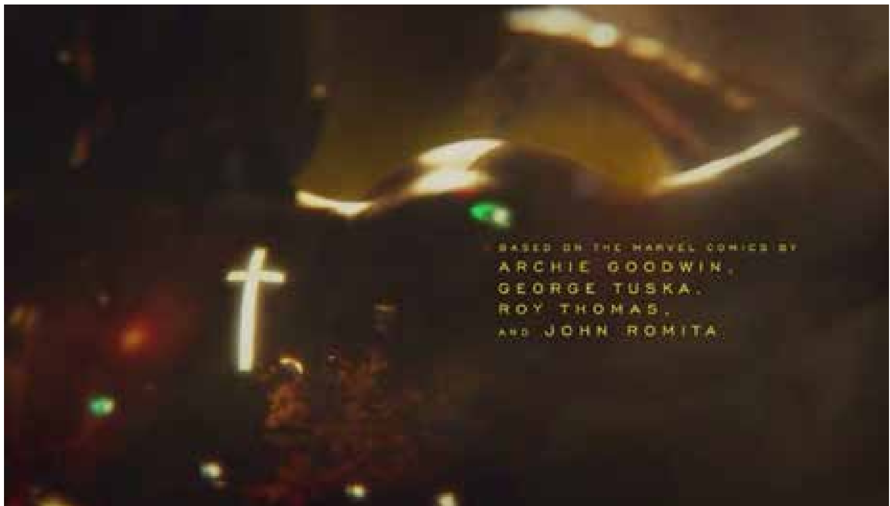

Fig. 8: Film still, opening credits, LUKE CAGE (2016).

16 This moment also represents the death of Carl Lucas as an identity. As Luke angrily tells Dr. Burstein after his post-Judas resurrection, "I'm Luke. Carl died at Seagate" (E10).

LUKE CAGE (2016) contains several other possible Christ-figure elements not mentioned by Baugh. Luke is poor,[17] and his submission to the police at the end is a "willing sacrifice".[18] He has a dual nature, "one fantastic and the other mundane",[19] beautifully captured by the name that Cornell gives him: "Dish-washer Lazarus" (E05). He is betrayed by a Judas-figure,[20] his old friend Willis Stryker who – in a move that is unbelievably on the nose – shoots Luke with the Judas bullets. As for Pop, in both his encouragement of Luke and his death he can be seen as analogous to John the Baptist, someone who "identifies and/or points the way to the Christ-figure, and fades away".[21] It is even possible to see Luke's hoodies as a gesture towards the "popular image of Jesus in his iconic white robes" (see fig. 9 and 10).[22]

Fig. 9: Film still, JESUS OF NAZARETH (Franco Zeffirelli, GB/IT 1977).

Fig. 10: Film still, "Moment of Truth", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E01, 52:46.

And then, of course, the show several times goes out of its way to tell us directly that Luke is a Christ-figure. When he confronts Cornell after surviving the mis-

17 Kozlovic 2004, par. 61.
18 Kozlovic 2004, par. 51.
19 Kozlovic 2004, par. 33.
20 Kozlovic 2004, par. 40.
21 Kozlovic 2004, par. 43.
22 Kozlovic 2004, par. 63. The hoodie appears to evoke the image of Jesus specifically as shepherd, as taking care of others, which fits Luke's reference to Luke 4:18 (discussed below). In fact the first time he wears a hoodie in the series is also the first time he uses his powers, when he protects his landlords from Cornell's men (E01). When the fight is done, Mrs. Lin says that she wants to pay Luke to help them, and he replies, "I'm not for hire. But you have my word ma'am: I've got you." And then he pops his hood (fig. 10).

sile attack, he is advised to consider his next actions carefully: "[It] costs to be a savior. Ask Jesus" (E05). And when Shades tells Cornell about the Judas bullet, he points out, "If you wanted to kill Jesus, that's the bullet you'd use" (E05).[23]

As many critics have noted, simply labeling a character as a "Christ-figure" is not in itself all that meaningful, as it begs the question: "So what?"[24] In most superhero narratives, I would argue, presentation as a messiah is used to support the perspective of zealous nationalism. This perspective depends heavily on claiming the moral authority to decide who is good and who is evil; aligning your hero with Christ conceivably can do a good deal of work towards this end.[25] LUKE CAGE (2016), however, explicitly tells us that Luke will be a very different kind of savior when he recites Luke 4:18 and re-names himself after the gospel writer: "The spirit of the Lord is on me, because I have been anointed to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind. To release the oppressed" (E04). Luke will thus be a savior more interested in helping people in need than in defeating evil. This is a much more down-to-earth mission, a more human mission, than we see in most superhero stories.

In this regard, while Luke is clearly special in many ways, the show also works to humanize him. This is evident in his fear of being recognized and sent back to jail, and his determination to earn a living with honest work, whether sweeping up hair, washing dishes, or tending bar. There is also the simple but important fact that he can be physically hurt: he is shot by Diamondback, he bleeds, he almost dies. When Cornell facetiously comments that people act as if Luke "can walk on water", Shades asks in all seriousness, "Can he?" (E07). This question, along with Mariah's suggestions for killing Luke – drowning, burning, poisoning (E06) – points to the vulnerabilities that he shares with the rest of humanity. This shared connection is movingly underscored when men in the community wear hoodies with holes in them, risking their own safety to

23 See Campbell 2016 for a theological discussion of the ways in which Luke functions as a Christ-figure in comparison to Matt Murdock from DAREDEVIL (Netflix, US 2015, 2016). Campbell argues that each hero represents very different aspects of the Christian messiah's salvific role, with Matt as the suffering Jesus and Luke the risen Christ. He contrasts the fact that Matt's "body is broken time and time again for the sake of those he seeks to save" with the understanding that Luke is "indestructible": "Freed from death and physical pain, after his resurrection, Luke Cage is able to tackle oppression in Harlem fearlessly. Mostly." While Campbell makes many good points, his use of "mostly" here is, I would argue, an understatement. Unlike Daredevil, who is in fact called "the man without fear", Luke is filled with a great deal of anxiety – and (arguably) fear – about taking on oppression. And while he is certainly much less susceptible to physical harm than Matt Murdock, LUKE CAGE (2016) makes the point in several ways noted below that Luke is far from indestructible.

24 See, e.g., Deacy 2006; Derry 2012, 189–191; Jasper 1997; Lyden 2003, 24; Plate 2003, 158, 160 n. 12.

25 It is thus not surprising that most superhero films end with a huge, enormously destructive fight. The protagonist essentially becomes the savior figure of Revelation, triumphing in an apocalyptic battle against evil.

make it harder for the police to find and capture Luke (E12).[26] As he becomes us, in other words, we become him: ordinary/special, criminal/hero, human/divine: Dishwasher Lazarus.

"WHO'S GONNA TAKE THE WEIGHT?"

The use of Hip Hop culture throughout LUKE CAGE (2016) is pervasive. From the soundtrack to the location of Luke's community, Hip Hop culture is prevalent and provides a foundational grounding for the series and for the character of Luke. His connection to the community, the father figure in Pop, the oversized picture of Biggie Smalls in Cornell's office, and the underground aura give LUKE CAGE (2016) a strong connection to a culture much larger than just its music.

As scholars have asserted, Hip Hop is much more than just music videos, lyrics, and "bling". [27] It is a culture by which those who have been disinherited can find identity, space, place, and being.[28] Moreover, Hip Hop is a contextual manufacturing of those oppressed and cast aside into DJing, rhythms, MCing, dance, language, street entrepreneurialism, street fashion, knowledge and spirituality.[29] Thus, LUKE CAGE (2016) and the themes within the first Black comic book hero present a reassertion of Black narrative and theology. LUKE CAGE (2016) is a secular articulation of the spiritual reimagined within a Hip Hop context and ethos. To that end, Luke takes on three of Hip Hop's theological concepts: (1) [a] theology of social action, (2) God of the profane, (3) a theology of community.[30]

Jon Michael Spencer's theomusicology provides a framework that allows us to better comprehend Luke's connection to Hip Hop, its culture, and its theology.[31] Theomusicology is defined as "a musicological method for theologizing about the sacred, the secular, and the profane, principally incorporating thought and method borrowed from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy".[32] It is, as Cheryl Kirk-Duggan and Marlon Hall state, "Music as spiritual practice … hear[ing] the challenges and evils in the church and the world

26 A television news report on this community action highlights the iconic/religious significance of Luke's hoodie by referring to him as "The 'Hole-y' Hero" (E12).

27 Dyson 2001; Hodge 2009, 2010; Johnson 2013; Miller/Pinn 2015; Miller/Pinn/Freeman 2015.

28 Forman 2002, 173–211.

29 Hodge 2010, 42–43.

30 Hodge 2010, 73–187.

31 While the central premise of this framework focuses on music, I have expanded its use to also explore cultural phenomena within Black and city contexts along with adding symbolic imagery and cultural mores – all of which are a part of LUKE CAGE (2016).

32 Spencer 1991, 3.

as the music reveals."[33] Theomusicology is distinguished from other methods and disciplines such as ethnomusicology:[34]

> Its analysis stands on the presupposition that the religious symbols, myths, and canon of the culture being studied are the theomusicologist's authoritative/normative sources. For instance, while the Western music therapist would interpret the healing of the biblical patriarch Saul under the assuagement of David's lyre as a psychophysiological phenomena, the theomusicologist would *first* take into account the religious belief of the culture for whom the event had meaning. The theomusicological method is therefore one that allows for scientific analysis, but primarily within the limits of what is normative in the ethics, religion, or mythology of the community of believers being studied.[35]

The theomusicologist is thus concerned with multi-level data within the context of the people they study, and subsequently analyzes the material within the time, culture, and context in which it was created[36] – something that LUKE CAGE (2016) provides a particularly good space for, and precisely what is needed when examining Hip Hop culture within the series.

Luke is a hero suitable for the post–civil rights context[37] in which Hip Hop finds itself. His use of violence, often as a last resort as when protecting his landlords, is a just use of that force when seen through the Hip Hop lens of rules of engagement. In other words, force should be used only when necessary and to protect those whom you love.[38] In one sense, Luke focuses primarily on his own community to do the work of a hero – much unlike other superheroes who take on a more meta-savior role to "save the world" or to save humankind from some far-off evil. In Luke's sense, this far-off evil is present in the local and, with advice from Pop, can create a space for heroic measures.[39]

33 Kirk-Duggan/Hall 2011, 77.

34 There is no universal or singular definition of ethnomusicology, as William Darity states; several words come to mind for ethnomusicology such as sound, music, performance, context, and culture. For some, it is the study of music in culture, or, more broadly, the study in context (Darity 2008, 20–22).

35 Spencer 1991, 3–4.

36 Theomusicology broadens the discussion of religion within Hip Hop contexts and asks the question "What is the Hip Hop community saying in the context in which the music, the art, the album, and the artist were created?"

37 This reference is to the generation of young adults born during the post-soul era (1980–2001), raised on a transmediated diet, disconnected from previous generations both locally and ideologically, and currently with non-binary issues to contend with in a post-9/11 society and living in Western society. This generation does not have the binary issues to contend with that the Civil Rights generation did (e.g. more Blacks in leadership or the right to vote). While those issues are still present, they manifest themselves in a matrix of problems, which involve police brutality, sexuality, sexual orientation, socioeconomics, transgender, class, and race.

38 Hodge 2017, 116–148.

39 I would note that there is still a strong patriarchal feel within LUKE CAGE (2016), and that this continues to be one of Hip Hop's major flaws. Gender and sexuality tend to favor men and heteronormative standards, leaving little to no room for LGBTQ and other variances to that norm. In this regard even

When interpreting a character like Luke in terms of religion and Hip Hop, we might consider three guiding categories:

1) The Sacred: not only for those elements within a society that are set apart, and forbidden, for ritual, but also for those elements within the given society and culture that aspire for both the adoption of a pious stance and the search for deity.
2) The Secular: for those items designated by a given society and culture as having little to no connection with a form of deity.
3) The Profane: for those areas in a society labeled or designated outside given morals, codes, ethics, and values established as "good" and/or "right" by the society and culture being studied.

With these understandings in mind, we can see Luke as a sacred, secular, and profane hero. An example of this trinary perspective is provided when he speaks at Pop's funeral (E05; fig. 11). Luke is in a conventionally sacred space, a church,

Fig. 11: Film still, "Just to Get a Rep", Luke Cage (2016), S01/E05, 44:46.

in front of a sign that connotes transcendence. But while he is the son of a minister, he himself is not ordained; he is as secular as his suit, and a key part of the message he delivers in this moment is very much about *this* world, about the community of Harlem. The profane is all that Luke embodies of the streets and his invoking of violence for good, his secular jacket covering the profane bullet holes in his shirt. The angle of this shot also suggests that Luke commands re-

though Luke's use of his power is communal, he is still cis gendered and attracted to women, as in the case with his sexual encounters with Misty.

spect and those who follow must listen; the subtext could mean he possesses something of deity himself, rooted in the sacred, secular, and profane.

The notion of a secular, sacred, and profane hero is not a foreign concept for those within the Hip Hop community. Heroes come in all forms, shapes, genders, and sizes. Take Biggie, for example, a hero who embodied an apotheosis approach to God and faith, yet was in all manner still "secular" and "profane". For the Hip Hop community, the good outweighs the bad, and Biggie is representative of an ongoing debate about God's connection to pimps, thugs, baby-mammas, and "niggas". Biggie provided that sacred, secular, profane connection to God and re-articulated it in his music, poetry, and work with his community. Someone like Luke is that conduit as well, as a person able to utilize their context and to begin to create a "better way" without using conventional methods.

The Hip Hop community regularly experiences violence, death, nihilism, and war-like conditions. One might argue that this reality is at the center of most of Hip Hop's social critique of dominant societal structures and systems. Equality, justice, fairness, impartiality in the law, and a social voice is where many Hip Hoppers – especially the underground community in which Luke finds himself – push towards and to which they give a lot of their energy. Thus, Luke, a reluctant hero at first and not originally from Harlem, roots himself into his space and place and rises to give that voice back to the community. This arc fits well with a messianic narrative or a Hip Hop Jesuz that The Outlawz or even Kendrick Lamar describes. Luke is not too perfect, not too saintly, not too connected to divinity; a hero that the post-civil rights Hip Hopper can connect with and to. "Luke" is the answer to the question posed by the title of the Gang Starr track (and of episode 3), "Who's Gonna Take the Weight?" This is worthy of notice and, especially in the image of a strong Black man in Luke, something that is much more complex than just all good or all evil.

"THAT'S THE LAST TIME YOU WILL EVER CALL ME A BITCH."

Constructions of masculinity and femininity inevitably implicate each other. When we approach any discussion of gender and sexuality, intersectional theory, formulated by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw[40] and further championed by Patricia Hill Collins,[41] is crucial. It becomes even more crucial when we consider gender in a series like LUKE CAGE (2016), which actively wrestles with race and class stereotypes, often using Christian tropes to do so. The characters struggle within a context that bell hooks has named "imperialist white-

40 Crenshaw 1989 and 2012.

41 Collins 1990, 2013, and 2014.

supremacist capitalist patriarchy".[42] That is, the show is not just about race, not just about gender, but is about these identity markers as interconnected ways of distributing power within our social context, in combination with religion, sexuality, material dis/advantage, etc. Characters' responses to their histories of violence flow down gendered lines. This section highlights three themes: absent parents, that is, a lack of constructive gender models; sex; and the relationship of gender to power.

