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Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler (ed.)

Using Media in Religious Studies
Strategies of Representing Religion
in Scholarly Approaches

SCHÜREN

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

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

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

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A scholar of religious studies and social anthropology, Dr. Brigitte Luchesi is an experienced documentary photographer. For Luchesi, the photograph is a form of participant observation, used in particular during Hindu rituals. It contains aspects of both production and representation that include the agency of photograph-taking, the social interaction between photographer and person(s) depicted, the photographer's place and perspective; personal interests, and scholarly and emotional reactions.

Participation in religious rituals and other acts of faith is most often a multi-sensual experience. Sharing this experience with those not present could involve long and detailed verbal descriptions, but a photograph can transmit impressions and informative details compactly and directly, providing sensual access too. The traits of documentary photographs prove useful when the images are deployed in public contexts. The relationship between text and photograph should be acknowledged, with the information the picture transports recognized as a medium in its own right.

The cover image shows Tamil worshippers of the Hindu goddess Sri Kamadchi in front of her temple in Hamm Uentrop, Germany, during the annual temple festival held on 25 June 2017. They are waiting for the mobile cult image of the goddess to be brought out of its normal location and progressed through the neighbourhood. The two well-dressed women have taken a vow to walk in front of the chariot all the way, carrying on their heads pots with sanctified water.

For further information visit <https://aestor.net/?staff=dr-brigitte-luchesi>

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Using Media in Religious Studies

Strategies of Representing Religion in Scholarly Approaches Editorial

As a student in the 1980s, I was first made aware of the existence of different cultures of “doing humanities” by three professors at the University of Göttingen. The medium they used in their lectures and seminars was their own personality and rhetorical style. The philologist reined in the personal, in an uncharismatic but very structured and reflective way of lecturing, as he tackled Islamic cultural history. Only later would I realize that this approach had parallels with the theoretical debate within German religious studies over the cultivation of distance from one’s subject of research, over controlling one’s emotions, which otherwise might hinder objectivity. Another professor, who had a quite good sense of humor, was fond of highlighting the facts of his subject – religious studies – with little narrations: the Hindus he saw one year in a procession in Benares took the exact same route the following year, but as a house had been built on their path, the whole procession entered through the front door and left through the kitchen door toward the garden. This account generated a little laughter and, subsequently, a critical postcolonial debate over whether it was right for the professor to encourage his students to laugh about a foreign culture. Nevertheless, the students had learned that rituals can be characterized by a certain stability. The third professor, with a Near Eastern and Muslim background, liked to display a U.S.-American professorial habitus. A communicative and charismatic person, he used stories from his cosmopolitan daily life to engage students’ interest in a certain topic before teaching his own social-science and theory driven field of Near Eastern politics. Even if these styles of mediating knowledge about religions were different and even contradictory, we certainly learned a lot in every lecture.

Reflecting on styles of teaching can be a starting point for deeper debate about using media in (re)presenting religions in the humanities. Everyday lecturing can be done in very different ways, and anyone who has attended an international conference will be aware of the variety of speech-making cultures. Distinct from personal style or regional culture, younger academics are now

more systematically trained to use didactics and, especially, different media to avoid only talking during a lecture, or simply reading out a prepared text. Does that approach have an impact on the transfer of facts? Or we might ask, with Marshall McLuhan, to what extent is the medium the message even in academic life?¹

The media turn, material turn and body turn have brought added complexity to our debate. There is a growing consciousness of the sensory dimensions within religions, of the “things” believers touch or the sounds they hear, for example. The study of media in religions and cultures is a common practice within disciplines with a focus on religion. The deconstruction of media is multifaceted and performed by analyzing texts, by focusing on material and visual cultures, by dealing with traditional and popular media or with film and mass media like the Internet. When religious studies no longer looks largely to texts as its “material”, the media we explore is more plural, which influences the selection of scholarly representations. When we are working on media within religions, it makes sense for our students to visit a nearby Buddhist monastery instead of just reading or talking about the topic in class; publications about Hindu soundscapes contain recordings;² monographs about material culture visualize their objects in illustrations. We are well aware that religions are perceived and communicated in complex cultures by methods of media use that also evoke emotions.

At the same time, while research on media within religions is extensive and well established, the use of media for representing religion in scholarly work remains rather neglected. This is astonishing, for media can also have various effects and impacts within the scholarly community. The lack of explicit engagement can become evident when formal institutional questions arise. Some years ago, at the University of Zurich a dissertation about a Japanese pilgrimage was done primarily as an ethnographic film,³ which per se comes closer to the reality of the performances researched than could any book. But to have only a written supplement explaining the film’s ideas seemed to underplay scholarly achievement.

We are only at the very beginning of reflection on how the use of media will also change our academic habitus. The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (German National Library) at Frankfurt am Main faced sharp criticism some months ago as some scholars expressed their anger at the library’s new tendency to make available electronic sources instead of the “authentic” books. The library’s responsibilities for preservation and circulation seemed well served by its supply-

1 McLuhan/Fiore 1967.

2 Wilke/Moebus 2011.

3 Arukihenro – Walking Pilgrims (Tommi Mendel and Atsuko Toda, CH 2006).

ing electronic versions for daily use, with works even available to more than one person at a time. But bibliophiles who find pleasure in being present in the library to handle the material book were indignant, even though it is still possible to read the physical copy, despite the extra demand on the library administration this entails.⁴

The scholarly identity perhaps makes it no wonder that the written and physical text is still predominant in the humanities. As every perception is a multi-layered sensory experience, an article in a book never simply transports neutral mentefacts. An article is, for example, framed by its appearance in either an established book series that signals seriousness or a paperback that seems more easy going. The electronic publication is perhaps more neutral as it lacks certain layers of sensory perception. All this has much to do with our embodied routines as scholars.⁵

The *Journal for Film, Religion and Media (JFRM)* is a good example of a contemporary development that sees the regular use of texts in combination with, for example, film stills that hint at the medium of film. While such practice expands the horizons of media representation, it also raises tricky theoretical and methodological questions, for illustrations are not simply supplemental, but must be read critically, just like any sentence, especially when interwoven with text. Every representation always transports its own logic and perspective. René Magritte joined others in engaging this question when, decades ago, he depicted this problem using humor: he drew a horse, a painting of a horse, and a man speaking the animal's name and added a line that reads "An object never does the same as its name or its image".⁶

The November 2017 issue of *JFRM* explores the possibilities for using media in representing religions. David Morgan has proposed that scholarly deployment of certain media is intended to signal objectivity. For example, charts might be used to display empirical "truth" or a photograph to "demonstrate" a position in an argument: to that end figures and pictures are often introduced without explanation of the perspective in which they lie or analysis of their production and context.⁷ This issue of the journal analyzes media as a crucial part of research, as a means of both producing and representing scholarly results.

In this issue, contributors have been invited to participate to an interdisciplinary debate about the significance and impact of media within academic work on religion. This self-reflection about producing and transmitting data in analyzing, deconstructing and representing religion through media also considers

4 Representing the position of the traditional readers: Thiel 2016. For the library see Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, n.d.

5 Reckwitz 2003, 282–301.

6 Magritte 1975, 33.

7 Morgan 2005, 39–47.

the emotional impact of media upon scholarly research as well as the different genres used in academic work. Reflection on our own perspectives and awareness of the recipients' possible perceptions are necessary if our aims are to inform and to make our methods transparent and suitable for what we want to express.

The topic of religion adds another layer to the scenery. Working on religions, we are fully aware of the different emic and etic perspectives. Scholars regularly adopt an intersubjective approach, but we work on topics that are normally highly subjective. Noting that a bird's eye view may still be limited, Russell T. McCutcheon suggests we leave space for an inner perspective as well, for example in the form of direct quotations of "original voices". He also asks us to consider what happens if the scholar working on religions has a religious faith. And we are also to reflect on how religions influence the cultures of the humanities.⁸

Orientalist Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003) provides an example that runs counter to common contemporary theoretical and methodological positions. Schimmel was a member of the German school of *Verstehende Religionswissenschaft*, or religious studies of understanding, and adopted an interreligious approach. Working on Sufism, she came so close to Islam that she might have been Muslim herself. Many Muslims admire her work for this inner sympathy. Even if the mainstream of contemporary religious studies does not want to follow her academic direction, where it is sometimes not possible to separate description from belief,⁹ from a didactic perspective her techniques of representation of religious content provides a surplus, in a marked comparison with a very rational presentation of facts. Schimmel was able to convey and mediate an emotional dimension within mystical poetry. Her approach, a product of her personality, combined the emic and the etic.

About 30 years ago, the University of Göttingen's ethnographic collection was the focus of a protest by Australian Aboriginals who wanted to stop a *churinga*, a sacred object, from being displayed as an illustration of their young men's initiation rituals. This wooden piece represented the virility of the young men, a power threatened if the object was viewed by a woman. In this case the emic perspective caused an academic institution to change its mode of exhibition. The *churinga* was returned to storage.¹⁰

This issue of *JRFM* contains three reflections on the theoretical and methodological use of media in religious studies.

In "Using Media to Teach Religious Studies: Reflections on Second-order Mediatization of Religions", Mirko Roth addresses media in higher-education learn-

8 McCutcheon 1999.

9 Schimmel 1994. The book's structure and argument lead its readers finally to a non-rational sphere where God can only be experienced.

10 Beinbauer-Köhler 2010, 129.

ing contexts. Although a foundational task, the teaching of students has to date garnered only limited systematic consideration. Roth explores both the use of media within religions and the use of media with a class. He seeks a strict differentiation and deconstruction of media contexts, exploring, for example, ways to let students hear a recitation of the Qur'an and acknowledge its plural forms. In general, he pleads for media to be used, but with sensitive integration within a university setting. He presents examples of teaching situations, and of steps in the learning process. The emic and etic perspectives, along with the emotions a certain medium might evoke, are always part of his deliberations and part of his approach to our discipline. In Germany there is no institutionalized tradition of didactic training for scholars at universities, although over recent decades optional training has been available. Roth is highly qualified in this field and combines his knowledge of teaching with a theoretical instrumentarium for dealing with media and religion.

In their article, entitled “*SinnRäume – An Exhibition on Contemporary Religion in Germany. Exhibition Practice as a Medium in Religious Studies*”, Celia Fitz and Anna Matter write about the creation of an exhibition at the Museum of Religions at the Philipps University of Marburg in 2015. The exhibition was an outcome of a student project which involved an empirical study of private homes as religious spaces. Interviews, documentary photographs and religious objects were combined and displayed on movable modules that formed rooms, as in a house. Visitors of all ages can explore and experience this space in a sensory combination of moving, looking, touching and hearing, while inspired and guided by texts that shape their encounter with homes and religions. The authors explain the project's outward appearance as a product of scholarly approaches to research on lived religion. Again, the insider and outsider perspectives are significant, in both distinguishing and combining the representation of the examples chosen. The result is an ongoing and thoughtfully designed exhibition that received an award from the University of Marburg.

Larissa Carneiro focuses on an example that tackles the topic of this issue from the perspective of American Evangelicalism. In “*Emulating Science: The Rhetorical Figures of Creationism*” she explores Young-Earth Creationists' techniques for convincing people using media of natural science – in particular with charts and models displayed at the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky – that are well known from Darwin's presentation of the theory of evolution. She deconstructs the visualization and modeling of scientific results, going back to the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle. These tools are deployed at the Creation Museum to demonstrate to visitors – to “persuade” them – that the earth was created by God in six days and that Darwin's species development is baseless. The staging of the Creationists' explanation draws from a common well of mediatic forms in natural science. Carneiro also interprets this installation in terms of the spatial

dimension, noting that rhetorician John Lynch characterized the Creation Museum as a “spatial sermon”. Carneiro explains her observations as evidence of the “emulation” of scientific techniques and a scientific culture of visualization. She consciously decided not to challenge the Creationist visualizations in her article.

These authors inspire us to consider what more might be done in this field of media and religious studies. For instance, international or regional cultures of media in studying religions might be more systematically researched, and the aesthetic effects of different media on scholars addressed. And readers of this interdisciplinary journal will likely be intrigued to see how this predominantly religious studies perspective might bring reactions from neighboring disciplines.

Uwe Wirth contributed an inspirational editorial article to the edited collection *Im Zwischenraum* (Inside the In-between Space).¹¹ He analyzed the content and layout of scholarly texts from the perspective of the study of literature, and he distinguished layers of argumentation, found principally in the main text, in paratexts at the beginning and end of books, and in subordinate or broader discourses in the footnotes. Even different versions of headings can guide the reader through textual spaces. An introduction – like this one – can be characterized as an in-between space, as a bridge that leads the reader to the articles, but it can also function as an open space, leaving room for the development of further discussion.

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FILMOGRAPHY

ARUKIHENRO – WALKING PILGRIMS (Tommi Mendel and Atsuko Toda, CH 2006).

Using Media to Teach Religious Studies

Reflections on Second-order Mediatisation of Religions

ABSTRACT

In terms of media theories, teaching religious studies provides a second-order mediatisation of religious phenomena – a mediatisation of phenomena already mediated by religious traditions. That tension needs to be reflected upon, as it raises a number of questions before we even reach the classroom. Furthermore, in class another tension comes to light, between teaching objectives and their limits. By formulating a hypothesis and problematising these tensions, this article develops a strategy based on the application of a concept of “competence acquisition”. How this strategy might look in a teaching scenario is demonstrated from an introductory seminar on Islam.

KEYWORDS

didactics, mediatisation, communication and media theory, religious communication and media

BIOGRAPHY

Mirko Roth is a postdoctoral member of the Department for the History of Religions at Marburg University. He has been teaching religious studies for more than ten years and holds several certificates in the field of didactics. His research focuses on ritual and performance theories, communication and media theories as well as the history of Islam and Cuban Santería.

The medial mediation of religions in higher education – a second-order mediatisation – should not be forgotten in any volume on strategies of representing religion in scholarly approaches. Even brief reflection on the use of media in teaching religious studies results in any number of questions that might be discussed. Some of these questions are based on fundamental considerations that long precede any specific reflections on the use of media use or teaching methodologies. These include, most importantly, (1) What do we want to achieve through the teaching of religious studies? What are our learning objectives? And (2) What can the teaching of religious studies achieve? Where are the limits?

