2. Spaces of Communication: Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The approach to Mormonism adopted in this study is located in the field of media and religion. Mormons form the case study, while the media specific to the project is identified as "documentary media", a term that we will explore below. The relationship between documentary media and religion is key on a systematic level and determines the theoretical and methodological parameters. It likewise shapes the study's approach to religion.

This chapter addresses a number of fundamental questions . How is the interface between documentary media and religion constituted? How is the term "documentary" defined and used? How is religion construed? And finally, how might documentary media allow us to research a religious group? The questions sketch an approach to religion that places center stage the media and their spaces of production, representation, consumption, distribution and circulation. The following deliberations are to be understood as working tools, to be employed and refined in the course of this inter- and transdisciplinary endeavor, as we scrutinize a diversity of documentary sources and their particular contexts.

The chapter starts with a short introduction to the field of media and religion. Next, the semio-pragmatics of documentary media are outlined, along with a discussion of how religion is conceived. The model of spaces of communication is then introduced, and discussed in relation to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (LDS Church) media library.[25] Finally, the methodological approach is explained with specific reference to the sources available for this study.

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25 "LDS Media Library – Art, Videos, Pictures, and Audio Downloads," accessed September 28, 2017, https://www.lds.org/media-library?lang=eng&_r=1.

2.1. The field of media and religion – an overview of approaches

In the last two decades "media and religion" has become established as an innovative and multifaceted field of research.[26] According to Stewart Hoover, whose own field is media studies, this research has taken two directions in particular: (1) examination of the ways in which religious groups and traditions use the media in the practice of their religion and (2) investigation of the engagement of the media with religion.[27] Audio-visual media makes up a subgroup, with its diverse forms – the "electronic church," feature films, television, or the Internet, for example – as subjects of research. Documentary media are frequently at the same time audio-visual media. Even though the literature that is mentioned in the following does not address audio-visual sources alone, they play a key role in the field of media and religion.

The interface of audio-visual media and religion can be divided up according to the lens through which the topic is viewed. For research on the use of media by religious communities three aspects are significant: (1) the producer and the production context, (2) the media itself, and (3) the consumer, aka the recipient. A focus on production will frequently deal with institutional and economic issues, for example the links between market and media within popular religion,[28] religious media as lifestyle,[29] or the

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26 Mia Lövheim, "Introduction: Gender – a Blind Spot in Media, Religion and Culture?," in *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*, ed. Mia Lövheim, Media, Religion and Culture (London: Routledge, 2013), 1–15; David Morgan, "Religion and Media: A Critical Review of Recent Developments," *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no. 3 (November 15, 2013): 347–56; Daniel A. Stout, *Media and Religion: Foundations of an Emerging Field* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, "Eine illustrierte Annäherung an das Verhältnis von Medien und Religion," in *Religiöse Blicke – Blicke auf das Religiöse: Visualität und Religion*, ed. Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler, Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, and Joachim Valentin (Zürich: TVZ, 2010), 245–266.

27 Stewart M. Hoover, "Media and Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005); Alf G. Linderman, "Approaches to the Study of Religion in the Media," in *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 305–315.

28 Hubert Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion: auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Campus-Verlag, 2009); Hubert Knoblauch, "Populäre Religion. Markt, Medien Und Die Popularisierung Der Religion," *Zeitschrift Für Religionswissenschaft* 8, no. 2 (2000): 143–162.

29 Lynn Schofield Clark, *Religion, Media, and the Marketplace* (Piscataway/NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 1–36.

marketing of religion in the media.[30] Investigation of media representations, or texts, might consider their symbolic-mythical dimension.[31] In addition, studies on representation have subjected media texts to qualitative or quantitative analysis.[32] With a focus on explicitly religious themes, religious significance becomes an analytical category in its own right. Emphasizing the communication process and its aesthetic qualities likewise brings a focus on the medium and its religious representations.[33] When the central concern is with consumers and recipients, that accentuation has highlighted, inter alia, the ritual aspects of the media or the social practices of recipients.[34] Behind the concept of media consumption as ritual is the idea that groups and individuals adopt the modes of interpretation transmitted in the media and that these modes are subsequently transferred by the recipients into other social spheres. One topic that has been addressed in this context is how the media portrays issues of identity, belonging, and

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30 Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*, Religion, Media, and Culture Series (London: Routledge, 2008).

31 Jörg Rüpke, "Religion medial," in *Religion und Medien: vom Kultbild zum Internetritual*, ed. Jamal Malik, vol. 4, Vorlesungen des Interdisziplinären Forums Religion der Universität Erfurt (Münster: Aschendorff, 2007), 19–28.

32 Andreas Hepp and Veronika Krönert, *Medien, Event, Religion: die Mediatisierung des Religiösen*, Medien – Kultur – Kommunikation (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009); Oliver Krüger, "Exkurs: Die Präsenz von Religionen im deutschen Fernsehen," in *Religionen im Fernsehen: Analysen und Perspektiven*, ed. Constanze Jecker, Kommunikationswissenschaft (Konstanz: UVK, 2011), 161–184; Constanze Jecker, *Religionen im Fernsehen: Analysen und Perspektiven*, Kommunikationswissenschaft (Konstanz: UVK, 2011).

33 Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, "Religion und Visualität," in *Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 343–364; Pezzoli-Olgiati, "Eine illustrierte Annäherung an das Verhältnis von Medien und Religion"; Heather Hendershot, *What's Fair on the Air?: Cold War Right-Wing Broadcasting and the Public Interest* (University of Chicago Press, 2011); Heather Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

34 David Morgan, "Religion, Media, Culture: The Shape of the Field," in *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–19; David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Stewart M. Hoover, "Media and Religion"; Stewart M. Hoover, "The Culturalist Turn in Scholarship on Media and Religion," *Journal of Media and Religion* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 25–36; Wayne Luther Thompson, "Religion and the Media," in *Encyclopedia of International Media and Communications*, ed. Donald H. Johnston (New York: Elsevier, 2003), 81–90.

human existence.[35] These three categories are certainly useful, but they are also not as clearly defined as these descriptions might suggest, for in practice media representation, reception aesthetics, and media production, as well as their institutionalization, are not only linked, but also influence one another, bolstering the interface of media and religion.[36]

The interface of film[37] and religion forms a subcategory of the broader topic of audio-visual media and religion. At first blush, film media and documentary media would appear to overlap, with both media forms conveying at least 24 images per second to provide the impression of motion, which is technically the case. But distinctions do exist, mirrored in scholarly activities in the field of film and religion, where researchers have primarily focused on the fictional feature film, and the experience of viewing has largely been addressed within the context of the cinema.

Five principal directions in scholarly approaches to the relationship between film and religion can usefully be identified.[38] First, since its earliest days, film has been used to convey theological narratives – we think, for

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35 Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, Religion, Media and Culture (London: Routledge, 2006).

36 Oliver Krüger, *Die mediale Religion: Probleme und Perspektiven der religionswissenschaftlichen und wissenssoziologischen Medienforschung*, vol. 1, Religion und Medien (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012); Stewart M. Hoover, "Media and the Imagination of Religion in Contemporary Global Culture," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14, no. 6 (2011): 610–25; Hubert Mohr, "Auf der Suche nach der Religionsmedienwissenschaft oder: Wie die audiovisuellen Medien unser heutiges Bild von Religion verändern," in *Aspekte der Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Richard Faber (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 159–182.

37 I am using the term „film" for audio-visual sources instead of movie because film encompasses a broader spectrum of media sources. Furthermore, it refers to the academic discipline "film studies" that is a relevant field for the current approach.

38 Some important approaches and overviews to the field of film and religion are mentioned here: Natalie Fritz, "Von Rabenvätern und Übermüttern: das religionshistorische Motiv der heiligen Familie im Spannungsfeld zwischen Religion, Kunst und Film" (Marburg, Schüren, 2018), 17–44; Marie-Therese Mäder, *Die Reise als Suche nach Orientierung: eine Annäherung an das Verhältnis zwischen Film und Religion* (Marburg: Schüren, 2012); Marie-Therese Mäder, "A Cultural Studies Approach to Film and Religion, Context and Film Analysis of YES (Potter, GB / USA 2004)," in *Approaches to the Visual in Religion*, ed. Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati and Christopher Rowland, vol. 10, Research in Contemporary Religion (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2011), 101–118; Marie-Therese Mäder, "Film und Religion: ein multidisziplinäres Forschungsfeld," in *Religiöse Blicke - Blicke auf das Religiöse: Visualität und Religion*, ed. Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler, Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, and Joachim Valentin (Zürich: TVZ, 2010), 325–348; Marie-Therese Mäder, "Film und Religion am Beispiel von EXISTENZ (David Cronenberg,

example, of narratives drawn from the Hebrew Bible or New Testament or films that deal with fundamental questions of human existence. Theological approaches were then constitutive of early scholarly engagement with film and religion, and their presence is therefore extensive and varied. We find films examined in light of, for example, theological aesthetics[39] and fundamental theological questions.[40]

Secondly, film and religion have been conceived as functional equivalents in everyday life. The functionality of feature films can be compared with the functionality of religion, in both instances at the narrative level. This direction highlights film and religion as competitors and film as a form of religion that tackles the contingencies of life and makes sense out of them.[41] Thirdly, film can represent religious phenomena within a specific cultural context. When that cultural context is key, various strategies are employed in reading the film in relation to its production and reception.[42] Fourthly, film and religion can be seen as communication systems, and as communication systems that interact in manifold ways.[43]

USA 1998),” in *Outer Space: Reisen in Gegenwelten*, ed. Charles Martig and Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, vol. 13 (Marburg: Schüren, 2009), 256–282; Colleen McDannell, *Catholics in the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

39 Charles Martig, *Kino der Irritation: Lars von Triers theologische und ästhetische Herausforderung* (Marburg: Schüren, 2008); Lothar Warneke, *Transzendenz im populären Film*, vol. 59, Beiträge zur Film- und Fernsehwissenschaft (Berlin: Vistas, 2001); Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (New York, N.Y: Da Capo Press, 1972).

40 Gerhard Larcher, *Zeit, Geschichte und Gedächtnis: Theo Angelopoulos im Gespräch mit der Theologie*, vol. Band 5 (Marburg: Schüren, 2003); Stefan Orth, Joachim Valentin, and Reinhold Zwick, *Göttliche Komödien: religiöse Dimensionen des Komischen im Kino* (Köln: KIM, 2001).

41 Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1996); John Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Matthias J. Fritsch, Martin Lindwedel, and Thomas Schärtl, *Wo nie zuvor ein Mensch gewesen ist: Science-Fiction-Filme: angewandte Philosophie und Theologie* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2003).

42 Melanie Jane Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London: Tauris, 2006); S. Brent Plate, *Representing Religion in World Cinema: Filmmaking, Mythmaking, Culture Making* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Nadine Christina Böhm, “Sakrales Sehen: Strategien der Sakralisierung im Kino der Jahrtausendwende” (Bielefeld, Transcript, 2009).

43 Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, “Film und Religion: Blick auf Kommunikationssysteme und ihre vielfältigen Wechselwirkungen,” in *Religious turns – turning religions: veränderte kulturelle Diskurse – neue religiöse Wissensformen*, ed. Andreas Nehring and Regina Ammicht Quinn (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 46–66; Daria Pezzoli-Ol-

These first four characteristics of the interface of film and religion are as valid for documentaries as they are for fiction films, with no distinction needing to be drawn between these two audio-visual forms. The fifth, and final, dimension to the relationship between film and religion provides an opportunity to characterize the relation between documentary media and religion more specifically. We now leave behind fiction film, and focus on documentary media.