From the beginning of the series, the issue of absent parents surfaces. As Pop is explaining why it is important to create a safe space for the young men of the neighborhood, Luke says, "Everyone has a gun, no one has a father" (E01). The link between a lack of positive male role models and community violence is made explicit. Pop's approach to the boys of the neighborhood also reflects what Patricia Hill Collins has called "other-mothering",[43] the practice, common in stressed communities, of "taking in strays", taking responsibility for underparented or neglected children and integrating them into non-biological kin networks. This practice is something we see not only with Pop, but also with Mama Mabel and then Mariah (E07).

Here begins a gendered split between the constructed parenting provided by Pop and that provided by Mama Mabel. Pop, on one hand, gives emotional support and mentoring, consciously creating sanctuary space free from violence. Mabel, on the other hand, brings abandoned children, Cornell and Mariah, into her world of hustle and violence. Mariah further takes on the role of "other mother" to Cornell. Though she tries to provide him with a kind of care different from that provided to them by Mabel, in the end, she cannot help but reproduce the violence of her past, bringing death rather than life. This parallels the role she plays for her neighborhood: her dream is to uplift, but in the end she cannot help but consume.

Mariah's collapse into devouring mother connects to the series' meditations on sexual violence. Even in episode one, Luke assists a co-worker, Candace, who is uncomfortable serving the VIP room alone, for fear of harassment or assault. The show acknowledges sexual violence as one of the multifaceted forms of violence it addresses, one that swirls around with and refracts other forms of violence, including structural violence. When Misty is speaking with a counselor after her attack on Claire (E08), he suggests that she needs to acknowledge her adolescent guilt over the murder of her cousin, who was abducted and raped (E09). In juxtaposing the exploitation and destruction of this body – young, black, and female, characteristics interpreted by her assailants and by the police as evidence of its disposability[44] – Misty's narrative offers a contrast with Luke's

42 hooks 2004, 29.

43 Collins 1995.

44 See Crenshaw 1991, especially 1266–1271.

invulnerable body. However, this contrast also highlights that while vulnerability to physical and structural violence is shared across disadvantaged communities of color, it affects men and women in different ways.

There is also the tragedy and complexity of Mariah's childhood sexual abuse, for which Cornell ultimately pays. Her crazed reaction to Cornell's accusation that she "wanted it" is multivalent (E07). On one hand, her powerful denial of the accusation offers a clear demonstration of how inaccurate and self-serving the cultural commonplace of blaming victims is. On the other hand, her actions afterward also reinforce the stereotype that abused women are crazy and dangerous.[45] Further, her character arc does not challenge the trope, fodder for exploitation films galore, that requires that women be raped before they are socially sanctioned or morally excused for mobilizing their own power as physical violence. Finally, there is also the last scene with Shades, who has just fallen in love with Mariah as a result of her violence, when she echoes her words to Cornell, "I did not want this", and Shades replies, "I think you did." What do we do with the juxtapositions that such an assault narrative provides in the context of rape culture?

Fig. 12: Mariah ascending. Film still, "You Know My Steez", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E13, 42:08.

Any discussion of sexuality in LUKE CAGE (2016) must consider the forms of sexuality that are visible and those that are invisible. It is not difficult to take a queer reading to the relationship between Luke and Cornell.[46] They are both

45 Merry 2008; Levy 2008.
46 On queer theory and the academic study of religion, see Wilcox 2012.

as smooth as protagonists from seventies' soul cinema, showing each other up, engaging in repartee parallel to that between Luke and the major female characters, and vying for the soul of their fictional Harlem. Through the male-desiring gaze, they can be read as competing suitors, the tragically Luciferian Cornell and the reluctantly messianic Luke, but also, therefore, as completing each other.

The homoeroticism between the two must remain subtext, however. This message is reinforced by the continued rhetorical use of the term "bitch" as an insult for men, angrily ascribed, for example, not only by Cornell (E01), but also by Misty (E07) and Turk (E12). The word's repression specifically of women is symbolically subverted by the clear inclusion in the series of powerful women, is made light of when Claire successfully recovers her bag from a mugger, and is explicitly challenged when Mariah tells Shades, "That's the last time you will ever call me a bitch" (E08). Yet the word's specifically homophobic power is never challenged, whether subtly or directly, as it would be by the visible presence of openly LGBTQ characters.

The foreclosure of latent desire between Cornell and Luke comes not only as Cornell is removed, but also with the simultaneous arrival of Diamondback, with his Old Testament rules and punishments. An erotically charged story of rival Brothers is overwritten with a literal one of rival brothers, explicitly presented in the show as a Cain and Abel story. However, behind this story of hate and fratricide is also an Isaac and Ishmael story, sons of the same man by different women. As Delores Williams has deftly demonstrated, peering behind the androcentric and patriarchal narrative actually gets us to a story of two women, mothers to sons from the same man, that is, to the shadows of Hagar and Sarah.[47] In Williams' analysis, Hagar's story is the story of African American women's historical experience. Hagar's appearance here only as back-story in the conflict between two powerful men is consistent with the historical androcentrism of Christianity, shared by the Black Church, that Womanist theologians such as Williams deconstruct. Predictably then, the shadow mothers also set up some "yo mama" insults (E13).

Finally, consideration of gender and sexuality in the series would be incomplete without a meta-view about the place of the show in its broader social context. The series features numerous significant roles for people of color and, more specifically, for women of color. In a media landscape in which roles for actors of color are often both deliberately and unconsciously limited,[48] LUKE

47 Williams 1993.

48 I am thinking here of critiques of "white washing" characters as other media forms are adapted to film, of the marketing concern that more than one significant character of color will pigeon-hole a show (e.g., as dramatized in "Indians on TV", MASTER OF NONE [Netflix, US 2015], S01/E04), and of the lack of recognition for actors of color who do manage, in spite of systemic racism, to land important roles (#OscarsSoWhite).

Cage (2016) provides an important exception. It is resplendent with beautiful women of color, of various ages, whose characters represent different avenues of agency, empowerment, and choice, even if the writing does not always do them justice.[49] It is also refreshing that sexuality is represented as a normal part of adult life; the series skips the cheap will-they/won't-they plot points; Misty and Claire don't have to compete over a man, but instead come to admire each other through cooperation in the trenches. Further, while the series attends to sexual violence, as discussed above, it is significant that the sexual encounters actually depicted on-screen are consensual, in great contrast to many competing series, though consistent with Jessica Jones (Netflix, US 2015), which introduced Luke's character.

"I'M NOT A MONSTER."

In the tenth episode of Luke Cage (2016), Luke reenters the acidic waters of baptism whence his salvation comes (E10). Luke undergoes his initial baptism as a scientific experiment at Seagate Prison (E04; fig. 13). He dies as Carl Lucas and becomes a new creature. When Claire confronts Dr. Burstein for transforming Luke Cage, he responds, "I … I'm not a monster (E10)." Burstein's response offers a crucial point of departure for evaluating the theological significance of Luke Cage (2016). Indeed Dr. ~~Frankenstein~~ Burstein and his creation confront us with an interesting paradox. Who is the monster?

Fig. 13: Baptism/rebirth. Film still, "Step in the Arena," Luke Cage (2016), S01/E04, 39:34.

49 Bastién 2016.

Luke Cage (2016) opens us up to a particular moment in the United States and elsewhere when militarism, racism, and economic exploitation have crippled Black and Brown lives. The show invites theological reflection and interrogation because of its themes of freedom, art, and humanity. Black Theology and Womanist Theology offer unique vantage points for engaging Luke Cage methodologically. Because both theologies are grounded in the reality of Black lives, these theological frameworks are relevant in regard to Luke and the Harlem community. For James Cone, the parent of Black Liberation Theology, Black experience, Black history, Black culture, revelation, scripture, and tradition encompass the sources for Black Theology.[50] Concern for the community and liberation in light of Jesus' gospel guides the theological norm or hermeneutical principle in Black Theology. Womanist theology concerns itself primarily with the liberation of Black women and the family, establishing a positive quality of life for women and the family, and forming political alliances with other marginal groups struggling to be free of the oppression imposed by white-controlled American institutions.[51]

For understanding the concept of a monster, James Baldwin is useful. In the documentary Take this Hammer (Richard Moore, US 1963), Baldwin says, "I'm not describing you when I talk about you. I'm describing me . . . We invented the nigger. I didn't invent it. White people invented it." Baldwin articulates that the creation of the monster (nigger) emerged from white supremacist fears imposed on Blacks. In *Democracy Matters*, Cornel West describes niggerization as the act of American terrorism on Black people, treating them as niggers for over 350 years, making them "feel unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, and hated".[52] Like the Tuskegee syphilis experiments in the late 20th century, Dr. Burstein takes Luke's Black body without any concern for his humanity. Burstein objectifies Luke into a thing that can benefit U.S. imperialism and militarism.

For centuries, the white gaze has invented slaves, Sambos, welfare queens, Jezebels, Hulks, and even animals out of Black bodies. These catastrophic misnomers are made possible by what Emilie Townes calls "the fantastic hegemonic imagination". Townes says, "The fantastic hegemonic imagination traffics in peoples' lives that are caricatured or pillaged so that the imagination that creates the fantastic can control the world in its image."[53] In this way, we may understand Luke Cage's impenetrable Black body as a result of white supremacist fantastic hegemonic imagination. The creation of Luke Cage emerges from the imagination of Dr. Burstein and not from Luke himself. Luke's impenetrable

50 Cone 2010 [1970], 24–35.
51 Williams 1994, 53.
52 West 2004, 20.
53 Townes 2006, 21.

body raises questions about how the United States sees itself concerning Black bodies. Does the United States understand itself to be impenetrable like Luke because of its military power? Does fear within the psyche of the white gaze perpetuate police brutality, harsh punishment, and the disproportionate imprisonment of Black bodies in the prison-industrial-complex due to false conceptions of the Black body? Who is the monster?

In *The Future of Ethics*, Willis Jenkins articulates the ways in which the earth is connected to women's bodies.[54] In particular, Jenkins evokes Womanist voices to demonstrate how earth's vulnerability relates to the vulnerability of women. The penetrable bodies of women in LUKE CAGE (2016) – of Candace, Mariah, and Misty's cousin – contrast with Luke's normally impenetrable male body. When Luke too is pierced, his insides ravaged by the Judas bullets, this gender distinction breaks down somewhat. Jenkins also helps us to go beyond the binary of female/male, as well as that of human/non-human, considering *all* those who are susceptible to harm. In this regard we remember that the United States continues to assert its imperial self not only through patriarchy and racism, not only through war and colonialism, but also through fracking, polluting, razing, and drilling.

What is Luke's response to his tragic condition and paradoxical self? He answers the niggerization imposed on his body like Emmett Till's mother, who responded to the murder of her 14-year-old son by saying, "I don't have a minute to hate. I'll pursue justice for the rest of my life."[55] Out of love, Baldwin tells his nephew that he does not have to confine himself to the definitions of the white world. With these two formulations, we may understand Luke Cage's pursuing love and justice as a response to the various cages in which he exists. When Luke chooses his name, he quotes Luke 4:18 (E04), a central text in Black Theology. In regards to Luke 4:18, Cone says, "Jesus' work is essentially one of liberation."[56] Like the Jesus of Black Liberation Theology, Luke Cage is anointed to bring liberty to the oppressed. As Jesus enters the human condition of those who experience systemic violence, Luke steps into the experience of those who are economically exploited, those who encounter police brutality, and those who encounter gang violence.

When two police officers stop Luke, many viewers may have people in mind like Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Renisha McBride, Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, and many others. Police inquiries have resulted in the deaths of too many Black and Brown people in the United States. However, the scene presents liberative tones when the bullets bounce off Luke (E07). This scene is very similar to Kendrick Lamar's music video ALRIGHT (Colin Tilley, US 2015), where Kendrick's body

54 Jenkins 2013.
55 West 2004, 21.
56 Cone 1997 [1969], 35.

levitates against the gravity of state-sanctioned violence. Even in the face of the monstrosity of police brutality, Luke shields the one police officer from the bullets of the other. He demonstrates a central claim in the thought of Baldwin and Black Theology – the liberation of the oppressed is tied to the liberation of the oppressor.

"NO ONE CAN CAGE A MAN IF HE TRULY WANTS TO BE FREE!"

In his brief yet influential introduction to the subject, Eddie S. Glaude Jr. argues that if "African American religion" is to have any analytical purchase, it must mean more than simply the religious life of people who happen to be Black. He insists, instead, that we understand it as a religious formation that "emerges in the encounter between faith, in all its complexity, and white supremacy".[57] African American religion responds to the political and social context of the United States in three ways. It represents a "*sign of difference*", insofar as it "explicitly rejects, as best as possible, the idolatry of white supremacy". African American religion operates as a "*practice of freedom*", wherein the "black religious imagination is used in the service of opening up spaces closed down by white supremacy". And it "insists on its *open-ended orientation*", meaning "African American religion offers resources for African Americans to imagine themselves beyond the constraints of now".[58]

We have already seen the ways in which Luke Cage, our "dishwasher Lazarus", stands as a *sign of difference* with regard to the traditional superhero story. If we take the archetypal comic book superhero who doles out violence in his (or occasionally her) quest to redeem the masses as an embodiment of the white savior – the figure who takes up the white wo/man's burden to save those who cannot save themselves – then we can read Luke Cage's reluctance to do harm and commitment to protecting the vulnerable as a rejection of one logic of white supremacy.

To this sign of difference we can add that the show opens up spaces closed down by white supremacy by reclaiming the image of the Black man in a hoodie which figures so prominently in the racist fantasies of the collective American subconscious in recent memory. Cheo Hodari Coker, the show's creator, brought to life a bulletproof Black man who shields other Black and Brown bodies from harm at a time when for viewers of color their bodies are as vulnerable as they have ever been. Nothing is more indicative of the show's birth in the Black Lives Matter moment than Coker's choice to dress Luke Cage in an array

57 Glaude 2014, 6.
58 Glaude 2014, 11–12 (emphases in the original).

of hoodies. Here Coker directly intervenes in the demonization and criminalization of Black bodies. Responding to the grim reality that a hoodie could, in the eyes of a vigilante like George Zimmerman, condemn Trayvon Martin to death, Coker reclaims the hoodie and opens an imaginative space wherein "heroes could wear hoodies, too".[59]

In many respects LUKE CAGE (2016) can also be understood as a *practice of freedom*. This is, after all, the meaning behind the titular character's name. Freedom is a central theme of the show, which is oriented around the wrongful conviction of a man who has escaped from prison. "No one can *cage* a man if he truly wants to be free", Luke states as he explains his adopted surname (E04). He demonstrates this ideal repeatedly as he escapes an impressive array of both figurative and literal confinements, including Seagate Prison, his father's low expectations, his own fears and anxieties, and the rubble that he is buried under when Cornell shoots him with a missile (E03–04; fig. 14). As for "Luke", he takes his first name from the gospel where Jesus proclaims he has come to "preach good news to the poor … freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind" (E04, Luke 4:18).