As we address the first questions, core issues concerning religious studies as an academic discipline are broached. We might wonder about the purpose of religious studies and how this purpose can be achieved. And we might ask, What is religion? The second questions take us into issues of modern teaching and its methods and limits, and also force us to consider whether and how understanding the Other is possible.

Additionally, using media in teaching religious studies moves us beyond the use of media per se into religious studies-specific reflection on how media can be used to mediate an already mediated phenomenon that more often than not is also grounded in a different social and cultural context. It is therefore necessary first to reflect on the first-order mediatisation process of religious traditions themselves, then to consider second-order mediatisation processes on the part of the religious scholar, and finally to examine the discrepancies and tension between these two levels. This approach will also help answer the questions raised above.

My didactical hypothesis for how media might be used in the teaching of religious studies to mediate religious facts from a religious studies perspective is as follows: media used in the first-order mediatisation of religion should as much as possible be permitted to “speak for themselves”, but in the teaching situation – in a second-order mediatisation – must be provided with a critical cultural and religious context. One suggestion for how this necessarily critical approach could look and might work will be developed in this article.

I further suggest that a religious studies teaching strategy might be designed such that the tensions inherent in the possibilities and limits of teaching religious studies as well as issues of first and second-order mediatisation can be resolved through the application of a concept termed here “competence acquisition”.¹ Teaching religious studies must be done in such a way that in the course of their studies students acquire the necessary competence to grasp and resolve these tensions for themselves, in the form of (a) the competence to learn critically (b) religious studies competence (c) intercultural competence and (d) media competence.

In approaching my hypothesis as plausibly as possible, I will proceed as follows: since unreflected preconceptions influence our attitudes and actions when we teach religious studies, I begin with a series of assumptions focusing on media and communication about what one purpose of religious studies might be and about what religion might be considered to be. These assumptions are based on the contemporary aesthetic approach of a “material reli-

1 Within German-language discourse there is friction between educational theories concerning “competence acquisition” (Kompetenzerwerb) and education (Bildung) that cannot be rendered properly in English. The concepts of “competence acquisition” and “learning objectives” as used here partly comprise Bildung. Cf. further Obst 2010.

gion”. I then look at the possible objectives of teaching religious studies as well as its limitations. After the reflection on the above-mentioned questions and their reduction, in the two preceding sections, to issues of teaching religious studies, a possible resolution of the raised tensions in facets of the concept of “competence acquisition” follows. I then describe concrete examples to demonstrate the possible use of media in the teaching of religious studies. The essay concludes with a short consideration of a possible outlook for religious media studies.

This essay cannot provide any universal answers. My intention is to sharpen the discipline’s vision, to specify issues and to highlight what I feel should be considered in the design and implementation of religious studies teaching strategies.

ASSUMPTIONS: RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND RELIGION AS MEDIATISED “SPACES OF PERCEPTION”

Our preconceptions as lecturers about the subject, purpose and style of religious studies have implicit and direct consequences for our teaching.² Aware of their impact, we need to address and reflect on such preconceptions before we can turn to our teaching objectives, which should also be addressed and formulated in advance. In this context I suggest religions be considered culturally specific “spaces of perception” that influence humans sensually and cognitively as mediated phenomena that are in turn influenced by humans.³

Humans are born into a world that is objectified inter-subjectively by other members of the group in communication and institutionalisation processes. This world and this particular reality are socially constructed and are constantly reconfigured by members of respective groups. This reality exists for humans in symbolic systems encoded in various media⁴ that structure whole “spaces of perception”: the human sensory system is exposed to a cultivated environment that can be highly artificial and highly complex. As one such possible “space

2 Cf. Silverman 2013, 11.

3 On the following remarks see Knoblauch 1995, Meyer 2011, Mohn 2012, Mohr 2005, Morgan 2016, Prohl 2012.

4 Because of its ubiquitous prevalence, the notion of media is blurred. The first step commonly taken in systematisation is to distinguish primary, secondary and tertiary media: primary media of perception (related to the senses); secondary media of understanding (verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems, e.g. languages); tertiary media of dissemination in space and time (books, tapes, TV etc.). Cf. Malik/Rüpke/Wobbe 2007, 7–8. Religious traditions use media that can be categorised in this manner for theological reflection and for creating public images. However, when it comes to media usage in rituals for representing the extraordinary, these media differ from everyday media. (See “Outlook” section of this article.) In terms of communication theory, beyond their semantic dimensions media have a material substratum that is part of the material aspects of communication. This materiality is an important factor with respect to the media as a tool and instrument: in constituting communication situations, coordinating communication processes, modifying semiotic systems and constructing social realities. Cf. Sandbothe 2011, 120–121.

of perception”, a cityscape consists of, among other things, a climatological-geographical space, an infrastructure shaped by social norms with differently coded control systems and a typical architecture that channels the people with their perceptions and moves vehicles and goods. This “space of perception” is additionally coded with identifiable sounds that form specific soundscapes and with a particular urban smell. These features interplay with climatological factors such as temperature, air pressure and humidity, which leave their imprint on the scene and colour how it is perceived.

“Spaces of perception” are thus, with their original environment patterns and unique aesthetics, culturally highly specific. They emerge as a response to and as management of the lived environment, helping make sense of it and enabling orientation within it and in communication with other members of a group in a given climatological, geographical, economic and socio-historical context. These multidimensional and variously mediated complexes of symbolic systems leave their imprint on the human being: on the one hand, these different “spaces of perception” are internalised with all the senses in various phases of socialisation so that the individual literally embodies them. Likewise, this socialised group member internalises these symbolic systems cognitively in their dimensions of meaning, which in turn become patterns for interpretation. Cultural and milieu-specific patterns of perception and perceptual habitus are thereby created, to which emotions are also subject. Human beings thus inhabit the most diverse of “spaces of perception” and encounter them with all their senses; they can orient intuitively, emotionally and cognitively in them and in doing so together with other group members can change them continuously.

The religious aesthetic structuring of environments by individual religions and religious currents creates, in turn, “spaces of perception” by means of their own communicative and educational institutions, each with its own specific media. In this way the awareness, perceptions, movements, emotions and interpretations of religious actors can be channelled. It should be noted here that religious actors in what is superficially one and the same religion experience quite different “spaces of perception” depending on historical period, cultural context, social milieu, family tradition and so on; the imprint of the religion on the respective religious actor is thus quite different as well.

For this reason and against this background, I see one plausible objective of religious studies research to be the reconstruction of such “spaces of perception” and of the four-dimensional symbolic complexes that constitute them in their material, medial, performative and receptive-aesthetic aspects as discursively and dialectically conventionalised and reconfigured by the members of the group.⁵

5 Cf. Geertz 1987, 9; Rüpke 2007, 35–43; Waardenburg 1986, 30–32. Gladigow (1988, 33) saw the purpose of religious studies research to be the reconstruction of culturally and religion-specific interpretation,

Despite the legitimate debates about research methods and even the object of research, there exists a broad consensus among religious scholars about research style and the ethical conditions under which the objectives of religious studies are to be achieved. That is, as an empirical, descriptive and non-normative discipline rooted in the humanities, religious studies is non-theological in the sense that it examines religious statements independent of their truth value. The object of religious studies is the forms and expressions of “human religion”.⁶

Before we continue our examination of media in teaching religious studies, we should not only reflect on our preconceptions but also ask ourselves what we want to achieve in our teaching.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS: POSSIBLE OBJECTIVES IN TEACHING RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND ITS LIMITS

What are our learning objectives when we teach religious studies? Only when this question is answered can the content and the structure of teaching be discussed effectively and, in turn, issues of methodologies and the concomitant choice of media be addressed.

From a didactic perspective, learning objectives can be broken down into three components: cognitive, affective and pragmatic. Cognitive learning objectives focus on intellectual skills such as knowledge and understanding; affective learning objectives refer to values, positions and attitudes; pragmatic learning objectives are concerned with skills that are necessary for the practice of the discipline. In addition, learning objectives are distinguished by their degree of complexity (in ascending order): knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation.⁷

Generally speaking, learning objectives in religious studies can be formulated – with variations and differentiated to meet the requirements of a particular course or seminar – as follows. Cognitive learning objectives can be seen as concerned with the histories of various religions, religious facts and beliefs as well as (religious studies) theories employed for their analysis and classification. Affective learning objectives are mainly the learning of religious studies research ethics and style. The pragmatic learning objectives include acquisition of the professional language of religious studies as well as experience of the critical use of media sources of all kinds, comparison of religions and other (empirical) methods. When these objectives are realised, we, as representatives of a university institution called “religious studies”, have socialised students of reli-

symbol and communication systems. This approach is merely expanded upon here.

6 Cf. Stausberg 2012, 1–3; Waardenburg 1986, 116–118; Wach 2001, 26–29.

7 Cf. Böss-Ostendorf/Senft 2010, 176–178; Laack 2014, 386–388.

gious studies to become religious scholars with a shared-knowledge canon and a common language and attitude as well as a shared toolkit and thus able to represent our particular discipline in the public sphere.⁸

So what do we want to achieve in our teaching of religious studies? Again and again I hear lecturers complaining that they do not get through their material. This may have many reasons, but we need also ask, can merely getting through the material be the point? And if so, how can that best be achieved? The times when “funnel learning” and “container communication” were considered legitimate teaching models are long gone. These practices assumed that information could be enclosed in words or sentences in a container-like manner and passed on and unpacked by a recipient without loss of meaning, funnelled, as it were, into their brain. Communication is a highly complex process with numerous uncertainties that are highly dependent on the prior knowledge and affective perception processes of the recipient. The result is quite individual and potentially idiosyncratic readings of what has been communicated, which proves difficult for instructors, because their information is no longer under their control. But to merely get through the material cannot be our goal, for to know that the Prophet Muhammad founded the Ummah (the Muslim community) in Medina in 623 CE is not yet to understand that this new social form represented a socio-religious revolution for central Arabia. Is the objective of teaching religious studies to elicit understanding? Do we want to evoke understanding by explaining the connections between socio-historical and religious facts?

In German-language religious studies, a current developed around the mid-20th century that called itself “understanding religious studies” (*verstehende Religionswissenschaft*). Gustav Mensching, and others, proposed that the symbolic level (“the sacred” as the signified) could be experienced and understood via the real level (the physical-material signifier) through empathy and personal experience, the application of the symbol in one’s own experience.⁹ In modern cultural studies, such essentialist and normative perspectives and approaches are no longer viable. Anti-essentialist and empirical religious studies methods and theories have demonstrated the cultural specificity of the perceptions, interpretations and meaning (re)production of religious actors – notwithstanding the fact that the validity of “the sacred” must remain a question for another discipline.

The term “understanding” in the following thus is to be understood in relation to the degree of complexity of learning objectives with regard to the academic relationship of “explaining and understanding”: grounded explanations

8 Cf. Engler/Stausberg 2011, 129–134; Laack 2014, 377. For learning objectives in religious studies in relation to the constructive alignment model cf. Laack 2014, 395–398. For methods of teaching religious studies with the premise of action-based didactics based on Laack 2014 cf. Weiß/Rademacher 2015.

9 Cf. Mensching n.d., 9–12.

of the correlations between individual facts should reconstruct their complex meanings and the relevant culturally specific horizons and thus lead to understanding.¹⁰ But as education scholars have long been aware, as instructors we can neither funnel knowledge nor create understanding. Further limits on teaching religious studies coincide, on the one hand, with the usual limits of university-level teaching and are, on the other hand, specific to the situation of teaching religious studies:

First, despite all the measures that can be taken, we cannot reach all students. Personal circumstances, learning dispositions and the above-mentioned risks of communication make a perfect mediation impossible. But by considering concentration spans, the concomitant changing of social forms and shifting media support (chalkboard, moderation cards, flip charts, PowerPoint, etc.), temporary personal circumstances can be cushioned and learning dispositions addressed. Furthermore, short evaluation methods at the end of the lesson (such as “one-minute papers”) can be used to identify and resolve acute points of misunderstanding.

Secondly, owing to factors inherent to the university context (space, time, equipment, etc.) and the complex and culturally specific character of the topic as such, it is impossible to discuss religious facts in all their complexity. That said, a didactic reduction can at least address the most relevant aspects of our object, while the use of examples or case studies can demonstrate more or less general rules, patterns and structures.

Thirdly, the teaching object of religious studies is often a non-European or pre-modern phenomenon, whose “spaces of perception” are usually quite different from our own. We thus often look at foreign cultural or religious phenomena in non-temporal and/or non-European contexts of meaning whose material aspects, media coding and performative contexts elicit different meanings for respective actors with different effects and triggering different emotions. Here, a form of understanding the other is required that – in light of the source material, the scientific observer perspective and epistemological hurdles – cannot be fully achieved but only be approximated. That said, since in any case the afore mentioned culture, religion, milieu and role-specific plurality even within a single religious tradition cannot be generalised, one’s own (methodically validated) observations and sensory experiences can form at least a point of (medially reflected and critically systematised) departure.

If we consider these limits and in responding to them apply the appropriate methods and means available to us, we can create basic conditions that will ensure better acquisition of knowledge, catalyse an understanding process and promote development of the competence to analyse religious facts and apply

10 Cf. Tetens 2013, 19–23; Rudolph 1992, 76.

religious studies methodologies critically. Therefore, the high aim of teaching religious studies should be to design learning situations and teaching scenarios in such a way that they enable students to acquire those competencies that identify a scholar of religious studies. In my mind, these include, in addition to more general skills of critical learning competence with regard to religious studies, three other fields of competence that make possible the critical reconstruction of religions as mediated phenomena with their various “spaces of perception”: (1) religious studies competence, (2) intercultural/interreligious competence and (3) media competence.

Since critical learning competence can be assumed to be a standard skill of a university graduate,¹¹ I will not address it in the following; instead I emphasise the latter three skill sets, thus focusing on the issue of media competence.