2.2. Documentary media and religion

Film and religion can be understood as interacting cultural moments.[44] Stuart Hall first described a "circuit of culture" in his textbook *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, published in 1997[45] and returned to the concept in the introduction to the revised edition of 2013 (fig. 5).[46]

For Hall, the term culture encompasses a way of life, a system of values and practices. Central to moments in culture is the sharing of meaning and a focus on practice. Persons, objects, and events never carry fixed meaning. Hall suggests that

> the question of meaning arises in relation to *all* the different moments or practices in our "cultural circuit" – in the construction of identity and the marking of difference, in production and consumption, as well as in the regulation of social conduct.[47]

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giati, "Vom Ende der Welt zur hoffnungsvollen Vision: Apokalypse im Film," in *Handbuch Theologie und populärer Film*, ed. Thomas Bohrmann (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), 255–275; Brent S. Plate, "Filmmaking and World Making. Re-Creating Time and Space in Myth and Film," in *Teaching Religion and Film*, ed. Gregory J. Watkins, Teaching Religious Studies Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219–232; S. Brent Plate, *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*, vol. 43, Short Cuts (London: Wallflower, 2008).

44 Mäder, *Die Reise als Suche nach Orientierung*.

45 Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, Culture, Media and Identities (London: SAGE in association with The Open University, 1997), 1.

46 Stuart Hall, "Introduction," in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), xvii.
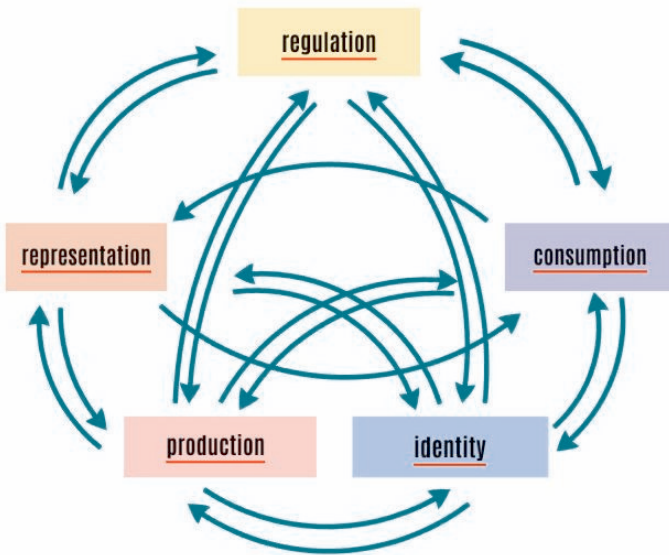
47 Hall, xx.

Fig. 5 Circuit of Culture (Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall).

In order to be able to make meaning in language, representation, or practices, people must possess shared codes. For example, sounds, clothing, images, or verbal expressions generate and communicate meaning. They represent human concepts, ideas, and emotions that are decoded, interpreted, and read. As communication is not a one-sided transmission but rather a dialogue, meaning is an unstable and alterable process. Also, different circuits of meaning can exist within a single culture, and they may intersect.

Difference and (associated) power relations are integral to cultural communication.[48] People communicate with a diversity of cultural practices – for example, the style of clothes and the manner in which they are worn, language expressions, visual representations of people in social media, the celebration of cooking, food prohibitions, or the consumption of specific products. These communicative interactions have in common that they are fundamentally defined by difference and power relations expressed in reg-

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48   Natalie Fritz et al., *Sichtbare Religion: eine Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, De Gruyter Studium (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 120–128.

ulations. For example, dress policies are implemented in secular as well as religious places. In some sacred spaces, shoulders and upper legs must not be bared or shoes be worn. Dress codes are often communicated for weddings. Designer dresses might distinguish the rich from the poor. Such practices differentiate people one from another, and demonstrate how difference functions as a defining aspect of culture. Hall has suggested that

> We should perhaps learn to think of meaning less in terms of "accuracy" and "truth" and more in terms of effective exchange – a process of translation, which facilitates cultural communication while always recognizing the persistence of difference and power between different "speakers" within the same cultural circuit.[49]

This quote highlights that difference and power relations are established in the "same cultural circuit", within its distinct moments; those relations can therefore be revealed through analysis of cultural communication.

And so we reach the fifth dimension of the relationship between film and religion: representation. Cultural representation has three forms. The material world, individuals and their experiences, and events belong to the first; mental concepts, the imagined, and ideas are associated with the second;[50] signs representing these concepts belong to the third realm, with such signs consisting of codes that are shaped by social conventions.[51] It is in terms of representation that we find a marked distinction between the fiction film and the documentary.

The audience for a film will likely believe they know whether they are watching a fictional film or a documentary film, even though the genres use the same techniques and can draw on the same aesthetics. But *how* do they know that they are watching a documentary instead of a fiction film, or vice versa? How do they perceive that difference? And how *do* documentaries differ from fiction films? We turn now to explore these questions.

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49 Hall, "Introduction," xxvi.
50 Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, "Religion in Cultural Imaginary. Setting the Scene," in *Religion in Cultural Imaginary: Explorations in Visual Und Material Practices*, ed. Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, vol. 13, Religion – Wirtschaft – Politik (Zürich, Baden-Baden: Pano Verlag Nomos, 2015), 9–38.
51 Anna-Katharina Höpflinger, *Religiöse Codes in der Populärkultur. Kleidung der Blackmetal-Szene* (Baden Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2020), 13–25.

The Semio-pragmatics of documentary media

An opposition of documentaries and fiction films, with the former conveying reality and the latter conveying an invented world, is hard to maintain. In place of the contrasting categories of fiction and documentary film, semio-pragmatics construct a heuristic approach, one that allows for a "documentary reading mode." The concept of "documentary media" then – derived from the documentary reading mode as used here – assumes the semio-pragmatic model, in which, according to Roger Odin, two paradigms – semiotics and pragmatics – are connected:

> It seems that both paradigms had been present all the time, present in the mind of the theorists, but also in everybody's mind: at the same time confidence in a text and in its autonomous existence, and the insight that the meaning of a text changes in accord with its context.[52]

The semio-pragmatic approach places audio-visual media in the tension between film and the communication spaces within which media function.[53] Rather than adopt the binary categories "fiction" and "non-fiction," we are encouraged through semio-pragmatics to construct a theoretical approach that is based on the variety of situations in which media communication takes place. These situations are then termed "reading modes."[54] Reading modes are generated and steered both by internal reading instructions, clues within the media itself, and also by information provided by the medium's context, which we can understand as external instructions. Internal reading instructions, also called peritexts,[55] comprise everything that is displayed in the film, including the information in the opening credits, the body of the film, and the closing credits.

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52 Roger Odin, *Les Espaces de communication: Introduction à la sémio-pragmatique* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2011), 15. French original version reads: "Tout se passe comme si les deux paradigmes étaient toujours là, en même temps, présent dans l'esprit des théoriciens, mais aussi dans l'esprit de tout un chacun: à la fois, la croyance au texte et à son existence autonome, et la reconnaissance que le sens d'un texte change avec le contexte." Translation mine.

53 Frank Kessler, "Historische Pragmatik," *montage a/v, Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation* 11, no. 2 (2002): 106.

54 For an extended discussion of Roger Odin's concept of communication spaces see Warren Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 77–108.

55 Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean, "Introduction to the Paratext," *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (1991): 263.

External reading instructions, or epitexts,[56] are drawn from the context for a source's production, representation, and reception. They are less limited than the internal reading instructions, which are mostly fixed as soon as the film is finished. External reading instructions are constructed by, for example, the cultural context of the audience member, which will be different in each reception process. Depending on their cultural and social background as well as their mental and emotional disposition, they might interpret a film differently, although not completely arbitrarily.[57] If the audience doesn't feel a comedy is funny, then the film may not have achieved its explicit goal, although tastes in humor vary, which is why different kinds of comedy are produced.

In addition, the institutional context often provides reliable and precise information that functions as reading instructions. A semio-pragmatic approach therefore pays attention to the institutional context within which the audio-visual sources are produced, distributed, and consumed. A film viewed on television in a family home is received differently from a film viewed by a church community or as part of a news program. An advertisement on a cinema listing or information available on an Internet site will shape how a film is read. Watching a show on a smart phone or tablet is not the same as watching a film in a cinema, surrounded by other spectators. Colleagues talking about a show they have seen might provide external information. The immediate responses of your neighbor in the cinema might influence your reception experience.

Production circumstances generate additional external reading instructions. Amateur productions will likely differ from generously financed, professionally created documentary productions, which is of particular relevance in the case of the (re)presentation of religious groups. Financing can play a central role, making possible lavish audio-visual representations that will be read very differently from home-movie style films. At the same time, connections can be made between individual films that we know were created within a single production framework.

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56 Genette and Maclean, 264.
57 Stuart Hall discerns in his paper „Encoding and Decoding" three different positions in the media communication process. These are the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated code and the oppositional code. All of the three codes are based on the idea that the media producers intend a specific message that might be read in different reading modes. See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Documentary Research*, ed. John Scott, vol. 1, 4 vols., Sage Benchmarks in Social Research Methods (London: SAGE, 2006), 233–246.

A semio-pragmatic approach locates the cultural practice of meaning-making between the media representation and its spectators. Meaning is not inscribed by the media before consumption. Meaning is generated within the tension of the two parameters formed by the media representation and the spectator. Each is situated within a specific context that affects the reading mode, and thus they generate varied reading modes. A semio-pragmatic approach therefore tries to anticipate possible "readings" of a specific film in a specific social and cultural space.

> Such a contextual framing is neither social nor cognitive but rather pragmatic in nature: It works by constructing the fullness of hypotheses that are in a first step corroborated phenomenologically (as spectators, we can all undertake such "readings"), and subsequently can be reassessed sociologically and/or cognitively.[58]

One such contextual framing allows a "documentary reading mode". The expression "documentary mode" contains a reference to what Odin has termed the "real enunciator."[59] An essential element of the documentary mode concerns the credibility and authenticity of the social actors on screen.

Documentary reading mode of "real life"

In documentary material, the impression is given that those who are portrayed are expressing their own opinions, imparting their own experiences, and providing their own insights about life; they are not, or so it appears, following a script as for a feature film. The documentary mode conveys a reality on which all those involved seem to draw in order to determine how the film looks and how that information is conveyed. Interviews are a concrete example of internal reading instructions that identify a real enun-

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58 Roger Odin, "Wirkungsbedingungen des Dokumentarfilms. Zur Semio-Pragmatik am Beispiel 'Notre planète la terre' (1947)," in *Perspektiven des Dokumentarfilms*, ed. Manfred Hattendorf, vol. 7, Diskurs Film (München: Diskurs-Film-Verlag Schaudig & Ledig, 1995), 96. The German version reads: "Dieser kontextuelle Rahmen ist pragmatischer und nicht soziologischer oder kognitiver Natur: Er funktioniert als Gesamtheit von Hypothesen, die in einem ersten Schritt auf phänomenologische Weise bestätigt werden können (wir alle können als Zuschauer diese 'Lektüren' vornehmen), um anschließend eventuell soziologisch und/oder kognitivistisch überprüft zu warden." Translation mine.

59 Odin, *Les espaces de communication*, 53–58, 289–291.

ciator. A viewer might ask, can I believe this expert? or what authority do you have to make such statements? They seek out a "real" enunciator who can be interrogated for information about topics, past events, persons, and the truth.

For Odin, the moral mode is closely connected to the documentary mode. This moral mode produces value by asking, who are you to tell me the truth? What is your authority to affirm what you affirm?[60] The producer and the social actors on screen need to appear credible to the audience within the communication process. If either or both lack such credibility, then the whole film fails. The audience does not need to share the opinions presented, but they do least need to believe that the opinions expressed are authentic. In a nutshell: films fall into the genre of documentary if they are received as showing real people in credible situations. For Patricia Aufderheide a documentary is "a movie about real life." She continues,

> And that is precisely the problem; documentaries are about real life; they are not real life. They are not even windows onto real life. They are portraits of real life, using real life as their raw material, constructed by artists and technicians who make myriad decisions about what story to tell to whom, and for what purpose.[61]

This definition has two crucial aspects. First, the narrative in a documentary conveys stories "about real life." The preposition *about* is central in the understanding of what documentaries are. The same proposition is also encountered in Bill Nichols' three-step definition:

1. Documentaries are about reality; they're about something that actually happened.
2. Documentaries are about real people
3. Documentaries tell stories about what really happened.[62]

Compared to Nichols understanding of "about" Aufderheide's implies that documentaries do not necessarily tell or show the truth, but that documentary narrations are shaped *as* real. And according to both Aufderheide and Nichols, documentaries build their world out of the factual world. A director might influence or even change the factual world through filming, but

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60 Odin, 56.
61 Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, 2.
62 Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 6–14.

the goal remains for the film to show images from the actual world to which the audience belongs.

