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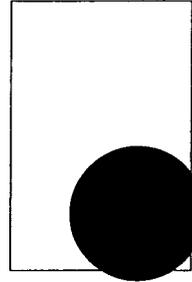
Religious revelation, secrecy and the limits of visual representation

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Abstract

This article seeks to contribute to a more adequate understanding of the adoption of modern audiovisual mass media by contemporary religious groups. It does so by examining Pentecostal-charismatic churches as well as the Christian mass culture instigated by its popularity, and so-called traditional religion in Ghana, which develop markedly different attitudes towards audiovisual mass media and assume different positions in the public sphere. Taking into account the complicated entanglement of traditional religion and Pentecostalism, approaching both religions from a perspective of mediation which regards media as intrinsic to religion, and seeking to avoid the pitfall of overestimating the power of modern mass media to determine the world, this article seeks to move beyond an unproductive recurrence to oppositions such as tradition and modernity, or religion and technology. It is argued that instead of taking as a point of departure more or less set ideas about the nexus of vision and modernity, the adoption of new mass media by religious groups needs to be analyzed by a detailed ethnographic investigation of how these new media transform existing practices of religious mediation. Special emphasis is placed on the tension between the possibilities of gaining public presence through new media, and the difficulty in authorizing these media, and the experiences they induce, as authentic.

Key Words

Ghana • mass media • modernity • Pentecostal Christianity • public sphere • religion • secrecy • traditional religion • visuality

INTRODUCTION

In our contemporary globalized world, examples abound of religions making prolific use of modern audiovisual mass media, thereby spreading religious messages out into the public sphere. Conversely, one can also discern – as even a host of recent Hollywood films, from *Bruce Almighty* to *The Passion of the Christ*, remind us – the popularization of religious forms and elements in mass mediated entertainment. Recent anthropological

431

research on Islamic, Pentecostal, Judaist, Buddhist, Hinduist or spirit possession movements shows that incorporating modern mass media into the sphere of religion entails new possibilities for broadcasting a religious message among a broader audience and for assuming a public role. However, modern audiovisual mass media offer not only possibilities to spread out that may resonate remarkably well with religious ideas of reaching out into the world, but also reconfigure religious ideas and practices by situating them in the context of the era of mechanical and electronic reproducibility.[1]

This article explores what is at stake when new mass media become available to religious groups, and offer new possibilities for public articulation and self-representation. It does so by focusing on a particular social field, contemporary Southern Ghana, where Pentecostal-charismatic churches and representatives of indigenous religious traditions develop markedly different, if not opposed, attitudes towards mass media such as TV and video. Whereas the former eagerly and skillfully make use of these new media in their religious practice, and certainly in advertising their religious business (De Witte, 2003, 2005a), the latter are more reserved. This is not merely a question of adopting or rejecting new media technologies as such, but also a reflection of Pentecostalism's and traditional religion's divergent positions in the contemporary dominant Ghanaian 'representational economy' (Keane, 2002),[2] which is characterized by a growing emphasis on the assertion of power through a politics of representation that thrives on mass media. In this representational economy, mass mediated images have become key to processes of imagining – and indeed: imaging – alternative communities based on religious conviction. Eluding immediate state control as a result of media deregulation after the adoption of a democratic constitution in 1992, Ghana's new public sphere has become a space in which the capacity to enhance one's visibility – as well as audibility[3] – has become a crucial power resource. This setting appears to privilege a Christian perspective, which offers rather stereotypical representations of 'traditional religion',[4] echoing 19th-century missionaries' propagation of Christianity as a religion throwing 'light into the darkness of heathendom'.

If the more conventional Protestant and Catholic churches have revised this simplistic stance, it is a taken-for-granted point of departure for Pentecostal-charismatic churches, which have gained much popularity in the last 15 years (Gifford, 1998, 2004). At the same time, the locally made, popular video-films – the focus of my research in the last decade (Meyer, 1999, 2004a) – mirror and affirm the Pentecostal hegemony. In these video-films, the camera appears to trade upon Pentecostal claims of throwing light into the 'powers of darkness' and represents traditional priests and chiefs as bloodthirsty primitives having much to conceal. These representations leave the latter puzzled and scandalized, but they do not seem able to replace them with more suitable images. They feel misrepresented, yet are wary of actively promoting traditional religion to a larger public by means of mass media (De Witte, 2005b). This contributes to traditional religion's apparent marginalization, as access to audiovisual technologies and the willingness and ability to embrace the visual image as a dominant mode of self-representation appears to be crucial for achieving power in Ghana's contemporary mass-mediated public sphere.

One might be tempted to view Pentecostalism's eagerness to incorporate new visual mass media into practices of public self-representation and video-film makers' inclination to inscribe their movies into Pentecostal views in terms of an alignment of

Christianity to the logic of modern mass media, in the process of which this religion is increasingly watered down. Conversely, traditionalists' reservations might be taken to indicate a refusal to align religion with modern mass media technologies and to signal a groundedness in a life world still unaffected by the modern. This all too nostalgic view fails to realize the complexity of the relationship between Pentecostal Christianity and traditional religion. It would be far too simple to approach both religions in terms of the opposition of modernity and tradition, in which indigenous religious traditions would appear as more authentic, yet by the same token as a 'matter of the past' (as has often been claimed by Pentecostals, e.g. Meyer, 1998). This is problematic because the inferior position of indigenous religious traditions in the contemporary representational economy should not be regarded as intrinsic to their nature, but as a result of the complex power relations between Christianity and traditional religion. As traditional religion has been construed as Christianity's Other, both are inextricably connected rather than simply opposed (Meyer, 2005a). Their divergent attitudes towards audiovisual mass media need to be understood against the background of this discursive frame and the different amount of power it lends to Pentecostalism, on the one hand, and traditional religion, on the other.

