



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

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

Merz, J.

Citation

Merz, J. (2014, November 6). *A religion of film. Experiencing Christianity and videos beyond semiotics in rural Benin*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/29657>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/29657>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/29657> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Merz, Johannes Ulrich

Title: A religion of film : experiencing Christianity and videos beyond semiotics in rural Benin

Issue Date: 2014-11-06

This thesis discusses three Christian films that have become popular in the Commune of Coby 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 Coby 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

Johannes Merz

A Religion of Film

Experiencing Christianity and Videos Beyond Semiotics in Rural Benin

Johannes Merz