Fig. 14: Luke's fist breaks free of the rubble *and* symbolizes solidarity with Black liberation movements. Film still, "Step in the Arena", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E04, 44:10.

Nowhere does the show exemplify the features of African American religion more poignantly than in its *open-ended orientation*. LUKE CAGE (2016) achieves something that has long remained a defining feature of African American religion: the creation of an imaginative space in and through which Black people can conjure worlds beyond the violence and degradation of daily life in a racist

59 Kim/Shifflet, 2016.

society. David Walker prophesied that God would wipe white supremacy off the face of the earth in wrath. The Exodus story of slaves set free by plagues and the parting of seas served as the mythic model for the liberation of the enslaved in the South and, later, for a second Exodus out of Jim Crow in the Great Migrations. Martin Luther King Jr. insisted that African Americans "as a people will get to the Promised Land", even if he also admitted, on the eve of his assassination no less, that he might "not get there with you".[60] And LUKE CAGE (2016) brings a world into being where a Black man in a hoodie is impervious to the bullets of police officers and gangsters alike, where that hoodied hero unites his beloved community (Harlem) against the death-dealers set out to destroy them from without and within.

Coker characterizes this open-ended orientation as a sort of wish fulfillment, noting "superheroes to a certain extent are always wish fulfillment".[61] Another way to think about the show, though, would be as an example of what Robin D. G. Kelley calls "freedom dreams". Reflecting on the significance of the imagination in the Black radical tradition, Kelley quips, "call me utopian, but I inherited my mother's belief that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds us".[62] When we view LUKE CAGE (2016) through the lens of African American religion, we begin to see the ways in which Black superhero narratives can function *as* religion, especially in the present moment when one must insist that Black lives matter in the face of a society that too often insists otherwise.

"ALWAYS FORWARD, FORWARD ALWAYS."

The content of LUKE CAGE (2016) demonstrates what one could call an "ultimate concern" in the Tillichian sense. It looks through the unconditional aspects of the existential situation of the context within which it is situated and subtly and overtly voices the situation through summarizing its multiplicity into themes/questions/problems that can be addressed.[63] In other words, we enter into the dynamic social, political, economic, racial, and other dilemmas of the New York City where the story is set without an explanation of those problems as problems, but with a Heideggerian "thrownness" right in the middle of the "action" from which the concerns that need to be addressed emanate.[64]

Luke Cage's role in this context is one of synthesis: he embodies the ultimate concern as displayed in the whole of the fucked-up situation manifested

60 King 1991 [1968], 286.
61 Kim/Shifflet, 2016.
62 Kelley 2002, 2–3.
63 Tillich 1951, 10–11.
64 Heidegger 1996 [1927], 127.

in the struggle that ensues between Cornell and the drug kingpin Colon (E01), the political maneuvering of Mariah as a disguise for her own balancing act between the legal and the illegal for personal benefit (E01), and the campaign of extortion of local businesses executed by both Cornell and Mariah (E03). In the embodiment and synthesis of this multiplicity, Luke Cage becomes a God in the Whiteheadian sense, a deity that is both involved with and affected by temporal processes. He does not create an answer ex nihilo, but takes the jagged bricks of his context and theopoetically makes a house of liberation in which Harlem residents "relocate" and experience a transformation of their understanding of themselves, their worth, and their potential for greatness, even in the midst of the multifaceted oppression plaguing them.[65] In the words of Jerome Stone, this might be thought of as "minimalist transcendence", a humanistic response/intervention that replaces the need for a divine response, or at least the affirmation that transcendence described in this way is more logically defendable due to an empirical experience and location of such transformation.[66] Luke represents the "creative transformation" that John Cobb describes as "the call forward",[67] a notion echoed by Pop's sacred mantra/dying words: "always forward" (E02).

One of the most interesting themes of Luke Cage (2016) that goes largely unstated is that of the "world within a world". The Harlem as presented has autonomous existence in the way that Indigenous communities in North America have a sort of sovereignty: it is dependent on the world from which it comes in a peripheral way, yet operates on its own rules. It has its presidents and its pawns, its members with social capital and those without. This is Whiteheadian interconnectivity. The parent world's racism, poverty, classism, sexism, and other deities of white supremacy that converge in the "event" of Harlem all play a role in how Harlem functions.[68] But the blatant existence of this parent world and its diseases are rarely made explicitly evident. One key example is Cornell's identification of what in his exegesis is the curse/blessing of the underestimation of Afro-diasporic individuals in the parent world of the United States in his statement, "It's easy to underestimate a nigga. You never see them coming" (E01). Another is the recurring appeal to literary works written by people of Afro-diasporic descent born in the United States as a source/instance of reclamation of identity, such as those of Langston Hughes and Walter Mosley (E01). The liberation strategy here is processual, emphasizing in glimpses how the humanistic wise use of the thematic background of a

65 Whitehead 1978 [1929], 346.
66 Stone 1992, 109–110.
67 Coleman 2008, 87.
68 Massumi 2009, 5–6.

context (even the background that is virtually inaccessible) can set a brighter future for even the darkest situation.[69]

Another theme of the series is "Switzerland", or Pop's Barber Shop. In this rhizomic meeting place, the hierarchical tensions of key influential people in the Harlem World become nonfactors, as all who enter this shrine of the barbershop lose the stance of competitor and become colleagues. This is not the cancellation of difference, but the acceptance of the contrast of multiplicity, so that difference is not solved but courageously engaged within this beautiful mess, this chaosmos, many times uncomfortably (E02). The role of space is important in Luke Cage (2016) as a process liberation philosophy, for Switzerland is a freeze frame of the moment of decision. In Switzerland, there are no decisions but only possibility. In Switzerland, entities are presented with choices that could lead to their progressive liberation if they enact them outside the Harlem World. Pop's Barber Shop is a prime liberating thematic instance of the secular transcendence that Afred North Whitehead alludes to and Jerome Stone clearly spells out.[70]

The pinnacle of this liberating process/secular transcendence unearthed by Luke Cage is the notion of secular Gods that shows up in the background of the series, sometimes literally. There are allusions to the transcendent Gods of classical Christian theism, such as the funeral service for Pop (E05) and the biblical recitations of Luke's nemesis Diamondback (E08). But either these are figureheads which symbolize empty religiosity or they use religion subversively, even perversely. These Gods, in other words, are dead.[71] The "true religion" of the Harlem World of Luke Cage (2016) lies elsewhere. You don't get much more religious than having a picture of the Notorious B.I.G. on your wall as the focal point of honor. The MCs are some of the Gods of Harlem, along with the drug lords. These are the people who many of the residents of the city – like Shameek, done in by hubris and Cornells's fists – aspire to be. They set the tone of the town. So does Luke Cage. While the drug lords take the position of disconnected coercion to influence Harlem, Luke presents a different way of life that is interconnected persuasion. In the poetry of his Godhood, he takes the vileness of the world and creatively transforms it to a beautiful mess that influences the dwellers of Harlem to follow his modest whispers of liberation, whispers infused with a contagious renewed sense of hope and power.[72]

69 Whitehead 1967 [1933], 256–257.
70 Stone 1992, 109–110.
71 Nietzsche 2007 [1882], 71–72.
72 Walker 2004, 59–60, 62, 69–71.

Fig. 15: Conflicting theologies: Shameek swaggers, Luke sweeps. Film still, "Moment of Truth", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E01, 02:57.

"DO WHAT YOU CAN, KID."

So where does all this get us? What is the point of this shared rumination on LUKE CAGE (2016), which is, in the end, just a Netflix series based on some comic books? Why should scholars of religion care? Why should anyone care?

Circling back to Jonathan Z. Smith, he has theorized religion as a way of envisioning how the world should be, in contrast to how it is, and acting out ways to reconcile that gap.[73] Creating a show, watching its episodes, participating in its fan culture, even ragging on it through criticism can be analyzed as part of this practice. After all, disappointment only makes sense in comparison to a better what-could-be. In a sense this idea speaks to the tension within the concept of the superhero itself: it is an imperfect response to the problems of the world in which we live, the envisioning of a solution that is not only impossible but also itself problematic. In the words of Method Man as he concludes his ode to Luke, "Bulletproof Love": "People say we don't need another hero, but now we got one" (E12).

Our initial roundtable discussion and this ensuing article analyze, and ultimately contribute to, the meta-process of a culture reflecting on itself through its own products. We are excited about working in collaboration to allow for a richer sense of context than any of our individual approaches to LUKE CAGE (2016) could provide on its own. Rather than a single scholarly take, this article

73 Smith 1987.

is intended to provide a kaleidoscope of different perspectives, each lens allowing us to see new pieces and shifting our vision of the whole.

Fig. 16: Misty tries to see the whole picture. Film still, "Manifest", LUKE CAGE (2016), S01/E07, 10:45.

The sections of this article share what can be read in Smith's formulation as a dialectic of hope and disappointment. In its conscious engagements, the show has potential to offer subversive alternatives to the expected messages of mainstream entertainment. Luke is a more thoughtful, more human Christ-figure than usually found within superhero narratives, yet the genre's default to purifying violence ultimately proves impossible to completely escape. The series introduces not one, but several compelling characters who are women of color, but also at times disempowers them in conventional and therefore perplexing ways. The image of a righteous Black man in a hoodie, immune to bullets, is a Messianic dream in this moment in which "Black Lives Matter" is a supposedly controversial statement. Yet the image can also be twisted into white-supremacist sadism. The Harlem of the show represents an autonomous alterity, but does so by appropriating a real, thriving African American community into a fictional vision largely of deprivation. There are so many ways that the show is invigorating, entertaining, and inspiring and so many ways in which it inevitably falls short. Discussing together is part of the way we reconcile the gap.

Tracing religious elements within the show, putting the series in relationship to cultural phenomena with which it is in dialogue, and considering its trajectories of influence demonstrate that LUKE CAGE (2016) wrestles with some of the

major issues of our cultural moment – racism, violence, sexuality, and power – issues with which, as scholars of religion, we must also engage. In the end, there is no single answer or meaning. The show is multivalent, as are the best scholarly conversations.

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Celica Fitz and Anna Matter

SinnRäume – An Exhibition on Contemporary Religion in Germany

Exhibition Practice as a Medium in Religious Studies

ABSTRACT

In the research and exhibition project *SinnRäume*, students at the Philipps University Marburg examined the materialization of contemporary religion, exploring how religion is practiced at home, how a domestic room becomes a religious space, and how beliefs are materialized.

The rooms in which religious and spiritual individuals live are often filled with objects that are attributed special meaning. Be it in a Ganesh figurine, a decorative Buddha, a simple wooden cross, or even a painted mandala hanging on the wall, the research team discovered a great variety of design elements with personal religious meaning in the private spaces they were permitted to explore. These objects have in common that their meaning is defined by not only collective but also individual criteria and by how they are integrated into everyday life. Just as the meanings of these religious objects are individual, so too are the religious lifestyles of their respective owners.

The results of this project are shown in the exhibition *SinnRäume – Insights into Lived Religiosity in Germany*, which opened in November 2015 at the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung) at the Philipps University of Marburg. The exhibition concept, the presentation design, and the strategies of communication applied are an attempt to present not only religious studies research data but also the research process by which this data was acquired, as well as to relate how religious studies approaches contemporary religious culture in all its plurality.

KEYWORDS

Museum, exhibit, material religion, religious aesthetics, mediation, museology, Collections, religious objects, spatial discourses

BIOGRAPHY

Celica Fitz is a research associate at the Institute for Church Architecture and Contemporary Religious Art (EKD-Institut für Kirchenbau und kirchliche Kunst der Gegenwart) at the Philipps University of Marburg and co-curated the exhibition *SinnRäume*. She

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graduated in art history and religious studies in Marburg. Her primary research foci are exhibiting in theory and practice, contemporary art and visual culture, material religion, and transformation processes in contemporary religions in Germany.
Anna Matter is a research associate at the Department of the Study of religion at the Philipps University of Marburg. She studied cultural studies and the study of religion at the Philipps University of Marburg and co-curated the exhibition *SinnRäume*. Her research focuses on contemporary religion and material culture and religion, as well as on commemorative culture in Germany and Eastern Europe.

RELIGIONS IN MUSEUMS AND EXHIBITIONS

Museums and exhibitions play a significant role in mediating issues of social relevance. Exhibitions that examine religion are a prime opportunity for presenting (and at the same time constructing) often little-known concepts and ideals to an interested public. Such museum projects involving religion have been discussed intensively since the beginning of the 21st century, culminating in the realization that presenting religions in museums requires particular forms of mediation.[1] That said, few institutions exhibit material objects on the basis of concepts taken overtly from the religious studies canon. Crispin Paine noted that a neutral representation of religious concepts is seldom an explicit part of the curatorial mandate. Although since the 1980s anthropological approaches have ensured that minorities are increasingly being heard and discussed, the diversity of contemporary religious culture is rarely shown.[2] He notes,

> If my friend gives her Guan Yin statuette to a museum, it is likely to end up displayed (if at all) as an illustration of Chinese religion … But it sits on her bedroom "altar", alongside the Buddha figure and the crucifix, and plays and has played a crucial role in her spiritual journey through Catholicism, Zen Buddhism and Anglicanism into a personal mixture that works for her. Unless one day – improbably – a museum interviews her and collects these figures, this example of religion as it is actually lived (in the early third millennium by millions in the developed world) will be forgotten.[3]

A religious studies approach to the exhibiting of religious objects can be found in exhibitions curated by the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung) in Marburg, which opened in 1927. The first objects in the collection were donated by the founder of the museum, Protestant theologian and early religious scholar Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), who had obtained most of them during his travels in Asia in the 1920s.[4] In his collection, Otto tried to establish a

1 Paine 2012, 4–9.
2 In describing this diversity of religious practice as syncretism, Paine underlines the ties and forms of reception that lived religion can draw from a variety of sources; see Paine 2013, 17–22.
3 Paine 2013, 22.
4 Runge 2017, 155–158.

concept which considered the specific nature of religious objects in their presentation. Thus, a teaching collection emerged, used for study and research, not a collection that was to be understood as art or a collection of representative cultural objects.[5] In so doing, Otto concerned himself with the subtleties of exhibiting religious objects, the mediation of their contexts, and the diverse practices of religions. Developing from this core of primarily South Asian and East Asian objects, the Museum of Religions has grown substantially over the last 90 years. Today it holds approximately 9,000 objects from many regions and religions. The special exhibitions of recent years show not only historical objects but also contemporary cultural and everyday things and reflect contemporary museum and religious studies discourses, for example in exhibitions such as *Von Derwisch-Mütze bis Mekka-Cola: Vielfalt islamischer Glaubenspraxis* (2013) or *Es gibt keinen Gott! Kirche und Religion in sowjetischen Plakaten* (2015/16).[6] The exhibition *SinnRäume* opened in November 2015 and was realized with the support of both the Museum of Religions and the Department of Religious Studies at Marburg. It was curated in the tradition of simultaneous reflection of both the representability and the communicability of contemporary religion. The exhibition *SinnRäume*, subtitled *Insights into Lived Religiosity in Germany*, shows the plurality and individuality of contemporary religious practice in Germany based on a number of case studies. A great variety of religious concepts and practices can be identified, both within as well as outside the large institutionalized religions that find little to no public resonance. Religious objects, symbols, and practices not only are a part of the public expression of religion, but also are manifested in the private sphere and living spaces. How, then, can a private living room become a sacred site? And what do prayer beads, for example, mean to their respective owners?