The definition of documentary media would suggest that the individuals who appear within the film are not hired actors and that no screenwriter has crafted the lives, family relations, friends, work places, homes, and hobbies that are portrayed. But we can be in no doubt that the presence of a camera and film team crucially influences the situation of the social actors who appear before that camera. Choices have been made, often within a script, before shooting begins, and they continue to be made as the shooting takes place, and subsequently. For example, who is to be deemed representative of a religious community? What should be included in the portrayal, and what left out? Which moments in the life of a religious social actor are to be depicted? And then, how should the audio-visual depiction look? Which camera angles will be used, and when? How close should the camera be? What questions will be posed to the participants? What do the producers and filmmakers want to hear from the social actors, and what do they not want to hear? Documentary film makers often have a narrative in mind, and their decision-making in light of that narrative continues during the postproduction process. Which takes will be used and in which order will they be edited? What kind of music would be in accord with the desired effect? Such questions, and the decisions that follow, determine the documentary-media staging and representation of people and objects that live or exist in the everyday world.

Aufderheide embraces the complex relationship between documentary film and reality as follows: "The genre of documentary always has two crucial elements that are in tension: representation, and reality. Their makers manipulate and distort reality like all filmmakers, but they still make a claim for making a truthful representation of reality."[63] If this claim is made in a religious context, whether that religious context be associated with the social actors, setting and the stories told in front of the camera or with the audience, its inherent truthfulness becomes more ambivalent.

Understanding the interface of documentary media and religion requires each aspect be examined for how it shapes and is shaped by the other. How, then, should we approach this interactive process involving religion and documentary media theoretically? We now turn to find a framing for this reciprocity.

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63 Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, 9/10.

Mediated religion in society and culture

Two useful concepts, *mediation* and *mediatization*[64], address how the media influences religion.[65] These concepts embrace the communication of religion through an independent institution – namely, the media – that shapes religion in turn. Stig Hjarvard has argued, "Through the process of mediatisation, religion is increasingly being subsumed under the logic of the media, both in terms of institutional regulation, symbolic content and individual practices."[66] This perspective highlights (a) how communication processes are defined by social and cultural practices[67] and (b) how communication processes change in the short and long term.[68] For "mediation" and "mediatization" must be recognized as distinct phenomena, according to Hjarvard:

> Mediation describes the concrete act of communication by means of a medium in a specific social context. By contrast, mediatisation refers to a more long-term process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media's influence.[69]

Hjarvard further distinguishes three vehicles for the mediatization of religion: religious media, journalism on religion, and banal religion.[70] All

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64 The term "mediatisation" is sometimes also spelled and synonymously used as "mediatization".

65 Stig Hjarvard, "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion. Changing the Public Face of Religion," in *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2012), 21–44.

66 Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (2008): 11.

67 Hubert Knoblauch, "Benedict in Berlin: The Mediatization of Religion," in *Mediatized Worlds: Culture and Society in a Media Age*, ed. Andreas Hepp and Friedrich Krotz (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 143–58; Stewart M. Hoover, "Media and the Imagination of Religion in Contemporary Global Culture"; Friedrich Krotz, ed., "Medienkommunikation als Modifikation von Kommunikation, Typen von Kommunikation und der Bedeutungswandel mediatisierter Kommunikation," in *Mediatisierung: Fallstudien zum Wandel von Kommunikation* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), 85–116.

68 Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change," *Culture and Religion*, 2011, 124.

69 Hjarvard, 124.

70 Hjarvard, "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion. Changing the Public Face of Religion," 26–39.

three are related to documentary media, for example in the broadcasting of religious services, news, moderated debates, or entertainment. Only banal religion, probably the vaguest category of the three, includes narrative fiction. Hjarvard describes banal religion as "a bricolage of decontextualized elements from a variety of sources, including institutionalized religious texts, iconography and liturgy, brought into new contexts and serving purposes other than those of religious institutions."[71] Maybe the interface of media and religion is strongly coined by bricolage elements of religion and the category might seem somehow blurred.

The mediatization of religion changes its public face and is closely connected not only with secularization but also with other social and cultural processes like globalization, commercialization, and individualization.[72] As used here, "secularization" is not to be understood as the disappearance of religion, but as a transformation process influenced by the social process of mediatization among others.[73] To gain a hold on this process, Hjarvard has investigated how mediatized forms of religion challenge the Protestant church in Nordic countries. His conclusions draw on the three forms of mediatized religion. First, religious media allow multiple and individual voices and representations. Secondly, journalism on religion conveys a criticism of religious institutions that fail to adapt to the secular values of democracy. Thirdly, the "bricolage" of banal religion functions as a source of cultural knowledge about religion. In the current study, these three forms are used with reference to documentary media and are taken as factual, as opposed fictional.

The mediatization concept continues a historic tradition that has seen the media transform religion, generating new forms of religious communication. Additionally, in this exploration of the mediatization of religion, we will scrutinize how the documentary style influences, shapes, and transforms the public face of religion. On that score, the study looks in detail at religion's cultural moments, and specifically at practices and diverse forms

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71 Hjarvard, 36.

72 Hjarvard, 22.

73 José Casanova, "Eurozentristischer Säkularismus und die Herausforderung der Globalisierung," in *Politik, Religion, Markt: die Rückkehr der Religion als Anfrage an den politisch-philosophischen Diskurs der Moderne*, ed. Wilhelm Guggenberger, Dietmar Regensberger, and Kristina Stöckl, vol. 4 (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2009), 19–40; Charles Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (Columbia University Press, 2011), 43–59.

of documentary representation, which will be sketched at the end of this section.

Reading modes of religion

We have been using the complex term "religion" in this discussion and need now to elaborate on the concept for which it stands. "Religion" as understood in this study is rooted in communication theory,[74] where religion can be understood as a specific system of communication.[75] Religious communication will often address human contingence, the idea that everything in life might be different.[76] It allows to transfer the transcendental into an immanent realm. The approach adopted here allows us to see this transformation happen within media practices. We must bear in mind, however, that what is deemed to belong to the transcendental realm differs according to cultural context.[77]

Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta choose to combine functional and substantive definitions of religion, an approach that is useful for the current

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74 Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, "Religion as Communicative Figurations – Analyzing Religion in Times of Deep Mediatizations," in *Mediatized Religion in Asia: Studies on Digital Media and Religion*, ed. Kerstin Radde-Antweiler and Xenia Zeiler, Routledge Research in Digital Media and Culture in Asia (New York: Routledge, 2019), 11–24; Volkhard Krech, "Religion als Kommunikation," in *Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 49–64; Edmund Arens, "Religion as Communication," in *The Social Psychology of Communication*, ed. Derek Hook, Bradley Franks, and Martin W. Bauer (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 249–65; Jürgen Mohn, "Die Religion im Diskurs und die Diskurse der Religion(en). Überlegungen zu Religionsdiskurstheorien und zur religionsaisthetischen Grundlegung des Diskursfeldes Religion," in *Religion – Wirtschaft – Politik: Forschungszugänge zu einem aktuellen transdisziplinären Feld*, ed. Antonius Liedhegener, Andreas Tunger-Zanetti, and Stephan Wirz, 1st ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011), 84–111; Pezzoli-Olgiati, "Eine illustrierte Annäherung an das Verhältnis von Medien und Religion. ".
75 Fritz Stolz, "Religiöse Symbole in religionswissenschaftlicher Rekonstruktion," in *Religion und Rekonstruktion: ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 67–70; Robert A. Yelle, *Semiotics of Religion: Signs of the Sacred in History*, Bloomsbury Advances in Semiotics (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 2.
76 Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne: ein internationaler Vergleich*, Schriftenreihe "Religion und Moderne" (Frankfurt/M.: Campus-Verlag, 2015), 63; Krech, "Religion als Kommunikation," 58.
77 Pollack and Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne*, 66; Martin Riesebrodt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen: eine Theorie der Religionen* (München: Beck, 2007), 113.

study with its examination of how people communicate about religion through different media.[78] Representations carry meaning, even if that meaning is situational and has a specific function. People communicate content and want to achieve something by doing so. This approach also connects religion to its religious agents, as Pollack and Rosta propose: "For religious actors, communication with what they hold to be transcendental, by means of rituals, prayers, scriptures, images, dances, sermons, songs of praise, experiences or discoveries, is central to their religion."[79] The meaning of religious practices is defined in the tension between social actors, media practices, and the vast fundus of religious symbols and expressions.[80] This study therefore approaches not only media but also religion from a semio-pragmatic perspective, with religious meaning-making understood to be constructed through the interaction of the media and social actors.

Different institutional contexts generate different meaning for religious communication and influence its production, distribution, circulation, and consumption. With reference to Odin, Warren Buckland has described this institutional basis and the resulting modes of comprehension:

> Each institution consists of several modes – for example, the institution of commercial cinema comprises the spectacle, fictional, and dynamic modes, whereas the institution of non-professional cinema includes the home movie, aesthetic, and artistic modes. Institutions determine the mode in which a particular film is to be comprehended. For Odin, an institution is "a bundle of determinations which govern the production of meaning in selecting, hierarchising, and structuring the modes of production of meaning which are put to work."[81]

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78 Pollack and Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne*, 48–72.

79 Pollack and Rosta, 72. Translation mine: "Die über Rituale, Gebete, Schriften, Bilder, Tänze, Predigten, Lobgesänge, Erlebnisse oder Erfahrungen ermöglichte Kommunikation mit dem als transzendent Vorgestellten steht für die religiösen Akteure im Zentrum ihrer Religion."

80 Robert Yelle uses the term "semiotic recognition" (12–17) to describe the religious discourse as an act of communication and how it "contributes to the transmission of its message" (13). See Yelle, *Semiotics of Religion*, 13. His approach is useful to understand how transformations of language characterize religious processes like secularism.

81 Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film*, 98.

The question is, then, which reading mode comes into play when religion is communicated? This question guides this research and its analysis of its sources.

Drawing on the theoretical considerations we have just encountered, this study considers, from a semio-pragmatic perspective, media practice as developed for a targeted audience. Its analysis understands religion as a cultural phenomenon that interacts and intersects with diverse other cultural fields, such as the media.[82] It seeks to understand communication related to religion by focusing on religion in documentary media, aided by consideration of production, representation, distribution, circulation, and consumption. In every space, we find religious and non-religious agents with active roles, as makers and consumers. Additionally, the medium has its own fund of religious symbols and codes that can be used to address, process, and transmit ideas about religion and the content of religion. In this understanding of religion, communication is placed center stage, linking diverse activities by diverse social actors. The interface of religion and the media is thus examined in light of these points of reference for readings of religion.

The semio-pragmatic approach to religion and documentary media demands its own methodology. Spaces of communication for documentary media and religion include production, representation, circulation, distribution, and consumption, to which we have made reference, but which now require more detailed discussion.

2.3. Religion in spaces of communication

The interface between documentary media and religion can be explored through a semio-pragmatic approach that interrogates sources to see how they function within specific contexts, those of production, representation, distribution/circulation and consumption. These contexts are understood as *spaces of communication*, which systematize the levels at which documentary media and religion interact. Analysis that considers communication spaces will focus primarily on reading modes in the material under consideration. Roger Odin's definition discerns three elements of the "world" generated through film:

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82 Linda Woodhead, "Five Concepts of Religion," *International Review of Sociology* 21, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 123–127.

