

Situations of Religious Plurality

Considerations on a Space-Sensitive Approach to Face-to-Face Encounter

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1 Introduction¹

This volume is concerned with the conviviality of people in super-diverse societies. Based on my empirical research on religiously plural events in Hamburg, I want to make a spatially sensitive and interaction centered contribution in this chapter and focus on religiously plural encounters as a situated activity. I am convinced that this is a helpful perspective for gaining manageable access to the “messiness of interactions” (see Bieler in this volume) that takes place in convivial moments.² Therefore, I will present some theoretical reflections on the interplay of social interaction, spatiality, and religious plurality and propose an analytical framework for the study of the localization of religiously plural encounters. When I use the term ‘situation’ as a key concept in the following chapter, I do not understand it in the manner of an abstract state as one would use it to describe the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany or the current situation of war in Ukraine. Instead, the concept of situation I would like to put forward here refers to face-to-face activities that are organized by means of the direct interaction of bodily-involved participants and under specific structural conditions that can become meaningful in interaction. My approach is based on concepts of interaction theory developed by Erving Goffman, namely his concepts of interaction order, social occasion, region, and behavior setting, which I will deal with in relation to considerations of spatial and practice theory. In addition to this theoretical grounding in my understanding of situation, I will suggest an analytical framework for a differentiated spatially sensitive reflection on situations of religious plurality.

1 In this chapter, I present theoretically sharpened and further developed considerations and results of my dissertation, Kalender 2023.

2 Following Gilroy, Heil (2015: 320) also emphasizes, “engaged encounter or face-to-face interaction is a crucial practice of conviviality”, underscoring the importance of an interaction theory perspective.

Subsequently, I will start with my reading of Goffman's situation concept and will locate it in the field of practice theory. Afterwards I will emphasize spatiality as a key factor of situations and end my theoretical reflection with religious plurality as a particular condition of situations. Based on these reflections as well as my empirical research on the spatiality of interfaith events, I present thoughts about three different spatial layers intended for application to situations of religious plurality. In the last section, I will briefly relate my notion of situation to the concept of conviviality as the overall frame of this volume.

2 Situations in the Horizon of Practice, Space, and Religious Plurality

Goffman has coined a number of concepts in the field of face-to-face encounters, whose connectivity is evident in their broad reception in the social and cultural sciences and beyond.³ In their introduction to the anthology "Practice Theory and Research", Spaargaren et al. (2016), for example, make a strong case for the high connectivity of Goffmanian thoughts to practice-theoretical approaches. In particular, Goffman's turn to the situation and the accompanying focus on contexts of concrete social action justify his relevance to practice theory (4f.). Another field relevant here, in which Goffman's reflections have also found resonance, is that of spatial analysis. For example, Giddens (1986) describes him as "one of the few sociological writers who treat time-space relations as fundamental to the production and reproduction of social life, rather than as making up 'boundaries' to social activity" (36). The fact that Giddens, who praises here, is at the same time considered an important representative of practice theory with his own design,⁴ in addition to his importance for the discourse on spatial theory, indicates an overlap between practices and space, which I want to concretize theoretically in this contribution.

In the following, I work with the assumption that Goffman's openly designed concepts can be connected to a spatially sensitive consideration of religiously plural encounters and can be fruitfully combined with a practice-theoretical perspective. In doing so, I do not pursue a specific agenda of spatial or practice theory, but want to open up a general theoretical repertoire of concepts. Therefore, I make use of theoretical considerations from the fields of theories of practice and spatial theories in the manner of a cheeky but (so I am convinced) productive eclecticism.

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- 3 Dellwing traces in his comprehensive introduction to Goffman's work an increased "quarry reception" for example with regard to the fields of marketing, politics, internet, film, television, media, medicine, science, law, diversity management, and emotion work, Dellwing 2014, 194ff.
 - 4 Giddens is described as one of the central theorists in the field of practice theories alongside Bourdieu and Schatzki, among others, Reckwitz 2003: 282 or Limacher/Walther 2021: 10ff.