The deliberate adoption of audiovisual technologies on the part of Pentecostals and the concomitant Pentecostalization of popular cinema, as well as traditionalists' more reserved attitude, raise intriguing questions about the relationship between religion, new audiovisual mass media and modernity. The nexus of audiovisual mass media, vision and modernity has been central to critiques of the modern era in terms of Benjamin's 'era of mechanical reproducibility', Heidegger's 'age of the world picture', Debord's 'society of the spectacle', Foucault's panopticon, and even Baudrillard's simulacrous hyper-reality. These critiques converge in identifying vision as the master sense through which an unrecoverable rift separates the signifier and signified, appearance and substance, or representation and presence (see Jay, 1994).[5] In his fascinating chapter 'Believing and Making People Believe', Michel de Certeau (1984) linked these critiques of modern ocularcentrism with questions concerning religion and belief. In the modern age the relationship between seeing and reality initially was governed by scientific methods of observation: making something visible was a proof that it was real. Ever more sophisticated visual technologies, De Certeau argued, were to expose a hitherto invisible aspect of reality, gradually replacing belief with visual evidence (and thereby positing a strict boundary between science and religion). In the contemporary era of the simulacrum, however, the 'contract between seen and real' (1984: 186) has been reversed. As the assumption 'that an invisible immensity of being (or beings) lies hidden behind appearances' (De Certeau, 1984: 187) gradually dissolved, belief is no longer opposed to visual evidence and hence has lost its grounding in the invisible. On the contrary, belief has became rooted in the visible, in that visual images are vested with what De Certeau called 'the energy of belief' (1984: 178). Thus, far from paving the way for a secularized, rational society, the overwhelming presence of visual technologies has produced a new symbiosis of vision and belief, in which both are mutually constitutive, leading to a situation in which there are 'too many things to believe and not enough credibility to go around' (1984: 179).

There is much to say in favor of this very interesting point, which blows up careful scholarly distinctions between religion and science, belief and visual technologies. As this

article will show, questioning such distinctions is key to any attempt to grasp the adoption of modern mass media by contemporary religious groups, and to assess the extent to which the logic of superficial spectacularity that is implied by such media affects religion. But we should also acknowledge the dissonance between the European (French) context, which De Certeau had in mind, and our contemporary post-secular order.[6] Whereas the former context is, to a considerable extent, characterized by the decline of institutionalized religion – leaving the belief energy that was once upon a time addressed by religion as a target for mass media – in many postcolonial settings religions do play an (ever more) important public role. Here religion is not superseded by other forces that mobilize audiovisual mass media so as to make people believe, instead religions use these media themselves, and struggle to strike a balance between aligning belief with audiovisual technologies and vesting these with religious authority so that there is, to invoke De Certeau again, enough credibility to go around.

Against this background, it would make little sense to simply apply the insights of De Certeau, and for that matter the work of other scholars addressing questions of vision and modernity, to the Ghanaian situation or to a host of quite similar contexts. One should be wary of subsuming such different social fields under existing western discourses on vision and modernity, but instead acknowledge the fruitful tension between such discourses and these fields, between grand theory and ethnography.[7] This is what drives the analysis put forward in this article. In addressing the relationship between mass media, religions, and their presence in the public sphere, I seek to transcend an all too generalizing view that might be inclined to offer ready-made answers about the presumed relationship between vision and modernity.

It seems to me that one basic problem with existing views of the nexus of vision and modernity lies in their explicit or implicit overestimation of the power of modern mass media to change the world in a quite homogenizing manner.[8] While media and the formats and styles associated with them do, of course, shape the articulation of a given message to a large extent, it still needs to be taken into account that the suitability and mode of use of media often are subject to intense debate and contest. This is certainly the case in relation to religion, as this article will show. Rather than assuming what modern mass media supposedly do to religion once they have been adopted, it is necessary to pay attention to the ways in which religions negotiate new media (see also Hirschkind, 2001; Van de Port, 2006). Far from mistaking the adoption of mass media by religions as an entirely new phenomenon, I suggest that media are intrinsic to religion (De Vries, 2001; Plate, 2003; Stolow, 2005; Van der Veer, 1999). Once religion is approached as a practice of mediation between people and the divine (or more broadly: the realm beyond the empirically perceivable reality), the adoption of modern audiovisual mass media does not appear as entirely new – nor as a fall from unmediated grace – but in terms of a shift from one medium to another, or at least the adoption of a new medium next to old ones. The question then is: How does the adoption of new media, and the formats and styles which they produce, relate to, and possibly transform, relations among religious practitioners and between them and the divine?

Another shortcoming of theories about vision and modernity lies in the strong emphasis placed on visuality. While visuality indeed has gained prime importance in Ghana's contemporary representational economy, it is important to realize that the urge

434

to produce images does not imply that the world is becoming increasingly transparent and available to sight. Indeed, as making something visible presupposes an invisible, hidden, or even secret realm (Taussig, 1999, 2003), vision and visuality should be viewed as part and parcel of a dialectics of revelation and concealment (Meyer and Pels, 2003). In short, we need to put the visual in perspective by exploring its relation with 'the underneath of things' (Ferme, 2001), that is central to questions of power in modern Africa (Geschiere, 1997).[9]

Taking into account the complicated entanglement of traditional religion and Pentecostalism, approaching both religions from a perspective of mediation, and seeking to avoid the pitfall of equating visuality with transparency, this article seeks to analyze the nexus of religion and media in a manner that moves us beyond an unproductive recurrence to oppositions such as tradition and modernity, or religion and technology, and transcends all-too-easy assumptions about the power of modern mass media per se to transform the world.

RELIGION AS MEDIATION

Before zooming in on Pentecostalism's and traditional religion's divergent attitudes towards audiovisual mass media, we need to have a closer look at the nexus of religion and media that has recently started to receive attention from scholars in the fields of anthropology, religious studies, media studies and philosophy (Stolow, 2005). It has been argued that religion and media are entangled in complicated ways that subvert facile oppositions such as spirituality and technology, or faith and reason (e.g. De Vries, 2001). This entanglement harks back to a characteristic feature of religion: the positing of a distance between human beings in the world and the divine realm. This distance can only be overcome through mediation. Once religion is understood as a practice of mediation, media – in the broadest sense: images, spirit mediums, written texts, sound, films – appear not as *Fremdkörper* to religion, but as an inalienable condition on which any attempt to access and render present the divine and to communicate among religious practitioners ultimately depends.[10]

From this viewpoint, the recent adoption of mass media by various religious traditions can be put in perspective. Rather than involving an irretrievable break with a religious past in which the divine still was immediately accessible, this adoption signals nothing more (or less) than a new moment in the history of its mediation. To be sure, the question of the adequacy of old and new media to mediate God may give rise to vehement disagreements, as for instance in the case of Protestants' iconoclasm which sought to replace the Catholic worship of images by a textual approach centered on the Bible – a stance reminiscent of Protestant missions' attitude towards so-called heathens in Africa (see later in this article). Likewise, as debates about the suitability of radio to read tafsir so as to mark the end of Ramadan in Northern Nigeria (Larkin, 2001), the use of cassette sermons as new means of inducing Islamic piety (Hirschkind, 2001), the appropriateness of video and TV as adequate vehicles of the Holy Spirit (D'Abreu, 2002; De Witte, 2003, 2005a; Oosterbaan, 2005), or the possible threat posed by visual media to maintaining secrecy (Ginsburg, 2006; Van de Port, 2005, 2006) suggest the availability of new mass media may provoke critical deliberations about their potential to generate and sustain authentic experience and forms of authority within existing religious traditions. Technology thus never 'comes in a "purely" instrumental or material

435

form – as sheer technological possibility at the service of the religious imagination' (Van de Port, 2006: 23), but needs to be embedded into the latter through an often complicated negotiation process.