> By film's communication space, I mean a space where communication
> actors share the experience of constructing a film: building a world
> which the viewer is invited to enter, a world within which various
> events occur (usually structured by narrative), and whose rhythm the
> spectator is encouraged to share (I call this the "phasing" process).[83]

The active agents identified by Odin are not just the actors who appear in
front of the camera. The production process, or "the experience of con-
structing a film," creates a world the viewer can become part of. The film
itself is the "world within which various events occur" and the reception
process is "the world [...] whose rhythm the spectator is encouraged to
share." When the actors who participate in all the film's communication
spaces, from production to consumption, agree upon a single "axis of rele-
vance," then, according to Odin, the communication space works success-
fully. This "axis of relevance" describes the situation when producers and
audience share a common understanding of what is screened, or according
to Odin, "share the same rhythm." This situation is an ideal that all too
often is absence, as Stuart Hall highlighted in his renowned encoding-de-
coding model.[84] Odin also provides another definition of communication
spaces:

> Within my semio-pragmatic approach, a communication space is a
> space through which the harness of constraints directs the transmitter
> and receiver – the actants of the communicational process – to pro-
> duce meaning along the same axis of relevance.[85]

This definition again describes an ideal situation, in which the consumer
(receiver) decodes the message such that it reads just as the production
(transmitter) intended when it was transmitted. But such is not always the
case. Our tendency to identify that variation, rather than successful trans-
mission, may be problematic. Why, we might ask, would any company in-
vest in an image film or advertisement if audio-visual communication is so
ambivalent? Any company with a pre-determined aim wants to see its in-
vestment in media production achieve that aim, and reap rewards. Reli-

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83 Roger Odin, "Spectator, Film and the Mobile Phone," in *Audiences: Defining and
    Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*, ed. Ian Christie (Amsterdam: Amster-
    dam University Press, 2012), 156.
84 Hall, "Encoding/Decoding."
85 Roger Odin, "The Home Movie and Space of Communication," in *Amateur Film-
    making: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web*, ed. Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda
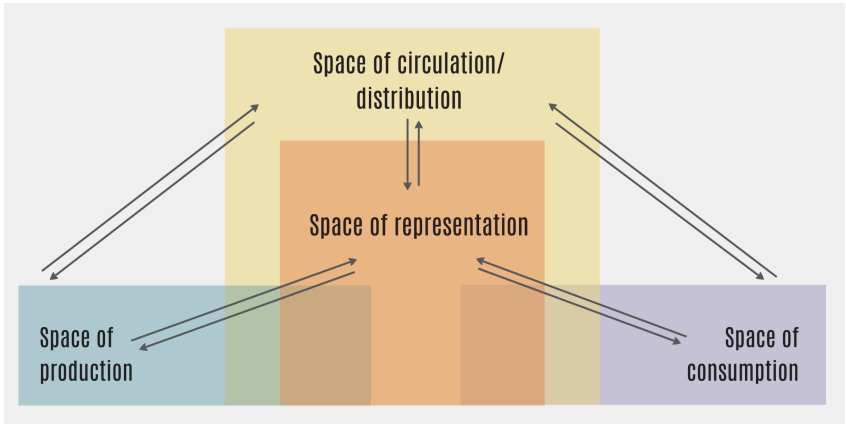   Young, and Barry Monahan (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2014), 15.

Fig. 6 Model spaces of communication (Marie-Therese Mäder in reference to Roger Odin).

gious communities are no different. Their investment in media productions – in a film with educational purpose, for example – needs to prove profitable, or otherwise will be judged a failed investment.

Spaces of communication in relation to religion have specific qualities to which we shall now turn our attention. We will learn of these four spaces by considering their general characteristics and also their interactions, which are usefully illustrated by the types of documentary media encountered in this study.

As figure 6 depicts, the four spaces of communication overlap but also diverge.[86] The space of production interacts with the spaces of representation, distribution, and circulation. The space of media consumption in turn interacts with the spaces of representation, distribution, and circulation. The spaces of representation and distribution/circulation both influence the spaces of production and consumption. The model proposes, however, that the spaces of production and consumption do not intersect, which is intriguing in a communication model. It supports the argument that media communication is not a one-way process where meaning is generated by the sender and unambiguously decoded by the recipients. Odin

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86 Marie-Therese Mäder, "Documentary Media and Religious Communities," *Journal for Religion, Film and Media (JRFM)* 1, no. 1 (2015): 32.

calls this model a non-communicative communication model.[87] But where do we position religion in these spaces and their interactions?

Space of production

The production space is defined by the agents that produce the audio-visual sources. These agents might, or might not, be part of a religious institution. They can be affiliated with a religious institution while the production company for which they work is not. The religious agendas behind each production can vary, and the interests behind each production are therefore highly significant. Religious institutions, religious actors, governments or political parties finance films for certain purposes. Who has financed a production can provide an indication of the role religion plays in the material, and how religion is not only represented but also understood by the makers. The space of production will naturally affect the space of representation. Financial resources and religious affiliations will shape the narration. The space of production also influences where a source will circulate. Religious institutions as producers can use their distribution and circulation networks – television channels, public affairs or media departments, for example – to sell and broadcast their products. But producers are not dependent on their own networks, for they can also use publicly accessible platforms such as Vimeo, YouTube or their own websites. Where a production is to circulate shapes the production. For example, whether the audience will pay or access the material freely will shape the business model and the nature of the product. If the goal is to make a case to the audience about a cause or a product, such as a religious community and its values, the product may be given to the audience without charge, much like an advertisement. As soon as the source provides additional benefit, perhaps in the form of entertainment, the audience may be more willing to pay for its access. These economic factors also shape the production space.

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87 "L'intérêt de mettre au point de départ de la reflection un modèle de non-communication est évident." See Odin, *Les espaces de communication*, 19.

Space of representation

For religion, the space of representation is the most frequently discussed space, whether in reviews, by the audience, in scholarly discourse, or within religious institutions. Religious agents or individuals representing a religious institution will have a specific perspective on religion within the space of representation, where religion can be represented visually and aurally and can be addressed directly and referenced in the narrative. Aural and visual representation is more likely to be explicit in religious narratives and portrayals of religious communities. Religious references such as symbols and signs, both aural and visual, may be part of the narration, but not necessarily at the center of the story world, playing instead what we might term a "supporting role." The church bell rings as diegetic sound, symbolizing the beginning of a new day – a symbol that is religious but also understood in a broad context. When that church bell is heard to ring in a television report on noise pollution, then the sound of the bell is a religious topic, not simply a reference point.

In the space of representation, religion can be examined analytically and hermeneutically, with consideration given to filmic parameters such as camera, sound, and light and to their interaction. The question is then how the cinematic style shapes religious symbols, references, characters, or narratives and how they interact with the non-religious parameters. Light per se is not religious, but if the light represents a halo, it has become a religious sign. Clothing is not religious in its own right unless it references a religious tradition and practice, like a monk's cowl. The interaction of the cinematic parameters can be described as "homogenization," a term employed by Odin, as all the visible and audible signs, symbols, and references combine into the narration. Each parameter is merged with all the other parameters.[88] The model in figure 7 shows how the relationship between the parameters and the relationship between the audience and the film are shaped. The two levels of film and the audience are synchronized in the reception process – the ideal situation in which the spectators are able to follow and make sense of the narration.

The model suggests that any kind of representation can influence, shape, and foster religious stereotypes, be it a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf or Moses as a white-bearded old man. Religious representations can support, pass on, question, and even transform traditions. They can inform

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88 Mäder, *Die Reise als Suche nach Orientierung*, 35; Roger Odin, *De la fiction* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2000), 35–52.
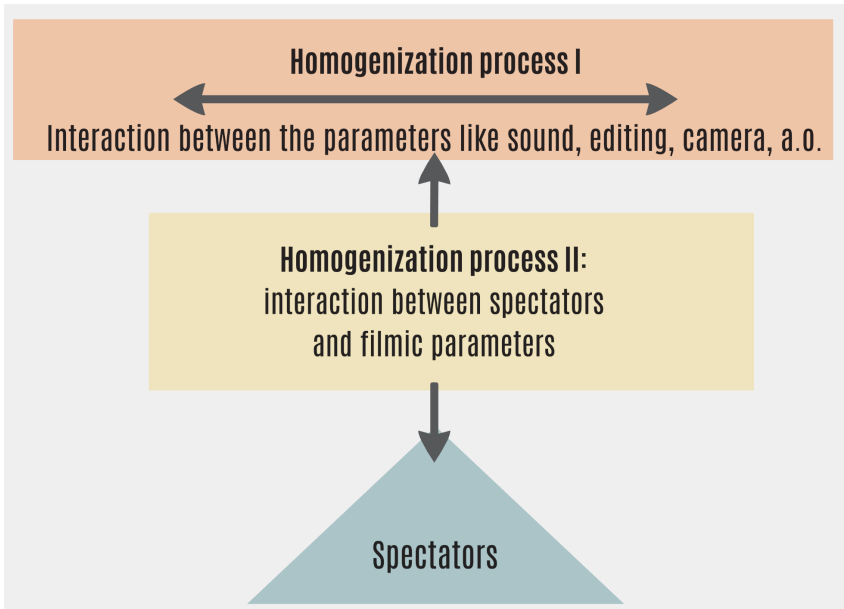
Fig. 7 Model of homogenization between filmic parameters and between the spectators and the film.

about and communicate religion to a varied target audience comprising religious and/or non-religious spectators from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Different representation styles, genres, and subgenres demand different aesthetics, which influences the production space. A reality show is not funded and organized as is a short documentary or commercial. A historical documentary with scenes of re-enactment may well be costlier than a TV report that must be available quickly. And specific forms of narration favor specific forms of distribution. An ethnographic documentary might be shown at a festival for visual anthropology, whereas a reality show will likely be distributed through streaming services or television channels. The representation style defines the subgenre, with the space of distribution and circulation implied to a certain degree. Additionally, however, the space of distribution and circulation can shape a film's narration.

Space of distribution and circulation

Our third space, the space of distribution and circulation, defines where, for whom, and by whom a source can be accessed. In this space, television channels and distribution companies, for example, buy films and provide access to them. The television channel will make the material part of its programing. Many documentary sources circulate on the Internet, whether with paid access (Amazon's Prime Video, Netflix, Hulu) or for free, as on YouTube or Vimeo. These services define who has access to the product and who cannot stream the material. Streaming services have geographical restrictions, for example, which means that access to a source may vary from country to country. Some documentaries are shown only at film festivals, others only in cinema or on television. They might also be sold as DVDs or can be ordered electronically to stream.

The institutional aspect is crucial in this space because it influences the reception experience. A documentary about a religious community that is transmitted as part of the programing of a national television channel will not be received in the same way as is a film shown at a visitor center belonging to that religious community. The space of circulation and distribution also shapes the space of production. The required length of the documentary will influence its style and production. And the distribution network might determine the production's financial requirements. Thus, production volume will be affected by the level of financing a network receives. For streaming networks Netflix and Amazon, circulation and production spaces can collapse, because both services are also producers. If a production is independent of any distribution network, as is often the case with religious institutions that are not officially represented by the state, the producers may need to acquire financial partners at the start. Officially represented religious institutions – for example, the state churches in some European countries – might benefit from access to circulation provided by a public television network, as is the case in Switzerland. The Roman Catholic, Protestant and Christ-Catholic churches in Switzerland are given transmission time and technical support to broadcast on Sundays.

Media professionals working for a production may also be part of a distribution network. Networks of religious communities often cooperate with media professionals who are members of those communities to ensure the audio-visual style and content are in accord with the ethical standards of the community. Control of the production space is often fostered by close connections between production and circulation. Educational religious films provide a good example of how the distribution and circula-

tion space can govern the production space. If a church needs audio-visual sources for instruction, the production will be framed by the nature of the target audience and the context in which the material will circulate and be received. The space of media consumption then coincides with the space of distribution and circulation. Where a documentary is shown defines who has access to the source, as we noted. Home movies such as wedding recordings, for example, are shared in private settings, by friends, family, and wedding guests; they may be shared on streaming platforms. Also, a film may not have only one form of circulation: a single film might be consumed on the Internet, or in social media accessed via a laptop, smart phone, or tablet, or at the cinema, or as a television program, or on DVD, and on either the big screen or a small display.