RESOLUTION: ACQUISITION OF NECESSARY COMPETENCIES

In order to test my hypothesis of a critical perception of second-order mediation in the successful teaching of religious studies, individual teaching scenarios must be designed that will meet the above-mentioned learning objectives and ensure the concomitant acquisition of the associated competencies. I consider religious studies competence (1) as described above to be the internalisation of the research style inherent to the discipline, the ability to apply religious studies methods and the possession of historical knowledge and religious studies theories that are used to classify and reconstruct religious facts. Such competence can be achieved in the course of a study programme through learning and understanding, practice and application, critical accompaniment and reflection. The sphere of intercultural competence (2) is, for me, a core religious studies competence, but within the framework of teaching religious studies I see it as a separate focus. I understand intercultural competence to be the understanding that socio-historical developments are contingent, cannot be interpreted by applying teleological, universalist or evolutionary models and are dependent on many contextual factors. As a result – as described above – highly specific infrastructures, societies, cultures and religions (which are also constantly changing) emerge over generations; their complex symbolic systems have unique dimensions of meaning in specific “spaces of perception”. These in turn influence distinctive patterns of perception and perceptual habitus and suggest cultural and religion-specific options for interpretation and action. Students of religious studies must therefore learn to understand that their own patterns of interpretation cannot remain unquestioned and can at best serve as a conditional foil for any such interpretation, because these complex symbolic systems with

11 Cf. Laack 2014, 392–395.

genuine “spaces of perception” have their own culturally specific characteristics and specificities and must be understood as webs of interpretation and meaning of their own.

The notion of media competence (3) does not mean, as it might in everyday language, the responsible use of – for the most part – new media, but aims at an understanding that religions are mediated phenomena encoded in different media. That is, to ensure that (religious studies) media competence is acquired, religious studies teaching concepts must

- reflect different dimensions of media concepts and be able to consider various media typologies.¹²
- examine the relationship between media and the body’s sensory system and perception apparatus.¹³
- recognise the links between media and both role differentiation and social structures.¹⁴
- reconstruct the media hierarchies that are favoured by the actors of a specific culture at a given point in time.¹⁵
- identify those media used to create specific religious “spaces of perception”. How do these media differ from the media of everyday communication? How does this religious media hierarchy differ from that of a more general social hierarchy and which patterns of perception and perceptual habitus emerge?¹⁶
- examine the horizons of meanings that these media occupy even in their material and performative dimensions.¹⁷

Understanding these aspects is necessary if one wants to understand the “stage” upon which religious facts are performed, i.e. how they are mediated, so that students can, after a grounded explanation, classify and in turn understand them critically and in culturally appropriate terms.¹⁸ Furthermore, the practical implementation of these considerations in the teaching of religious studies provides the basis upon which students of religious studies can acquire the necessary competencies to be able to effectively and independently differentiate the media-theoretical tensions between first-order and second-order mediation and their respective meaning horizons. Ideally, the tensions inherent in the field are thus resolved in the concept of “competence acquisition”. What that means for the teaching of religious studies, its conception,

12 Cf. Ziemann 2006, 18–21; Malik/Rüpke/Wobbe 2007, 7–9. Cf. further Münker/Roesler 2008.

13 Cf. Mohr 2005.

14 Cf. Ziemann 2006, esp. 11–14, 25–35.

15 Cf. Lotman 1990, esp. 294–296; Posner 2008, esp. 55–58.

16 Cf. Mohn 2012; Stolz 2001, esp. 80–145.

17 Cf. Krämer 2004, Mohr 2005, Prohl 2012.

18 Cf. Leach 1978, esp. 118–121.

teaching structure and methods as well as its media use will be addressed in the following.

EXAMPLES: MEDIA USE IN THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

How can the above-formulated didactic hypothesis be implemented practically? Let us take two illustrative example topics from an introductory seminar on Islam: (1) the Qur'an and (2) the obligatory prayer and the mosque.

It can be said, initially, of the structure of the course that after the preparatory instruction units, consideration of first-order mediatisation should alternate with that of second-order mediatisation, i.e. critical religious studies interpretation. Similarly, a course could be structured in learning, group and plenum phases (think–pair–share) or in alternating input and output phases.¹⁹

To introduce those students who have had little or no contact with Muslim religious worlds to the subject, initial contact with audio-visual media support should be established, with history, beliefs, forms of appearance and expression as well as their historical development and plurality addressed. This step is necessary to translate, by means of communication, what is absent in terms of space and time into something more tangible upon which the units that follow can build concretely and substantively.

Reflection on the media concept as well as the development of a media typology based on the illustrative material in the introductory video can then follow, asking

- What all function here as media?
- What particular media of religious communication can be identified?
- Which different media do Muslims use in which contexts of their religious practice?

By means of a unit focussing on beliefs and forms of expression as well as on the religious histories of Islam, the importance and meaning of media and media use can again be examined and a media hierarchy identified. It should not be forgotten that, in consideration of its geographical dissemination, historical developments and the plurality of religious currents and milieus, no universal generalisations can be made about Islam.

Once this foundation has been laid, the focal issues can be accessed quite easily. Each of the following units should be prepared using an introductory reading or practical assignment, to ensure a first rough point of orientation (think).

19 Cf. Böss-Ostendorf/Senft 2010, 243–266.

QUR'AN

In the units on the Qur'an, I would consider it useful to introduce into the teaching situation editions and translations of the Qur'an that differ in various respects (language, size, materiality, typology, ornamentation, etc.). Individually or with a partner, a first impression of a sensual and cognitive nature should be identified (pair) that can then be discussed in the class (share).²⁰ These first impressions are guided by the preparatory "think" assignment with which the instructor sets a thematic focus.

On a meta-level, this class situation often reveals all too clearly that the medial socialisation of students in Germany appears to be routinised in two respects: first, with respect to a fixation less on aesthetics than on content (many begin to read the text); secondly, with respect to a scientific classification of the medium book (examination of the title information, the register, annotation apparatus, etc.). This can easily be traced back, on the one hand, to theoretical units and to different and culture-specific "spaces of perception" as they are imprinted onto actors, channel actions and evoke behaviours, and, on the other hand, to the differentiation between first-order and second-order mediatisation.

The following section addresses the necessary critical religious studies classification of the preparatory reading assignment. From a religious-historical perspective, knowledge of the editing and reception history of the Qur'an, its manifold legitimate readings and the historical and socio-political conditions of its development can be very helpful, as is knowledge of the fact that the text is the gravitational centre of many Islamic sciences: for Qur'an exegesis, Hadith studies, Qur'an readings and Qur'an-based philology, jurisprudence and philosophy. Relevant for a religious studies approach to the Qur'an are, among other things, structure, styles and themes in the Qur'an as well as its implementation in religious practice, which varies situationally and locally as well as in different milieus.²¹

Identifying the dimensions of meaning attributed to the Qur'an by pious Muslims as inimitable, based on the Arabic language's being extraordinarily beautiful and at the same time the Word of God and a witness to the miracle of Muhammad's prophethood, appears to me to be indispensable both in terms of religious studies analysis and media typological classification. It is then possible to discuss in class how many Qur'ans are in fact circulating from an inner-Muslim perspective. This dimension of meaning can be revealed in a comparative religions approach and can open illuminating horizons for students socialised in

20 If devout Muslims are taking part in the course, it should not be forgotten that they have in the past most likely only encountered the Qur'an in cultic purity and that they might take offence at the Qur'an coming into physical contact with non-believers. This can form a catalyst for a reflection on different levels of mediatisation.

21 Cf. Bauer 2015, Bobzin 2001, Neuwirth 2010.

European-Christian traditions. As the *tertium comparationis* “Word of God”, the Qur’an can be better compared with Jesus Christ than with the Bible. In Christianity the Word is made flesh in Jesus Christ; in Islam the Word of God is made into book in the Qur’an. It is for this reason that the Qur’an can most certainly be regarded as the central medium of Islam. But as scripture and book of the Word of God or as a recited Word of God?²²

It is important that this media typological tension be addressed, because although the oral dimension of the Qur’an cannot be overestimated, it often remains under-illuminated. The power and beauty of the Qur’an – and other levels of meaning as well – open themselves not to the reader, but to the listener. This is readily evident in narrative parts such as Surah Yusuf, which unlike in the Old Testament version is a play of voices. Recurring elements and references in the chiasmic structure connect and intersect the narrative in such a way that they form an inner coherence and keep the dialogue gripping and fluid. The protagonists differ in the nature and complexity of their language – which is vital, since Yusuf alone appears as a named actor.²³ Furthermore, it seems from the inner Muslim perspective to be the case that recitation of the Qur’an as a form of re-enactment of the revelation of the Word of God is not merely re-presentation but a sacred sound sphere in which the extraordinary becomes corporeal.²⁴

This point suggests itself for the presentation of an audio sample.²⁵ After a quick round in which acoustic impressions are collected and reflected upon on the basis of religious studies classifications and newly acquired interpretive horizons, the various uses and recitation contexts of the Qur’an can be introduced, which can be an opportunity to address again the differences between first-order and second-order mediatisation.

A further media theoretical point of tension can be found in the fact that most Muslims are not Arabic native speakers and most have little if any knowledge of Arabic, yet the Qur’an is read and heard in Arabic, even in less pious Muslim communities. On the one hand, this can be explained on the basis of the above-mentioned dimension of meaning; on the other hand, it raises questions about the relationship between the form and content of a medium, when the aesthetic dimension of a recitation predominates.

Ultimately, despite the prominent position of the oral and/or acoustic dimension of the Qur’an as a medium of perception, its character as a medium of communication (language) and dissemination (script/book) with both aesthetic and material dimensions remains central. Pious Muslims ensure the ritual purity of

22 Cf. Kermani 1999.

23 Cf. Roth 2017.

24 Cf. Neuwirth 2010, esp. 31–37, 168–181; Fischer-Lichte 2014.

25 Course evaluations often show that students would have preferred the use of audio samples earlier in the learning process, a desire I see as being founded in different learning types. I prefer this dramaturgy.

their Qur'an, storing it prominently above all other books; the representativeness of its visual appearance and its haptic impression are of vital importance.

THE OBLIGATORY PRAYER *ṢALĀT* AND THE MOSQUE

The fields of *ṣalāt* and mosque are independent religious phenomena and could very well be discussed separately. I consider them together here because I think the prostration (*sağda*) during the *ṣalāt* is intimately associated both historically and physically to the place of prostration (*masğid*) and because I am convinced that with this first-order mediatisation of religious communication in Islam, particular dimensions are exposed: body and space. The five daily obligatory prayers are one of the most prominent forms of experiencing and expressing Muslim piety,²⁶ while the mosque crystallises the most prominent forms of Muslim architecture and art.²⁷

If I take the first part of my hypothesis seriously, then a visit to one or more mosques in the course of the class is indispensable, for ritualised body choreographies accompanied by recitations and symbolic spatial configurations address the senses in a multimedial, multisensory form that can and needs to be retraced. That said, a theoretical religious studies classification before the excursion seems to me important and necessary for proper preparation of the topic, first, to prepare the students for the field – in the form of a reading or other practical assignment and the application of think–pair–share methodology – secondly, so as to collect and adequately formulate questions that can be asked of the individual who guides the class through the mosque, and thirdly, to discuss handouts to be used for field notes during the excursion and for subsequent reflection.

With regard to the religious studies classification of the *ṣalāt*, it seems helpful to me to reveal its historical development, for example, that the number of times it is to be practised and the times of day are not laid out in the Qur'an but emerged from the practice of the Prophet in correspondence with a forming tradition.²⁸ Additionally, the *ṣalāt* can be analysed, for example on the basis of a close video analysis, as a form of religious communication, applying ritual theories that consider the prayer sequence and structure and its interritual entanglements²⁹ or its performance of emotions, group identity and world views³⁰

26 Cf. Watt/Welch 1980, 263. The body as a holistic and multi-sensory medium of experience and expression is central to the Islamic tradition: all five pillars of Islam are forms of religious practice that stress bodily experience (esp. the *ḥağğ* pilgrimage and *ṣaum* fasting). The same is true of the Shiite passion play (*muḥarram*) and the dances of the mystic currents of Islam. These forms of religious communication are either “total communication”, that is, all senses are addressed, or one sense is pushed to its limits.

27 Cf. Korn 2008, esp. 50–70.

28 Cf. Watt/Welch 1980, 262–271.

29 Cf. Gladigow 2004.

30 Cf. Tambiah 2002.

or as religious communication.³¹ In this experimental undertaking of analysis, reduction and abstraction, it becomes quite obvious that a sensual-medial reduction is made that creates a medial and sensual distance between first-order and second-order mediatisation, a fact that should be noted.

The formalised prayer process can be easily subdivided into separate sequences and ritual elements, which can be a helpful teaching tool, for it reveals the course of the ritual and also makes it easy to identify these elements in other spheres of Islamic practice, such as pilgrimages. A variety of pictures, images, diagrams and audio-visual media from various first-order manuals and from the Internet (whose respective production backgrounds should be critically examined) can support the teaching/learning process.

As a crystallised allegory of a religious “space of perception”, the mosque is a witness to the variety and cultural diversity of Islamic traditions. Large-format images and photographs of many mosques are easily accessible and presentable, from West African clay mosques to North African court mosques, domed Turkish mosques, Iranian four-*iwan* mosques and Chinese pagoda mosques. This variety shows all too clearly that the ideal of a unified Islamic tradition is a mere fantasy and that the tradition always incorporates variously encoded medial expressions of local cultures and societies. Didactically interesting is the possibility of showing selected photos of the mosque that will be visited and reflecting on the limits and perspectivity of the medium of photography. In this context, for example, one can discuss how media can direct the gaze and construct particular perspectives or what sensual and medial discrepancies emerge between first-order and second-order mediatisations.

For purposes of historical classification, to my mind, it is sufficient to say that, although no particular or in a comparative religious studies sense specifically sanctified space is necessary for performing the *ṣalāt*, Muhammad’s house in Medina was the first mosque and the prototype for later structures. This building combined living spaces with diplomatic, social and charitable aspects, as well as serving for communal prayer. From this point of departure, different regional building types have emerged, which can be discussed using the above-mentioned photographs and floor plans.

What students should know before the excursion should include basic elements of and possible symbolic points of reference in a mosque’s interior. The core and most necessary elements of a mosque include, besides the basin for the preliminary ritual washing (*wuḍū’*), the *qibla*-wall with its niche (*miḥrāb*) indicating the Kaaba and direction of prayer toward Mecca and a pulpit (*minbār*) for the Friday sermon. Considering how simple the *ṣalāt* is and how meagre a

31 Cf. Roth 2016, esp. 151–162.

mosque building could theoretically be, the architectural and artisanal splendour of many a mosque construction is all the more striking.