If, as an understanding of religion as a practice of mediation suggests, religion and media need to be understood as co-constitutive, it makes little sense to claim that the former exists prior to the latter (see also Mazzarella, 2004, on media and culture). And yet, from within religious discourses, this co-constitutiveness tends to be mysterious. From a Protestant perspective, for example, established and theologically approved practices of mediating God appear not simply as human-made, one-directional devices which ultimately construct the divine with which believers seek to get in contact, but as modes through which God chooses to reveal Himself. Protestantism thus entails a paradox: the need to mediate the distance between believers and God through human-made images or texts, whilst asserting at the same time that God eschews human attempts of being captured through media representations. Without the latter assertion, these mediations would implode as mere constructions of a fictional distance and hence lose their ground.[11]

Exactly because mediation is intrinsic to religion, a given medium may seem almost natural and be taken for granted as producing authentic religious experience. One could also say that the medium is made to disappear behind the message, though shaping it at the same time. For any medium entails its own possibilities and constraints, privileging particular senses and giving form to particular things, whilst excluding, if not obscuring, others. To return to the example of Christianity: from a Catholic perspective the icon of a saint, or Mary, appears as an embodiment of a sacred presence – revealing 'invisibility through the visible', thus presenting a void, gap or *kenose* (Slatman, 2001: 222, see also d'Abreu, 2002) – and induces a particular kind of religious experience. From a more distanced perspective, such an icon would appear as just a particular medium bound by its limits and possibilities, and thus *constructing* the divine in a particular way that excludes other possibilities. Such constructions, in order to appear as authentic and credible, need to be authorized by religious authorities.

Seeking to unmask icons as mere idols, Protestant iconoclasts stressed exactly the inadequacy of the medium of the human-made (thus: constructed) image, and claimed that God would rather render himself present in and through the biblical text. A similar argument was also launched by Protestant missionaries vis-à-vis what they took to be pagan idol worship. This assault amounted to more than merely propagating the substitution of one medium for the other. The plea to shift believers' focus from the image to the biblical text was legitimized by a renouncement of allegedly human-made constructions in favor of a true revelation through the Word that the Bible was held to embody, thereby attributing agency to God in mediating Himself. The new medium of the text was propagated exactly because it appeared as more suitable to render present the divine, thereby exempting it from the charge of being human-made (or, if you wish, mere projection) that was leveled against the medium of the image. This was, of course, not simply a matter of theological deliberation, but had profound repercussions in social life. By instigating the shift to the new medium of the book, Protestantism also associated itself with new, modern techniques of the self and modes of perception, that is, with the emerging print capitalism that has been associated with the rise of modern ocular-centrism (Anderson, 1991; Jay, 1994).[12]

436

The shift from the icon to the modern book-medium was not a mere change of technology, but required elaborate arguments to authorize the new medium as more suited to render present – however partially – the divine.[13] The presence of the divine, though necessarily produced by the medium, was held to completely overwhelm the medium itself, which was downplayed as an inalienable aspect of what it mediates. In this sense, the incorporation of a new medium into religious mediation practices is never just a matter of adopting or adapting to a new technology. In order to function in religious mediation practices, such a new technology needs to be authorized as a suitable means to merge with what it sets out to mediate, thereby transforming a mediated representation into an immediate presence. This alignment of medium and message involves tensions and conflicts, certainly in the case of modern audiovisual mass media. In the following section, Pentecostalism's and traditional religion's attitudes towards such media will be discussed along the lines set out so far. I seek to pinpoint that an understanding of religion as mediation allows for a critical exploration of how media, as technologies, produce the divine in particular ways, involving distinct senses in generating religious experiences, as well as how these technologies are embedded religiously and authorized as able to instigate authentic experiences.

DIFFERENT MEDIATIONS: PENTECOSTALISM AND TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The liberalization and commercialization of hitherto-state-controlled media, that is, film, TV, radio and the press, transformed the Ghanaian public sphere significantly and offered new possibilities for the public presence of religion. In particular, Pentecostal-charismatic groups, which have become increasingly popular since the mid-1980s, have adopted audiovisual media with much success and started to openly counter state politics of tradition and identity. Prior to 1992 the state placed a strong emphasis on African heritage and culture as being central to the imagined community of the nation, and favored the neo-traditional Afrikania mission, which claims to represent a plethora of different local cults, with airtime on radio (Boogard, 1993). By contrast churches, though having many members, were hardly present on radio and TV. This situation has been almost reversed in the course of the 1990s, with Afrikania now playing a marginal role in the representational economy, viewing itself as a victim of the now dominant – or indeed: hegemonic – Pentecostal-charismatic audiovisual presence (De Witte, 2005b). On the other hand, in Pentecostal circles it is feared that Pentecostalism may fall victim to its own success, as the excessive spread of its message into mass culture occurs at the risk of trivialization and banality.

Pentecostal Christianity and traditional religion, as intimated already, are entangled with each other in a much more complicated way than the public assertion of their mutual incompatibility suggests. In order to grasp this entanglement, we need to take as a point of departure the initial encounters between (Protestant) Christianity and indigenous cults in the mid-19th century, when the relationship between both was established and the discursive frame through which both religions speak about each other emerged. These encounters can be fruitfully approached by focusing on conflicting practices of religious mediation. This is not merely a matter of theological or philosophical deliberation but leads right into the heart of religious practices and how they are situated in a wider social field.