Space of consumption

The space of media consumption is defined by the audience and their reception experience. It includes the effect and function of audio-visual sources. Most sources are produced with a certain audience or, at least, a predetermined effect and function in mind, be it education or entertainment. In this way consumption influences the space of representation. Audiences also expect films and shows of a certain type, following fashions of representation in the media market.

For example, the subgenre of the reality show became prominent in the late 1990s with the production *Big Brother*, which was not the first reality show but was particularly influential; *Big Brother* was followed by many other reality shows that adopted its format, with people exposed to a challenging situation.[89] In *Big Brother*, a group of people live together in a container, with cameras observing them for 24 hours a day. The inhabitants of the container are exposed to different tasks and the audience votes on who must leave, namely those who, in their eyes, are least deserving of staying; the last person remaining is the winner and receives the prize money.

The commercial media business is based on supply and demand like any other market. Audiences demand specific representations according to genre, with expectations of how characters should dress, talk, and behave. A religious-motivated production has to be aware of such needs, and adapt its message accordingly. Additionally, the audience might favor specific

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89 Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (Wallflower Press, 2012), 9–15.

spaces of circulation: the popularity of streaming has bolstered companies that stream films. Religious productions are indeed available on such platforms.

The construction of public discourse through the distribution of films, above all for films that occupy multiple distribution channels, can only be controlled to a limited extent by their producers. Documentary media are not distributed only via television and cinema, where distribution takes place within a strictly regulated and institutional framework, but are often also accessible via the Internet. In general, the Internet is crucial to the distribution and circulation of audio-visual sources about religion, connecting the spaces of distribution and circulation with the space of consumption. A film that appears in a single context, on YouTube for example, engages one form of public discourse. When a film with ties to a religious community appears on the church webpage it has a distinct and controlled context, but these particular external reading instructions vanish when the film is accessed via a different site.

We can explore the interaction of spaces of communication on the Internet in a religious context through the example of the LDS Church webpage.[90]

Spaces of communication in the LDS Church's media library

Reconstruction of the historical Mormon community has been a concern of LDS Church media production in movies, on television, and, as a later arrival, on the Internet. Portrayals of the LDS Church and its members deemed inappropriate by its leadership can then be countered by self-representation. In his work on the Mormon university in Jerusalem, Blair G. Van Dyke has written of the elaboration of such communication strategies as a primary goal of the Public Affairs Department of the LDS Church: "The LDS must be self-defining in the media. The LDS Church has learned in Jerusalem and elsewhere the damage caused by allowing disingenuous opponents to define Mormonism in the media."[91] Van Dyke's expression

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90 The LDS Church's communication strategy is discussed in part II and III.

91 Blair G. Van Dyke, "The Mormon University on the Mount of Olives: A Case Study in LDS Public Relations," *Journal of Media and Religion* 12, no. 4 (October 1, 2013): 194. Van Dyke examines anti-missionary organization's use of the media to block the construction of the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies on the Mount of Olives in the mid-1980s.

"self-defining in the media" is used with reference to the process whereby Latter-day Saints represent themselves, largely by means of depictions of other Mormons, their theology, and their history, through media production sponsored by LDS Church agents or institutions. The attitude toward the church recounted by these productions is mostly positive and respectful, for Mormon media makers are evidently most concerned to construct and then distribute within the public sphere representations of their institution and agents that are affirming.

The LDS Church promotes their audio-visual media through their media library website.[92] The selection of material is vast and covers mostly short films of diverse genres and sub-genres, with the resources available including fiction, documentaries, advertisements, educational material, and conference proceedings, as well as films addressing a specific social group, such as children, women, leaders, or missionaries. The recordings are grouped and displayed according to key terms or topics, with each grouping often containing a series of short films between one and four minutes in length. The short films and movies can easily be downloaded for use in the classroom or to be sent to a third party.

Audio-visual material that draws on the Gospel and Book of Mormon, documentary media with re-enacted scenes from the believer's perspective, provides an example of just how elaborate and professional is the LDS Church use of film as a media to promote its worldview. The material in the media library is sorted into categories such as "Church History," "Auxiliary Training," "Easter," or "General Conference," to name just few of the forty-one possibilities, and under keywords such as "Mothers," "Religious Freedom," and "Temples."

The Gospel films are numerous and, under the heading "Bible Videos", they are arranged in two ways. Listed as "Life of Jesus Videos Chronologically", they follow the life of Christ, with sections entitled "Birth," "Ministry," "Final Days," "After Resurrection," and "Other"; they can also be accessed by scriptural topic or event. The Gospel is filmed in 100 episodes, with each episode a short film with actors that can be watched on the webpage. The site is set up also to allow accesses to the Bible shorts available on DVD and via an app for smartphone and tablet.[93] The LDS Church's production of its own Gospel films allows it to provide material that

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92 "Social Media Index Page – LDS Media Library," accessed June 14, 2019, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/social?lang=eng.

93 "Bible Videos – The Life of Jesus Christ – Watch Scenes from the Bible," accessed June 14, 2019, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/bible-videos?lang=eng&_r=1.

abides by its strict ideas about the representation of sexuality, language, and violence. The many audio-visual Gospel adaptions that do not respect these restrictions are not permitted viewing for LDS Church members. Over three years the LDS Church produced the short Gospel episodes in an ancient Israel that had been elaborately constructed in the desert of Provo in Goshen in the state of Utah.

In this example, by and large all those involved in the production and its consumption belong to the same institution, although everybody can watch the short films online without payment. The clips are also available on YouTube and iTunes for free and can be downloaded and shared very easily, as they are offered in different formats. When accessed on the LDS Church website, the Bible videos reference the scripture and a task (Fig. 8): "Ponder what the savior means to all humanity –and to you personally. And then share the good news."[94]

While the Bible-based videos are stylistically very homogenous – they employ the same actors in consistent settings – the videos for *The Book of Mormon*, listed just below the Bible category, are of various genres and styles. The first category is introductory, with several talks or sermons, mostly by LDS Church leaders, that reference *The Book of Mormon*. In the chapter entitled "Jacob–Mosiah" the script is provided by experts who chronologically and historically reconstruct the story of *The Book of Mormon*; the sections entitled "Alma-Helaman" and "Nephi-Moroni" are composed similarly. The section entitled "Book of Mormon stories (animated)" consists of 58 animated short films of between 1:30 and 3 minutes in length that tell the story of *The Book of Mormon* in the style of a graphic novel, with commentary in a male or female voice. The term "animated" is used to describe a format in which, on the whole, the background moves while the characters and objects in the foreground remain still. For example, in a clip from chapter 8 (fig. 9), the sea seems to churn and lighting flashes, but the figures are motionless. The voice-over is spoken by a warm and light female voice that reminds one of a kindergarten teacher reading a picture book for children. The target audience may well be young children of preschool or kindergarten age.

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94 "He Is Risen," accessed June 15, 2019, https://churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2011-10-025-he-is-risen.

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English

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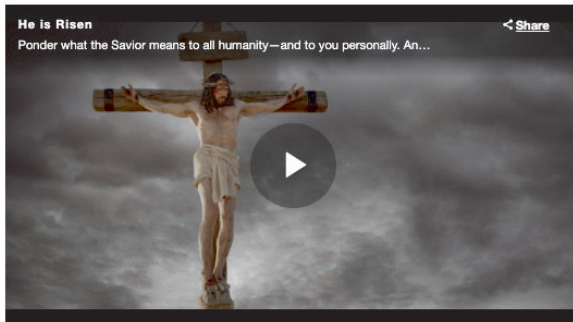
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He is Risen

He is Risen
Ponder what the Savior means to all humanity—and to you personally. An…

⤓ Share

He is Risen
⤓ DOWNLOAD ▮TRANSCRIPT

Ponder what the Savior means to all humanity—and to you personally. And then share the good news. John 20:11-17

(7:35)

Video Topics
Addiction
Baptism
Jesus Christ
Ministering
Pornography
Sabbath Day
Race and the Priesthood
View All Video Topics…

Video Collections
All Lessons
Addressing Pornography
Basic Beliefs
Bible Videos
Broadcasts and Live Events
Children
Christmas
Church History
Documentaries
Easter
Family History
Films
Humanitarian
Inspirational Messages
JustServe
Ministering
Missionary

Fig. 8 The King James version of John 20:11-17 is referenced below the video with a task and the request to share "the good news."

Fig. 9 Screenshot from "Chapter 8: Crossing the Sea.[95]

The last section in the media library, entitled "Book of Mormon Presentation," contains educational films that discuss religious experiences and revelations in short narrations. For example, in "Becoming Children of Christ," two young women learn about "what it means to put off the natural man and become children of Christ."[96]

The variety in the genres and styles of *The Book of Mormon* material suggests it may be intended for an audience different from the audience for the material in the Bible category, an audience composed of diverse age groups. The character of the audio-visual material in this section, which covers talks, sermons, and educational films, suggests a pedagogical purpose.

The LDS Church offers its members advice on the use of social media and the Internet and is also very clear in setting up standards for online resources in general.[97] Its interest in appropriate media practice and in preventing harassment through social media and cyber bullying is evident in a video clip produced by the LDS Church that can be found on the mor-

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95 "Chapter 8: Crossing the Sea," accessed June 15, 2019, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2010-12-08-chapter-8-crossing-the-sea.

96 "Becoming Children of Christ," accessed June 15, 2019, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2007-01-0003-becoming-children-of-christ.

97 "Share Goodness," accessed June 14, 2019, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/share/goodness?lang=eng; "Social Media Index Page – LDS Media Library"; "Use of Online Resources in Church Callings," accessed June 14, 2019, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/pages/online-resources-for-church-callings?lang=eng.

monchannel.org site. The Mormon Channel website lists the video "Bullying – Stop it"[98] as one of the most-seen videos of 2014.[99] This short film tells the story of a girl who is bullied by classmates via social media. One boy steps up, first approaching the girl to show her his empathy and then stopping the other boys from continuing their attacks on the girl. At the beginning of the short film, Dieter P. Uchtendorf, LDS Church president and second counselor in the First Presidency, speaks in a voice-over about "the destructive spirit of contention, resentment, and revenge." By June 16, 2019, this video had had 12,370,764 views on YouTube, and had attracted 17,335 comments and 229,827 likes and 6,408 dislikes.

Even this short discussion of the LDS Church's use of the media, which draws on examples of videos that engage the Bible and *The Book of Mormon*, indicates the extent of LDS Church involvement in the media, from production to consumption, as it seeks to control output on every level. Audio-visual media are not the only means used by the LDS Church to represent itself and spread its message for missionary purposes and to sustain the loyalty of its members, but particularly with the added contribution of the Internet, such media have become well-trod, if challenging, terrain for the LDS Church as it seeks to craft its image in accord with its worldview.

This example also shows how in the case of religion, and specifically in the case of a religious institution, communication spaces interact. In each of the spaces, individuals are active agents – as media professionals, producers, social actors, and audience, for example – who perform their functions in light of their belief system. Heidi Campbell has identified a similar process employed by the Catholic Church: "The negotiation and adoption of new technologies requires the religious group to create public and private discourses that validate their technology choices in light of established community boundaries, values, and identities."[100] In the instance examined here, that "new technology" is the Internet, which functions as a distribution network and an instrument of circulation. Its use requires a con-

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98 Mormon Channel, *Bullying - Stop It*, accessed September 28, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYVvE4tr2BI.

99 "Mormon Channel's Top 10 YouTube Videos of 2014," accessed September 28, 2017, https://www.mormonchannel.org/blog/post/mormon-channels-top-10-youtube-videos-of-2014.

100 Heidi Campbell, "How Religious Communities Negotiate New Media Religiously," in *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*, ed. Pauline Hope Cheong, Digital Formations (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 86.

trol mechanism that allows the public face of the LDS Church to be shaped according to an established institutional framework. The online image must be consistent with the offline institution. To that end, the LDS Church has published guidelines, encountered above, that address the appropriate use of social media and the Internet for material related to the LDS Church, and also by individuals as they engage the Internet more broadly.[101] As the titles suggest – "Use of Online Resources in Church Callings" and "Gospel Media" – these guidelines are intended for LDS Church members, and they seek to establish a media consumption culture that conforms to the LDS Church's "boundaries, values and identities," as itemized by Campbell.

