

A religion of film. Experiencing Christianity and videos beyond semiotics in rural Benin

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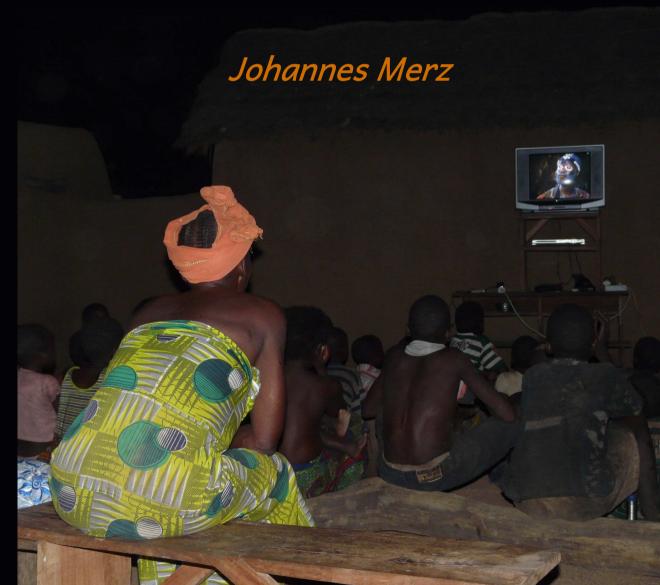
This thesis discusses three Christian films that have become popular in the Commune of Cobly of today's Republic of Benin, notably the American *Jesus Film* (1979), the American-Ivorian missionary film *La Solution* (1994) and the Beninese video film *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (2002). The discussion centres on how people receive and understand these films together with the digital video technology that has facilitated their recent success. Indeed, Christian films have become so important in this part of Benin that the question needs to be raised whether Christianity is shifting from a religion of the book towards a religion of film.

The theoretical starting point is semiotics, a theory that has been foundational not only for film, media and media reception studies, but more recently also for the study of materiality. This thesis' main theoretical contribution is a critique of semiotics, arguing that this theory, which has been foundational to Western science since Aristotle, is in fact too limiting. Semiotics, even in its Peircean orientation, cannot sufficiently explain how people in the Commune of Cobly understand shrines, film and media more generally, both through their material manifestations and interactively in terms of communication. Instead, a process called "presencing", which goes beyond semiotics, can explain better people's understanding of shrines and media.

A Religion of Film

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Experiencing Christianity and Videos Beyond Semiotics in Rural Benin



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