Christianity and its Other

As I tried to show in my earlier analysis of encounters between Ewe and German Protestant missionaries (Meyer, 1999), the latter excelled in condemning indigenous religious practices in terms of the 'worship of idols', or even 'fetishism'. From a Protestant perspective, Africans should not bow down to human-made gods, but turn to the Bible and pray so as to find again the Christian God, with whom the black race had lost contact in a distant past.[14] Stressing the importance of reading the biblical text and listening to the sermon as key religious practices, missionary Protestantism envisioned the production of a new kind of religious subject that renounced practices of being possessed, attending elaborate rituals, seeking divination, observing taboos and other important aspects of pre-Christian life that came to be regarded as uncivilized and primitive.[15] Whereas formerly the local gods and spirits manifested themselves by possessing the priests and priestesses, and thus had to be approached by ordinary people through the intermediation of the latter, Protestantism offered access to the divine for all converts (though, of course, the pastor and the evangelists were to oversee the congregation and ensure the implementation of the church order). The condition of the possibility for individual converts to approach God, however, was a renouncement of the possibility of being possessed by a god in favor of a textual orientation. Stressing the importance of the book, and, more generally the importance of literacy,[16] Protestant modes of mediating God required a literate, reading subject. In this sense, conversion to Protestantism did not simply entail a shift from one religion and its key medium to another (from mediumship to the book), but also a 'conversion to modernity' (Van der Veer, 1996).

However, the relationship between missionary Protestantism and modernity was all but smooth. For the primitive, backward Other from which Protestantism struggled to dissociate itself did not disappear (and, in a sense, was even needed). For instance, although Protestant missionaries sought to unmask local priests as deceivers, who fooled people by making them worship self-made devices, they still attributed power to the latter, dismissing them as diabolic. The worship of idols, it was claimed, would lead people away from the true and only God, and tie them all the more to Satan. Therefore missionaries instigated the public burning of so-called fetishes and shrines. This dramatic performance not only marked Christianity's superiority, but also attributed power to these religious objects – why otherwise take the trouble of destroying them in such a public act? Thus, even a convert to Christianity was not expected to develop a more rational disenchanted outlook and dismiss the power of idols as superstitions, but just to stay aloof from them.

The power of so-called idols, now conceived as belonging to the realm of Satan and his powers of darkness, kept on haunting African versions of Christianity (see also Latour, 2002). While, with the course of time, orthodox Protestant churches moved beyond this attitude and even sought to accommodate traditional religious elements under the banner of Culture (Coe, 2005; Meyer, 1999; Peel, 1994), African Independent churches and Pentecostal-charismatic churches[17] further elaborated the diabolization of non-Christian traditional religion. Casting out old gods, witchcraft and all kinds of spirits, and protecting believers against magical objects became a prime concern in these churches. In this way, the reality and danger of what came to be termed 'African power' is asserted, while at the same time certain traditional modes of dealing with evil

and mishap are accommodated into Christianity, as reading the Bible and praying to God are not considered enough. Especially as even Christian converts could still be possessed by evil spirits – thus embodying a satanic force – it was found necessary to develop counter measures, such as calling upon the Holy Spirit. In this way, being 'possessed' by a divine force is brought back in, so as to supplement the Christian reading subject with an extra force.

The power of vision

In its self-presentation, from the outset (both Protestant and Catholic) Christianity mobilized the metaphor of light and darkness so as to claim its superior position with regard to traditional religion, which was regarded as prone to conceal. This metaphor also captures both religions' position: whereas Christianity featured as a public religion commanding respect – an educated, civilized person was to present himself as a Christian – traditional religion thrived in the realm of secrecy – to be called upon by that same civilized person in the dark of the night because of Christianity's apparent failure to deal with African power (see also Steegstra, 2004). Even though African Independent Churches, and later Pentecostal-charismatic churches, set out to outlaw this hypocritical attitude by offering more efficient ways of dealing with evil and mishap that have much in common with traditional modes, the association of Christianity with public visibility and traditional religion with secrecy is still maintained. Christianity, and above all Pentecostalism, engages in the *public performance of revelation*, whereas traditional religion asserts its rootedness in secrecy.

The association of Christianity with light and public presence, and traditional religion with darkness and secrecy, however, should not blind us to the fact that both partly converge in emphasizing the importance of vision. Protestant vision practices linked up with local religious traditions in interesting ways – far too complex to summarize here – for powerful priests, too, were said to have the capacity to see into the invisible, to have a second pair of eyes. Protestant missionaries endorsed a kind of hermeneutics of everyday life, which was predicated upon the notion that there was always something behind mere appearances, yet their meaning could be found through the biblical text.[18] One of the attractions of Protestantism was that it made available to all believers the capacity to understand what lies behind surface appearances by referring to the biblical text, whereas traditionally the capacity to see into what remained hidden to the eye was what distinguished priests from commoners. However, missionaries kept on stressing the importance of the biblical text in the work of interpretation (rather than divination), and were reluctant to allow for more elaborate vision practices (such as having visions, going into trance, interpreting dreams and similar techniques) geared to the unmasking of occult forces such as witchcraft.

Mainstream Protestantism's unwillingness to endorse this kind of vision practice played an important role in the emergence of African Independent Churches, which placed strong emphasis on dreams and visions (thereby allowing women to assume a more important role as prophets), and also contributed to the current popularity of Pentecostal-charismatic churches. When I conducted my research in Peki (Volta Region) in the early 1990s, I was struck by the constant reference to modern audiovisual technologies in pentecostally oriented circles. The operation of the Spirit of Discernment, which empowers believers to see into the realm that lies beyond mere appearance, was

439

explained to me by, for instance, drawing an analogy to X-ray or to the screening devices at the airport, which make it possible to look at what is concealed to the naked eye. Also, I learned that God's supervision over human beings could be likened to film technology, as God registered carefully every person's life, including his or her secret encounters with occult forces and amoral behavior, and kept it as a film (Meyer, 2005b). Nothing could be hidden from His view, and He would never forget, only forgive. Preachers, too, often mobilized their ability to look beyond what was called 'the physical' right into 'the spiritual', telling persons what was the cause of their ill health and mishap, or even accusing them or their relatives of witchcraft.