Thus, the Internet is a vital component of the interface of documentary media and religion, not least because as a virtual space of distribution and circulation it enables easy access to numerous audio-visual sources. With religious groupings or traditions interacting virtually with members and non-members,[102] the Internet becomes a place of social activity for social actors that influences their religious practices.[103]

The Internet is a challenge not only for religious institutions and social actors but also for those undertaking research. On one hand, as analysis of Internet use expands, it has developed useful ways of approaching the categorization of the often vast amount of material available. [104] On the other

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101 "Use of Online Resources in Church Callings."

102 Campbell, "How Religious Communities Negotiate New Media Religiously"; Mark D. John, "Voting 'Present': Religious Organizational Groups on Facebook," in *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*, ed. Pauline Hope Cheong, Digital Formations (New York/NY: Peter Lang, 2012), 151–168; Robert Glenn Howard, *Digital Jesus: The Making of a New Christian Fundamentalist Community on the Internet* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Erica Baffelli, Ian Reader, and Birgit Staemmler, eds., *Japanese Religions on the Internet: Innovation, Representation, and Authority*, vol. 2, Routledge Studies in Religion, Media, and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011).

103 Stewart M. Hoover, "Concluding Thought: Imagining the Religious in and through the Digital," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi Campbell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 266–268; Knut Lundby, "Theoretical Framework for Approaching Religion and New Media," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi Campbell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 225–237.

104 Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, Media, Religion and Culture Series (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in the Network*, vol. 24, Digital Formations (New York: P. Lang, 2005).

hand, we must consider the extent to which researchers should locate themselves within the Internet presence through their commentary. Mark D. John has demanded in the paper "Ethical decision-making and Internet research" that the engagement of the researcher be exclusively passive, a call that this project follows.[105]

2.4. Researching audio-visual representation of religious communities

The spaces of communication of documentary media and religion that we have encountered fulfil different functions. First, and we have seen, they enable the systematization of the audio-visual sources, their contexts, pre-conditions, and potential interactions, on a theoretical level. They then allow us to situate a research question in a specific space or between spaces. Secondly, they shape methodology, determining that different spaces and interactions be scrutinized. Each space and the interaction between the spaces is then analyzed using a particular methodological approach. Research question and method are thus synchronized. And lastly, but significantly, the sources on which a study is based can be identified, characterized, and accumulated in light of the different spaces of communication.

That methodological framing for the current project will now be outlined and, finally, the corpus of material will be introduced.

Approaching spaces of communication

As we saw in the introduction to our discussion of spaces of communication these four spaces both overlap and diverge. Their differences require appropriate methods of examination. This study's methodological approach therefore draws from discussion of mixed-method approaches[106] and triangulation.[107] Specifically, it adopts a multimethod research design.

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105 Norwegian National Ethics Committees, "Ethical Guidelines for Internet Research," December 2014, https://www.etikkom.no/globalassets/documents/english-publications/ethical-guidelines-for-internet-research.pdf.

106 Norman K. Denzin, "Triangulation 2.0," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 6, no. 2 (2012): 80–88; Norman K. Denzin, "Moments, Mixed Methods, and Paradigm Dialogs," *Qualitative Inquiry* 16, no. 6 (2010): 419–27.

107 Christel Hopf, "Qualitative Interviews – ein Überblick," in *Qualitative Sozialforschung: eine Einführung*, ed. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke, Rororo (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2016), 519/5206;

Both mixed-method and triangulation approaches have been much debated within the social sciences and are generally employed when quantitative and qualitative data are gathered within a single project by different researchers, at different places, times and with different social actors.[108] Such an approach aims to complement and condense the data sampling in order to prevent one-sided and biased results. Triangulation can take place on a theoretical level, by working with different theories, and at the methodological level, by applying different methods. Applications of triangulation have expanded over time such that now it designates not only quantitative and qualitative approaches but also hermeneutic methods that combine with these approaches. Sociologist Uwe Flick has provided a useful summary:

> Triangulation comprises the capturing of different perspectives on an object of research or, more generally, in responding to research questions. These perspectives can take concrete form in the application of varied methods and/or in the selection of varied theoretical approaches, with the two aspects then to be connected or combined. Additionally, triangulation refers to the combination of different types of data, in each case in light of a theoretical perspective adopted, in turn, in light of the data.[109]

The sociologist Norman K. Denzin has described the advantage of using multiple methods as "an attempt to secure an in depth-understanding of the phenomenon in question."[110] No single method, neither qualitative nor quantitative, fully covers any object of research, he notes:

> Objective reality can never be captured. We only know a thing through its representation. The combination of multiple methodologi-

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Uwe Flick, *Triangulation. Eine Einführung*, Qualitative Sozialforschung (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011), 13–26.

108 Hopf, "Qualitative Interviews – ein Überblick," 519.

109 Flick, *Triangulation*, 12. Translation by the author. German original version: „Triangulation beinhaltet die Einnahme unterschiedlicher Perspektiven auf einen untersuchten Gegenstand oder allgemeiner: bei der Beantwortung von Forschungsfragen. Diese Perspektiven können sich in unterschiedlichen Methoden, die angewandt werden, und/oder unterschiedlichen gewählten theoretischen Zugängen konkretisieren, wobei beides wiederum miteinander in Zusammenhang steht bzw. verknüpft werden sollte. Weiterhin bezieht sie sich auf die Kombination unterschiedlicher Datensorten jeweils vor dem Hintergrund der auf die Daten jeweils eingenommenen theoretischen Perspektiven."

110 Denzin, "Triangulation 2.0," 82.

cal practices empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry.[111]

Triangulation involves an attempt to draw near truth through a diversity of approaches, which is exactly what Laura L. Ellingson, a communication scholar trained in women's and gender studies, rejects: "Whereas triangulation seeks a more definitive truth, crystallization problematizes the multiple truth it presents."[112] The post-modern concept of crystallization nuances the idea that a multitude of methods of analysis and genres of representation can be combined to form a coherent interpretation of any kind of phenomenon, and it eschews the incompatibility of different methods.[113] Even though Ellingson's concept is focused on qualitative methods, it also covers hermeneutic approaches. Ellingson describes five components of crystallization.[114] (1) Any qualitative approach, she argues, should generate a deeper account, or, in reference to Clifford Geertz, a "thick description". (2) She understands the concept as an intrinsically multimethod approach, with varied qualitative approaches standing in a continuum, in opposition to dualistic approaches, be they quantitative or qualitative. That continuum embraces qualitative methods – from the positivistic that claims objective truth to the interpretative – as inclusive and not contradictory. (3) She notes that crystallization allows for variety in the way in which findings are presented. The examination of a religious community through the lens of the media undertaken in this study uses textual interpretation of the sources and stills from audio-visual sources in its argument, and quotes from interviews with media professionals, and statistical data of a quantitative audience study. (4) The researcher's position within their endeavor is reflected. An explicit hermeneutic position is key for the

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111 Denzin, 82.

112 Ellingson, *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research*. Ellingson defines crystallization as follows (2009: 4): "Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them."

113 Charles Teddlie and Abbas Tashakkori, "Overview of Contemporary Issues in Mixed Methods Research," in *SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research*, ed. Abbas Tashakkori, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 1–44.

114 Ellingson, *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research*, 9–12.

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examination of a religious community. Sources, methods, theories, and questions are all deliberate choices made by the scholar while undertaking research, choices that must be explained explicitly. Furthermore, and in particular in the study of religion, the relation between researcher and subject needs to be clarified (see chapter 1.3). (5) The idea of a single, discoverable, and eternal truth is rejected in favor of an understanding of knowledge that is "inevitably situated, partial, constructed, multiple, and embodied."[115]

A diversity of theories, methods, sources, and ways to present results allows a plurality of perspectives and counters hegemonic and biased positions. In this sense crystallization is not only a methodological program but also a political and ethical understanding of scholarship and research. The results of such research are complex, diverse, and possibly contradictory, for they are not submitted to uniformity and singular paradigms in method and theory. The term "interpretation" is key for this approach, because it is consistent with the idea that there cannot be a single fixed reconstruction of any object of research.

Dutch filmmaker and cultural theorist Mieke Bal describes the multiplex character of interpretation in her method of cultural analysis by discerning four principles.[116] (1) Objects, theories, methods, and their interpreters interact within the analytical process, with the object, in particular, playing an active role. (2) Interpretation is based on dialogue, both between the object and the researcher and between researchers. (3) There is no meaning without interpretation or without interpretive activity, from which we can conclude that objects have no predefined meaning and that meaning is not to be found in the work itself. (4) Analysis, a performative

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115 Ellingson, 12.

116 Mieke Bal, "Working with Concepts," *European Journal of English Studies* 13, no. 1 (April 1, 2009): 13–23; Mieke Bal, "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 2, no. 1 (April 1, 2003): 24/25; Sigrid Schade and Silke Wenk, *Studien zur visuellen Kultur: Einführung in ein transdisziplinäres Forschungsfeld*, vol. 8, Studien zur visuellen Kultur (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011), 65–68. On Mieke Bal's webpage there is also a video in which the theorist explains the five aspects of cultural analysis slightly differently from how they are discussed here. See "Home – Www.Miekebal.Org," accessed June 16, 2019, http://www.miekebal.org/. For the fifth aspect she proposes that the object has always the last word in the sense that must be closely evaluated again and again. Furthermore, Bal emphasizes that cultural analysis always takes place in the present: "The historical past matters to the extent as it matters in the present." This inevitably includes later readings of an art work as part of each new interpretation.

practice, is always accompanied by a learning process on the part of the recipient. Researchers are also consumers, with a store of interpretation that builds through perception and contemplation and is constantly growing. Reflecting crystallization at the micro-level of the research itself, the four levels form fundamental analytical-hermeneutic considerations for the current study and are inherent in the approaches it adopts.

The concept of crystallization also works well with the theoretical definition and methodological strategy provided by spaces of communication. Crystallization explains how a religious community can be engaged through the media according to theory, method, sources, and data sets and how the results can be presented.

Applied methods for the research

The current study combines methods from social science, ethnographic studies, media hermeneutics, and film analysis. The methods will now be discussed in the context of spaces of communication, as encountered earlier in this chapter and the methods will be elucidated with reference to the data and sources and elaborated upon. This discussion will provide an overview of the methods applied in light of theoretical premises and sources.

Let us start with the space of production. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with eight media professionals who belong to or are close to the LDS Church were conducted during field work in Salt Lake City/US in June 2015 and in Frankfurt/DE in August 2015. During the intense one-hour conversations, a narrative-biographical approach and a guided interview style were combined. The conversations provide insight into the media self-representation strategies of a religious community. The interviews had been coded with reference to grounded theory[117] and evaluated by working with sociological hermeneutics of knowledge.[118] In a second step

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117 Jörg Strübing, "Grounded Theory und Theoretical Sampling," in *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*, ed. Nina Baur and Jörg Blasius (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2014), 457–72; Andreas Boehm, "Grounded Theory - wie aus Texten Modelle und Theorien gemacht werden," ed. Andreas Boehm, Andreas Mengel, and Thomas Muhr, Schriften zur Informationswissenschaft 14 (Konstanz: UVK Univ.-Verl. Konstanz, 1994), 121–40.

118 Jo Reichertz, "Objektive Hermeneutik und hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie," in *Qualitative Forschung: ein Handbuch*, ed. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and

the interviews are compared, and parallels as well as oppositions are discussed.