At the same time, the study of private living spaces and the narratives of their owners offer access and insight into the reality of everyday life. We argue that this lived religiosity is materialized in how individuals interact with their things and within spaces. The goal of the research and exhibition project was to study and present these forms of belief.

The exhibition faced the challenge of communicating academic discursivity – and of doing so in a manner comprehensible to lay visitors. The exhibition theme had to be presented without prejudice and also mediated to the visitor. *SinnRäume* was to be able to participate in academic discourse while portraying its message clearly. The exhibition topic requires impartiality be retained and conveyed. With the display based on the methods of religious studies, diverse religious styles are presented alongside each other in an equitable fashion. That

5 Bräunlein 2004, 55.
6 Franke/Runge 2013; Runge/Trofimov 2015.

focus on the diversity of beliefs raises the issue of how this approach might be conveyed in an exhibition which is understood as a medium of communication. How can one make these methodological and content-driven considerations clear and visible in an exhibition? The exhibition's status as a medium of knowledge transfer raised specific challenges that will be discussed in this article.

THE EXHIBITION *SinnRäume*

The exhibition *SinnRäume* was motivated by the wish to combine and apply museology and religious studies methods and theories. The research and exhibition team comprised ten students of cultural anthropology, art history, media studies, and religious studies. Inspired by various seminars that integrated the collections of the Museum of Religions into topics concerning religion in museums or material religion in general, the group of students worked voluntarily and independently to realize an exhibition that would implement theoretical knowledge and address the question of how contemporary religion could be displayed in an exhibition. From Spring 2014 until the opening of the exhibition on 29 October 2015, the team met first weekly and then, in the final phase of the project, daily. From the first discussions about theoretical approaches and issues of representation and mediation to the financing and construction of the exhibition itself, all curatorial questions were addressed in workgroups.

We aimed to develop our own research questions by applying an appropriate research approach. The goal was to create novel forms and solutions for the display of contemporary religion, providing unique interactive and participatory means of access to lived religion in a reflective religious studies exhibit. Attention was paid to ensuring the transfer of grounded scholarly knowledge, as well as to mediating different means of access to content.

In order to grasp the phenomenon of the materialization of individual religiosity, the project team conducted 20 narrative interviews across Germany with individuals in their homes. The *SinnRäume* exhibition presented eight of these personal portraits. These interviews demonstrate a broad spectrum of religious and spatial concepts, from liberal Jew Rahel with her cultural understanding of religion to Catholic priest Thomas in his house full of mementos and souvenirs. There is Jessica, a follower of Hare Krishna with a Krishna altar in her living room; Tabish and his family, who pray together and belong to the Ahmadiyya community; the nature-loving Protestant Heike in her garden; Esther, a Hindu-influenced Roman Catholic with her Buddha statue; ascetic evangelical chaplain Markus; and spiritual physical therapist Martina with her concept of immaterial space.[7]

7 These eight individuals (described using their own terms) are the current eight case studies in the *SinnRäume* exhibit.

> Every room I live in is special for me and has my writing on it. My biography certainly plays a role here, in that I have received many valuable gifts and religious tokens, but also that this space serves my day-to-day life.[8] (Thomas, January 2015, 00:12:30)

> I am not a Buddhist, certainly not, but I love the Buddhas because they remind me of India. Just like some odors or colors are connections to India for me.[9] (Esther, October 2014, 00:40:59)

> When we pray here at home, we look to Mecca. I have an app on my mobile that reminds you of the prayer times and even the direction to pray in – looking roughly to the south-east.[10] (Tabish, June 2014, 00:18:23)

> When you move into your first own apartment, you really try to make it comfortable. I think, in the beginning, you really miss your old home. Your mother and your father or your own room. And I wanted to make it as comfortable as possible and for me that definitely included that I have these objects that I associate with Judaism here as well.[11] (Rahel, September 2014, 00:59:21)

These examples present individuals with varied living and religious models and were not chosen as representative of certain religions. The selection challenges visitors with the idea that in their own local neighborhoods there exist many different world views that despite their geographical proximity differ significantly from their own.

In the exhibition, these eight case studies are augmented by religious studies concepts divided into the working categories "religion", "space", "things",[12] and "living". These terms emerged in the course of the research as common core elements of the interviews. They were chosen as working categories on the basis of empirical analysis. They point to issues of everyday practice, socio-spatial construction, religious concepts and meanings, and narratives of objects and thus form the theoretical background to the exhibition. Contemporary dis-

8 "Jeder Raum, den ich bewohne und belebe, ist für mich Heimat und kriegt dann auch meine Handschrift. Da spielt sicherlich meine Lebensgeschichte eine Rolle, dass es viele wertvolle Geschenke und religiöse Zeichen gibt, aber auch das dieser Raum meinem Leben dient", Thomas, January 2015, 00:12:30.

9 "Ich bin kein Buddhist. Ganz bestimmt nicht, aber die Buddhas liebe ich, weil sie mich an Indien erinnern. Genauso wie manche Gerüche oder Farben für mich Verbindungen zu Indien sind", Esther, October 2014, 00:40:59.

10 "Wenn wir hier zu Hause beten, richten wir uns nach Mekka aus. Auf meinem Handy habe ich eine App, da kann man sich an die Gebetszeiten erinnern lassen und sogar an die Gebetsrichtung – so ungefähr nach Südosten", Tabish, June 2014, 00:18:23.

11 "Wenn man das erste Mal umzieht und eine eigene Wohnung hat, dann ist man wirklich bemüht sich das gemütlich zu machen. Ich glaube, am Anfang vermisst man doch sehr das eigene zu Hause. Bei Mama und Papa oder das eigene Zimmer. Und ich wollte es mir schon so gemütlich wie möglich einrichten und da hat es bei mir definitiv dazu gehört, dass ich diese Objekte, die ich mit dem Judentum verbinde, auch hier habe", Rahel, September 2014, 00:59:21.

12 We chose to use the term "thing" (Ding) instead of "object" (Objekt) in this context because it implies neither the existence of neither a subject nor a subject–object relationship. We understand "thing" as an overarching term that includes human and natural artefacts.

courses on the individualization and privatization of religion were also applied in our interdisciplinary methodology, as were spatial theoretical reflections on private space and corresponding religious concepts of life and living together. The results of our deliberations were contextualized in the terms and concepts of religious studies and made tangible in the form of texts, images, and quotations from the interviews (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Exhibitionview, *SinnRäume*, Photography by Wolfgang Magin © *SinnRäume*

EXHIBITING MEANING – CREATING MEANING

From the assumption that an exhibition is a medium of communication, it follows that in addition to the themes and content presented, the presentation itself plays a role in the generation of meaning. Thus, every form of presentation conveys a certain message. When the museum or exhibit is understood as a medium and the exhibition space as the central exponent, the chosen aesthetic for the exhibit becomes one of the most important communication media.[13] Jana Scholze developed a theory of museum exhibits as a communication medium that is based on the definition of museums and exhibits as generators and constructors of knowledge, history, and opinion. Applying this cultural semantic approach, she incorporates the exhibition into a communication theory model

13 Scholze 2004, 258.

to reveal processes of forming meaning and communicating information.[14] She examined the structures and processes of the generation and mediation of meaning in the medium of the museum exhibit.[15] The medium of the exhibition becomes a speech act on the part of the curators to the visitors. The curators encode their statements, for example in the form of the objects they choose to exhibit, the correlations made between them, how they are arranged, the spatial configuration of the exhibition and the lines of sight, the implicit rhetoric, and the content of the explanatory texts.[16] In a museum exhibit, visitors learn about the things being shown and their meaning from the curator's perspective. In addition to the overarching mediation and communication act that takes place through the content of the exhibition itself, various processes of coding and decoding take place within the exhibit. The generation of meaning is also affected – consciously or unconsciously – by the form of presentation.[17] On the basis of these theoretical considerations, the practical design of an exhibition must address not only the content but also the form of communication. With the challenges that emerge with the communication of religious ideas and in light of consideration of theoretical assumptions and the reflection of created meaning, we are required to ask how new experience-based museology and mediation concepts can be combined with a specifically religious studies approach that claims neutrality. How, we wondered, might we design such an exhibition?

Applying media techniques and technologies, *SinnRäume* attempts to consider exhibition concepts as a medium for a communication act involving curator and visitor. In order to achieve this communication a balance between mediation, guidance, and vacancies (that is, space and impulses for the creation of meaning by the visitor) needs to be established.

The exhibition space as such will shape the visitors' awareness of the theme of the exhibit. The target audience of the Museum of Religions is both academic and non-academic. In consideration of the frequent visits of school groups to the museum, emphasis was placed in our exhibition design on experience-based mediation, identification, and emotional affects.

Religiosity and religious practices were to be made experienceable – but they had also to be contextualized and explained as objectively as possible.[18] In the presentation of these religious concepts, a balanced composition was as important as it was difficult to implement. The route the visitor takes through the architecture of the exhibition, the installations, and the depicted private spaces

14 Scholze 2010, 121–149.
15 Scholze 2004; Paine 2012, 4–9.
16 Scholze 2004, 11.
17 Scholze 2004, 15.
18 Paine 2013, 6.

themselves make the content accessible to visitors through the application of contemporary museological concepts, that is, by applying visual, audible, and olfactory elements. In addition to reading direct quotations, visitors can also listen to interview excerpts, prayers, and hymns. Objects loaned by the interviewees and things used in religious practice can be touched, viewed, and even smelled. Finally, besides these interactive elements, visitors can become part of the exhibition itself by means of participatory submodules.

ARCHITECTURE

When visitors enter the exhibition space, they find themselves at the center of an installation. They are surrounded by door-sized panels that each introduce one of the eight case studies by means of photographs, texts, and quotations. The exhibition architecture suggests eight abstract spaces within the space of the exhibit. Ideally, the experience should be that of entering a room. The design elements have a curious voyeuristic aspect to them and arouse the visitor's interest in the spatial concepts that are introduced. In the middle of the exhibition space is a four-sided column where the four working categories – religion, space, things, and living – are explained. The category of religion is discussed on the front of the column. Behind the column there is a showcase with objects (on loan) from our interviewees and a panel titled "A Transparent Exhibition" (*Eine durchsichtige Ausstellung*), upon which we reflect on our principle question, about the ability to exhibit, both things in general and in our exhibition in particular. Here paper and pencils are provided and visitors are invited to comment (upon themselves) and contribute their ideas and personal stories to the exhibition.

To ensure that our eight case studies are presented and perceived as equal and

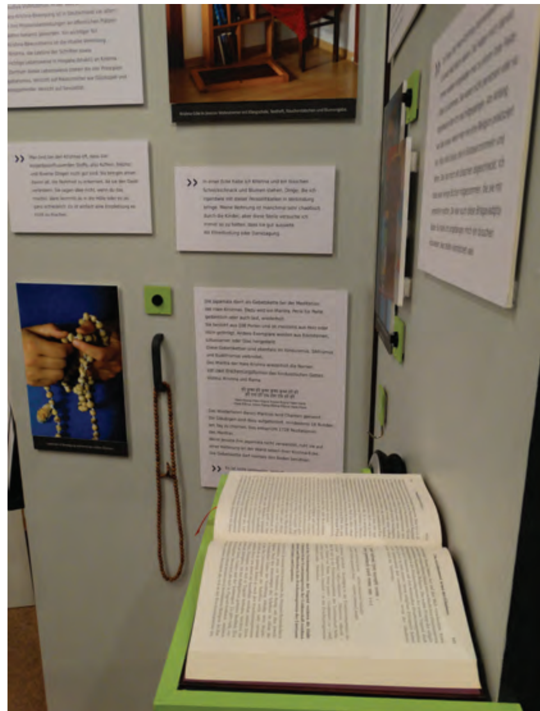

Fig. 2: Panel Jessica, Detail, Photography by Lilli Obholz © *SinnRäume*

independent portraits, they are each provided with their own space. They are arranged not on the basis of religion or relevance but rather according to the categories of religion, things, space, and living that they address. Contrasting examples are juxtaposed to avoid any unintended generalized hierarchies. Nevertheless, various spaces in the exhibition necessarily correspond visually.[19] In exploring the exhibition, a visitor will draw correlations between the case studies and the centrally located working categories. This effect is used and managed by the directional system. The exhibition circuit and the visual guidance systems provide connections between the case studies. That said, visitors are free to move around the circular exhibition as they desire, and we do not promote any one predefined chronology or hierarchy. Various guidance concepts and design elements attempt to underline connections by means of constructed vacancies in which the visitor is asked questions about the connections and differences between exhibition elements.

When the exhibition space is entered, the focus is on the front of the central pillar, which in three design elements using three media addresses the different levels of how we want to understand religion. In an introductory text we present the discursive nature of religion as a working concept. Below this text, listening stations have been installed, where diametrically opposed definitions of religion from historical and contemporary theologians and religious experts, our interviewees, public figures, and even Wikipedia can be listened to. These statements are presented by various voices as a polyphonic and discursive miscellany.

The third media level is designed as a didactic support and as participatory. Removable cards upon which various quotes are printed hang below the text and the listening stations. During guided tours, visitors are handed these cards to discuss the quotes and then search for the right placement in the exhibition, which is marked by green hooks. Some of the cards cite our interviewees:

> In a corner I have a Krishna and few knickknacks and flowers; things that I somehow associate with this personification. My apartment is sometimes very chaotic because of the children, but I try to keep this corner so that it always looks orderly; as a form of homage or thanksgiving.[20] (Jessica, June 2014, 00:26:59)

These quotes can be associated with their respective speakers on the basis of photographs and other texts. Jessica's statement above, for example, can be assigned to her via a photograph of her living room (Fig. 2).

19 Scholze 2004, 11.

20 "In einer Ecke habe ich Krishna und ein bisschen Schnickschnack und Blumen stehen. Dinge, die ich irgendwie mit dieser Personifikation in Verbindung bringe. Meine Wohnung ist manchmal sehr chaotisch durch die Kinder, aber diese Stelle versuche ich immer so zu halten, dass sie gut aussieht: Als Ehrerbietung oder Danksagung", Jessica, June 2014, 00:26:59.