In the late 1990s, when locally founded Charismatic Churches started to develop elaborate media ministries, the analogy between the Spirit of Discernment and modern audiovisual technologies was pushed a step further. Many of these churches represent themselves as masters of modern media technology. Not only do they produce and sell videos and VCDs representing sermons and other carefully edited church events to a mass public, they appear regularly on TV and radio (De Witte, 2003, 2005a; see also Gordon and Hancock, 2005). A number of these churches also broadcast the performance of miracles, thereby obviously calling upon audiovisual technologies so as to make spectators believe in the efficacy of divine power, allegedly operating through the pastor. Such shows are usually not broadcast live, but subject to careful editing. The mode of address is such that spectators are made into eyewitnesses of the operation of divine power that is embodied by the pastor. At a certain moment spectators are directly addressed (by the pastor looking into the camera); they may be asked to join in with a prayer, or even to touch the screen so as to be touched by divine power and get healing. Television here is not confined to addressing the senses of the eye and the ear alone, but is also employed to convey the sense of touch (De Witte, 2005b). Many times I heard from people that they had felt personally moved by a TV pastor, thereby suggesting that the medium of television is able to bridge the spatial and, given that these shows are not live events, temporal distance between the televised appearance of the pastor and his viewers at home. In this way, television is authorized as suitable to convey immediate religious experience.

Interestingly, in traditional shrines, too, the power to see behind the surface is emphasized, and reference is made to modern technological devices. Many people, when talking about witchcraft, talk about 'African electronics', and stress that Africans, too, developed technological devices that enable them to see (and also travel) over long distances, yet unfortunately only use them in a destructive manner. I have not conducted research on the use of audiovisual technologies in traditional cults myself, but would like to refer to work by Heike Behrend (2003), who shows that photography, for instance, was easily incorporated into African divination practices and also used in performing (bad) magic against persons. Hence it would be much too simple to assume that traditional religion would be situated outside of the realm of modern audiovisual technologies. Where traditional priests and Pentecostal pastors differ, however, is the use of audiovisual technologies in the service of self-representation. I have met quite a number of traditional priests who insisted that no photographs be taken inside their shrine, and who would tell me of photographers' failure to photograph or film traditional rituals that take place in public (see also Spyer, 2001, and later in this article). Likewise, Marleen de Witte (2005d) reports traditional priests' crude stance vis-à-vis a TV camera crew

440

seeking to document the performance of a traditional ritual. The crew, which was introduced to a number of shrines in the Volta Region by the already mentioned Afrikania mission, was prevented from filming inside the shrine. This insistence on keeping certain matters secret and thus away from the eye of the camera and the public screen obviously collided with Afrikania's attempt to launch a more respectable public image of traditional religion. In this sense one could say that traditionalists engage in the public 'performance of secrecy' (see also Mattijs van de Port, 2006).

This is very different among Pentecostals, who use audiovisual technology to aggrandize the pastor as a man with true vision, whose charisma is created, or at least affirmed, by projecting his endlessly reproduced image onto the television screens. Pentecostal pastors, as Marleen de Witte put it, 'become "living icons" mediating the power of the Holy Spirit to the spectators at home' (2005a: 323). Pentecostals excel in publicly displaying their vision power, yet what they see and subsequently depict in sermons and books is not God Himself, but rather the power of His sight which makes people's hidden troubles appear, their secret involvement with occult forces, the machinations of the Devil and consorts. While God is thus not depicted as such – a strong distinction is made here regarding Catholicism and local religious traditions which are despised as idol worship – He is held to be able to attribute a kind of supervision, which is reminiscent to His omniscient eye, to the faithful – vision at work, so to speak.

Put differently, Pentecostals attribute much importance to the Spirit of Discernment, which enables born-again Christians to look behind the surface of mere appearance and lay bare the operations of the 'powers of darkness'.[19] The Spirit of Discernment is mobilized as a key power resource by Pentecostal pastors, who at least partly owe their charisma to being recognized as seers, and seek to enhance it by using audiovisual technologies to spread their fame on TV and video. The point here is not merely to reveal as such, as vision is considered part of the fight against the powers of darkness that were held to operate in 'the spiritual'. Making visible, in this sense, is a strategic device in overcoming Satan, who, it is asserted, hates being exposed. The examples offered in this section suggest that Pentecostalism's adoption of audiovisual technologies is found to be quite unproblematic, in that such technologies are understood as almost natural extensions of already existing religious vision practices. Both reinforce each other. Taking up the televisual format implies the adoption of the spectacle as key mode of public self-presentation. While this resonates well with Pentecostal ideas about the spectacular nature of miracles and the power of God, it also draws Pentecostalism close to the forces of mass entertainment. How to authorize convincingly Pentecostal mass-mediated imagery as authentic and hence achieve credibility is a matter of ongoing concern for the media ministries of Pentecostal-charismatic churches.[20]

Popular video-films[21]

Fully depending on the support of the audiences, Ghanaian popular video-films, as I explained elsewhere (Meyer, 2004a), surf on the wave of the popularity of Pentecostalism. Certainly in the early phase of my research many video-film makers would tell me that they received their film as a divine vision, which appeared on a white wall in their dreams. Though nowadays more and more video-film makers lament the predominance of Pentecostalism, which prevents them from making the films they would really like, they acknowledge that it is virtually impossible to stay in the business without adopting

441

what I would call a 'pentecostalite style' (Meyer, 2004a). Thus, also in a great deal of Ghanaian and Nigerian video-films, born-again Christians, and certainly the pastor, are not just objects of the spectator's gaze, but above all are celebrated as the harbingers of the vision offered by the camera itself. Pastors' visual capacities are technologically extended by the camera, in the sense that the camera mimics the pastor's ability to reveal what otherwise remains concealed to the naked eye and projects it onto the screen. While these films, of course, are audiovisual and thus address the ear and the eye, it is important to note that in pinpointing the overlap between films and Pentecostal Christianity the dimension of vision is very much emphasized. Sound (which is often of a technically mediocre quality) is made to support the revelatory pretensions, for instance by playing Christian songs which tune spectators into a religious mood or by making use of sound effects that indicate that something demonic is going to happen.[22]

Inscribing films into Pentecostal vision practices, viewers are made to witness revelation in action. Revelation may, for instance, occur in a dream, which the audiences are made to witness together with the dreaming protagonist. There are numerous examples of a person seeing in a dream that another person has very bad intentions, or may even be a witch. As soon as the dreamer wakes up, still in shock about the terrifying vision, he or she will start praying, thanking Jesus for sending the revelation as a kind of warning, and promising to devote himself or herself fully to Christ (e.g. Meyer, 2005b). Such scenes echo Pentecostal attitudes towards dreams, which are never simply seen as an expression of repressed and displaced desires but as God-sent glimpses into the realm of darkness, through which God tries to explain something to the dreamer. Revelation also materializes in audiovisual images when a pastor or a very staunch Christian starts praying. At that moment, again in line with Pentecostal practice, demonic forces are shown to materialize. These forces are shown to dwell in shrines in the bush, on the beach, or at the outskirts of the city. Traditional religion, in other words, is represented as not only thriving at the margins of social life, but, more importantly, to derive its power from its marginal, undomesticated position. Such scenes are depicted by making use of special effects, which show, for example, how a person morphs into an animal: a snake, a cat, or any other animal associated with occult forces (Meyer, 1995). This usually culminates in the arrival of the Holy Spirit – materializing through fire, a laser like weapon, or a sharp knife – who eventually defeats the demonic forces (Meyer, 2005a). Offering a glimpse into the spiritual realm by making use of special effects, films offer audiences a simulacral divine vision, which allows them to witness the entanglement of the spiritual realm, that remains hidden to the naked eye, with the physical world, that presents itself to the eye yet remains inexplicable by mere physical sight alone.