The space of production is frequently closely related to the space of distribution and circulation, they can therefore be analyzed using the same methods and sources. Therefore, the elaboration of the production, distribution, and circulation spaces often refers to the same "documents" providing information about the nature and purposes of the media.[119] "Documents" are understood as standardized artefacts in different formats, material such as press kits, websites, archive resources, press interviews with the media professionals and literature.[120] Analysis of the documents is undertaken by exploring the production, representation, distribution/circulation, and media communication spaces of their information. That analysis asks who produced the document, what is represented and how, where and how is it circulated, and for whom it is intended.

In the space of representation, documentary sources by and/or about Mormons are scrutinized and critically analyzed[121] in a semio-pragmatic approach that takes the sources' communications spaces and their reading modes into account. Further analysis based on cognitive assumptions scrutinizes the film's style by analyzing parameters such as camera, light, editing, and sound.[122] Along with the sources' style, plot and story are highlighted. The "plot" is the part of the film that is visible and audible, which includes all the sequences, each scene and shot. The "story" is more than

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Ines Steinke (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2015), 514–524; Hopf, "Qualitative Interviews – ein Überblick," 436–449; Ronald Kurt and Regine Herbrik, "Sozialwissenschaftliche Hermeneutik und hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie," in *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*, ed. Nina Baur and Jörg Blasius (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2014), 473–91.

119 Uwe Flick, "Zur Verwendung von Dokumenten," in *Qualitative Sozialforschung: eine Einführung*, Rororo (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2016), 312–326.

120 Stephan Wolff, "Dokumenten- und Aktenanalyse," in *Qualitative Forschung: ein Handbuch*, ed. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke, Rororo (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2015), 503.

121 Rainer Winter and Sebastian Nestler, "'Doing Cinema': Filmanalyse als Kulturanalyse in der Tradition der Culltural Studies," in *Film – Kino – Zuschauer, Filmrezeption = Film - cinema – spectator, film reception*, ed. Irmbert Schenk (Marburg: Schüren, 2010), 99–115; David Bordwell and Kristin Marie Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013); Louis D. Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 13th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2014).

122 Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*; Louis D. Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*; Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, Sightlines (London: Routledge, 1992).

the plot. It encompasses the whole narrative world, or diegesis, that is constructed by the spectators from the plot, including inferences and premises. David Bordwell's conceives "plot" in a narrative film as

> all the events that are directly presented to us, including their causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations; opposed to story, which is the viewer's imaginary construction of all the events in the narrative.[123]

Documentary sources have a narrative quality like that of fiction films. Several story lines may be drawn from the same plot. In most cases there is no wrong or right understanding, for different readings can be made of a single source. This project applies an approach that allows for varied readings of religion from diverse points of view. It takes into account that religious and non-religious recipients may read differently, and that their readings may be shaped by their belonging or not-belonging to the community portrayed by the source. The principal question must be: what kind of meaning does the source have for whom? Denzin talks about subversive readings of documentaries (he does not refer to Halls' encoding and decoding model but the parallels are compelling). Many films present a version of truth by suppressing contradiction and by constructing consistency. Such constructed consistency happens when arguments form a chain of cause and effect that leads to a "truth."[124] For example, social actors in the *I'm a Mormon* series generally appear very happy and seem more successful than average in what they do. At the end of each video they say their name and then the phrase: "… and I'm a Mormon." This statement, standing at the end of the video, suggests that the social actor's success and happiness are a product of their membership of the LDS Church.[125] Readings can, however, vary: LDS members might feel affirmed, taking that they belong to the right church; former Mormons might however be offended, aware that their experiences in the LDS Church were less upbeat.

A subversive reading locates the values behind such arguments and detects the narrative's worldview. In the context of religion, reading film in this way can generate an understanding of how a religious community

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123 Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 503.
124 Norman K. Denzin, "Reading Film – Filme und Videos als sozialwissenschaftliches Erfahrungsmaterial," in *Qualitative Forschung: ein Handbuch*, ed. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke, Rororo (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2015), 424/425.
125 For a more detailed analysis of the series see chapter 4, part II.

wants to represent a topic and its members, values or practices, or how it wants to be perceived by members and non-member. Or a subversive reading might establish how non-members want to represent a religious community in light of their particular political, social, or cultural agenda. Denzin notes, "Subversive readings look at how the film idealises specific key moments like family, work, religion and love,"[126] drawing attention to how this approach can expand the film-analysis through critical evaluation of the cultural values and norms that are depicted. Such issues must be addressed in an evaluation of religion in documentary media, and they pick up on the features of documentary media noted, as we have seen, by Odin. To resume the *moral mode* addresses the authority and credibility of a documentary source: the audience might ask, why should I believe what is presented here? It looks critically at the argument or communications strategy presented and considers for which audience the narrative is credible and for which it is not.

In addition to applying a semio-pragmatic approach in the space of representation, this study considers the space of consumption by examining online comments about the material. Comments are found on YouTube, in blogs, on webpages, and in reviews, for example. Joseph Reagale has described the "comment" as follows:

> As I use the term, comment is a genre of communication. […] Although comment is reactive, it is not always responsive or substantively engaging. […] Comment is short—often as simple as the click of a button, sometimes measured in characters, but rarely more than a handful of paragraphs. And it is asynchronous, meaning that it can be made within seconds, hours, or even days of its provocation. Putting aside future transformations, comment is already present: comment has a long history […], and it is pervasive. Our world is permeated by comment, and we are the source of its judgment and the object of its scrutiny.[127]

This characterization highlights dual character of this form of social interaction: members of an online community can make judgements but they can also themselves become an object of scrutiny. Their judgments express

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126 Denzin, "Reading Film - Filme und Videos als sozialwissenschaftliches Erfahrungsmaterial," 425. Translation by the author.

127 Joseph M. Reagle, *Reading the Comments: Likers, Haters, and Manipulators at the Bottom of the Web*, First MIT Press paperback edition (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 2015.

opinions that might range from appreciation to excoriation, depending on personal preferences. Comments in a religious context can be very emotional. They also show how variously the source material can be received. In their comments, some commentators may judge a religion or the religious actors very harshly, while members of the relevant church express sympathy and identify with the institution. Comments can be used to bond with other commentators with a shared worldview or to distance the commentator from an institution. Overall, as a specific form of communication, comments can help clarify how a documentary source works and can allow the researcher to determine the triggers for audiences found within in the source.

Let us look at one example of comment on a religious topic, drawn from postings in the online forum for the reality show *Sister Wives* (US, 2010–2020), broadcast by the US television channel TLC.[128] The show depicts a polygamous Mormon family in the United States with one husband and four wives; the number of children in the family grows over the course of the 14 seasons from 13 to 18 plus 2 grandchildren. Since 2014 the reality show has also been aired in German-speaking countries, with the title *Alle meine Frauen*. The channel TLC is geared to a female audience.[129]

Those who participate in the online forum are mainly women. The German TLC webpage asks the audience if they could imagine a life as a polygamist. While the discussion is initially guided by that question, it expands into a critical discussion of the lifestyle of the Brown family, from the viewers' perspective. The most frequent topic of discussion is Kody Brown, the husband. The online comments are mixed in their feelings about and attitudes toward the family. Generally, the comments reflect an ambivalence about polygamy, but opinions on the family itself are mostly positive, of the type we see in figure 10.

> Hats off to them!! We can definitely learn something from Kody and his wives. This polygamist family works so well because of these five great people brought together by fate. This family still has values and morals. Unfortunately, most people no longer understand what this means. In times when everybody only thinks of themselves, and nobody is willing to back down for a greater common purpose. Nowa-

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128 See for detailed discussion of the reality show *Sister Wives* chapter 5, part II.

129 Brenda R. Weber, "Trash Talk: Gender as an Analytic on Reality Television," in *Reality Gendervision: Sexuality & Gender on Transatlantic Reality Television*, ed. Brenda R. Weber (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 2/3.

days respectful and loving relationships with each other are more likely to be the exception. They [the Browns] cannot multiply enough. [130]

Jenni Fischer
chapeau !!
Von Kody und seinen Frauen kann man sich ein paar Scheibchen abschneiden.
Das diese polygame Familie so großartig funktioniert, liegt an den fünf großartigen Menschen, die das Schicksal hier zusammengeführt hat.
In dieser Familie gibt es noch Werte und eine Moral.
Das können die meißten Menschen leider nicht mehr nachvollziehen.
In einer Zeit, in der jeder nur noch an sich denkt, und niemand sich zurücknehmen würde, für ein gemeinsames großes Ziel.
Heutzutage sind respektvoller, liebevoller Umgang miteinander, schon eher die Ausnahme.
Die können sich gar nicht genug vermehren.
Like · Reply · Jul 19, 2015 4:37pm

Fig. 10 Screenshot of a comment in the online forum of Sister Wives on the German TLC webpage.

Jenni Fischer praises the adults' relationships with the words. "This family still has values and morals." As in many other comments, the focus here is not the sexual relationships but the interpersonal relationships. Fischer's comment suggests a very tolerant attitude toward the polygamous and religiously oriented lifestyle depicted in the show.[131] She uses the platform to present herself as open-minded, eschewing judgement based on a different worldview. At the same time, she engages in a public discourse about moral standards. Her comments come across as both appreciative and defensive. Fischer evidently likes to express her affection for the show and for the polygamous family it depicts. Reagle terms such positive experiences in a small online community "intimate serendipity."[132] People like to bond with others, to share their enthusiasm, with crass dissenting commentary unwelcome; such interventions can wreck the atmosphere of a chat and bring it to an end.

Online comments are just one window into the space of consumption, but they are particularly revealing for this study. We can also establish how documentary media is received via quantitative audience studies. This project thus also considers how audiences from two cultural backgrounds, Spanish and Swiss, perceive the values, opinions, and attitudes related to

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130 Translation mine. The online forum isn't active anymore and has been deleted.
131 A detailed discussion of the reality show *Sister Wives* follows in chapter 5.
132 Joseph M. Reagle, *Reading the Comments*, 11.

religion in documentary media and thus how effective such communication strategies can be.[133] A quantitative study was conducted with as its subject the documentary *Meet the Mormons* (Blair Treu, US 2014), produced by the LDS Church, an image[134] or advocacy film[135] about LDS Church members intended to promote the institution.

Documentary sources of the study

Most of the audio-visual sources examined in this study are from the last 15 years and therefore can be deemed "current"; this cohesion also opens the door to comparisons. This period saw a strikingly high number of audio-visual productions with Mormons as their subject or stemming from the context of the LDS Church. One reason for this boom was the establishment of a satellite TV station by Brigham Young University (BYUtv) in 2000; by 2019 its programing was reaching 53 million households.[136] Advances in technology that guarantee distribution have also encouraged intensified production of audio-visual material.[137] Particularly later in this period, the Internet, with its speedier transmission of data, availability and easy access, has also provided a vital means of distribution of documentary sources. Additionally, in the 2012 U.S. Presidential election a Mormon, Mitt Romney, was the nominee of the Republic Party, making Mormonism a much-discussed topic in the media.[138] And last but not least, and especially relevant for this project, broadcast series and shows set in a Mormon context brought Mormonism public attention.

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133 The audience study is presented in chapter 6.1, part II.

134 A corporate video portrays a product, an institution, or a company in in the context of advertising.

135 Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, 77–90.

136 "What We Do," BYUtv Giving, accessed March 25, 2019, http://www.support-byutv.org/what-we-do.

137 Sherry Pack Baker, "Mormonism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion, Communication, and Media*, ed. Daniel A. Stout, Routledge Encyclopedias of Religion and Society (New York: Routledge, 2006), 264–266.

138 The documentary *Mitt* (Greg Whiteley, US 2016) portrays former governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney. Romney twice entered the race to become president of the United States: in 2008, when he failed to secure the Republican Party nomination, and in 2012, when he was defeated by Barack Obama. The film is produced by and can be streamed through Netflix.

The sources are classified according to their spaces of communication. This approach allows distinctive categories to be identified: material from within the LDS Church forms one large category, while material that cannot be attributed to a single religious entity forms a separate category. The "series," a typical format for television, DVDs, and the Internet, is found in both categories; since around 2000 series have been a prominent form of television production and extremely successful as an audio-visual format. Many such series, as well as television reporting, documentary films, and advertisements, can be consumed via the Internet, providing them with a potentially global audience.