Other cards cite the exhibition organizers at work and can be associated with the explanatory texts on methodology. The practice of interviewing and the role of the interviewer are part of the research process and are integrated into the exhibit. So, for example:

> The tape recorder is already running. I would start then… um… Just begin by telling me something about yourself, something biographical, something about your religious biography if you like.[21] (Interview with Markus, December 2014, 00:00:12)

The search for the fitting quotations undertaken by each new visitor or group of visitors is accompanied by new conversations that create new associations between the interviewees and the working categories. For example, during one guided tour of the exhibition, the differences and similarities between Markus' ascetic lifestyle, inspired by his evangelical church community, and the aniconism of the Ahmadiyya community, as Tabish explained it in his interview, was up for discussion. In the moderation of these discussions, emphasis is placed not on any superficial comparisons based on the material objects and how they are ordered but on using these insights as points of departure for discussing the corresponding religious ideals.

EXHIBITING SPACES AND MATERIAL RELIGION USING DIFFERENT MEDIA

Early on, a pivotal question concerned how space might be exhibited. In light of the focus on rooms, houses, and gardens as well as on practices performed in these spaces and places, the biggest challenge was to find a way to transfer these spaces into a small exhibition room less than 20 square meters in size.

The first ideas involving recreating parts of these spaces were quickly dropped in favor of using photographs of the rooms and objects instead. In combination with the explanatory texts, quotes, and interactive elements, we aimed to communicate an understanding of these spaces that reached beyond simple rooms.

The pragmatic decision to use photographs of rooms and objects instead of the objects themselves was also influenced by the exhibition team's reflections on the documentation of lived religion itself. The spaces being shown and the ensembles of objects in them were marked less by aesthetic criteria than by their status as a mnemonic device for the interviewees, and they were left in their original state. In practice, this meant that in photographing them, we neither removed objects nor dusted or rearranged them in any way. The per-

21 "Das Tonbandgerät läuft jetzt schon. Ich würd dann auch anfangen. Ähm. Erzähl doch einfach etwas über dich, etwas biografisches, gern auch schon etwas zu deiner religiösen Biografie", Interview with Markus, December 2014, 00:00:12.

spectives of the photographs were likewise chosen not with regard primarily to lighting conditions but based on the personal perspectives of the interviewees. The taking of the photographs coincided with and became part of the interviews. In the exhibit, these photographs are not illustrative, but, like the texts, independent media elements.

The photographs are considered visual media and imagery as well as material forms. They are printed on different surfaces and can be looked at, touched, or turned around. This way material religion is not only displayed in the exhibition but also used as an approach to mediate this content on different levels.

The living spaces depicted in the exhibition open the way for visitors to reflect on their own living situation or to identify with certain images. Thus, a Catholic priest among the exhibition visitors quickly identified with Thomas' toy monstrance. But he was also captivated by Esther's statements about her self-identification as a Catholic influenced by Hinduism, which significantly contradicted his own religious ideals. In addition to providing personal insights, the photographs also make a very personal tour of the exhibition possible, with more profound understanding of the ideals and everyday lives of our interviewees.

TEXTS

The text categories in *SinnRäume* range from statements taken from our interviews to contextualizing explanatory texts on religion to thematic texts on broader working definitions and the exhibition project itself. They provide information on different levels. First, the direct quotes provide an individual and emotional level of access. Our research process was rooted in an inductive approach, with terms of self-identification therefore a basis of definition. This approach was to be included in the presentation of the results, hence the use of the direct quotations. Meaning is thus mediated in the first person, with tangible protagonists describing their own perspectives. This lays the groundwork for visitors to identify with the persons portrayed.

During one of the first guided tours a woman declared her identification with more than one interviewee. While she shared some beliefs with Jessica and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, she also practiced some forms of meditation that Martina depicted. This personal engagement not only made the exhibition accessible to her but also sparked a discussion on similarities and differences between Jessica and Martina as well as an exchange between the visitors about their own experiences and beliefs.

The explanatory texts are intended to provide scholarly perspectives and research results as well as impulses and questions for the visitor's own encounter with the case studies. In addition, some wording enables a glance behind the

scenes of meaning-making in such an exhibit, specifically that on a panel titled "Insights into the Exhibit" (*Einblick in die Ausstellung*):

> Museum exhibits create knowledge and convey that it is true and irrefutable. This is done by the curators: they select the things that you are allowed to see. Things that do not fit into the concept remain in storage. That is: objects are put together into groups that conform to the message of the exhibit, not with objects that conform to the context in which the object was used. This has more to do with the intentions of the curators than with the actual origin of the respective object. To the left you see a piece of art. Unfortunately, the postcards that stood next to it cannot be included in our exhibit. And it was part of our exhibition concept that when we showed you these specific objects, we would present you with this specific text. (Explanatory text on the panel "A Transparent Exhibition", *SinnRäume*)

A goal of *SinnRäume* was to encourage visitors to reflect critically not only on the representability of religion in an exhibition but also on museum practice in general (Fig. 3).

The exhibition also shows how meanings and definitions are created and how they can change. This is reflected in the design of the object descriptions in the showcases. The loan objects came from the homes of our interviewees. The respective descriptions include standard data on size and origin, but this information is augmented by statements on the subjective meaning of the objects and in one case on the process by which a member of our project team collected contextual data on that specific object.

Fig. 3: Exhibition view on the Panels: Religion, A transparent Exhibit, Esther, Markus, Photography by Nikolas Magin © *SinnRäume*

In applying this mediation technique of focusing consciously on case studies, we relinquished any claim to be able to communicate any form of objective truth. The objects are shown in their complex individual significance. The exhibition form makes it clear that the case studies are not fixed examples of specific religions.

The Museum Exhibition as a Medium Exhibiting (in) Religious Studies

Reflection on modes of presentation and mediation possibilities appears unavoidable in the face of the heterogeneous research object of contemporary religiosity. Jana Scholze has argued that theoretical exhibition analysis remains absent from the German-language scholarly canon. Building upon her arguments, the *SinnRäume* exhibition can be seen as a medium for the mediation of research results as well as a religious studies approach to religions.

We consider *SinnRäume* a performative exhibition that transpires with visitors and guides. Photographs, texts, and even sound stations can only implicate meanings, but guided tours in particular help create discussion of these private religious spaces. Such discussions and guided tours are inherent to the concept. They take place during the opening hours of the Museum of Religions, which is mostly accessible only on a guided tour.

Conversations about interreligious dialog and tolerance arose within the guided groups. Religious tolerance and freedom were nearly always commented on by the visitors without any input from the guides. Another recurring topic was astonishment at the diversity of religious affiliations in Germany beyond Christianity, a diversity that was somehow familiar to most visitors but had not been paid much attention previously. While such discussions were not explicitly intended in the conception of the exhibition, they are always encouraged.

Every group of visitors adds something to the exhibition, sometimes in the form of notes, sometimes in the form of stories. These add to the narratives of the exhibition and are included in subsequent guided tours, therefore constantly amplifying the exhibition. *SinnRäume* is fully realized by the visiting of the exhibition.

Our theoretical assumptions outlined above define a religious studies–based exhibition approach as ideally a value neutral and unbiased representation of religious styles. *SinnRäume* uses an actor-centered approach that defines religion in a broad sense through an emic view of the persons portrayed. This approach is also realized in the participatory character of the exhibit, which integrates the visitors themselves into the generation of meaning.

Participation in the creation of meaning in an exhibition is most fully present in the constructed vacancies.[22] We assumed that within the reception process the participatory elements would aid the visitor in identifying similarities and differences across the religious models presented, and that the case studies would lead them to the realization that different religious spatial concepts and objects exist.

Inherent to the exhibition is an understanding of scholarship as discursively defined, based on working definitions. The exhibition therefore provides a methodological tool for a study of religion that approaches its object discursively. This experimental aspect is one of the most important features of our research. The reflective modules and participatory elements in this experimental approach were designed to open a window on the nature of empirical religious studies as well.

The exhibition deliberately uses presentation methods to generate meaning. Walking through the exhibition architecture and the depicted spaces, the visitor experiences the contents and message of the exhibition as visible and comprehensible. This presentation concept drew on the demands of the new museology of the 1980s and the concept of experience-centered mediation that had emerged in the 1970s.[23] This association-rich spatial architecture not only serves the presentation of objects but is also particularly appropriate if the goal is to present superordinate theories and abstract ideas on the basis of material objects.[24] The central challenge of the *SinnRäume* project was how best to present the abstract concepts of religion and space in a museological context.

This challenge of mediating an actor-oriented concept of religion that included individualized and institutional religion(s) was met by using case studies to exemplify various definitions of religion. The role of objects in these definitions was shown by direct quotations, while the spatial concepts were traced by photographs. In order to arouse the curiosity of the visitor and to create a certain experience, visual habits and presentation expectations were deliberately challenged and everyday behaviors (such as looking into drawers or opening flaps) were harnessed for didactical purposes. This experience of the constructed space of the exhibition architecture prefaces and guides the encounter with the core exhibition theme.[25] Vacancies were used deliberately to involve the visitor in the process of generating meaning. In the *SinnRäume* exhibit, spatial immersion into concepts of various spaces was made possible. At the same time, the construction was intended to convey that the issue was not that of staging religion but that of reflecting on religion. As a result, our empirical findings on the

22 Scholze 2004, 24, 136; Buschmann 2010, 151.
23 Scholze 2004, 263.
24 Scholze 2004, 28.
25 Scholze 2004, 258.

internal perspective on religion acquired further levels of contextualization and reflection in the exhibition process itself.

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Freek L. Bakker

Intercultural Perspectives on Das radikal Böse and The Act of Killing

Similarities and Dissimilarities in Coping with Trauma in Indonesia and Germany, in Southeast Asia and Europe

ABSTRACT

This article offers a close reading of Das radikal Böse (The Radical Evil, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013) and The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012), films that provide access to the same topic by focusing on different facets of it. In referring to historical events distant from each other in terms of timing, geography and religious associations, these filmic works draw on very different situations and contexts. But even then, something universally human can be detected. The thinking of Zygmunt Bauman and Emmanuel Levinas assists the exploration of three scenes in which perpetrators seem to break down when they realise what they have done to women and children.

KEYWORDS

Shoah, Eastern Europe 1941–1943, Stefan Ruzowitzky, Indonesian genocide 1965/66, Joshua Oppenheimer, Zygmunt Bauman, Emmanuel Levinas, intercultural perspectives

BIOGRAPHY

Freek L. Bakker studied theology and Indology at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. In 2003 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Interreligious Dialogue at Utrecht University. He has written books and articles analysing Hinduism, religion and film and interreligious dialogue.

This article offers a close reading of Das radikal Böse (The Radical Evil, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013) and The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012), two films that are very different but nevertheless provide access to the same topic by focusing on different facets. These filmic works arose from separate situations and contexts, from historic events distant from each other

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both temporally and geographically. The mass killing that is their topic happened in Indonesia 25 years after that in Eastern Europe. Differences are at the core of my investigation: the differences between the films themselves, the images they use and their approaches.

I scrutinise the differences in the filmic representations. How did the German soldiers react to the orders they received? And how do the Indonesians, in particular Anwar Congo and Suryono, look back at what happened? I read the films as bridges between documentary representation and social memory of the massacres, with the psychic effect of the killing on the perpetrators playing an important role and differing widely in Europe and Indonesia. The differences in how these events are perceived retrospectively has probably to do not only with psychology, but also with religion.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that there are also strong similarities between the films, particularly when they are viewed more expansively. I seek to outline these aspects by analysing three key sequences in the films. Finally, and to permit more profound analysis, I have drawn on the thought of the Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) and of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995).

In the background of this academic exploration lurks the question of what I myself might have done in such circumstances. I am not sure that I would have acted differently.

TITLES

We start the comparison by looking at titles. Das radikal Böse reminds us of a statement made by Hannah Arendt, in the Kantian tradition. Arendt wrote: "The radical evil is something that should have never happened, something with which one can never reconcile, and therefore also something which may never be passed in silence." Arendt believed that the radical evil is an open wound which will never heal. Filmmaker Stefan Ruzowitzky deliberately went back to this statement by Hannah Arendt and not to her better known "das banal Böse" (the banal evil). "The banal evil belongs to Adolf Eichmann", Ruzowitzky said, "the man killing people from behind his desk. This film is about people who did the shooting themselves."[1]

At the beginning of the film, frequent reference is made to the idea within the title "The Act of Killing". Time and again filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer asks Anwar Congo: How exactly did it happen? What did you do? This seems a questionable form of curiosity, a morbid interest even. Who would want to know how people kill other people? But in the course of the film it turns out that

1 Zawia 2014, interview with the director.

exact representation of what has taken place is key to a process in which Anwar Congo returns to his past and is almost submerged by his trauma. It seems that for the first time he has realised what he has done.

POEMS

Both films start with a poem. DAS RADIKAL BÖSE begins with a text by Primo Levi:

> Monsters exist, but
> they are too few in number
> to be truly dangerous.
> More dangerous
> are the common men.[2]

THE ACT OF KILLING starts with words of Voltaire:

> It is forbidden to kill; therefore
> all murderers are punished
> unless they are in large numbers
> and to the sound of trumpets.[3]

These poems reveal a difference in perspective. In DAS RADIKAL BÖSE the danger comes from the common man, someone who does not seem to be a monster, which suggests that all of us can be such killers. This film aims to confront us with ourselves. THE ACT OF KILLING speaks about the very large number of victims – and also about the enormous number of killers? – whose number makes their prosecution impossible and therefore gives them a sort of protection. This scale is emphasised by the sounding of trumpets, which in Voltaire's time would have been understood as a reference to army trumpeters. The image conjured up concerns the notion that killing a human being is always murder and therefore sinful – "it is forbidden to kill" even if the killing is on a large scale and carried out with the support of the people in power. THE ACT OF KILLING demonstrates that in the end the perpetrator feels the truth of this. Neither the support of the state nor the scale of the killing can nullify the perpetrator's actions, which have brought negative karma.

FILMIC APPROACHES

The difference in approach across the two films is tremendous. DAS RADIKAL BÖSE starts by asking how it was even possible that such ordinary men could

2 Levi 2015, 191.
3 English translation of a statement found in Voltaire 1977.

become such dreadful murderers. This is Ruzowitzky's first question, to which he then adds many other questions, thus gradually making his point.

The movie is divided into 19 chapters. Many chapters begin with scenes showing German soldiers as extracts from letters they wrote home are recited. This start is followed by comments from experts and sometimes elements of already published research, in particular from *On Killing* by David Grossman.[4] Some experts are Jewish, scions of the people that the soldiers tried to exterminate. Others are not, as in the case of a Polish Roman Catholic priest. An important detour is taken with *Bibrika*, a chapter about a town of that name in Ukraine. This chapter relates how normal life was in this city and how this normality was ended by the murderers. Because of the large number of Jews in the district in which these killing campaigns took place, the area was called Jiddishland. In some places Jews were even in the majority. The film starts by showing images of some of the accused at Nuremberg declaring "not guilty", and it ends with images of the conviction of all the accused at this trial, followed by pictures of some of these mass killings and an indication of the numbers murdered in these campaigns.