In terms of symbolic references, it can be pointed out that the *miḥrāb* points not merely to Mecca but also to the Prophet Muhammad, as does the pulpit. The *qibla*-wall also indicates the Kaaba, traditionally considered to be the house of God built by Abraham, and thus God himself. If we associate the lamp often suspended in the *miḥrāb* with the so-called verse of light (Q 24, 35), its light points to God and to God's presence.³² The boundless ornamental embellishments that can be added to the structure all have similar referential functions.³³ The spatial structure of the mosque, like the structure and practice of the *ṣalāt*, can be read as the reification the mentifact of egalitarianism as conceived in the form of the Ummah. Accordingly, different mediated levels of reference exist: geographical, salient, social and theological. These can best be traced not in the classroom but in the mosque itself.

OUTLOOK: RELIGIOUS MEDIA STUDIES?

In the course of this discussion of forms of religious communication, that is, of first-order mediatisation, a shift from metaphor to metonymy has emerged on the semiotic level. That is to say, religious symbols can be viewed by actors not as merely an allegory for something but as a real physical embodiment of the extraordinary. This can also be found in the media and can be interpreted on the basis of at least two media theoretical aspects as a shift from tertiary and secondary media to primary media of perception and, thus, as a shift from the content to the form of religious communication. Both aspects perform an immediacy of the communication situation for the participation of the actors with the reality conceived by them as being religious. The recitation of the Qur'an is an appropriate example. In a kind of re-enactment, the primary medium of the recited word, which is perceived and valued especially for its aesthetic dimension (materiality and form) and not its content, comes to the fore in place of the tertiary medium of the book (coupled with the secondary medium of the Arabic language).³⁴ This can also be seen in the mediatisation of other religions, whereby the somatisation of religious reality, and not its symbolisation, is the core of the performative framework.³⁵

32 Quite often, the *miḥrāb* is brought into association with the throne verse (Q 2, 255), which indicates the omnipotence and omnipresence of God.

33 Cf. Korn 2008, 50–70; Korn 2012, 15–19; Schimmel 1990, 267–274.

34 Cf. Neuwirth 2010, esp. 124, 168–181.

35 Cf. Leach 1978, 24–26, 36–38, 88–90; Meyer 2011, 25–29; Wenzel 2004, 276–279.

Media sociology, media studies, performance studies and communication studies suggest the following perspectives:³⁶

- Media constitute the situational context of communication as such. Significant differences emerge depending on whether communication takes place directly (so face-to-face) or is mediated indirectly (at a spatial and/or temporal distance).
- Media dictate the communication process, for example when not all actors are able to use every medium to the same extent or in the same way (owing to lack of knowledge or lack of competence, or because of social sanctions or distinctions, etc.). As a result, asymmetries emerge that the more media-competent actors can use to control communication in their favour. Furthermore, the so-called symbolically generalised communication media (money, power, faith, love, etc.) exert a clear influence on the course of communications.
- Media influence the communicable contents: not every form of content can be communicated in any and every medium. The plan for the construction of a bridge, for example, cannot be transmitted via olfactory coding. The medium thus defines the limits of the communicable, and the content being communicated can acquire a specific form that can have a particular effect or can trigger specific emotions.
- Media stand in interrelation to the structure of a group and society. In the course of social differentiation processes, (new) media must emerge to ensure or re-establish the principle accessibility of disparate parts of society.

Media thus play an important role in the social (re)construction of reality with its cosmologies, epistemologies and norms as well as its social structures and conceptions of gods, humans and roles, etc. Media change religions – and religions change media.³⁷ These arguments suggest that considering religions as mediatised “spaces of perception” provides reliable and fruitful access to the field. Furthermore, we can keep in sight the issue of how and in what ways recent medial transformational processes change religions, and by association be aware of the challenges for religious studies or the discipline itself.

On these grounds it does not seem farfetched to suggest that religious studies should be carried out in close correspondence with media studies.³⁸ Analyses of forms of cultural, religious and social media production, types and uses and of their interrelated processes make it possible for concrete conclusions to be drawn based on the facets described above that are relevant for religious

36 On the following remarks see Krämer 2004, Münker/Roesler 2008, Schützeichel 2004, Ziemann 2006.

37 Cf. Rüpke 2007, 35–43.

38 Following Mohr 2009, Rüpke 2007.

studies. In addition, such analyses provide important data as religious studies seeks to reconstruct the religious “spaces of perception” constituted in medial communication processes. The analysis and integration of these dialectical interrelationships between religion and media in religious studies scholarship or the teaching of religious studies could promote and support the acquisition of the media competence necessary for resolving the discrepancies and the tension between first and second-order mediatisation by the students themselves, as described in this essay.

In addition, I consider it useful for the teaching of religious studies for spaces to be created in which students can produce different media products themselves in a didactic-ludic manner. Exceeding participant observation, they can experiment with the possibilities of different media. In this way, students can acquire, beyond a theoretical framework, a practical feeling for the characteristics of respective media, their production processes and their limitations. Through the experimental testing of media production, both the possibilities and limitations of medial mediation can be identified, students can be sensitised in the use of the respective media and the discrepancies between first-order and second-order mediatisation. This could be a fruitful teaching practice in religious studies, for example in processes of learning through research.

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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

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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

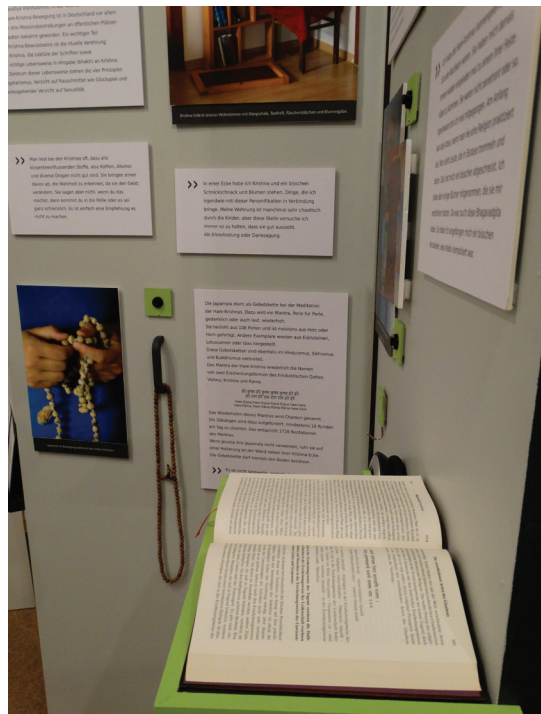


Fig. 2: Panel Jessica, Detail, Photography by Lilli Obholz © *SinnRäume*

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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Emulating Science

The Rhetorical Figures of Creationism

ABSTRACT

This article compares forms of visual argumentation in the scientific study of evolution and Young-Earth Creationism, arguing that secular forms of scientific representation have affected the way creationists visually construct their own. In order to affirm their view of the origin of the universe, creationists borrow from, mimic, and ultimately emulate the techniques, or at least the appearance, of scientific method and reasoning. The use of the word “emulation” is very deliberate since their aim is to match and surpass a rival scientific paradigm – evolution. The sermon preached by the design of the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, is not content simply to look like science, but aims to do science that is affirmed by the Scriptures.

KEYWORDS

Visual representation, figures of science, rhetoric, evolution, Creationism

BIOGRAPHY

Larissa Carneiro has a PhD in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media from North Carolina State University, USA. From master’s study to the present, her research interests have occupied the intersection of media/technology, science, and religion, with three overarching themes: the relationship of science and technology, the relationship of religion and technology, and the ways in which media and technology contribute to the production of both religion and science. She is currently a visiting lecturer in the Religious Studies Department at Duke University.

INTRODUCTION

In a museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, that opened its doors to the public in 2008, visitors encounter a scene of Adam seated in a flowery meadow, naming the animals that pass by. Behind him, a few feet away, lurks what looks like a young raptor, waiting to receive its name from the primordial taxonomist. Rhetorician John Lynch has described the Creation Museum as a “spatial sermon” whose major aim is to convince visitors to reject evolutionary theory and

to encourage the experience of religious conversion to Fundamentalist Christianity.¹ He argues that the rhetorical capacities of the museum offer to take the individual on a path of discovery and truth. As in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Creation Museum's many sections and displays bid visitors to walk toward evangelical rebirth.

But Lynch's claim has a couple of problems. First, in religious studies, "conversion" is a concept that has been discussed extensively. One leading authority regards conversion as "a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations".² Conversion, in other words, is not the result of a single event or experience, but a development that unfolds over time within a complex social setting. Secondly, if "conversion" is an appropriate word for describing the major objective of the Creation Museum, the creationist enterprise would not be alone in this business. If the museum acts as a space for religious conversion, it is because it *emulates the rhetorical strategies employed by secular museums around the world*. Whether secular or Christian, science museums are not only places for education or demonstration of scientific evidence. They also work as rhetorical places for affirming truth and inculcating beliefs. However, for the sake of clarity, instead of "conversion", I employ in this article the traditional concept of rhetorical studies: persuasion. Secular museums also aim to *persuade* visitors by affirming their own version of reality.³ And this task of persuasion links the two kinds of museums in a history of rivalry that has its origin in the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, when the two sides of a nascent culture war began to take shape – when the disciples of evolution first engaged the disciples of creationism, and lost. But in the decades that followed, fueled by the nation's involvement in the Second World War, the technological militarization of the Cold War, and the race to the moon, the value of science rose in the public ethos of the United States. As a result, evolution became the overarching paradigm to explain the formation of new life forms. Natural history museums have worked as rhetorical tools to corroborate and reinforce the veracity of the evolutionary premise: all existing living things were not suddenly created in their present forms but have randomly evolved from earlier specimens over millions and millions of years.

The similarity between the two kinds of museums should not be a surprise. Present-day Creationism would not have existed without the scientific strategies deployed by its secular counterpart. On the one hand, the more the apparatus of secular science progressed (museums, laboratories, books, and articles), the more Fundamentalist Christians felt compelled to mimic textual, visual, and

1 Lynch 2013, 1–27.

2 Rambo 1993, 5. See also Rambo/Farhadian 2014.

3 On the scientific production of versions of reality, see Law 2014, 337–342.

material scientific strategies in order to argue against the premises of evolution. Following modern scientific sensibility and simulating the protocols of secular science, creationists developed rhetorical tactics to measure what is understood by mainstream science to be immeasurable: God and the mythical events described in the Book of Genesis.

This article focuses on one of the most important strategies for scientific reasoning: visual representation. The sociologist John Law provocatively stated that science may be characterized as the history of representing visually what scientists try to describe.⁴ Conceptions of how life works are built through the arrangement of materials in natural science museums and all kinds of graphic and pictorial images, which also produce simplified visual displays that facilitate public consumption. Scientific representations, continues Law, are the “secret weapons” of science: they convert the complexity of living bodies, chemicals, and procedures into a set of figures and texts that can be easily understood by anyone.⁵ Moreover, Bruno Latour has contended that scientific rhetorical strategies can be constructed in such a way that it hides any trace of ownership or even cultural context.⁶ Such pictorial statements aim to achieve the status of a universal truth that transcends time and space.

But scientific representations are not exclusively the object of investigations of sociology of science. Rhetoricians such as Lawrence Prelli, Alan G. Gross, and Jeanne Fahnestock have argued that graphic techniques and modes of display, such as the ones found in natural science museums, articles, and textbooks, are not mere images. In fact, they constitute part of the rhetorical toolkit that has played a role in the construction of scientific facts.⁷ Fahnestock, for instance, defines what she calls “figures of science” as visual devices that add rhetorical force to the persuasive effect of scientific claims. In science, she continues, this genre of image has historically been used as a strategy for reasoning. “These figures epitomize lines of arguments” and “it is impossible to remove them from reasoned prose.”⁸ In her original study, Fahnestock explains scientific representations in terms of the 2,500-year tradition of figures of speech. She moves beyond metaphor and analogy to consider modes of figuration less discussed but extensively used in technical reasoning, such as antithesis, incrementum, and polyptoton. To my reading, Fahnestock’s arguments recall Law’s claim: in science, figures are means for simplifying what would otherwise be too complex to be rapidly captured. In her words, scientific illustrations are “constructions

4 Ibid., 338.

5 Law 1986a, 46. See also Law 1986b, 1–38.

6 Latour 1987, 21–62.

7 For further consideration, see Fahnestock 1999; Prelli 1989; Gross 2006.

8 Fahnestock 1999, 43.

and devices that most succinctly express a line of argument, so succinctly that the argument can be created almost automatically by creating the figure”.⁹

Based on the work of Fahnestock, this article compares forms of visual argumentation in the scientific study of evolution and Young-Earth Creationism. I argue that secular forms of scientific representations have affected the way Creationism is visually constructed by its proponents. In order to do that, I will first discuss common forms of visual representations (graphics and illustrations) as strategies for reasoning in the construction of the evolutionary theory. Then I will turn to demonstrate how Creationism, emulating secular rhetorical strategies, creates a competing scientific model by visual means.

But before I proceed, it is important to clarify the object of my study. Young-Earth Creationism, Creation Science, or Flood Geology is, like Intelligent Design, one of the major creationist schools of thought. According to Creation Science, what is narrated in the first chapter of the Christian Bible is literally true. According to Creationism’s core principles, (1) the universe, the earth, and humankind were created from nothing in six literal days by nothing but God’s words; (2) biological life did not evolve according to natural processes as asserted by Darwinism, but was supernaturally created by God; (3) all the major transformations that have occurred in this planet originated from the 371-day period of the deluge and its aftermath; and, finally, (4) the age of the universe is not 14 billion years, as argued by mainstream science, but no more than 10,000 years. No less important, according to the creationist view, the factual accuracy of these principles can be scientifically demonstrated by a wealth of geological and paleontological investigations, all of which confirm what is described in the opening of the Book of Genesis.

THE VISUAL (DE)CONSTRUCTION OF DARWINIST REPRESENTATIONS

An illustration composed of a sequence of four bird heads and beaks appeared in the published edition of the diary that Charles Darwin wrote during the voyage of HMS *Beagle* to the Galápagos Islands. The drawing had a clear rhetorical purpose. By repeating and arranging the same motif with subtle differences (one bird’s beak is shorter, another’s beak is longer), the visual alliteration of finch heads aimed to illustrate Darwin’s speculations about evolutionary theory.¹⁰ With this simple diagram, the naturalist aimed to convert the scientific community from the prevailing view that all separate species were created distinctly by divine intervention to his own theory.

