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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 mediatised 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

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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-

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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 media[4] 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]

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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 mediatised 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 mediatisation 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 mediatised 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 mediatised, 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 mediatisation 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,

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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

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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 chiastic 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

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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 (saǧda) during the ṣalāt is intimately associated both historically and physically to the place of prostration (masǧid) 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 entanglements[29] or its performance of emotions, group identity and world views[30]

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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 ḥaǧǧ 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

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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]

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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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