The structure of The Act of Killing is completely different. After the quotation of Voltaire a big metal fish emerges on the screen, located in a heavenly landscape. A row of men and women come out of the fish's mouth performing an Indonesian dance in the splashing of a waterfall. They appear like angels clothed in red and white, the colours of the Indonesian flag, and among them we find Anwar Congo, the main protagonist of this film. He too is dancing. Subsequently the story of the film unrolls. The filmmaker interviews proud murderers, Anwar Congo and Herman Koto, and proposes to them that a film be made of the killings so that Hollywood will be able to witness their great actions. I skip over the details here. It is not long before Congo starts to tell about his nightmares. After a scene in which they show how they set fire to houses in a village, Congo is increasingly silence. The heavenly scene returns once, when a victim thanks his murderer for enabling him to go to heaven sooner. At the end of the film, Congo is completely silent. He vomits because of what he has done. It hits him severely. A little later he leaves the place where, at the beginning of the film, he had proudly started to recount his great deeds. He walks through the shop below. His pride is entirely gone.

The different cinematic approaches mirror the huge differences between the historical circumstances on which the works draw. Das radikal Böse is a filmic collage about German soldiers, particularly the special death squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) that operated in Eastern Europe. They were in a foreign country. They were not killing Germans. Time after time they explain in the film that they had killed Jews to prevent the Jews from killing them. They had to kill the women and the children, because "they", the propaganda stated, "would do exactly

4 Grossman 1995.

the same or ten times worse to their women and children". Nonetheless they were deeply relieved when they learned that such killing was no longer required of them as it had become possible to gas Jews in large numbers.

The Act of Killing is about Indonesia, where in 1965 a coup d'état took place that according to propaganda had been initiated by the communists. In reality it was the work of discontented officers. Aidit, secretary of the Indonesian Communist Party, was also involved, but the party executive probably knew nothing, and the common party members were entirely in the dark. Nonetheless a campaign of mass murder was launched, not against foreigners, but against fellow Indonesians. A similar story circulated: if the Communist revolt had been successful, the murderers would have been murdered. After the death of at least 1 million people – estimations differ and the figure may have been higher – the frenzy died down. But unlike the German perpetrators, the Indonesian killers were proud of what they had done, and they remain proud. More than that, they reap benefits from their killing. For example, Herman Koto became a leader of the Pancasila youth movement. Such pride is absent among the Germans, but this could have been different if Hitler had won the war.

There are more differences, but before I discuss them, I wish to draw attention to two turning points, as I term them, in the films.

TURNING POINTS

First we note two sequences in Das radikal Böse. The first sequence is about the moment the soldiers receive the order to kill women and children. We see a small group of soldiers walking along the open doors of a large empty stable. One of them says:

> "With the first train cars my hand was trembling as I shot. But you get used to it. With the tenth car I aimed calmly and shot confidently at all the women, children and infants."

Now the screen shows images of young blond German girls with flowers in their hair. The soldier continues:

> "When I think of my two infants at home. I know these hordes would do the same, probably ten times as cruel."

We see the soldiers again, sitting. One of them lights a cigarette. Another soldier writes to his family:

> "My dearest Mommy, Traudy and Hans-Peter, Daddy is waiting for a letter since 22 September. But unfortunately, no one arrived. So Blobel ordered me to shoot the children. I asked him who was supposed to perform this. He said: 'The Waffen-SS.' I objected: 'Those are all young men.'"

Fig 1: German military and children (DAS RADIKAL BÖSE, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013), 01:04:10.

The screen again shows images of German girls. The soldier continues:

> "'Can we take the responsibility for shooting little children?' Then he says: 'Take your men.' Once again I said: 'How could they do it? They have little kids themselves.'"

Fig. 2: German soldier with riffle (DAS RADIKAL BÖSE, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013), 01:12:40.

The screen is filled with pictures of German officers helping little blond German girls. The soldier goes on:

> "This tug of war lasted ten minutes. I suggested that the Ukrainian militia should shoot the children. And nobody objected."

The screen shows the soldiers again. Another soldier says:

> "Picking berries would be nice. Yesterday was Thanksgiving." (01:03:20–01:04:28)

In the second sequence one of the German soldiers tells about his nightmare the night before:

The soldier says:

"I had a terrible night. How can a dream be as true and expressive as reality?"

The screen is filled with images of soldiers walking with rifles through green pastures.

Next another soldier says:

> "I tried to suppress the pictures of the past from my memory. But I couldn't."

Now his face appears on the screen looking into the darkness of the night. His glasses lie on a small nightstand next to his bed. A third soldier begins to speak. He says:

> "Somebody told me that Blobel was lying in his room with a nervous breakdown. 'My mood is very gloomy', he said. I went into his room. Blobel was talking gibberish. He said it was impossible to shoot so many Jews. The sight of dead bodies isn't jolly, especially women and children." (01:12:59–01:13:21)

Both sequences reveal that the soldiers feel a strong repugnance at killing women and children. But then they recall the explicit propaganda statements that explained why they must kill them. "These hordes would do the same, even worse." Simultaneously, however, the soldiers try to dodge this task, passing it on to others, to the Ukrainian militias; nobody objects. The second sequence is about nightmares and again the focus is on the killing of women and children.

Now we shall give particular attention to a sequence in THE ACT OF KILLING that shows a re-enactment of the chasing down and torturing of women and children, as well as the setting alight of houses in a village. The men wear the same red-black shirts and black trousers as they did in the 1960s. Afterwards one of the women who participated in the re-enactment faints. A girl, the daughter of one of the perpetrators, cries. These acts were horrible. The camera focuses on Anwar Congo, the man who was so proud of his role in the killings.

Fig. 3: Women pulled out of a burning house (THE ACT OF KILLING, Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012), 01:58:29.

Eight persons surround the woman who has fainted. “She must calm down.” Another woman and a man kneel down. The man stretches his arm around her shoulder; the woman caresses her. Another man sprinkles Eau de Cologne on her head. Congo looks at them. Two men take the head of the woman in their hands. One blows on her forehead. In the next scene one of the perpetrators says to Febby, his crying daughter:

> “You played excellently, Febby. Now you must stop crying. I am ashamed of you. Movie stars never cry long.”

Meanwhile we see people wearing Indonesian straw hats looking at the houses; some of these homes are still burning. Another perpetrator also looks at the scene. He seems to be very content and takes a puff from his cigarette. Then the camera focuses on Congo, who likewise takes a puff from his cigarette.

> “I regret one thing”, he says, “I had never thought that this scene would be so horrifying. My friends said: ‘You have to play this more sadistically.’ But then I saw those women and children.”

The women and a girl appear on the screen. Congo goes on:

> “Imagine the future of those children. They are tortured and now their houses burn down. What kind of future they will have? They will curse us for the rest of their lives. It was very (*sangat*), very …, very serious …” (2:00:34–2:02:18)

Here too it is women and children who unlock Congo’s emotions. Suddenly he imagines their future and their expectations, what could have become of them. He realises what he had taken away from them. “They will curse us for the rest of their lives. It was *sangat* …, *sangat* … It was very, very serious.” Previously Congo had told of a nightmare that was disturbing him. Once, when it was completely dark, he chopped off a man’s head with a huge chopping knife. He can still hear the death rattle. “I saw his head on the ground”, he says, “and his eyes looking at me. On my way home I asked myself why I didn’t close his eyes. That is the cause of my nightmares. I am constantly haunted by his eyes looking at me, those eyes I didn’t close. Now these eyes are permanently looking at me in my nightmares. It confuses me heavily.” – “Is this the revenge of the dead?” he had asked earlier.

Later in the film Congo speaks about karma. “Karma”, he says, “is the law of nature constituted by God.” Congo believes that the souls of the dead have returned and that they send him these nightmares.

In Das radikal Böse one of the soldiers is ordered to kill women and children. At first he obeys. But later the soldiers are able to dodge this task, leaving it to the Ukrainians. Despite all the propaganda they find the order dreadful. One of the experts interviewed in the film, psychologist Robert Jay Lifton, points out

that above all they exhibit self-pity, as they constantly complain that they were assigned to this battalion. They had tough luck. They would have preferred to have been assigned to a battalion that was not ordered to kill Jews. Apparently Lifton is right. The soldiers express this sentiment loudly and clearly. Nonetheless we may wonder whether there is not also something else happening. One of the soldiers says to his fellow soldiers – I follow here the German text – that it is impossible to shoot so many Jews. His words are: "Der Anblick der Toten darunter die Frauen und Kinder ist auch nicht um aufzumuntern" (The sight of the dead, among them those women and children, does not pep up). This is the unemotional tough talk of men, but even here we hear that seeing the dead bodies of women and children causes great mental confusion. While this response might be termed self-pity, in my opinion it is rather horror, an intense feeling of shock accompanied by an indomitable will to run away from this experience.

For Lifton self-pity means that these soldiers think it dreadful that they belong to this battalion while not thinking of what they did to their victims. It may also be, however, that these words express that they did not want to carry out this killing and that they will not want to do so in future as well. Later in the film one of soldiers says that he is afraid that he will never forget, which makes it impossible for him to return to a normal life. In other words, these memories will always be with him and will constantly haunt him.

The idea of being haunted by the souls of the dead is entirely absent from DAS RADIKAL BÖSE. What haunts the soldiers is what they have seen and experienced. In THE ACT OF KILLING, by contrast, people repeatedly talk about being haunted by the spirits of the dead. I will return later to the important distinction that this contrast highlights.

THE PARALLEL

Before I turn my attention to this difference, I wish to point to a remarkable parallel. However great the distance between Eastern Europe and Indonesia, however different the situations – the massacre of Jews who are deemed not to belong to the killers' people and the killing of compatriots – and however far apart in time the events, the films deal with processes that are also closely akin to each other.

Both movies deal with a "purification" that has some form of government backing, a purification of elements that are supposedly no longer at home in the country where they live. This purification was part of the vision of the government for the future of the country. This vision determined who might be deemed pure or impure, who was good and who was bad, who had the right to continue to live and build a future in the country and who had to be removed.

In each instance the latter disturbed the happiness of the former. Zygmunt Bauman has proposed that a vision is a necessary impetus to such "cleansing". A forest, a mountainside, a pasture or an ocean, or nature in general, distinguished from human culture, is neither clean not dirty in and of itself. Human behaviour defiles and besmirches nature, whether with the remnants of a Sunday picnic or the waste of chemical factories. Human behaviour creates the distinction between dirty and clean.[5] Impurity is understood in terms of the presence of something that is not natural, something that causes irritation and must therefore be removed. A vision based on purity is related to a desire to create order, an order that stems from the presence of that which belongs and the elimination of that which does not belong. The world of those striving for such purity is too small to provide space for the other.[6]

Even before he was inaugurated as president of Indonesia, President Soeharto had introduced the concept of *Orde Baru* (New Order), in opposition to the concept of *Orde Lama* (Old Order), for which President Sukarno was responsible in the form of the so-called Nasakom order, which had room for nationalists, religious people and communists. The New Order had no space for communists. Something similar can be said of Nazi Germany. The German saying "Ordnung muss sein" (There must be order) has been identified as a fundamental of German culture.[7] "Ordnung muss sein", President Hindenburg stated in 1930.[8] Adolf Hitler implemented this maxim by explicating that there was no longer room in the German Reich for Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and the disabled, nor for communists.

Bauman repeatedly references differences in forms of dirt. Cockroaches, flies, spiders and mice need no invitation to enter a house. They might be present for a long time without the other occupants being aware. The filthiest dirt, however, may be invisible to the eye – carpet mites, microbes or viruses, for example. What appears safe and clean may not be safe and clean. Hygiene is important. Dirt is not innocent. It can endanger health and must therefore be controlled constantly.[9]

If human beings are regarded as dirt, the message is that they need to be removed. Bauman points out that an atmosphere can change suddenly. Despite contemporary anti-Semitism, Jews in Germany appeared to be increasingly accepted, especially if they assimilated and their behaviour conformed to that of a "good" German citizen. In Indonesia the communists were also accepted. Their political party was the biggest in some populous provinces and they therefore

5 Bauman 1998, 5.
6 Bauman 1998, 6
7 Tomalin 2006, 37.
8 Graudenz 1930.
9 Bauman 1998, 6–7.

participated in provincial administration. They were even represented in parliament. Moreover the Indonesian air force and navy were "reddish", as was said at the time. Many teachers and farmers were communists. In other words, communists and Jews participated in Indonesian and German society respectively. They were not denied that role.

The situation changed in German in the 1920s and early 1930s and in Indonesia in fall 1965. Suddenly communists and Jews were seen as dirt and deemed infectious, a threat to the health of each country.

Once that label has been applied, two possibilities lie open. Those so identified might be compelled to assimilate completely, to come to resemble those who are accepted to the extent that the distinction has in effect disappeared. They might be "devoured", in Bauman's words. Or they might be excluded, "vomited", deprived of the right to share a space with those who are accepted. According to racial thinking, the option of devouring the Jews was impossible in Germany; the racial distinction could not be overcome by assimilation, through education, training or other forms of socialisation.[10] In Indonesia such a distinction was not made. But then the threat was deemed all the greater, for now communists were like carpet mites, microbes or viruses, unseen but evil. Extirpation was presented as the only option. This idea of purifying a country is found in an account of what occurred on the Indonesian island of Bali. Nationalist Ernst Utrecht recorded in 1967, one year after the killings, that the murderers had seen the killing of members of the Communist Party as a religious duty to purify the land.[11] The killings were regarded as a purification ritual comparable to existing rituals in the traditional Hindu religion of Bali.[12] The victims even offered themselves "voluntarily" to the murderers, although probably under heavy pressure. It was said that those who volunteered to die would not go to hell after their deaths. Often clothed in white robes, they were brought to a place where they were stabbed, shot or decapitated.[13]

I wish to add something to this analysis that in my opinion exerted much influence in both situations – the idea that if the others were not killed, they would take the lives of the killers. Their killing is then seemingly inevitable, for the failure to intervene puts the killers and their families at risk. In the movie we hear Germans talk about hordes that will rape and kill their women and children. In Indonesia something similar was said about the communists. For the perpetrators these narratives bring an urgency to their efforts at extermination. If they do nothing, it may be too late. In Indonesia those who were not communists feared the communists greatly. The communists had done very well in

10 Bauman 1998, 18–19.
11 Robinson 1995, 300.
12 Swellengrebel 1984, 45; Schulte Nordholt 1991, 33–39; Bakker 2001, 40–41.
13 Robinson 1995, 300–301; Vickers 1989, 171–172.

provincial elections in Central Java and East Java in 1957. They had taken a significantly larger proportion of the vote, which led President Sukarno to suggest they be included in the national government.[14] After these electoral advances communists repeatedly organised demonstrations and campaigns in which other Indonesians were intimidated. Many non-communists believed it was only a matter of time before the communists would win a national election and assume power. The national election was repeatedly postponed. It was to have been held in 1960 and again in 1965, but it was not until 1971, so after the killings, that another national election took place in Indonesia.

A SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE

Noting these parallels we now return to the significant divergence noted above. Anwar Congo spoke about the spirits of the dead who would return and give him nightmares, depriving him of a carefree life in a purified world. The Germans did not speak of the souls of the dead. I assume that this distinction has to do with the distinct German and Indonesian cultural and religious environments.