9 Ibid., 40.

10 Robin 1992, 32.

Inspired by the work of geologist Charles Lyell, Darwin wanted to argue against natural theology: the different finches in the Galápagos Islands had not been created one by one but were all descendants of an original finch. Darwin argued that, through a long process of adaptation across successive generations, the birds had developed different beaks that were better adapted to each environment: heavier beaks were able to break husks or larger seeds; pointed beaks could better pierce fruit, and so on.¹¹ In order to reason that different species were not the product of divine creation but the result of natural selection, Darwin opted for a very traditional rhetorical figure of speech: he created a visual polyptoton.

“Polyptoton” is one of the major reasoning strategies listed in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, later detailed in his *Topics*. It is defined as the repetition of the same word, image, pattern, or root as a persuasive device. In a polyptoton, each time a word or image is repeated, it comes in a slightly different form. According to Fahnestock, in scientific visualizations, the goal of a polyptoton is to create a new knowledge by building upon a concept or an idea that is already accepted or known. By creating a sequence of similar birds with small differences, Darwin intended to build his new theory upon what was already accepted: thus, while it is true that species present physical differences, this certainly does not mean they were individually created by God. Darwin took the similar patterns to suggest that, instead, they all had evolved from one common ancestor.

Polyptoton is not the only Darwinist figure of science that Fahnestock has investigated. She argues that in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Darwin endorsed antithesis, another figure of speech, when trying to understand the role that emotions and expressions played in evolutionary adaptation. In an illustration contrasting the behavior of two dogs, Darwin opposed different emotions by placing them side by side. The first dog is visually represented as “hostile”: it has raised hair, an elevated head, bared teeth, and the body in an aggressive posture. The second dog is “humble and affectionate” and represented in a submissive position. Instead of walking upright, the body sinks downward. Darwin stated that the ability to identify such visual clues was key for natural selection. Humans and animals would know, for example, if someone or something approaching them posed a threat. In his own words, the naturalist stated that animal behaviors could be read in terms of “principles of antithesis” that were part of a body language that was “innate or universal”.¹²

Another relevant example of visual rhetorical tools in the service of evolution is the scientific illustration known as the “Evolution of Homo Sapiens”. This parade representing 25 million years of human evolution is one of the most

11 Ibid.

12 Darwin 1899, Chapter 2.

successful visual devices for promoting evolution and the idea that humans evolved from apes. The image also relies on a tradition of rhetorical figuration in order to make its claim persuasive, in employing incrementum. In this image, published in the *History of Primates* by Sir Wilfred Le Gros Clarke (1949), six ancestors line up as if marching toward progress from left to right. Fahnestock explains that in this kind of visual representation, the image “has to be formed according to some principle of ordering, and by far the most common principle of ordering is by increase or decrease in some quantifier of attribute”.¹³ In such a rhetorical device, the argument is formed by a visual or textual sequence of things or events. Because of its sequential property, representing a linear progression, this technique for scientific reasoning is perhaps one of the most common strategies for evolutionary claims and, therefore, very present in textbook illustrations and museum exhibits, in which images or objects are arranged in a way that creates the perception of a clear movement from beginning to end.

Another important visual incrementum employed by the evolutionary perspective is the paleontological timeline: a vertical system of chronological measurements accepted worldwide that relates fossils and stratigraphy to time. Fahnestock cites as a famous sequence the progenitors of the modern horse crafted by paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson. The chart presents a linear progression of “typical horses” associated with fossil deposits. Individual strata register successive periods of time, with the upper stratum typically indicating younger or more recent life forms than those below it.¹⁴

Ironically, this form of visual composition actually distorts what is currently accepted in evolutionary theory. Stephen Jay Gould pointed out that this kind of linear representation of evolution is not accurate; indeed, he called it “embarrassing”. The image suggests that evolution can be described as a steady, linear progress. But this misses the rhetorical point. As previously suggested by Law, these images accomplish their mission of simplification. They convert a much more complex branching perspective into a clear progression.¹⁵

But Fahnestock is not the only scholar to suggest that Darwin and later evolutionists relied on visual rhetorical strategies to convince readers of the plausibility of the theory. In 1990, the rhetorician John Angus Campbell published the article “Scientific Discovery and Rhetorical Invention: The Path of Darwin’s Origin”, which became a seminal work in the field of rhetoric of science. In his essay, Campbell provocatively contended that Darwin had not formulated the major aspects of his theory based on material evidence. By analyzing Darwin’s diaries and notebooks, Campbell concluded that each of Darwin’s theories explained reproduction, geological change, and natural selection only in rhetori-

13 Fahnestock 1999, 95.

14 *Ibid.*, 100.

15 Gould 1989, 31–35.

cal terms, by which Campbell meant the employment of metaphor, analogy, and other figurative devices. For Campbell, only through the employment of such means and vivid imagination was Darwin ingeniously able to engage and convert the members of the Royal Society, mostly composed of natural philosophers and devout Christians.¹⁶ For instance, in order to erase all the contradictions in his theory and overcome the lack of empirical data, Darwin drew a simple illustration. The choice of the “tree” motif was neither casual nor guided by scientific rigor. According to the historian of science Daniel J. Kevles, Darwin chose to represent his theory as a branching tree, which he called the “tree of life”, echoing the biblical image that was familiar to and cherished by his audience.¹⁷

RHETORICAL FIGURES OF CREATIONISM

Such figures as polyptoton, antithesis, and incrementum are also found at work in the visual strategies employed by the Creation Museum. However, inside the museum, instead of evolutionary theory and common ancestry with primates, the rhetorical purpose is to present visitors with an alternative paradigm for understanding the creation of the world and how nature came to be the way it presently is: baraminology.

“Baraminology” is a contemporary creationist taxonomy hypothesized to argue against evolutionary premises. Introduced in 1990 by Kurt P. Wise (a graduate of Harvard University and student of Stephen Jay Gould), the theory proposes that in the six-day creation, God created not all forms of animals, as previously believed by creationists, but “kinds” or *baramim* (from the Hebrew *bara*, to create, and *mim*, kind).¹⁸ Baraminology also was conceived to deal with the logical glitches contained in Creationism. For instance, the theory aims to explain within the scope of the Fundamentalist Christian worldview how Noah could gather, accommodate, transport, and feed all present living forms in his mythical Ark, which for critics is commonsensically impossible. According to Wise, such an unreasonable enterprise was never necessary. Noah did not bring to the Ark all existing animals, but only all “kinds”, or, in other words, the common ancestors of the major groups of animals.

Curiously, although baraminology arose as an alternative model to the evolutionary scheme, its visual forms for rhetorical reasoning do not differ from its counterpart. If those forms were displayed outside the context of the Creation Museum, it would be hard to interpret such visual devices as non-Darwinist. For example, baraminology is likewise visualized as a tree, only in the creationist

¹⁶ Campbell 1990, 59.

¹⁷ Cited in Robin 1992, 16.

¹⁸ Frair 2000, 82–91.

case the “tree” is called an “orchard”. If, as Campbell has suggested, Darwin relied on his famous “tree of life” to counter opposition to this theory and its problematic lack of material evidence, the creationist orchard is no different. With no source of material proof, the “orchard” visually asserts that God created each group of original forms or “kinds”, such as an original equid or canine, from which different specimens later developed, i.e. all contemporary breeds of horses or dogs. Therefore, the rhetorical purpose of the creationist orchard is to assert that all dogs and horses, whatever their size, color, and constitution, share the same ancestry in the original equid or canine created by God.

It is helpful at this point to recall the major rhetorical reasoning at work in Darwin’s illustration of finches: he sought to demonstrate that the great variety of finches on the Galápagos Islands had not been created one by one but had descended from a single original finch. In spite of the visual and rhetorical similarity of their argumentation with Darwin’s, advocates of baraminology insist on targeting the evolution of finches. In a reference to Darwin’s illustration, the Creation Museum website reads: “God created ‘every winged bird according to its kind’ (Genesis 1:21). So, for example, fluctuations in the population of finches and finch speciation occurs [*sic*] in a response to different environments. But after all, finches still remain finches.”¹⁹

In order to present a counter-model for evolution, the website displays another polyptoton constructed analogously to Darwin’s illustration: a sequence of 140 images of different dogs displayed side by side, in which each dog presents a slight difference from the next. Just as Fahnestock suggested of Darwin’s use of polyptoton, the creationist version aims at building a new knowledge on what has been previously accepted, but in the latter case the previous knowledge is the theory of evolution! Surprisingly, the creationist representation does not directly contradict Darwinism, but, like Darwin, seeks to refute the old premise of natural theology in which God had created all specimens individually. The different dogs in the Creation Museum website had not been created one by one but were all descendants of an original dog.

The similarities between secular and Christian visual argumentation do not end here. On a wall in the Creation Museum, visitors find a visual incrementum that literally blends the secular paleontological timeline of horses and the “Evolution of Homo Sapiens” illustration. Like the secular paleontological timeline, this visual incrementum features the development of horses as a motif. Similar to the “Evolution of Homo Sapiens”, this horizontal incrementum also represents a march from the beginning, albeit a much shorter trek from the “Ark equid” to the present time of the larger modern equid. Alongside the statement that some sort of progression happened from a common ancestor, this

19 See “Darwin’s Finches”, n.d. Creation Museum website, <https://creationmuseum.org/creation-science/natural-selection/> [accessed 11 February 2017].

visual representation has two important rhetorical objectives: (1) to promote the idea that, rather than a million-year-process of evolution, all different specimens quickly developed in a short process that began only 4,363 years ago, when the waters of the Flood had finally subsided; and (2) the animals transported in the Ark were in fact smaller than their contemporary versions.

A text accompanying the diagram clarifies the first objective and puts an end in any eventual hypothetical counter-argument: drastic changes from small species to larger contemporary species could have happened in a short span of time. How? “God provided organisms with special tools to change rapidly.” Furthermore, why is a smaller animal represented at the beginning of the creationist version of an equine parade? This arrangement from smaller to larger species is not supported by material evidence. The visual choice is not random. This image also aspires to erase an important contradiction in Creationism: the problem of the size of the Ark and the size of some “kinds” of animals, such as elephants, giraffes, horses, and even dinosaurs. Logically, it is possible to argue that even if the Ark only carried the original “kinds”, it would have been impossible for Noah to host a variety of big animals in his vessel because of the obviously limited space. The illustration solves the problem: at the beginning, before and during the Flood, horses were smaller, and later, after the deluge, they evolved into bigger and taller species.

Antithesis is also an important rhetorical figure for Creationism. In fact, it is not too much to state that the entire museum complex works as a project of antithesis to evolutionary theory. That should come as no surprise. As already mentioned, Creationism would not exist without evolutionary theory. The intrinsic dependence of the existence of the opposite for its own definition is precisely how the syntax of antithesis functions. Fahnestock has stressed that “whether the opposed terms in an antithesis are contraries, contradictories, or correlatives”, the figure requires two parallel if not identical phrases²⁰ Moreover, Creationism must pose itself as a contrary, otherwise the analogy between secular and Christian rhetorical devices could cause confusion for the museum’s audience.

The confusion is addressed by appealing to what creationists consider the two kinds of authority regarding the origin of the universe and humankind. Many diagrams around the museum make the point again and again that decisive authority comes from “God’s Word”, translated according to creationist interpretation of the Bible. For creationists, the Bible is the key to understanding the past, present, and future of this planet. The other authority, which lacks stature and the power to trump faith, advocates for evolution: “man’s word”, with no capital letters. With this simple use of antithesis – God’s versus man’s –

20 Fahnestock 1999, 49.

all debate about the origin of life leads to a foregone conclusion for creationists. The Word of God, inerrant and fully intact in the Scriptures, is the only reliable and fully sufficient documentation of the origin of life.

In one of many “God’s Word” charts displayed in the Creation Museum, visitors see two trees placed side by side, composing the “creation orchard”. On the left of this chart appears the tree of the “primate kind”, from which all ape-like creatures evolved (chimpanzees, gorillas, and even what secular science considers the earliest hominids). On the right side, a single line represents the creation of humans, which occurred only 6,000 years ago, when God decided to make “man in his own image”. In another antithetical pairing, Darwin’s “tree of life” (dubbed “Man’s Reason”) is contrasted with all trees that, according to creationists, constitute the creation orchard, which includes the trees of butterflies, dinosaurs, worms, and mushrooms. The illustration declares that after the Flood all these kinds evolved into many different species due the new post-diluvium environmental condition. This point is crucial for Young-Earth Creationism since the Book of Genesis affirms that God instantaneously created the first humans.

CONCLUSION

In the fields of sociology and the rhetoric of science, images like those I have described become objects of critical scrutiny. Since Socrates, the word “representation” may imply something suspect or deceptive. For many moralists and religious thinkers, representation has long been associated with the manipulation of reality, the vanity and folly of idolatry, the beguiling effect of spectacle, or the moral dissipation induced by the falsehoods of theatre.²¹ In the realm of scientific illustrations, Ludwik Fleck points out, it is hard (even impossible) to find one single “natural” representation. All representations are retouched, rhetorically designed, and systematized according to some theory or world-view.²² Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar have even suggested that such visual devices serve to conceal the fact that scientific results are not produced by nature but fabricated by scientists.²³ According to these scholars, in science, pictures are instruments for persuasion: they tell viewers what to think and how to look at a phenomenon.

In the visual rhetoric of representation, persuasion is the subtle business of seeing depictions in a particular way. The representation is there, on the wall of a museum, on the page of a scientific article, in a children’s illustrated book, in order to corroborate what viewers already know. Understood rhetorically,

21 For further consideration in visual representation in science, see Daston 2014, 319–322.

22 Fleck 1979, 35.

23 Latour/Woolgar 1986, 176.

an image or illustration is an affirmation of what someone wants the reader to accept as true. If this is so, the kinship of creationist and secular science museums is not surprising. And if we situate them within the American context of a history of rivalry and competition for public attention, the fact that they use the same visual rhetoric even makes sense. But I have framed their relationship in terms of emulation rather than of merely mirroring one another. This is because the lion's share of symbolic capital rests with the scientific enterprise, which is much more prestigious, authoritative, and widely affirmed than the creationist view of the origin of the universe. That means that in order to be noticed and to generate authority within their own community of Christian Fundamentalism, creationists must borrow from, mimic, and ultimately emulate the techniques, or at least the appearance, of scientific method and reasoning. I choose "emulation" very deliberately: the word means the effort to match or surpass another. Thus, creationists try to match secular science in order ultimately to surpass it. The sermon preached by the design of the Creation Museum is not content simply to look like science, but aims to do science that is affirmed by the Scriptures.