In other words, a successful film depends on effacing all traces of being made up,[23] so as to convincingly feature for the spectators as a revelation, thereby bridging what happens in 'the physical' and 'the spiritual' realms with the help of the camera. The point I wish to make is that this kind of divine vision power seems to lend itself easily to filmic visualization. It is not that the Holy Spirit or God Himself is depicted; what is visualized is their operation: vision in action, with demonic forces being its ultimate target. Trapping the otherwise invisible or elusive into an image, in this sense, is an act of symbolic violence with regard to traditional religion. This is reminiscent of the Protestant iconoclasm, yet also pushes it further, in that destruction is to happen through the image.[24] It is not a question of using a hammer against the image, but a use of the

image as a hammer – a stance that proves the importance of the notion of 'iconoclash' launched by Latour (2002), who insists that the destruction of the image does not lead beyond the image.

Therefore it seems to me that an analogy exists between Pentecostal mediation practices focused on vision, and the way in which the camera is put to work in Ghanaian video-films, between Pentecostal dramatizations of the struggle between God and the Devil in the context of deliverance and its visual spectacularization, which is the climax of this kind of movie. Both Pentecostal practices and video-films converge in the urge to reveal what remains hidden to the naked eye, yet is shown to have such a strong, eventually destructive influence on the visible world. In this sense both engage in the public performance of revelation – ultimately so as to destroy.

In this framework, traditional priests appear as targets of the Pentecostal gaze. In some films they are even shown to make use of photographs in their divination practice, or to employ the surface of a water-filled calabash as a kind of screen enabling them to see across a long distance (reminiscent of the already mentioned notion of 'African electronics'), but ultimately their vision power is subordinate to that of the Pentecostals (Meyer, 2005a). Of course, video-films contain many scenes depicting traditional priests in their shrines. These depictions echo Pentecostal, and for that matter early Protestant, imaginings of traditional religion, but are far removed from how traditional representatives see themselves. I have often witnessed public discussions in which video-film makers were accused by traditionalists, and those in defense of the traditional heritage, of misrepresenting them. At such occasions, video-film makers retorted that it was not at all their intention to offer truthful and realistic representations of traditional religion. Instead, they echoed and affirmed, as it were, existing stereotypical views about traditional religion, as they continue to be sustained in Pentecostal circles (Meyer, 2004a).

That the charge of misrepresentation has its own limitations, however, became clear to me when I talked to Nii Kodjo Armah II, a professional photographer and sub-chief at Jamestown, who, for many years, had been a member of the film censorship board, which has to approve every (video) film before it is screened or sold in public. As, at least officially, all Ghanaian videos have to pass through this board, Nii Kodjo Armah II has had ample opportunity to know the genre. He told me that he felt that these films offered a wrong image of traditional priesthood (and chieftaincy), but also remarked that it was impossible to come up with more accurate representations. In his own career as a photographer he had had the experience of the camera ceasing to work when he tried to take a picture of matters meant to remain secret, and during his own initiation he had undergone experiences that resisted visual representation. In a sense, he insisted that the power on which traditional religion thrives refuses to be captured through modern visual devices. During my visits to traditional shrines in the context of my research in the Volta Region in the early 1990s, I have often encountered the claim that traditional powers refuse to be depicted by modern visual devices. The production of the documentary on Afrikania (discussed earlier) was complicated, if not thwarted, by the same claim.

Video-film makers realize this antagonism between traditional powers and modern film technology. In fact, many of them told me that they felt compelled to make rather artificial representations of traditional priests and their shrines. For one thing, they realized that in the register of tradition of which chieftaincy and priesthood are part, not everything is convertible into images: 'there may be just one small and scanty pot in a

shrine, but tremendous power dwells in it', my friend and video-film maker Ashiagbor Akwetey-Kanyi told me. However, 'for film you need to exaggerate, one cannot do with the image of a simple pot in order to depict a shrine'. Thus the compulsion to tell a story through spectacular images requires that video-film makers resort to the imagination. Many films offer extravagant images of traditional religion that have little in common with actual traditional worship, and that have been carefully set up by set designers. As the medium of film requires abundant visual images, video-film makers and the set designers around them do not only imagine, but also image, traditional religion. Such film shrines are thus made to substitute for a much less visual original.

However, once created, a film shrine may assume a reality of its own, and serve as a new dwelling place for occult forces. For there seems to be no clear-cut boundary between fake shrines, their entourage and related paraphernalia set up in front of the camera, and 'the real thing'; between the representation and its referent. I learned that all too easily spirits, which always roam about in search of new dwelling places, may enter such a fake abode. They can make it real, even if it bears no resemblance to a real shrine out there, which, as stated earlier, does not necessarily consist of images and thus does not fit in with the regime of visibility on which video thrives. This is also reason for some video-film makers to make sure they replace some of the required ingredients by fake-things (e.g. alcohol by water, blood by red liquid) and only make nonsensical incantations in no really existing language.

Set designers, as well as actors, are careful to prevent the representations of demonic forces turning into a reality of their own, for instance by praying over the objects used to set it up, thus asking God to prevent the representations created on set to mimic reality from actually interfering with the real world. It should be recalled that setting up a film shrine is incorporated in a larger project of revelation, which claims to reveal the powers of darkness. The Devil, as stated earlier, is supposed to sabotage the visual violence against him and his agents, and may thus prevent the camera from recording a particular scene. Taking possession of a fake shrine is an even more serious move, as through this the powers of darkness show that ultimately Christian vision power has its own limits. The forces of darkness, though to be fought through visual strategies, may ultimately resist visual representation. This, of course, ultimately confirms the position brought forward by Nii Kodjo Armah, and thus affirms the force of 'African power'.