But before I scrutinise this perception more thoroughly, we can note another difference. DAS RADIKAL BÖSE was based on letters the German soldiers wrote to their families and friends back home after they had carried out the murders, sometimes immediately after, but sometimes days or weeks later. The temporal distance between the killings and their reports and reflections on those killings was much smaller than in Indonesia. Joshua Oppenheimer held his interviews with Anwar Congo, Herman Koto and others involved in the Indonesian massacres in 2012, so 47 years after the coup d'état and 46 years after the end of the killings, which continued into 1966. How people look back differs according to whether the event on which they are reflecting took place recently or far longer ago. In both instances we learn that perpetrators are haunted, but the Germans speak about what they saw, the act of killing, the sense of pleasure experienced by some of them, but also a disgust that they murdered defenceless people. Nobody speaks about being haunted by the spirits of the dead, with the idea of a spirit living on after death evidently absent. As a convenient shorthand, let us call this the Western perspective. For Anwar Congo, and also for other Indonesians, the souls of the dead are a bitter reality; they want revenge, haunt them and give them nightmares. The Western perspective is also known in Indonesia, with one of his friends advising Anwar Congo to visit a psychiatrist. Congo refuses.

We face the difference between an Eastern (Indonesian) understanding of the cosmos and a Western (German) view of the universe. The Indonesian in-

14 Ricklefs 1981, 248.

terpretation is full of imperceptible beings that are very real to the Indonesians and will certainly want revenge. Anwar Congo moreover fears the power of God, who will not leave his sins unpunished – he speaks of *dosa*, which means sin. This concept is missing in Das radikal Böse. There the view of the cosmos is much more secularised. Perhaps age is an explanation for this difference: the Germans are young, while the perpetrators speaking in The Act of Killing are much older. Those who know Indonesia will be well aware that the social imaginary is much more religious than the social imaginary in Western Europe. Large parts of Germany were Protestant, and the souls of the dead play only a small part in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. The dead do not remain among the living; they go to heaven, to God, or to hell, so to a place somewhere outside this earth, although there are exceptions.

As a result, in the German context evil is more closely related to guilt. It was wrong to kill helpless women and children. The perpetrators knew the argumentation that justified these actions, but such justification was insufficient. The images haunted them. Nightmares and severe mental illness followed.

In Indonesia the perpetrators respond in terms of spirits of the dead who haunt them in combination with knowledge that they have sinned and that God will not leave their wrongdoings unpunished. But the Indonesian perpetrators are most tormented by the weeping, crying, pain and sorrow of the women and children. They are likewise haunted by nightmares. The outcome in the two instances is therefore the same. Oppenheimer's next film, The Look of Silence (ID 2015), reveals that in Indonesia many perpetrators also subsequently suffered severe mental illness. We learn in this movie that drinking the blood of the dead was one method used to counter such mental torment.

We can usefully draw here on ideas of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas as formulated and summarised by the Dutch philosopher Ad Peperzak:

> I possessed and enjoyed my world as my home. Full of joy about the good things of the earth; without any notion that I made other people poor, deprived them of their rights or even killed them by appropriating all these things. … Then someone else rises in face of me. … The Other presents himself. He looks at me. Even before he has said one word to me, his face speaks to me. … His face, his eyes, totally uncovered, *nude*.[15]

For Levinas, the Other stands for God. With this in mind, what he says in the following quotation, cited from Peperzak, is very remarkable, for it is almost a direct response to Bauman's analysis. "If the Other [God] is really in the centre of one's thinking and doing, one has come to a movement that forces a breakthrough of the world and its orderliness but exactly because of this points to

15 Peperzak 1984, 9, cf. Levinas 1979, 194–204.

a Reality that has left a trace when passed by: the face commanding us from above but in humility."[16]

In this way Levinas seeks to explain how the encounter with the Other leads to an ethical relationship in which the subject who meets the Other is forced to re-evaluate.[17] Precisely this occurs in these two films, as the Other, in particular the sight of the women and the children, makes the perpetrators conscious of what they have done or – in the case of the Germans – are doing.

The social imaginaries differ, but the effect is nearly the same. In the German context guilt dominates; in the Indonesian context divine punishment and revenge undertaken by the souls of the dead are to the fore.

These differences naturally shape conversations with the perpetrators and how they cope with what they have done. The dialogue with the Germans thus deals with redemption, forgiveness and living with a bad conscience. The dialogue with the Indonesians also deals with redemption, but here calming the spirits and averting divine punishment are more significant. It seems very likely that rituals will be performed in the hope that they will counter some of the effects of their evil deeds. The rituals in the German context will be different. The church offers the opportunity to confess one's sins and be forgiven or to talk about those sins in a pastoral dialogue, for everything can be brought to God in prayer, including remorse. Yet I expect that in Germany more secular means are also adopted to assist those who feel such guilt.

Will such opportunities be sufficient? My personal experience as a Protestant minister communicating with people who experience such trauma suggests that no relief can be total.

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16 Peperzak 1984, 11.
17 Levinas 1979, 195.

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Arno Haldemann

Charivari or the Historicising of a Question

The Irrelevance of Romantic Love for the Audio-Visual Performance of Marriage in Bern in the 18th and 19th Centuries

ABSTRACT

Citing Oscar Wilde, in their call for papers the editors of this volume ask the question "Who, being loved, is poor?" On a meta-theoretical level, this article seeks to contextualize this question and its citation socially. On an empirical level, it contrasts the socially highly determined question and its implicit presuppositions with the findings of a local case study from the canton of Bern in the 18th and 19th centuries. When we examine precarious marriages through petitions for dispensation from the preacher's threefold reading of the banns from the pulpit, the collective audio-visual dimension of marriages in an agrarian society with scarce resources becomes apparent. With the petitions, the couples tried to avoid attention and thus escape the communal tribunal of a charivari and the like. In Bern, the material and media dimension of weddings were largely governed by local standards. Charivaris were audio-visual means for society to communicate shared values regarding marriage. An expression of the locally accentuated moral economy, they did not reflect romantic ideals of love. The performance of weddings as large and public rituals was a communal compulsion rather than the expression of an individualistic and therefore creative event. The performative wedding as the epitome of individualism is a very young historical development and strongly linked to a late-modern bourgeois culture of singularity.

KEYWORDS

Oscar Wilde, Bern, Charivari, marriage, romantic love, bourgeoise culture, individualism, intimacy, agrarian society, collective performance, codes of communication

BIOGRAPHY

Arno Haldemann received his education in history and religious studies at the Universities of Bern and at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) in Paris. In his PhD project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, he is researching the genesis of civil marriage in the Swiss Canton of Bern between 1742 and 1865. He focuses on the interaction of deviant subaltern actors wanting to get married, resistive local communities, families and corporations and the arbitrating Bernese marriage tribunal. Thus, he investigates the interrelation of actor's agency, communal customary legal and moral concepts and contemporary population policy. Arno Haldemann is a member of the Graduate School of the Humanities at the Walter Benjamin Kolleg of the University of Bern.

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INTRODUCTION

In their call for papers, the editors of this volume cite Oscar Wilde as they ask a wide-reaching question: "Who, being loved, is poor?" For a postmodern historian, this instantly and inevitably becomes a twofold question: what kind of love did Wilde intend and why do the editors refer to it? As the call's eponymous question encompasses different temporal levels, the answer should be historically nuanced and socially differentiated. For this reason, I will focus on three questions: (1) what does the question tell us about its famous originator, his socialization, and the social field he was participating in, or, in other words, how would Wilde have understood his own question? (2) what does the use of this question tell us about the editors who refer to the famous playwright in their call for papers for a contemporary scholarly journal and about those who perceive the reference and answer it? While the first two questions will be explored on a meta-theoretical level, I want to answer a third question on the basis of empirical data from a case study from the canton of Bern. Notwithstanding its peculiarities, in this article Bern represents a relatively arbitrarily selected place at the centre of Europe during the transition from the 18th to the 19th century. The majority of the populace in this city-state were agrarian and rural. So, (3) how would actors in this society have answered Wilde's question? In my response to this third question, I hope to advance to the very core of this call for papers. I will demonstrate the irrelevance of Wilde's intentions in his question for the audio-visual and material dimensions of the marriage rituals of Bern's agrarian majority in its transition from early modern times to modernity proper. I will put forward the argument that certainly in this part of Europe, and likely elsewhere too, a large part of the population would never have considered Wilde's question. Perhaps, however, they would have asked the inverse question, "Who, being poor, is loved?", and, more fundamentally, "What is love?"[1]

THE BOURGEOIS BIAS OF ROMANTIC MARRIAGE

Wilde was the son of a renowned medical doctor who had been educated in the humanities. His mother was an equally educated translator and poet who operated a well-known salon. He was descended from a quasi ideal-typical bourgeois background.[2] In his mother's social circles the very young Wilde had contact

1 If the editors searched for a reference frame for this hypothetical question, for better or worse they would have encountered Haddaway's eponymous pop song. This reference would possibly not have sat so easily in the academic and intellectual milieu of the editors as does the citation from Oscar Wilde, but it would have more likely corresponded with the folk culture of the subaltern actors I investigate in my study.

2 The term "bourgeois" is used here for want of a better translation of the German *bürgerlich*. The term "bourgeois" denotes here a specific life style "with an emphasis on personal education and political participation. As such, bürgerlich has a positively connoted discursive tradition and breadth of mean-

with famous contemporary artists and intellectuals of Dublin's local scene. He thus received "the socialization of artists".[3] He enjoyed an outstanding education in classical philology. As a student, he became a member of a freemasons' lodge.[4] Wilde is to be viewed as an integral part of "the artistic field", the very specific element of modern society which Andreas Reckwitz sees as responsible for the formation of the creativity *dispositif*.[5] The successful but controversial author was not just a prominent but formative part of the contemporary artistic avant-garde. He paradigmatically embodied dandyism in his time. Wilde was an outstanding representative of literary aestheticism, and his whole existence must be attributed to the modern "aesthetic of genius".[6] Retrospectively he can appear as the personified icon of individualism.[7]

This individualistic aestheticization drew from the concept of romantic love, in which English sentimentalism played a crucial role.[8] The sentimentalist ideal of love became central, albeit in reconstructed form, to Wilde's own iterations of love.[9] During the 18th century, a critical backlash against "aristocratic and agrarian traditionalism" had culminated in the romantic novel and theatre. Thus, a normative concept of romantic love became a constitutive part of "bourgeois modernity", which structured Europe's 19th century socio-culturally.[10]

Wilde's play *A Woman of No Importance* revolves around romantic love, by which the self-determining bourgeoisie appears to have distinguished itself from the aristocracy. The question we are exploring is posed in the fourth act by the bourgeois character Miss Hester Worsley and refers to a historically specific emanation of love. This love dissociated itself from traditional and aristocratic forms of convenient love, but it stemmed from a thin, privileged and elitist social stratum, in which at the time it was exclusively disseminated.[11] The bourgeois *dispositif* of romantic culture raised passionate love to its own end. Thus, passionate love became the essence of the modern marital relationship. Henceforth, according to the ideal of romantic love, no one was to marry for convenience; one should marry for "pure", which is to say self-referential and

ing that none of the usual translations – 'bourgeois', 'middle class' and 'citizen' or 'civil society' – can do justice to", Reckwitz 2017, 33.

3 Reckwitz 2017, 38.

4 Ellmann 1988, 3–50.

5 Reckwitz 2017, 33–37.

6 For the genesis of the aesthetic of genius cf. Reckwitz 2017, 38.

7 On Wilde's (self-)iconization cf. Reckwitz 2017, 160–162.

8 Luhmann 1986, 145.

9 Wilde not only adapted this ideal in his writings but also integrated it into his personal life: "Wilde wanted a consuming passion; he got it and was consumed by it", Ellmann 1988, 362. At a certain point in his life, he lived out his homosexual love relatively openly, which was not "convenient" for his contemporaries at all; see Ellmann 1988, 258–262.

10 Reckwitz 2017, 202–203.

11 On the genesis of romantic love see Giddens 1992, 38–41, and Luhmann 1986, 129–144.

unique, love. As a result, love came to be thought of as something singular, self-determined, individual, and liberal, as a matter between two individuals who established family and household on the basis of romantic love. Strategic, material, and political points of reference were either veiled by bourgeois feelings or became irrelevant because both parties were likely from the same privileged social class. This is exactly the reason that Hester responds to her own question ("Who, being loved, is poor?") with a romantic answer: "Oh, no one. I hate my riches. They are a burden."[12] Only her bourgeois material status allows her to conceive romantic love as a true emotional luxury and, therefore, material riches as a burden. She does not realize that wealth and social status are the constitutive preconditions for her subjective feelings. She cannot recognize that the script for her own play is already socially determined. In this context, the answer to Wilde's question may well be "almost no one" or perhaps "not many", but with a concept of wealth in mind completely different from that held by Hester. A person of the 18th or 19th century normally had to be wealthy and to belong to a sophisticated bourgeois milieu if that person was to have the luxury of marrying romantically, and therefore purposelessly and individually. If that wealth was in the form of financial security, it was possible to take passionate love as the fundament of marriage and conceive it as true riches. Romantic love was a privilege of wealthy and thus closed social circles whose existence was neither dependent on the agrarian or industrial-labour context nor defined by the Sisyphean struggle for security.

That *homines academici*[13] should take up Wilde's question and use it as the point at issue in their call for papers is not surprising if one follows Andreas Reckwitz's theory on the invention of creativity: we have a tendency to be Wilde's epigones in relation to our individualism and socialization. The bourgeois and avant-garde Wilde can be interpreted as a pioneer of our own contemporary urban middle-class culture, in which "ideas and practices from former oppositional cultures and subcultures have now achieved hegemony".[14] In that culture, creativity that is directed at singularity seems inevitable and characteristic. This might explain the editors' hypothesis as to why "many couples are looking for alternative expressions of the wedding ritual": modern lovers are on a compulsive quest for an unconventional, outstanding, and singular audio-visual and material performance of their unique love in their very individual marriage. The use of Wilde's question confirms him as a reference point of our own bourgeois

12 Wilde 1969, 173.

13 In his study *Homo Academicus*, Pierre Bourdieu depicts the social constellation of the academic community and establishes "the proportion of sons of farm workers… [is] smaller in the population of the 'powerful', whereas the proportion of sons of primary teachers, craftsmen and tradesmen and above all the sons of businessmen is much greater", Bourdieu 1988, 78.

14 Reckwitz 2017, 4.

culture. This culture assumes that marriages "have become events, a big business with fairs, wedding planners and specific products for the special day(s)" for reasons of individualism.[15] Thus, the intensely loving and unique marrying couple come into focus in a romantically staged wedding that celebrates and exhibits their private happiness and intimate feelings. The wedding's uniqueness is made public to showcase the couple's private bliss. Only the romantic and allegedly individual consensus of the lovers shall be constitutive for the accomplishment of the marriage. Social prosperity as a fundamental precondition for this kind of individualistic and love-centred marriage is disguised by romantic feelings.