The sources are described according to their axis of relevance, a term used to refer, as we have seen, to the relationship between the spaces. When filmmaker, producer and director, and consumer agree upon the source's meaning a single axis of relevance is generated, with the same meaning created in the encoding and decoding processes. That understanding is based on an ideal relationship between spaces and can be applied heuristically, as a way to identify and describe the sources.

The study works with four documentary media types: advertisements, documentaries and corporate videos, television reporting, series and shows. Each type deals differently with religion. Alongside their distinct characteristics within their spaces of communication, their distinct goals also distinguish them one from the other. The source descriptions that follow function as a typology that classifies and presents the documentary media employed in this project's case study. While there are exceptions and incompatibilities within each section, this typology can provide a useful overview of the corpus as long as we remain alert to a potentially reduced complexity and variety. Detailed examination is found in the chapters that follow, where most of the examples mentioned here will be expanded upon.

Our first type of documentary media about religion is advertisements. Advertisements want to sell religion – the goal is to acquire members, raise money, or make values or an image desirable. The *I'm a Mormon* (LDS Church, US 2010–16) series of advertisements – 184 videos produced by the missionary department of the LDS Church – is one such source.[139] The counter-series *I Am an Ex Mormon*, with 44 episodes (2010–16), is an audio-visual response to the LDS Church advertisements and included in the analysis. The producers of the advertisements have economic or ideo-

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139 The number of videos may vary because the LDS Church deletes outdated videos and also uploads new ones

logical goals. The advertisements must be persuasive and spread a positive message; they have a short format, at two to six minutes long, with testimonials at the center of the narration. The advertisements also circulate in the Internet, on YouTube, and on other platforms and are embedded in the webpages of the institution or group that executes the production process. They address three groupings: Mormons, non-Mormons, and Ex-Mormons. Within these three groupings there are also sub-groups to be reached, for example, men, women, and specific nationalities and ethnicities.

The second type of media is documentaries or corporate video that seek to inform or convince their audiences. They are single productions, often with a single responsible author or director. Some documentaries are supported by public funding, others by private, perhaps religious, institutions. The backers of such documentaries are not always explicitly named. Some documentaries are produced by religious actors and institutions; others claim an outsider's perspective on religion. The production context can range from arthouse film to corporate video, and their purpose can be as varied as are the production contexts. Some documentaries adopt an unfavorable approach to religion while others promote religion. There are both short- and long-format documentaries, running between 20 and 90 minutes. Documentaries are shown variously at festivals, in cinemas, and in religious institutions, perhaps in a visitor center. Most can be bought as DVDs and watched on streaming services. They may seek to persuade and/or to entertain their audience.

The documentaries included in this study can be identified as explicitly promoting Mormonism, as adopting a more distanced approach, and as critical of Mormon communities, institutions, and agents. Documentaries that cast Mormons in a critical light include *Inside Polygamy: Life In Bountiful* (Olivia Ahneman, US 2009), *Tabloid* (Errol Morris, US 2010), *8: The Mormon Proposition* (Reed Cowan, Steven Greenstreet, US 2010). One of the documentaries that, by contrast, promotes or defends Mormons is *Nobody Knows. The Untold Story of Black Mormons* (Darius A. Gray, Margeret B. Young, US 2008), which, as the title suggests, reconstructs the history of black Mormons in the United States, from their explicit exclusion to their admission to the official ministries of the LDS Church. *American Mormon in Europe* (Daryn Tufts, Jed Knudsen, US 2006) and *American Mormon* (Daryn Tufts, Jed Knudsen, US 2005) blend comedy and documentary with revealing interviews in which the directors ask passers-by what they know about Mormonism and show how limited the interviewees' information is. Both films display a humorous side to Mormons in order to pro-

mote the LDS Church. *Meet the Mormons* (Blair Treu, US 2014), a corporate video produced by the LDS Church that we have already encountered, portrays the lives of outstanding Mormons around the globe and presents an international, multicultural, and upbeat image of the Church.

Television reporting is another type of documentary source. As the term indicates, these sources are produced in formats made for television and will be advertised as television production. They follow the rules of journalism in gathering, assessing, and presenting information, and they may have a sensational edge. Some adopt the format of so-called "infotainment" by combining information and entertainment. The various collaborations that make up the production context can be complex. Private or public networks affiliated with religious institutions might produce such television reporting, and religious actors working for networks might be involved in the production process; in some productions that focus on religion, however, no religious experts or institutions are involved. The journalistic style might seem to claim the standpoint of an objective outsider, and talking heads and expert interviews can be used to foster credibility and claim relevancy. The editing and music score often dramatize the story. TV reportings include material like from the German-language television networks Pro Sieben, ZDF, DokuTV, and ARTE, with titles that include *Der Kampf ums Weisse Haus* (ARTE, 2012), *Dawn Porter unter Polygamisten* (ZDF neo, GB 2007), *Die größten Mormonenmythen* (ProSieben, 2014), and *Polygamie in Gottes Namen – Willkommen bei den Polygamisten* (DokuTV, 2013).

TV reportings are also produced by English-language networks and originated in the United States like *Secrets of Mormon Cult, Breaking Polygamy* (ABC, US 2012) and *Life After Polygamy: The Daughters & Wives of a Polygamist Cult Reclaim Their Hometown (HBO, US 2016)*, or in Canada (*Inside Bountiful, Polygamy Investigation* (GlobalNEWS, CN 2012) or in the United Kingdom (*The Culture Show – The Mormons Are Here (*BBC, GB 2013). The listings of such titles highlight the frequency with which TV material addresses polygamy. Polygamy is far from prevalent amongst Mormons in the United States or in Europe yet attracts attention as in these reportings, a presence that part III about the ethical space of documentaries will discuss.

The fourth and final type of audio-visual material comprises *series* and *shows* about religion, terms used to refer to their fictional and documentary character respectively. Each series or show is made up of individual episodes. Shows and series differ fundamentally in their nature. *Big Love* (US 2006–11, HBO) is a *fictional television series* with documentary ele-

ments and is set in the milieu of the Fundamental Latter-day Saints (FLDS). The history show *History of the Saints* (US 2010–present) is produced by Glenn Rawson, Dennis Lyman, and Bryant Bush, all members of the LDS Church. The show covers early Mormon history of the 19th century, for 1805–1835 and 1844–1877.[140] Two *reality shows* are discussed in detail in the current study. *The District* (LDS Church, US 2007–2013), comprising eight episodes, is produced from within the LDS Church and is shown at the Church's visitor center. It depicts the everyday life of eight missionaries as they encounter and proselytize potential members of the LDS Church. *Sister Wives* (US 2010–20, TLC, 14 seasons), which we have already encountered, depicts a polygamous Mormon family with one husband, four wives, 18 children, and two grandchildren, first in Utah, later in Las Vegas, Nevada, and finally in Flagstaff, Arizona. This last show garnered high ratings and has been discussed on shows such as *Good Morning America* and the *Ellen Degeneres Show*, on which the adult participants have appeared.

The intention behind these series and shows is varied. The main goal of the fiction series *Big Love* is to entertain, with religion used as a rich and colorful context. The history show *History of the Saints* is an upbeat and uncritical explanation of Mormon history. The LDS Church reality show *The District* has an educational intent directed at future missionaries and also informs its audience about the work of LDS Church missionaries, perhaps as a way of countering prejudice. The TLC reality show *Sister Wives* is also intended as entertainment, but the social actors involved use their public presence to defend their lifestyle. In this last instance, religion and its practices are sensationalized. By definition, reality shows depict people going about their everyday lives over the course of several episodes or even several seasons. Anita Biressi has proposed, "The highly visible presence of ordinary people in 'unscripted' situations are both the watermark of reality TV and arguably an explanation of its success with audiences."[141] Social actors in reality shows may be paid as are professional actors hired for fictional series. In the case of *Sister Wives* the contract with TLC became an important source of income for the large Brown family.[142]

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140 "History of the Saints – Television Documentary Series," accessed June 15, 2019, https://historyofthesaints.org/.
141 Biressi and Nunn, *Reality TV*, 2012, 2.
142 Derek A. Jorgenson, "Media and Polygamy: A Critical Analysis of Sister Wives," *Communication Studies* 65, no. 1 (January 2014): 24–38.

The production style is similar for both reality shows and series. Private companies and networks, religious and non-religious, invest in the production. By contrast, in the representation space the differences between the series and the shows are more obvious. *Big Love*, a fictional series, uses footage from television reports about the legal case of Warren Jeffs, the leader of the FLDS community, who was convicted of the sexual abuse of a 12-year-old girl. The so-called found footage is a bridge to the world of the audience, generating credibility and actuality. Inclusion of the FLDS news story allows the fictional characters in *Big Love* to participate in the current debate about polygamous families and their legal standing. To bolster its authority, *History of the Saints* also uses found footage whenever possible, and additionally interviews with descendants of Mormon pioneers and with historians as experts. It also includes visual and textual historical sources. Some scenes are even re-enacted with costumed professional actors. By contrast a reality show presents itself as unstaged, with its social actors located in their everyday lives, as in the case of the missionaries and the potential members they would like to see baptized.

Distribution and circulation also differ. The fictional series *Big Love* has been sold and distributed internationally, and can be accessed dubbed into languages such as German, Dutch, Finnish, Portuguese; it has also been banned in some countries, in Malaysia for example, because of the sex scenes.[143] It has been nominated for awards, including Golden Globes and Emmys, in categories such as Best Actor and Best Television Series – Drama. By contrast, the history show is presented almost exclusively in a religious context, for example on BYUtv (operated and funded by Brigham Young University) or at church-sponsored events. Complete seasons are available on DVD, and single episodes can be bought and streamed via the producer's website.[144] The distribution network for *The District* is similar but is explicitly supported by the LDS Church, with the show advertised and presented at the theater at the visitors' center in Salt Lake City (fig. 11).

The show can be watched on streaming platforms like YouTube and Vimeo and has been uploaded to the LDS media library. The space of distribution is revealing of the backing the project has received: whereas *History of the Saints* is sold as a private initiative, albeit with the permission of

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143 *Parents Guide*, accessed October 13, 2017, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0421030/parentalguide.

144 "History of the Saints | Product Categories Downloads," accessed October 13, 2017, http://historyofthesaints.org/product-category/history_of_the_saints_products/downloads/.

Fig. 11 The theater at the LDS visitor's center in Salt Lake City/UT presents the reality show The District *(Image: Marie-Therese Mäder, 2015).*

the LDS Church leaders, *The District* is officially and strongly supported by the LDS Church and can be downloaded for free. And finally, *Sister Wives* is entirely privately produced. The success of the TLC network, which specializes in reality shows, is evident in their ability to distribute their products exclusively through their webpage. When the show was first broadcast and was receiving wide media attention, the public affairs department of the LDS published a short statement noting that the church has not permitted polygamy since 1890 and that the faith of the family depicted in the series has nothing in common with the LDS Church's values. That statement is now no longer available online. Ignoring events that are inappropriate from the perspective of the LDS Church is common practice for the public affairs department.[145] But the relationship between the social actors

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145 Interview with head of LDS Church public affairs Michael Otterson, June 22, 2015.

in *Sister Wives* and the LDS Church has been raised in tabloids and other news forums, some of them close to the LDS Church.[146]

This overview of the sources on which this project draws within their spaces of communication highlights the differences between similar types of documentary media. In the chapters that follow, a selection of the source material will be discussed according to distinct themes that highlight and elaborate the relationship between documentary media and religion in greater detail.

But first we turn to scholarly considerations of Mormonism. The following chapter looks at scholarly interpretations of Mormonism to demonstrate how the image of a religious community can vary according to the hermeneutic approach applied. That analysis will also provide insight into this relatively young religious tradition.

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146 "Daughter of Famous Polygamist Family Denied Baptism," *LDS Daily* (blog), October 14, 2015, http://www.ldsdaily.com/world/daughter-of-famous-polygamist-family-denied-baptism/.