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Media Reviews

Book Review: Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, Tausend Tassen Tee

Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2014,
143 pages, ISBN 978-3-650-40022-2

Exploring media means following cultures and ways of communicating that materialise in many forms. *Tausend Tassen Tee* by Jürgen Wasim Frembgen deals with the culture of tea drinking in the Islamic world: dishes, preparation, locations, social settings and imaginary. The author seems predestined to write about his subject as he is an expert in the material culture of Sufism and through his ethnographic fieldwork has long personal familiarity with the regions of Pakistan and India.

To present his results, Frembgen chose a medium that at first glance might seem a typical “coffee-table book”, with its rich illustrations and its cover portraying an expressive and colourful calendar sheet from India in the 1950s that depicts a woman with a cup of tea. A closer look reveals a detailed documentation of tea drinking in the Near and Middle East in the form of a reflective combination of text and more than 60 “speaking” illustrations, mostly photographs taken by the author.

In the first part of the book, Frembgen presents general information: botanical issues concerning *camellia* or *thea sinensis*, forms of trade and medicinal aspects as well as cultures of preparing and serving tea. Tea drinking is described in its social aspects, hinting at the main section of the text.

This introductory part is followed by a “thick description”. This contextualized examination of tea drinking provides almost intimate insight into tea-houses gained by the ethnographer during years of travelling – in Morocco, in cities such as Cairo, Damascus or Istanbul and at pilgrimage sites in Pakistan and India. These some hundred pages are particularly valuable because of their illustrations, which show mainly contemporary but also some historic interiors of kitchens and guest rooms and therefore present a whole imaginary of such semi-public spaces. Additionally, the ethnographer not only presents his observations from a bird’s eye view, but also tells of his encounters with ordinary people like taxi drivers, who drink and explain tea, and with connoisseurs and professionals, both men and women, who prepare tea. In these parts we find

emic and etic perspectives (Clifford Geertz, Russell T. McCutcheon) combined. Readers learn that tea drinking is a way of life mirrored in the material culture and the bodily and sensational acts of social gathering and drinking, mainly from small cups. And tea drinking is also bound up with an old oral culture of sayings and local stories, which Frembgen has collected.

The author is conscious of spatial dimensions. He describes famous teahouses as public and political spaces. With parallels to the German *Weisswurst* divide and the Swiss so-called *Röstigraben*, the Himalayan region can be socially divided into areas of tea drinking with milk and tea drinking without milk. Within a male world, the teahouse is (or was) a space of gathering outside the family home. Frembgen also makes reference to women and their collective cultures of drinking tea, but their places are normally closed to him (one exception is seen in the illustration on page 49 with female stea-cooks in Morocco). Broadly framed, he shows a traditional lower-class or middle-class world where tea is prepared in a samovar, with spices and maybe milk added. That traditional world and its social structures have started to vanish, even in Pakistan and India. The samovar is replaced by the Lipton teabag and tea-to-go is a trend around the globe. Hence, it is all the more important that this traditional world of tea drinking is documented.

De facto this book is a contribution to an elementary field of everyday culture. Implicitly it adopts perspectives and raises questions inherent in contemporary research, especially research on material culture and religion that takes into account, along with the material, whole sensational sets (Birgit Meyer), habitus and imaginaries (Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati). But other than in a few footnotes, Frembgen does not explicitly contextualize his study with debates current in the humanities. That absence may reflect a desideratum within the German tradition, where the study of food cultures is an inhomogenous field. For the Islamic world, not much analysis has been done beyond Peter Heines' works on wine and culinary cultures that appeared in the 1980s and again in 2014. The German humanities are less differentiated in their approach to food cultures than are English-speaking disciplines, where we find, for example, Sami Zubaida and Richard Tappers, *A Taste of Thyme: Culinary Cultures of the Middle East* (2000), and, in the United States, anthropological programmes in food studies.

Perhaps it was this lack of a scholarly context that caused the publishing house and the author to opt for a more popular design and content (with footnotes but without separate bibliography) that might stand out on any coffee (or tea) table. That approach would appear to propel the romantic stereotypes at the end of the book that contradict modernity: "To drink a cup of tea means contentment and well-being. It is part of a way of life of calmness and serenity" (136). Nevertheless, reading the complete book is certainly

worthwhile, to gain insight into drinking tea as a highly social and cultivated practice in the Middle East.

In this book – much as in his other projects like ethnographic films – Frembgen presents himself as a sensitive intermediary with empathy for the culture he conveys to his reader, surely significant for the topic addressed by this issue of the *Journal for Religion, Film and Media*, the use of media in religious studies.

Book Review: Friedhelm Hartenstein/ Michael Moxter, Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots. Exegetische und systematisch-theologische Annäherungen

**Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2016,
360 pages, ISBN: 978-3-374-03060-6**

The representability of the divine, as well as the therewith-coherent power over the represented deity, is raised as an issue throughout the Old Testament, culminating in the explicit image ban of the Decalogue, in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. This issue has not only theological implications, but also anthropological significance, in, for example, the belief that humankind is made in the image of God. In the current age of ubiquitous virtualization, questions concerning the essence of icons and iconic media arise anew, above all in the context of philosophical discussion about corporeality and in media theory. Therefore, in this work the two authors, Friedhelm Hartenstein and Michael Moxter, seek to develop a hermeneutic of the biblical image ban, to which end they adopt first a religio-historical and exegetical approach and secondly a systematic-theological approach. From a Protestant point of view, they unfold exemplarily the diverse layers of interpretation and reception of the ban and, further, show how every hermeneutic of the ban operates with a specific understanding of images and icons.

FORMAL ASPECTS

With this book, the publishing company *Evangelische Verlagsanstalt*, based in Leipzig, has produced a paperback publication of some 360 pages, a very handy format, with an attractive cover image. The work was launched as the 26th volume of the series “Forum Theologische Literaturzeitung” (ThLZ.F), in which issues of contemporary society are addressed in scholarly studies that have an interdisciplinary theological perspective. This text is well suited to the series for it provides interested readers (also from outside the subject area) with an over-

view of and insight into discussions that are part of a dialogue with Europe's biblical and Jewish-Christian heritage.

Friedhelm Hartenstein, who holds the Chair of Old Testament in the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, has already edited and published a range of articles and books that have addressed topics such as the development of a theological aesthetics of the Old Testament, the metaphorical language of the Psalms, the religious history of Israel and its background, and the image ban itself. By contrast, Michael Moxter, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Hamburg, is a specialist in religious philosophy. He managed dedicated projects and edited volumes to cultural theology in connection with Ernst Cassirer and to hermeneutical studies on imagery and aesthetics. Hartenstein and Moxter's co-operation on the topic addressed in this book began in seminars held in Hamburg. In the preface the two authors note that the writings published here have therefore been generated over an extended period (5). They invite readers to understand the two parts of the book as forming a dialogical whole.

As the book introduces the reader to Iron Age cultic sites and artifacts and addresses works by modern artists, it includes several pictures – which in view of the topic seems only appropriate. Whereas the drawings of the first part are integrated, placed within the running text, the color paintings and photographs that illustrate the second part appear on additional white pages toward the end of the article. Only two illustrations are slightly lacking in quality (326–327), and all the illustrations are helpful and well chosen.

The footnotes list literature for reference and exploration. Unfortunately, the book does not include the bibliography that could have assisted readers by offering an overview of literature that might be useful for further research.

CONTENT

In a jointly authored introduction, Hartenstein and Moxter pose questions that will frame the analysis that follows, noting, in particular, the role of the image ban in the evolution of Israel's monotheism and the role of images in general for human cognition and human-world interaction (12). Further, the authors point to how biblical interpretation is enriched by engagement with a philosophical and cultural hermeneutic of the image, particularly through the insights generated by the "iconic turn" (while acknowledging the limitations of this concept), which serves as an essential source throughout the book.

In part 1, Friedhelm Hartenstein undertakes religio-historical and exegetical analysis of the image ban. He first contextualizes the probable pre-exilic cultic practice in the Temple at Jerusalem by illustrating the cultic customs of previous and isochronic eastern societies and their varied integration of iconic as well as

symbolic or even aniconic religious objects. Here, an interesting designation of icons as a “verge” (Schwelle) between the divine and human spheres is introduced. The author emphasizes that interpretation of such images as “portraits” of an original, in a paradigm of similarity, does not correspond with cultic intention in the ancient east. The cultic object must instead be regarded as the privileged “place of the divine’s presence” (36), which is why it can function as a medium of communication with deities and of direct veneration of deities. The author’s reference to a “mental iconography” (49, 66–71) is particularly striking, highlighting a common conception of a divine world where gods are pictured as mostly corporeal and human (even if no anthropomorphic icons are integrated into cultic practice), which makes them, together with their individual names, able to be addressed by human beings.

Like Jens Kamlah, Hartenstein does not understand Israel’s cultic tradition as contrasting with other practices in the pluralistic eastern context. Israel’s empty throne in the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant can therefore be categorized as “iconic cult symbols”, which, Kamlah notes, “represented a deity without depicting the deity’s image. Though they avoided depicting the (anthropomorphic, theriomorphic or hybrid) figure of the deity, they were decorated with figures or figurative elements” (57). Although Israel probably did not venerate an anthropomorphic icon, its iconic symbols were embedded in a mental iconography, as is evident in the metaphoric language of the Psalms. Hartenstein records such anthropomorphisms in speech and prayer as “social metaphors” that regulate and reflect the relationship between God and the people.

In his second chapter, Hartenstein turns to ancient written Judaic and non-Judaic sources that reflect the extraordinary absence of iconic divine representation in the tradition of Israel and the significant biblical criticism of idols. The author thus paves the way for inquiry into the genesis of and preconditions for the biblical image ban, formulated explicitly in the Decalogue and at other points in the Scriptures. Starting with later biblical and non-biblical texts, Hartenstein “archeologically” works his way back to older, less “secure” layers of the Scriptures. Assuming that the Decalogue was formulated during or shortly after the Babylonian exile, he highlights the concurrence of the image ban and developing monotheism. The author emphasizes the role of emergent creation theology in which God and world – the creator and the creation – were clearly separated. Within this context, Hartenstein analyses the slight shifts in biblical idol-critical argumentation. His central thesis is that something that in ancient eastern cultic practice was certainly not extraordinary – the absence of cultic iconic representation – became a fundamental distinction as a result of Israel’s struggle for identity during and after the Babylonian exile.

This first part of the book ends by considering the implications of a hermeneutic of the image ban from an exegetical perspective (chapter 3). Whereas

biblical texts like the Psalms bear witness to “visions” of God as pluriform aesthetical experiences, other passages, as at Exodus 33:18–23, reflect the temporal dynamic of the presence and absence of God (and God’s abiding hiddenness), which Hartenstein and Moxter’s thesis holds also to be the intention of the image ban. In place of dead idols, narrations and metaphors lead the reader of the Bible to the limits of what can be said and thus function as symbolic icons that may help verbalize religious experience as well as opening up language for the vivid and dynamic God (and therefore also for new symbolic icons). In a final step, Hartenstein links the image ban to the doctrine of humankind as *imago dei* and shows that in the exilic and post-exilic periods of scriptural development, humankind takes the place of divine representation in the world, contrasting with the hand-made icons of Babylon.

The combination of the religio-historical approach with exact historical-critical exegesis, enhanced by the perceptions of contemporary hermeneutics of images, offers illuminating insight. It is especially interesting to see how Hartenstein traces theological development and its argumentation through accurate historical-critical exegesis. Topics touched on only briefly – for example, idol critique by the Presocratics (72–73) or even the crucial issue of humankind as *imago dei* (found primarily on the last few pages of the section, 174–182) – are taken up again in the second part; perhaps even their brief mention here was therefore unnecessary.

In part 2, across ten chapters Michael Moxter examines the image ban from a systematic-theological point of view. Rather than exploring the genesis and meaning of the ban in its original context, he presents and discusses its varied reception and emphasizes that a theological reading must be complemented by anthropological analysis. The diverse approaches are grouped thematically under broader headings such as “Images of Power” (*Bilder der Macht*), “Image and Corporeality” (*Bild und Leiblichkeit*) or “Image Ban, Monotheism and Negative Theology” (*Bilderverbot, Monotheismus und negative Theologie*). Thus, Moxter first considers icons and their eminent role in the context of political power. In ancient societies, statues really represented (royal) rulers and their dignity in their domain, and they were venerated accordingly. When Jews and Christians refused to bow down before such statues, the image ban functioned as an “iconoclastic critique of power” (197).

Moxter’s second chapter addresses images and their immanent corporeal dimension, concluding that everything that/only what is corporeal can be represented as an image. If the corporeality of God and the heavenly beings is denied, the image ban is intended to preserve God in his spiritual transcendence in order that God is not identified with limited, ephemeral materiality. However, are images as such evil? Is it only the power of imagination that leads back to chaos and disorder? Asking these questions, Moxter explores the argumenta-

tion of Plato, Descartes and the Protestant/Reformed tradition, which considers the body, images and the imagination in general to be inferior. Finally, he addresses the role that corporeality has played so far in the anthropological discussion of humankind as *imago dei* and in Christology.

By dedicating the next chapter to the image ban in conjunction with monotheism and negative theology, the author opens up the discourse of monotheism and violence, led most prominently by Jan Assmann, who views the image ban as an expression of religious intolerance. Moxter writes of a completely oppositional (unhistorical, apologetic) reception in the Jewish Enlightenment, when monotheism and the image ban were praised as the triumph of reason over the irrationality of polytheistic forms of religions. Following the Jewish phenomenologist Emmanuel Lévinas, who employs the monotheistic image ban at the core of his ethics, Moxter discloses his view of the long tradition of negative theology, with the image ban taken out of its original cultic context and turned into a paradigm of negative theological reasoning with regard to a special praxis (like Lévinas; the author refers also to Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard).