MARRIAGE AS A COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE

In my current research I investigate precarious marriage aspirations in the canton of Bern during the "Sattelzeit" (Reinhart Koselleck), the pivotal age between 1750 and 1850. I use the term "precarious marriage aspirations" to refer to conjugal liaisons which arose from controversial marital intentions, marriages that accorded with the dictionary definition of "precarious" in being "not securely held or in position; dangerously likely to fall or collapse". The precariousness of these marriages derived from their specific social, generational, economic, or confessional configuration, which deviated from the prevalent local customs. Thus, the right to marry was, as the dictionary definition of precarious requires, "dependent on chance" and had to be "obtained by entreaty".[16] Precarious marriages had to fight against societal impediments and opposition. Hence, they elucidate that marriages were certainly not an individualistic event in this transitional period in the 18th and 19th centuries, but were involuntarily yet attentively monitored, controlled, and, if necessary, collectively disciplined events in the local community.[17]

An optimal way to approach exemplary precarious marriages in the canton of Bern in this period is to analyse contemporary petitions as historical sources.[18] In these petitions, which requested dispensation from the preacher's reading of the banns from the pulpit on three occasions, the fear of becoming the object of public attention and, therefore, of a "rough music" or a *charivari* is implicit. The threefold banns reading, legally codified and obligatory for the canton of

15 See the call for papers for the current issue of this journal.

16 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/precarious [accessed 13 September 2018].

17 Coontz 2014, 5–9.

18 In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Bern and the rest of the aristocratic-ruled ancient Swiss Federation were occupied by the Napoleonic army. The French imposed a centralised republic. The strongly Napoleonically influenced Helvetic Republic confirmed the right to petition by constitution. Thus, a torrent of individual petitions from all cantons reached the executive authority, although the practice of petitioning had already existed under the *Ancien Régime*.

Bern as well as the rest of the Helvetic Republic, enabled communal control of marital affairs and the rejection of an intended marriage. The banns served as the official public announcement of an intention to marry, made to the parish during the Sunday service. Their reading was intended to avert clandestine marriages undertaken against the will of the families involved and against corporative and communal interests. Dispensation from the reading of the banns was an exemption accorded patricians in this corporative society. Subaltern couples used such petitions to try to avoid attention and thus escape the communal tribunal. The usually public wedding would then be inverted into a private affair. The ritualised and public reproach of a charivari and the like "usually directed [audio-visually and violently expressed] mockery or hostility against individuals who offended against certain community norms".[19] Because of their socio-economical configurations, precarious marriages endangered communal material resources and threatened both customary law and the common ethic. Thus, they adversely affected the prevalent moral economy.[20] The petitions reveal actors who were part of precarious relational configurations and urged the authorities to exclude the public reading of the banns from the pulpit to allow for a more intimate or even secret event.

An example for this finding is the case of petitioner Johannes Hermann and his wife-to-be. Hermann, a master stocking weaver resident in Bern who had been widowed for 20 years, wanted to marry the recently widowed and elderly Catharina Labhardt, who was not a resident of Bern. Because the remarriage of widowers essentially made the redistribution of property less probable and diminished the marriage opportunities for those who were as yet unmarried, Labhardt would be seen as endangering local communal resources. Impediments to marriage, financial resources, and the high age of marital majority all strongly limited the reservoir of eligible women and men. "To avoid the bothersome public gossip at such events", the couple appealed to the republican government for suspension of the requirement that the banns be read publicly from the pulpit.[21] Evidently not only invited guests were present at early modern marriages but also curious, gossiping, and backbiting spectators – whether one wanted them to be there or not. They threatened the bridal couple with infamy and thus with the loss of the early modern symbolic capital of honour and respectability.[22] Another example is provided by a pastor and petitioner "who to avoid sensation wishes to be able to marry without preceding three-time proc-

19 Thompson 1992, 3.

20 On the concept of the moral economy see Thompson 1971, 76–136.

21 "Zu Vermeidung des ärgerlichen Publikums-Geschwäzes bey dergleichen Anlässen", BAR B0#1000/1483#490* 1802–1803, 501–502.

22 On the sociological concept of honour as a symbolic capital see Bourdieu 1979, 95–132. On the concept of honour in early modern societies see Schreiner/Schwerhoff 1995, 2; Dinges 1994, 144; Backmann/Ecker-Offenhäusser 1998.

lamation of the banns".[23] With his request the pastor, a member of the middle class living in the agrarian context of face-to-face communities, indicated that he was by no means eager for the "big event" mentioned in the editors' call for this issue. He wished rather for discretion and privacy. These couples were not interested in an "alternative expression of the wedding ritual", but instead hoped that the expression of their deviant marital relationship would be as quiet as possible, even invisible.[24] Another churchman, a preacher who declared himself "peu fortuné", suggesting he was destitute, and "a friend of silence and calm" petitioned "to avoid noise and scandal that ordinarily accompanies this kind of [sacred] ceremony".[25] Abraham Puenzieux and Susanna Marie Vielland also hoped for dispensation from the need to have the banns read from the pulpit: "His reasons are the following, he fears a charivari, nocturnal celebrations which are ordinarily accompanied in the parish by scandals and caricatures".[26] In their common petition Albrecht Salchli, a councillor, and his fiancée asked for it to be possible for them to marry "with neither pageantry, nor being accompanied by a charivari or being announced with gunshots", because this was often the initiation of "real misfortune".[27]

While many couples in the sources consulted do not name the reasons for their apprehension,[28] Daniel Moser, father of bride-to-be Elisabeth, states them openly: he had promised his daughter to a local man of his own agrarian home town, but in the meantime his daughter had become engaged to another man from a different community. Now this wedding was approaching. In such circumstances, the petitioner said, it was a "silly rural custom of the wedding night, to give a charivari to a woman who does not get married to a local by staging her transfer of the trousseau".[29] How such a charivari was performed, we learn from a contemporary travel report on the Bernese Oberland: the transfer of the trousseau from the bride's home to the home of the newlywed couple was enacted in a parody by unmarried men from the bride's hometown. This simulation was accompanied by clanging cowbells and other noises, produced by whips, pipes, horns, kettles and canes. Equipped with the improvised

23 "der, um Aufsehen zu vermeiden, sich ohne eine vorhergegangene dreymahlige Verkündigung verheyrathen zu können wünscht", BAR B0#1000/1483#490* 1802–1803, 111.

24 See the call for papers for this issue.

25 "ami de la tranquilité & calme"; "d'eviter par là le bruit & l'éclat qui accompagnent ordinairement cette espèce [sacrée] de cérémonies", BAR B0#1000/1483#490* 1802–1803, 267.

26 "Ses motifs sont décidants, il craint un charivari, fetes nocturnes qui sont ordinairement accompagnier dans la Paroisse de scandales et de caricatures", BAR B0#1000/1483#490* 1802–1803, 493.

27 "ohne gepräng, ohne mit chari vari begleitet, noch mit feur-geschoss angekündet zu warden; wirklich ohn-glük", BAR B0#1000/1483#604* 1798–1801, 163–165.

28 In the five-year period from 1798 to 1803, more than 150 petitions from residents of Bern addressed the central government; these documents form the empirical material for my investigation.

29 "ländlicher unsinniger Gebrauch [...], dass in der Hochzeitnacht einer Weibsperson die sich nicht mit einem Ortsbürger verehelichet, ein Charivarii gegeben oder welches nemlich bedeutet das Trossel geführt wird", BAR B0#1000/1483#604* 1798–1801, 423.

instruments, the entourage of young, unmarried men raucously made their way to the couple's new domicile. To remain incognito, the participants were often disguised. They sometimes resorted to violence with "sooty cloth and rags on rods" against rubberneckers or relatives or turned their improvised weapons on the exterior of the houses.[30] Those latter circumstances probably induced Moser to comment that "misfortune" (*Unglück*) could often emerge during the transfer of the trousseau from one house to the other. Hence, "to avoid all unpleasant consequences, one wished to have this marriage blessed in the greatest possible peace".[31]

Another man was afraid of the threatening "caricatures and antics" (*Karikaturen und Possen*) his unmarried masculine peers in the community might perform because of his deviant marriage aspiration.[32] In his petition for dispensation from the banns, he recorded in writing his fear of becoming the victim of mockery and pranks on account of his wanting to marry the widow of a deceased relative. Antics sometimes involved audio-visual accompaniments to marriages which deliberately subverted social roles and customs. The carnivalesque performances of the unmarried men corresponded with a mock trial (*Narrengerichte*) and the Feast of Fools, which acted out the supposedly perverted reality to atone for it publicly.[33] They were generally staged at the end of a cacophonous procession. Another contemporary travel report gives us insight into a specific enactment of such a carnivalesque play: "At the destination they build a circle; the rough music comes to an end; impromptu some wanton pranksters hold farcical speeches, whose content one can guess." If the bride was pregnant before the marriage, this was indicated with a straw puppet. This puppet was either raised on a rod to make it visible to the whole carnival community or else the charivari's participants would "bring it along in a baby cradle, rock it and sing to it". If the bridal couple was poor, "the moody guests trade in cattle or cheese with feigned sincerity, milk the cows while imitating the sound, or pretend to offer the bridal couple very generous gifts for the dowry". When the antics were over, the whole flock returned home "with unruly laughter and noise".[34]

30 "berusste[n] Lumpen und Lappen an Stangen", Wyss 1816–17, 1, 335. For reports of similar rituals cf. Klapisch-Zuber 1987.

31 "wünschte man zu Ausweichung aller unangenehmen Folgen, dass diese Ehe in möglicher Stille eingesegnet würde", BAR B0#1000/1483#604* 1798–1801, 423.

32 BAR B0#1000/1483#604* 1798–1801, 323.

33 Davis 1971, 41–75; Ingram 2004, 288–308; Hoffmann-Krayer 1904, 85–86; "Autor/in" 2015, 442.

34 "Am Orte der Bestimmung wird ein Kreis gebildet; die rasende Musik nimmt ein Ende; und aus dem Stegreife halten ein paar muthwillige Lecker spasshafte Reden, deren Inhalt sich errathen lässt; bringt sie in einer Wiege daher, wiegt sie und singt dazu; handeln die launichten [sic] Gäste mit verstelltem Ernst um Vieh oder Käs, melken mit nachahmendem Geräusch die Kühe, oder machen den Hochzeitleuten zum Schein recht grosse Geschenke zur Aussteuer; mit unbändigem Lachen und Lärmen", Wyss 1816–1817, 1:335–336.

All these examples are about specific and concrete contemporary marriage constellations. There might be local differences in the way a charivari was delivered, but it always accomplished a similar function.[35] It constituted a collectively performed, communicative action of punishment. Its purpose was to denounce deviant behaviour by certain members of the community in a visible way and to that end it was accompanied by a lot of noise. It was intended to penalize deviating members, but also to reintegrate the violators of the social order. Thus, the collective conventions could be reinforced and the social order restored. Charivaris were the early modern audio-visual media *per se*. A community simultaneously sought to affirm and impose its norms visibly and audibly on its members. Abstract social codes found their physical expression in the performances of the charivari, which were visible, noisy, and sometimes even tangible.[36] For example, Moser neglected the prevalent local preference for endogamy with his daughter's marriage arrangement. By breaking his promise to a local, he also broke with the moral economy. Endogamy served the preservation of local resources and therefore was not to be disregarded. Moser experienced first-hand the physically painful consequences of the performative expression even before the upcoming marriage of his daughter: he was "battered in his own home in the cruellest way".[37] Thus, Moser had already been warned what would happen if the wedding of his daughter were to take place publically.

CONCLUSION

The examples presented in this article have shown the tension between the dominant performance of marriages, on one hand, and individual orientations towards romantic love in Switzerland in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century, on the other. At least in Bern's agrarian society with scarce resources, which despite nascent industrialization was still typical for the majority of the population in this period, weddings were largely governed by local collective standards. The audio-visual performances around precarious marriages were neither intimate nor individualistic but carried by common symbolic communication. This collective action reflected not romantic ideals of love, but the locally accentuated moral economy. In contrast to Wilde's bourgeois circles, in such an agrarian community adherence to these specific moral values seemed crucial for its functioning and, as such, its existence. These values had to be brought to mind repeatedly and kept up relentlessly by means of audio-visual perfor-

35 On the evidence of the regional diversity of charivari, rough music etc. see Thompson 1993, 467–533; «Autor/in» 2015, 441–443.

36 "Autor/in" 2015, 435–439; Eibach 2011, 627–644; Scharfe 1970, 186–190.

37 "in seinem eigenen Haus auf das grausamste thäthlich mishandlet", BAR B0#1000/1483#604* 1798–1801, 423.

mance. Collective economic and material resources, including eligible men and women, were essential to the agrarian community. They had to be preserved internally and protected against threats. Rituals of consensus provided a key means by which such threats were held at bay. Charivaris were the audio-visual means for the society to communicate shared values in- and outwardly.

People contravening local norms in the agrarian realm of scarce resources chose petitioning to avoid the publicity and extravagant festivities of a big event. Whether undertaken for material calculations or for the historically relatively recent notion of pure and unique romantic love, these deviant marriages represented a fundamental threat to the agrarian collective society. As the petitions illuminated, the precarious bridal couple feared becoming victims of a charivari, which raised the risk of noise, physical violence, mockery, defamation, and loss of honour.

According to Luhmann, "it is common sociological knowledge that the communal living conditions of past social orders left little leeway for intimate relationships".[38] The generalization of love as code of communication[39] found its respective expression in the performance of intimate relationships in big events like extravagant wedding rituals. The broader diffusion of the emotional luxury of love matches was bound to capitalistic preconditions, which were a shared bourgeois wealth that came from trade, speculation, bureaucracy, science, art, or inheritance and that could provide relief from the hard, collective, and existential context of agrarian labour in fields, woods, and stables. At least for Switzerland, the respective structural preconditions for love based individualistic marriages were not available to the masses until the end of the 19th century.

Finally, an interesting detail should not be left unmentioned. In 1790, in a single breath the Bernese ancien régime renewed the obligation for the three-time publication of the banns for non-patricians and confirmed the old patrician exemption from publication of the banns. Right after the short republican intermezzo known as the *Helvetik* (1798–1803), the old patrician elites, again in power after the end of the French occupation, reinstated the obligation in the form of one of the first laws with the following words:

Although as martial law required, these dispensations were only allowed in emergencies, because of the extensive and hardly observable limits they were often the cause of misrule. Hence, the orderly proclamation seems to be increasingly necessary now, partly because of the increasingly immorality, partly because of the many foreigners and partly, finally, because of the remaining abolition of local patrician privileges.[40]

38 Luhmann 1986, 15.

39 Luhmann 1986, 18–33.

40 "Auch war diese Nachlassung zufolge der Ehegerichtssatzung [...] nur in Nothfällen [...] erlaubt, hat aber bey den ausgedehnten schwer zu beobachtenden Schranken öftere Unordnungen veranlasst.

Doubtlessly, in the Bernese context during the transition from the 18th to the 19th century intimacy was a privilege for people who could afford love. The performance of a wedding as a large and public ritual was a communal compulsion rather than the expression of an individualistic and therefore creative event. Performative weddings as the epitome of individualism are a very young historical development, the produce of a late-modern bourgeois culture of singularity.

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