CONCLUSION

The availability of modern audiovisual technologies has had a significant impact on Pentecostal mediation practices. Allowing for Pentecostal vision practices to materialize through video, modern audiovisual technologies both link up with and transform existing repertoires of calling upon the divine. The apparent elective affinity between Pentecostal-charismatic vision practices and audiovisual technologies accounts for Pentecostalism's success, yet also entails the price of trivialization, invoking doubts as to whether there is anything behind the spectacular public performance of revelation. By contrast, traditional religion's uneasiness towards audiovisual media *and* its incapacity to crack the hegemony of Pentecostal-charismatic vision practices makes it difficult to draw a positive public image of itself, yet also seems to keep it at some distance, though not entirely apart, from the representational economy that characterizes Ghana's contemporary public sphere. Thus, on the basis of the – admittedly brief – analysis offered

in this article, there is much to say in favor of the argument that the adoption of new audiovisual mass media by Pentecostals favors the rise of a kind of simulated hyperreality, in which images refer to each other, but no longer to a signified outside of themselves. Concomitantly, the smooth association of Pentecostal vision practices and new audiovisual mass media suggests that, much in line with Michel de Certeau's suggestion, belief tends to be located in vision, and thus inextricably bound to modern audiovisual technologies, leading to a situation in which belief thrives at the expense of credibility.

And yet, this is not the whole story. For not only the Pentecostals, but also the traditionalists make a constant appeal to a realm hidden to the naked eye, to what lies underneath and is couched in secrecy. At least the claim is made that Pentecostal power resides in the ability to reveal the hidden, in penetrating that which traditional representatives such as priests and chiefs desperately seek to conceal, whilst the latter themselves also call upon their capacities of seeing into the dark – though not displaying this in public. The invisible realm – video-films' fictitious representation of traditional power – is to be captured by the act of depiction, and thus resists losing its significance to the flatness of the simulacrum, the realms of signs which no longer refer to anything outside of themselves. Moreover, the images that are made to appear are potentially dangerous – and thus never an object of mere gaze.

It seems that audiovisual technologies are called upon against the background of established religious mediation practices, which place seeing in the context of a kind of hermeneutics of everyday life that asserts the necessity to read images by referring to a realm beyond. While Protestant missionaries proposed reading the Bible as a key to understanding the true meaning of appearances, Pentecostals, though also calling upon the Bible, place comparatively more emphasis on practices of vision, for instance by mobilizing the Spirit of Discernment which allows them to look into the invisible.

In short, for Pentecostals there is always something behind the image, certainly in the case of depictions of the 'powers of darkness'. Although the act of depicting is meant to overcome these powers – as if the signifier could neutralize and empty the signified – they still threaten to subvert this feeble relationship: as I pointed out, those on the film set fear that the signified may completely overtake the empty image that is created to represent it. This empty image is a kind of reverse *kenose* in that, in contrast to the Catholic icon, it should not reveal, but rather *destroy* the invisible by making it visible. The impossibility of achieving this, because of invisible forces' resistance to being imaged implies that traditional religion, which Pentecostals by and large equate with demonic forces and despise for this reason, remains powerful – even though it is hunted down in continuous attempts to throw light into the dark. Diabolizing such forces affirms their power and thus binds Pentecostalism in a symbiotic relation with the powers it renounces so articulately.

The public performance of revelation and secrecy which separates, yet on a deeper level connects, Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity and traditional religion implies that each side engages with, and perhaps even needs, the other. While traditionalists refer to Pentecostalism to assert their difference, Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is entangled with its traditional Other in an even more complicated manner. In Pentecostals' assault of 'African power', we encounter a fascinating interplay of two conflicting, though interconnected, attitudes towards the image: one seeking to depict the invisible in a visual frame, making it subject to spectators' gaze, and thus neutralizing its power; the

445

other asserting the captivating power of the image, its uncanny capacity of surpassing this visual frame, inducing fear. Pentecostalism mobilizes both attitudes, which continuously question and at the same time require each other. In the face of the threat to dissolve into a modern visual regime thriving on the hyperreality of the simulacrum, and entailing banalization yet also public presence, Pentecostals invoke the realm of the demonic as a site that ultimately refuses to be trapped in the image, constant attempts to do so notwithstanding. So, ironically, it is the asserted invisible presence of traditional powers – be they considered unrepresentable (as for traditionalists) or impossible to be just depicted (as for Pentecostals) – that seems to play a key role in preventing Pentecostalism's slippage into the realm of the simulacrum and, at the same time, allows for the continuous public display of its vision power.

To conclude, in order to understand the relationship between religion and modern mass media, and the changing place and role of religions in our post-secular era, it should not only be asked how these media and the modes of representation that go along with them might reconfigure religions, and possibly force them into modern visual regimes. Equally importantly, how practices of religious mediation shape, or even refuse, the adoption of audiovisual mass media, how religions are positioned in relation to each other in concrete social fields, how far they are able to assume a leading role in the context of a broader politics of representation, and how they manage to retain credibility must be explored. The nexus of religion and media, I hope to have shown, is far more complex than any perspective taking as a point of departure a fixed idea about audiovisual technologies and modernity suggests.

Acknowledgements

Notes
1 See, for example, Babb and Wadley (1995); De Witte (2003); Eickelman and Anderson (1999); Hackett (1998); Hirschkind (2001); Meyer and Moors (2006); Morris (2000); Sanchez (2001); Schulz (2003); Van de Port (2005).

2 Webb Keane coined the notion of 'representational economy' so as to 'capture the ways in which practices and ideologies put words, things, and actions into complex articulation with one another' (2002: 85). The notion of economy is very important here, because it highlights that the politics of presence in Ghana's new public sphere that emerged in the wake of neo-liberal reforms is organized in a market-like manner. Whereas prior to the turn to democracy in 1992 the state dominated the politics of representation and what was to be articulated in the public sphere to a very strong extent, after 1992 with the liberalization of the media other voices became major players, curtailing the power of the state (see also Meyer, 2006).

3 The question of a politics of public presence through sound cannot be addressed in the scope of this article. For a programmatic discussion see Van Dijk (2001, 2005); and De Witte (2005c).