This discussion leads Moxter to his central chapter, entitled “Invisibility or Hiddenness of God?” (*Unsichtbarkeit oder Verborgenheit Gottes?*) (246–266). Here, he establishes the guiding thesis of the book – that the “image ban can be interpreted as a protection of God’s hiddenness” (251) – which will be developed in the following chapters. Accordingly, Moxter first elaborates Luther’s distinction between invisibility (*Unsichtbarkeit*) and hiddenness (*Verborgenheit*). God’s grace is not invisible but rather is hidden behind or in the folly of the cross. This has to be believed, it is nothing simply invisible which could be grasped by logical reasoning.

Moxter picks up this formulation of hiddenness for his own hermeneutic of the image ban (260) and accordingly interprets the doctrine of the human being as *imago dei* as a protection of humankind’s own openness. This makes possible the application of a hermeneutic of the image that adapts the insights of the “iconic turn”: the image’s function is not primarily “representation” but – in a tension of presence and absence – “giving to see/making present and concealing”. Moxter is viewing the other side of the coin: instead of interpreting the image ban with the help of a hermeneutic of the image, he sees the image ban itself as a paradigm for hermeneutics and thus notes its anthropological implications (266).

Consequently, the following chapter turns to the question of the inner power of images themselves. Moxter draws on Jean Paul Sartre and Ludwig Wittgenstein to bring greater depth to his thesis, noting “images even make present what is absent, which can be experienced as intensification of presence” (278).

Following this paradigm, as a final step the author analyses the relationship between image and sacrament.

The seventh chapter is very short and is dedicated to the question of how in the Protestant and Reformed traditions the senses of seeing and listening were viewed in relation to one another and how this influenced differing teachings on images. Similarly, chapter eight focuses on the history of theology. After illustrating the disputes over icons in the Eastern Church during the Middle Ages and the alternative path taken by the Western Church, the author depicts the hermeneutics of images in their strong relation with Christology.

In light of Theodor W. Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's criticisms of modernity and their reception of the image ban in their "negative dialectic", in chapter nine Moxter draws lines that connect with a possible contemporary aesthetics in negative theology. He ends by considering contemporary artists and their multiple receptions of aniconism and the negative philosophical and theological or even iconoclastic tradition. Chapter ten reviews the threads and results of the earlier chapters.

The systematic-theological section of the book offers many interesting perspectives on the topic of imagery and its intersection with other areas of anthropological relevance. Moxter refers to a wide range of modern and post-modern philosophers as well as to arguments made by the Church Fathers and by Luther and Calvin. The ninth chapter is of particular interest, with its consideration of contemporary aesthetics in the light of a negative dialectic and of the interpretation of modern art pieces.

The orientation and structure of the text are, however, confusing. The chapters differ vastly in length (compare chapters 4 and 7 for instance), leaving an impression of a lack of balance and unequal weighting. Furthermore, it appears that various purposes are intertwined. On one hand, the discussion provides an overview of elaborated receptions of the image ban, which illustrate the shift in hermeneutics together with transformed parameters in the history of thought and differing (implicit) hermeneutics of the image itself (341). On the other hand, it seems that the authors wanted to contribute to a Protestant hermeneutic of the image (ban) and also to a general cultural debate. All three aims are approached diligently and well argued. The confusion stems from their overlap, when it is not always clear how the information presented is to be positioned.

In a short conclusion, the two authors state clearly the guiding thesis of the entire work. A conception of the image that gives account of it as the portrait of an original in a paradigm of similarity does not provide an adequate basis for understanding the image ban. An image "gives to see" and "makes present" while also concealing and hiding, and therefore the biblical image ban served and serves not to protect God's invisibility (or the rejection of any mental im-

age), but to preserve God's hiddenness, even in connection with Revelation (353–355). Additionally, Hartenstein and Moxter reflect on the actuality of their topic with reference to recent incidents like the terror attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*.

CONCLUSION

The book offers a multi-perspective approach to a theologically and socially controversial issue. Their broad definition of the term “image” (21) allows the authors to explore the phenomenon of imagery and its manifold associated dimensions, which makes for a very enriching, and readable, study. Hartenstein and Moxter are working in a Protestant context. However, I recommend the book for all scholars of religion who are interested in visual studies!

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Book Review

Monika Leisch-Kiesl: ZeichenSetzung / BildWahrnehmung

Toba Khedoori: Gezeichnete Malerei

Vienna: Verlag für Moderne Kunst 2016, 347 pages,
ISBN: 978-3-903131-29-3

Marcel Duchamp's installation *Sixteen Miles of String* (1942) is the starting point for the aesthetic and philosophical analysis of marks, images and drawings by art historian and philosopher Monika Leisch-Kiesl, Professor of History and Theory of Art in Linz, in her new book, *ZeichenSetzung / BildWahrnehmung*. Duchamp's surrealistic work of art was constituted by 16 miles of ordinary white twine stretched from ceilings and crystal chandeliers, crisscrossing the canvases exhibited at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in Manhattan in 1942. Leisch-Kiesl emphasizes above all the new visual configuration and the special perceptual situation the thousands of sections of twine create, which involve both the artist and the viewer. This labyrinthine system of lines generates a new kind of space without beginning or end, in which no object is set up and the public is right in the middle. The lines trace thoughts and gestures at the same time, creating a drawing that is always becoming, opening new forms and movements in space. Leisch-Kiesl looks similarly at Sophie Taeuber-Arp's artworks, namely her series of small drawings entitled *Movements de lignes* (1939), in which the artist traced unspectacular lines to open up a conceptual space that evokes a new perceptual experience. Both artists worked with lines and traces and created conceptual drawings that disclose a particular spatial and temporal dimension of reality, which challenges the quality and possibilities of our vision. Their works of art introduce the main topic of the book, which deals with image theory developed from the 1990s to the end of the 2010s specifically in the field of drawing (which is a key area of the author's research). Leisch-Kiesl aims to explore the specific aesthetic and philosophical meaning of drawing through the large-scale compositions of the Australian artist of Iraqi origin Toba Khedoori, who has participated

in a number of international group exhibitions (Venice Biennale, 2009; Liverpool Biennial, 2006; São Paulo Biennial, 2004 among others), although the theoretical and aesthetic reception of Khedoori's work in German-speaking areas is not particularly relevant. The analyses of five of Khedoori's minimal drawings allow the author to develop the new phenomenological and semiotic theorem of the *ZeichenSetzung* in order to investigate not only the "logos of images" (Gottfried Boehm), but also the *evocation* power of drawings as representations of reality. How do images become marks? And how do marks become images? Khedoori's delicate compositions on large thin sheets of waxed paper provide the ideal occasion to explore the effectiveness of lines and marks interpreted as gestures of both hand and thought. Her wall-size drawings maintain a strong relationship with the commonplace world of objects – stairs, wood, windows, chairs, train compartments, doors, walls and fences – without simply representing them in a mimetic way: every element appears familiar yet decontextualized, deprived of any sign of life and radiating a geometric translucence. Khedoori depicts simple icons and everyday milieus detached from any context or background, aimlessly disembodied and altered through perspectival distortions, which seem to oscillate between solidity and evanescence, at once in motion and also crystallized in a timeless "neither-here-nor-there".

In her work *Untitled (Window)*, a relatively small drawing of a window emerges in the middle of the large-scale sheet of paper as an immediately recognizable everyday architectural element. Leisch-Kiesl focuses on the familiarity yet melancholic disconnectedness of this object, which generates a "certain pulsation of proximity and distance" (41). The use of in-between elements such as doors, windows, walls and tunnels generates a movement of "semantic vibration" (130), which is at once static and active and thus able to challenge both the symbolic potential of the lines and the perceptive processes of the subject.

Khedoori's works deal with neither (photo)realism nor pure abstraction, but appear at once implacable and shaded, familiar and unrecognizable, monumental and ephemeral, in a continuously fleeing presence that affects both emotion and thought.

The book emphasizes the "irritating" quality of Khedoori's drawings (as well as the Drawing as a form of contemporary visual art), which swing between detailed illustration and enigmatic placelessness, destabilizing the viewer because of their lack of (or incongruences in) perspective and their unfolding and open-ended trait. Despite the high precision of Khedoori's touch, a closer look reveals detritus and personal traces of the artist – parts of the wax, little insects, dog and human hairs, a shoe print and dust particles – that are strewn throughout the waxed works, reminding the viewer of the at once physical and ghostly plasticity of Khedoori's gesture. Minimalist three-dimensional objects are depicted on the two-dimensional surface of huge sheets of paper in viscous emulsions of

synthetic wax, and place the viewer in a timeless and enigmatic space of both mediation and uncertainty.



Fig.: *Untitled (Rope 2)*, 2011
Oil on canvas, 94.3 x 59.4 cm

Leisch-Kiesel stresses this ambivalence of Khedoori's drawings in their immanent realization: the enigmatic and open character of Drawing lies in the fragmentary gesture, that is in the proper act of tracing lines and marks, much more than in the final static composition. Drawings become marks generating a special communicative situation between artist and viewer which challenges the power of seeing and shows the complexity of the subjective processes of perception. In this regard, Khedoori's compositions seem to recall, in a certain way, the style of a biblical parable, in which immediately identifiable elements and situations – work in the fields, the baking of bread, family conflict – actually hide enigmatic marks and meanings which are able not only to render the familiar ambiguous, but also to provoke the established way of perceiving and believing. The author asks: “What do these icons of the world of objects narrate? A window, a door, a stab? They are simply recognizable in their lapidary representation – and then? They certainly do not lead to a real given situation, but they do not lead to a dream world as well” (125). Leisch-Kiesel uses the notion of “conceptual narrative” to interpret not only the quality of Khedoori's works, but also the development of drawing from the 1990s, noting that the drawing “brings narratives into play, although it is still not clear what they are telling” (85). Through analysis of seven key terms (*kunstgeschichtliche Situierung*, *Phänomen Zeichnung*, *Betrachten einer Zeichnung*, *marks/Zeichen*, *das Konzeptive – das Narrative*, *Denk-*

Formen, Raum und Zeit), the author explores the development of the linguistic and visual turn in the field of drawing in close dialogue with the most relevant phenomenological and semiotic perspectives (of Peirce, Derrida, Deleuze, Lacan and others). Drawings demand attention be given to the effectiveness of the marks and generate reflection on the psychological and phenomenological mechanisms of perception. Leisch-Kiesl therefore emphasizes the time quality of drawing, together with its fragmentary and incomplete nature: “If paintings present Beings, the drawn line presents Becoming” (N. Bryson). The intangible and phantasmic materiality of the conceptual space of drawing with the uncertainty of its edges communicates a “vague sense of lost completeness” (A. Newman). Unlike the unified space of paintings, the white page of a drawing disperses the substance of the depicted object yet accentuates its potentiality. The use of the pencil (but also of oil paint) on the paper is a way to inhabit a space of becoming and uncertainty that introduces the experience of time and evokes imagination and an attitude of listening.

Leisch-Kiesl examines the visionary minimalism of Khedoori’s works in order to develop a new theorem that is capable of grasping the particular feature of the phenomenon of drawing as not only space to generate meaning, but also “direct inscriptions of the world” (*Zeichnung als direkte Markierung der Welt*, 78). Lines and marks are thus interpreted as “acts of thought” (109) able to inaugurate new constellations of meaning and perception. The author speaks of “*ZeichenSetzung*” to emphasize the special capacity of the drawing to open a space on the paper, that is to create a space that did not exist before – as we have seen with Marcel Duchamp. Within this perspective Leisch-Kiesl refers to the consideration of drawing by French philosopher Alain Badiou, who has commented on the disjunctive and fragile character of pure drawing and the *intensity of its weakness*. Drawing is able to institute a new world without the strength of images and the force of colors that characterize painting, “but by the minimalism of some marks and lines, very close to the inexistence of any place”. The relationship between surface and gesture is dialectical as well:

In one sense, the paper exists, as a material support, as a closed totality; and the marks, or the lines, do not exist by themselves: they have to compose something inside the paper. But in another and more crucial sense, the paper as a background does not exist, because it is created as such, as an open surface, by the marks. It is that sort of movable reciprocity between existence and inexistence which constitutes the very essence of Drawing.” (A. Badiou)The gesture of drawing opens up a new imaginative and theoretical landscape that challenges the viewer to experience new rational and imaginative landscapes. With its ephemeral yet potential quality, a drawing can evoke notions, ideas, images, emotions, associations and thoughts about reality. Translating in a certain way Paul Ricoeur’s famous idea “*le symbole*

donne à penser”, this book insists that *drawing gives rise to thought*. The “semantic vibration” between capture and slide generates a process of interpretation of signs, which has traits of necessity and even of violence. Referring to Gilles Deleuze’s aesthetic expressed in his book *Proust and Signs* (1964), in which the French philosopher explored the meaning of signs within Marcel Proust’s work *In Search of Lost Time*, Leisch-Kiesl offers an interesting aesthetic interpretation that culminates in a meditation both on drawing as a sign-producing gesture and on the subjective capacity to be emotionally and theoretically affected by signs. The signs of drawing create a resonance space “in which the perceiving subject not only spins his/her thoughts, but also feels and imagines” (186). The “reign of signs”, according to Roland Barthes, represents an apprenticeship system that activates sensibility and thinking. Moreover, the semiotic potentiality of lines and marks stimulates the viewer and challenge his/her capacity to see, to comprehend and to imagine. The fragmentary character of drawing generates a special lack of wholeness, which *forces the subject to think*. Drawings become hieroglyphics that have to be interpreted in their immanent semiotic meaning and in the “trajectory of thought” they generate. With regard to this interpretation, in the chapter entitled “*Das Bild ist ein Akt und kein Ding*”, Leisch-Kiesl develops interesting phenomenological considerations on the “activity of images” in order to explain their effectiveness and their immanent potentiality to affect, to transform and to provoke the subject both theoretically and emotionally. Consequently, she emphasizes the active role of both the image and the eyes (*Bildakt* and *Blickakt*) to point out the “appellative trait of signs” (*appellativen Zeichenbegriff*, 210).

In this perspective, drawings correspond to an artistic visual praxis which forces us to see, to develop ideas and to express emotion through the materiality and mediality of marks (217-233): “Drawing seems to be the medium of the fugitive per se, thereby gaining its strong presence” (230). In the last part of the book, proceeding from the philosophical considerations of the young Derrida on the figure of the “différance”, the author highlights significant aesthetic elements of drawing which could be used as conceptual trajectories to approach Toba Khedoori’s works as well. *Le trait – le retrait*, *La brisure / la trace*, *Das Einmalige / l’unique* are a crucial category that enlighten – even without completely explaining – the evocative, unfolding and fragmentary nature of drawing. The depicted lines and marks disturb any stable presence, they are *brisure / traces* that interrupt any consequentiality and collocate the gesture and the effect of drawing in the future, expositing it to a “*navigation première et sans grâce*” (Derrida). The incompleteness of drawing and the unfolding nature of its conceptual narrative release from any traditional mimetic and static representation of the real as well as from its concluded figuration. However, such openness neither guarantees ipso facto the evocative potentiality of signs nor opens up new tra-

jectories of thought or new ways to inhabit time and space. In any event, drawings also have to move desire from fragments of imagination and the detritus of memory. In this sense, Khedoori gently encourages viewers to examine more carefully her waxed surfaces, which are not saturated mentally and materially by narrations and figurations, but appear to be spread with traces and detritus from her studio floor.

Leisch-Kiesl's interesting aesthetic and philosophical analysis of Toba Khedoori's drawings becomes an occasion to illustrate a theory of signs in which reception – the possibility of being theoretically and emotionally affected and challenged by signs – assumes a special function. The large-scale and precise yet elusive miniatures affect the vision from mark to mark, disturb any direct assumption of meaning and give rise to thought through their unexpected “semantic vibrations”. These convincing aesthetic and philosophical elements give momentum to the consideration of drawing and signs in Leisch-Kiesl's new book and are particularly worthy of being read and discussed in contemporary academic and artistic fields.

Charles Martig

Film Review

ON BODY AND SOUL (Ildikó Enyedi)

HU 2017

ON BODY AND SOUL (Ildikó Enyedi, HU 2017) is an astonishing film that offers a precise and sensitive look at everyday life. The plot presents an unusual love story between Mária, a young woman who has just begun to work as a quality controller, and Endres, the chief financial officer of the factory where she has been appointed. That business is a slaughterhouse, a peculiar place that is presented as a good working environment, where people speak to and respect each other. The close-up on the transformation of living being into dead meat builds the main setting of ON BODY AND SOUL and offers a scenario where corporality is very much present.

For different reasons, the two protagonists do not have easy access to life and are confronted with limits that challenge them every day. Communication between the main characters is almost impossible. Accidentally they discover that they regularly meet in dreams. The images of those dreams present nature as a place without limitation and of an incredible beauty and intensity, which is in juxtaposition to the concreteness of death within a slaughterhouse. The contrast between freedom and constraint is staged not only within the narration but also with a style based on close-ups on small things in everyday life.

After receiving the Golden Bear and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the Berlin International Film Festival, Hungarian director Ildikó Enyedi presented her new masterpiece ON BODY AND SOUL at the Zurich Film Festival in September 2017. This film review consists of an interview with Enyedi focusing on the interactions between religion and film in this new work and more generally in her cinematography.

You received the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury in Berlin. How did you response to this?

It was a complete surprise for me. I was called to receive the FIPRESCI award, the prize of the international film critics, and I didn't realise that I would receive the Ecumenical award at the same time. It was a wonderful surprise.

What does it signify for you?

Well, it has a special importance. Exactly what this ecumenical approach is trying to do is what we try to do in every community at any level. It is so heart breaking to see what happens in society. At least for the moment it seems to me that we go for confrontation and accentuate differences. In fact deep down all my films are about the importance of what we can do in our everyday life. What we do in families and communities affects bigger movements of history.

How does this interaction take place?

We feel that we are just tiny bits of paper floating on the waves. But I think very locally in your life if you try to be sincere to yourself and open to other people around you, you will be much harder to manipulate. In fact, in all my films, beginning with my first film *MY TWENTIETH CENTURY* (HU 1989) up to *ON BODY AND SOUL* (HU 2017), the leading idea is that you feel yourself powerless as a person because somebody else is deciding about your destiny instead of you. But this is not the case.

What makes the difference?

If you do not have access to political power, the way you live makes you more authentic. This helps the people around you to be more authentic as well.

This is also the theme of your new film *ON BODY AND SOUL*, a love story between two outsiders.

Yes, it is. Love is the most extreme form of opening up towards another human being. Therefore it is good to show this in the form of a love story. But in fact it is about taking the risk not to shatter yourself or defend yourself but to be fully present in your life.

But you chose a slaughterhouse as the setting for your love story. This is quite unusual.

What I realized some years ago is that the structure of everyday life has become very practical. Those frames that religion gave to us in the past are emptied. Nobody is turning to them anymore. In this big void everybody wants to be efficient. We want to resolve the situation instead of living through it. I would like to give a simple example. In the past an ordinary meal was not just an occasion to stuff some food in your mouth. It was also about your remembering that you are part of something bigger than yourself. It's a wonderful thing to be aware of this bigger context. The transcendent was very present in everyday routine.

This was also the case in your Hungarian context?

Yes, the same was true for childbirth or marriage, for the death rituals that involved saying goodbye to somebody. Today in the hospital you have all the machines and the professional care. But there is no space in there, you really have to force in that

a person has to prepare for a big journey and say goodbye to this world and to that person's beloved.

In your film you are very interested in the aspect of the soul.

What do you intend by doing so?

In this film, wherever we show bodies, human and animal bodies alike, this is mostly about their soul. This young woman Mária is trying to open up her soul. She is really exercising. She is making steps to discover the sensual world around her: the richness and the beauty of nature, for example, or the power of the sunshine and the touch of the grass. The woman evolves through sensitive impressions. In this very indirect way I wanted to show that body and soul are a whole. What we are is the interaction of these two aspects.

You work with a lot of sensual details in your film-making. Your approach includes a lot of “finesse”. What is your intention when you set up a camera and look at persons or at different details of life?

I am an only child and my greatest enjoyment during this period of my life was reading and observing. It can be a passionate thing to sit in a park and watch people. I find it very touching to see people forget themselves in any kind of action. Somehow I see in honest work, in how to cook or handle wood as a carpenter, for example, an economy of gesture. In this beauty I see the transcendent aspect of human life. To me it is very much alive in the way you touch an object. Every gesture is somehow a communication with the world around you.

How does this relate to film-making?

If you want to see humanity at its most wonderful state, go onto a film set. I'm again and again deeply touched that hardworking people who have families at home to feed come at four o'clock in the morning and work 14 hours a day for something that is not necessary. Film is something fully imaginary. But the film-making team is able to believe in it so strongly. It is wonderful to see that not only the film crew but also the guards and the drivers of our film production knew exactly what we were planning to do. I wrote a synopsis and wanted everybody to know what this film was all about. This resulted in an extraordinary sense of detail. The whole crew was very exact. They knew exactly what was right or wrong. We were all of us very keen to accomplish film-making in detail.

While listening to you, this seems to me like a kind of “spirituality of film-making”. You are referring to reality through your camera work and your directing with an attitude of spiritual impact. What do you think about this idea?

I actually agree. The wonderful thing is that you can accomplish this level of film-making. In a poem you can not add anything or take anything away. You really have to be very exact. To write a poem with 60 people is an amazing experience. I had ext-

raordinary moments of communication with these people because if they wanted to make this work right they really had to understand the depth of the film. **ON BODY AND SOUL** was like a fragile princess. The slightest fake or not rightly balanced gesture could ruin the whole thing. Even during the grading, it was not about aesthetics but about the meaning of the scene. We were talking about Mária's feelings and how her world is changing.

How did your actors respond to your insights and your working procedures?

We had very good communication between the actors and me as director. You have to get to know them and understand how they communicate. The special thing on the film set was that the whole crew was so deeply immersed in the film. With Alexandra Borbély the work was very symbiotic. I barely had to tell her anything during the shooting. We did all the work beforehand. It was really nice to see her way not of trying to understand Mária and then play the role but of finding the body and the soul of this character. Géza Morcsányi, who plays the chief financial officer of the slaughterhouse, and Alexandra Borbély in her role as a quality controller are very different. In the love story of these two characters I was barely required to make major changes in their acting. In-between smaller corrections were necessary. This is due to my approach to film-making as a holistic workflow.

Is your film-making truthful?

Yes, absolutely. It is a priority in my cinematography.

How was **ON BODY AND SOUL received by the audience?**

After the excellent response at the Berlin International Film Festival where it won several prizes, we presented the film in Hungary in the first week of March 2017 and it is still in cinemas.

This is definitely a long-term presence in cinemas. What about its release in other countries?

The film brought a far larger audience than the production company had expected. Several countries in Europe are releasing the film in the autumn, Germany, Great Britain, France and the Scandinavian countries, for example. The film will be shown in nearly every European country.

The starting point of this success was in Berlin?

A prize can help launch a film, of course. But afterwards it can't really endorse the promotion. What was very rewarding – for all us who made this film – was the direct response to **ON BODY AND SOUL**. In discussions with audiences after screenings, I really made an effort to connect not on an intellectual but on a sensitive level. I tried to make the point that sensitivity and the soul are somehow the same.

Is this the secret of a successful launch in cinemas?

It was my intention to give audiences the chance to have this experience and to connect with the idea that body and soul are corresponding parts of human life. There is also a very fine balance between “laughing” and “laughing at”. These two aspects are so close to each other.

How did you accomplish this kind of balance?

In the editing we worked on this balance. Through this love story I wanted to give the spectator a heart-warming sensation by experiencing openness. If you keep the humour in the drama at too low a key it can hardly be understood and the film becomes pretentious. ON BODY AND SOUL seems to balance these elements perfectly. We found a balance of body and soul in the film and give this experience to the audience.

FILMOGRAPHY

MY TWENTIETH CENTURY (AZ ÉN XX. SZÁZADOM, Ildikó Enyedi, HU 1989)

ON BODY AND SOUL (TESTRŐL ÉS LÉLEKRŐL, Ildikó Enyedi, HU 2017)



Calls for Papers

JRFM 2018, 4/1 CALL FOR PAPERS

Trauma, Memory and Religion

Representing Memories of Killing in Film

In the last few years, two influential films were released that dealt with the memories of men who had killed people a very long time ago. Although *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* (DE/AU Stefan Ruzowitzky, D 2013) and *THE ACT OF KILLING* (Joshua Oppenheimer, NO/DK/GB 2012) re-enact massacres performed in countries distant from each other, the works show astonishing similarities. In both films the killers were haunted by images popping up in their nightmares, depicting the angst and despair of their victims. Is this kind of reaction by the killers a universal human phenomenon when faced with such horrible events? Or is it a cinematic device to express the sense of guilt? How is the memory of the traumatic experience of killing represented in film?

DAS RADIKAL BÖSE, which won an award at the Jerusalem Film Festival in 2014, focuses on the question how ordinary German soldiers could become the murderers of Jewish civilians, including men, women and children. During their military campaigns in Eastern Europe in 1941 and 1942 they killed two millions people with rifles and pistols.

THE ACT OF KILLING received the BAFTA Film Award for the best documentary in 2014. It uses the technique of role-playing to allow the feelings of the murderers to come to the surface. Two years later, Joshua Oppenheimer made a second film, *THE LOOK OF SILENCE* (NO/DK/GB 2014), in which he recaptures the same killings but from the perspective of the victims.

Both in *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* and in *THE ACT OF KILLING* a religious dimension is discernable, in which apparently a certain difference comes to light: depending on the religion tradition, different strategies to express the responsibility of the killers are presented. In *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE*, which is embedded in the Protestant Lutheran tradition, the actors speak about feeling guilty, while in *THE ACT OF KILLING* the actors, mostly Muslim Indonesians who also have some roots in local indigenous religions, relate to God's inevitable punishment. Which role does

religion play in this context? Is it religion that introduces differences between the ways of coping with massacres?

This issue of **JRFM** is devoted to films in which trauma, memory and religion are interwoven and encourages interdisciplinary approaches to this topic with particular consideration for psychology, film studies and comparative religion. We are inviting articles that

- analyse the religious dimension in the above mentioned films or in other productions from all over the world,
- address intercultural dimensions and/or gender differences in films dealing with the topic of trauma, memory and religion, and / or
- focus on the role of sound in this kind of films and its religious significance.

The issue has also an open section for articles on other topics linked to the profile of **JRFM**.

Contributions of 25,000-30,000 characters (including spaces) should be submitted online for peer review by November 28, 2017 through the journal homepage www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register. Publication is scheduled for May 2018.

For any questions regarding the call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact the office manager of **JRFM** (jrfm@uni-graz.at).

JRFM 2018, 4/2 CALL FOR PAPERS

“Who, Being Loved, is Poor?”

Material and Media Dimensions of Wedding

Wedding rituals are performed as a “rite de passage” in diverse cultures and within religious as well as secular contexts in manifold variations. The temporal horizon of the marriage vow might be forever and eternal, until death breaks the couple apart, or just temporary. The ritual can include only two persons or several, groom and bride, two grooms or two brides or a multiplicity of persons in any constellation. For some time now, weddings have become events, a big business with fairs, wedding planners and specific products for the special day(s). Media representations influence the look and performance of weddings, how the festivities are orchestrated and celebrated. And at the same time, many couples are looking for alternative expressions of the wedding ritual.

The **JRFM** 2018 4/2 is inviting articles considering the material and media dimension of the wedding ritual. We welcome both historical and contemporary case studies, diachronic and synchronic approaches to questions as:

- The link between tradition, innovation and change in religious rituals and motifs.
- Representation, political and economic dimensions, race, gender and ethnicity of weddings.
- The visual and material context of the production and consumption of the ritual.
- A wide range of media – films, from short documentaries to reality shows and fiction, clothing, festivities before, during and after the wedding, etc.
- Also normative aspects of marriage with their impact on LGBTIQ communities, intercultural or interreligious couples can be considered.

This issue of **JRFM** will be devoted to visual, audio-visual and material dimensions of the practices surrounding weddings from a diversity of cultures, religious traditions, and spiritual movements. It encourages interdisciplinary approaches to this topic with particular consideration for the study of religion, visual anthropology, film and media studies, theology, and comparative religion.

The issue has also an open section for articles on other topics linked to the profile of **JRFM**. Contributions of 25,000-30,000 characters (including spaces) should be submitted online for peer review by February 28, 2018 through the journal homepage www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register. Publication is scheduled for November 2018. For any questions regarding the call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact the office manager of **JRFM** (jrfm@uni-graz.at).



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