4 Traditional religion is a quite inadequate term, which echoes these stereotypical representations. Although the term is widely used, even as a self-description, we need to realize that it is part and parcel of the discursive frame introduced by Christianity, which viewed indigenous religious traditions as Christianity's Other. Rather than simply searching for a more neutral term, I argue that we need to unpack the discursive formation in which traditional religion is addressed as such (see also Meyer, 2005a; Peel, 2003; and later in this article).

5 It should be noted that these approaches tend to neglect sound at the expense of vision, making it seem as if vision operated in isolation from other senses.

6 Post-secular in the sense that the much noted and discussed global resurgence of religion forces us to acknowledge that the modernist vision of a secularized society did not materialize. The public presence and appeal of religion all over the world forces us to rethink religion outside a modernist frame (e.g. Lyon, 2000; Thomas, 2005; Van der Veer, 2001).

7 The same goes, of course, for the question of modernity at large. Recent Africanist scholarship struggles to avoid imposing a western-centric definition of modernity on African contexts, without denying the reality of a set of modern policies and institutions that shape everyday life. See Geschiere et al. (forthcoming).

8 This has given rise to vibrant, still ongoing debates addressing the pros and cons of technological determinism.

9 Another way to put the visual in perspective, impossible to pursue here, is to pay more attention to other senses than the eye, in particular the ear and questions of hearing (see also Hirschkind, 2001) and touch (see also Marks, 2000; Verrips, 2006).

10 For example, De Vries (2001); Plate (2003); see also Keane (1997), who makes a similar argument in relation to religious language, which faces the dilemma that transcendence supposedly lies outside of discourse, yet requires being reduced to a discursive form so as to be expressed.

11 Exactly this paradox leads the German Protestant theologian Manfred Josuttis (1999) to a fascinating contemplation, even for non-theologians, of the possibility of speaking about God while at the same time acknowledging Him as a secret (*Geheimnis*). He criticizes the textual approach that has become dominant for modern Protestantism for failing to acknowledge the distance between textuality and divine presence. The gap is where the secret is.

12 As Schneider puts it in his discussion of Luther's alignment of Christianity and the medium of the book: 'he became the theoretician and politician of the hot medium of the printed book, which reduced sensory participation to a single sense, insofar as it liberated writing, the biblical sign, from the medium of sacramental semiotics' (2001: 207).

13 Since the biblical text was approached as embodying the Word (which had become flesh in Jesus Christ), reading also entailed a kind of hearing (which means an interesting interference of the eye and the ear). The importance of hearing the voice of God also shows in the Protestant emphasis placed on listening to the sermon, and the downplaying of more ritualistic aspects. It would be interesting to reflect further on the relationship between reading and hearing, and the senses of the eye and the ear, in modern Protestantism.

14 Considered as sons of Ham, who was cursed and expelled for looking at the nakedness of his father Noah, Africans were inscribed into a biblical frame. The task of the mission was to lead them back to worship the Christian God, from whom they had been turned away as a result of Ham being cursed.

15 In the context of this article, it is impossible to sketch the complexity of pre-Christian worship. See Meyer (1999) for a more elaborate account of Ewe religion.

16 The missionaries worked hard to translate the Bible and other Protestant texts into the Ewe language, because they were convinced that the Word of God could only touch a person when he/she was addressed in his/her own language.

17 African Independent Churches often arose from oppositional movements within established mission churches. The aim of such movements, and the later African Independent Churches, was to turn Christianity into a more effective religion, able to counter evil forces and offering rituals so as to bring health and wealth. In the course of the 20th century, Christian dynamics in Africa were characterized by debates about how to make Christianity more African. There have been at least two dominant voices in these dynamics: one claiming to reincorporate culture positively into the Christian message (this stance is taken by the leadership of the orthodox churches), the other seeking to enhance the capacity of fighting evil by developing more adequate ritual devices and mobilizing the Holy Spirit against the 'powers of darkness'. The Pentecostal-charismatic churches, which became a major factor in the late 1980s, belong to the second position. For an overview see Meyer (2004b).

18 The image of 'the broad and the narrow path', spread by missionary Protestantism throughout the world, offers a perfect illustration of this attitude. The image juxtaposes certain images with biblical texts, teaching that ultimate understanding of what one sees can only be gained through reading the Bible. Only in this way can a Christian hope to gain part of God's omniscient eye that is depicted on the top of the picture. Seeing like God is mediated through the biblical text. For a more elaborate analysis see Meyer (2006).

19 In this sense, they go much further than the 19th-century missionaries, for whom the Bible was the key to the interpretation of the visible world, in that visual images called for a Bible-based interpretation. By contrast, in Pentecostal circles, the Bible is called upon so as to authorize the revelations that, as pastors claim, have been given by God. In this sense, it was African Independent Churches and above all

Pentecostal-charismatic churches who stressed looking into the invisible as a central religious practice.

20 Recalling the discussion between Jesus and Thomas, who doubted the appearance of Jesus and was criticized by Jesus for placing too much emphasis on vision, theologians might be tempted to liken Pentecostalism to Thomas. Matters are more complicated, however, in that Pentecostals do not simply propagate a kind of empirically grounded physical vision, but rather a religiously construed way of looking into the spiritual realm. This vision can only be achieved by the grace of God. At the same time, by aligning this divine-given vision with technologies of mass mediation, the boundary between religious vision and ordinary visibility does get blurred. Hence the problem of credibility.

21 The points presented in this section partly overlap with a more detailed presentation in Meyer (2005a).

22 I would like to stress that I am not in favor of discussing the visual in isolation from other senses. This is a legacy from much theoretical work on modernity and vision. In cinema studies one can notice a turn away from equating films with vision at the expense of other senses, and a move towards exploring how audiovisual forms may convey multisensory experience (Marks, 2000; Sobchack, 2004). At the same time, in relation to the films discussed here I would like to stress that the issue of revelation still stands central. Other senses are called upon so as to turn the revelations offered by films into credible representations.

23 We could say that the medium itself is rendered invisible – a requirement that any good film needs to meet (Moore, 2002). I was surprised to experience Ghanaian audiences' preparedness to look beyond the usually mediocre technical quality of video-films and allow themselves to be carried away by the story. Initially, this was quite difficult for me. The success of this move, of course, has to do with the fact that the films cannibalize established, memorized Christian repertoires.

24 Reminiscent in the sense that a spiritual entity needs to be fixed as an image, captured by being seen, so as to be destroyed – a question not of destroying an image, but destroying *through* an image.

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