2.1 Practice and its Context: The Double Face of Situations

The basis of my concept of situation, following Goffman, is its double-sidedness as practice *and* structural context. Thus, the term denotes both the collective effort to produce a “definition of the situation” (Goffman 1966: 96) as well as the place and, consequently, the structural references under whose conditions the definition is produced. A practice-theoretical understanding of society, regardless of its theoretical framing, assumes that practices do not float freely in space but each occupy a distinct position in social space at certain times (Giddens 1986: 119). This idea includes a spatiotemporal division of the world into different regions, in which everyday life occurs in a continuing flow of action (ibid: 3). Within the flow of everyday life, as the natural structure of opportunity for face-to-face encounters, situations emerge by the mutual perception of at least two persons, as Goffman (1966) points out: “Situations begin when mutual monitoring occurs, and lapse when the second-last person has left” (18). The spatial context of a perceived bodily co-presence is not merely an unaffected “container” (Löw 2012: 24) for interaction. Rather, as I will elaborate, the multi-layered spatial environment is used as a stage for the representation of the participants in a situation and is socially produced, preserved, and also challenged.

2.1.1 Definition of the Situation: Interaction Order as Local Practice

When a planned or accidental gathering of people occurs and thus a situation emerges, a number of basic (often implicitly asked) questions arise for all participants at first: What kind of situation is at stake? What behavior of the other participants is to be expected? And what behavior is expected of me? (Goffman 1986: 8). Since situations exercise a kind of totality in terms of the bodily involvement of the participants, answers to these basic questions of “with-ness” (see Bieler in this volume) are quite urgent. This shared urgency for orientation in a situation is the basis for cooperatively producing and maintaining a common *definition of the situation* (Goffman 1966: 96). The reference to cooperative action should not be confused here with an unanimity of interests and motives among the participants. Rather, this “tacit cooperation” (159) is about “a kind of interactional *modus vivendi*. [It] involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured.” (Goffman 1956: 4, emphasis in original) Important is that at least a critical mass of participants in a situation has a similar understanding of what is going on.

As Goffman emphasizes in much of his research, people use a number of practices to accomplish this. Among the various concepts he created, the notion of interaction order is the most significant which he himself describes as the generic term of his theoretical focus (Goffman 1983: 2). The *interaction order* refers to “a traffic of use, and arrangements which allow a great diversity of projects and intents to be realized through the unthinking recourse to procedural forms.” (ibid: 6) These more or less standardized forms of behavior help regulate the course of an encounter. Thus, the interaction order is not a structural reference, but a “local performance” (Dellwing 2014: 42). The patterns of interaction order, which is, the cooperative practices for producing and maintaining a definition of the situation, are borne of their “constant repetition” (Goffman 1983: 9) in a wide variety of everyday situations. The appropriateness of culturally specific greetings, of dress

at a rock concert or at the opera, of facial expressions at a funeral (Goffman 1966: 28), or of the degree of escalation at a demonstration involves standardized forms of coexistence. The notion of *routine*, as an important concept of practice theory, helps to understand here that the ability to situationally fall back on common patterns of behavior is closely connected to a special kind of knowledge. As Limacher and Walthert point out, practice-theoretical approaches emphasize the importance of implicit knowledge, which is not primarily anchored in thinking, but in the body.⁵ Unlike explicit knowledge, it is therefore “not explicable, but mobilizable – in the form of spontaneously retrievable body knowledge.” (Limacher/Walthert 2021: 16, own translation of the German original) The security offered by this incorporated “local knowledge” (Reckwitz 2003: 292) in face-to-face encounters, however, should not obscure a basic character of situations. Interaction order as local practice is carried out in permanent tension and under the risk of failure. Accordingly, Pouliot (2016), for example, emphasizes the presence of “processes of struggle – that is, the never-ending politics – that sustain interaction orders.” (55) Against this background, the *social occasion* of a gathering of people is an important reference point for the interaction order. The more planned and organized an occasion is, the more clearly the course of an encounter may be prestructured. The type of occasion (I have already mentioned funerals or rock concerts as examples) also sets a framework for appropriate behavior and the respective roles⁶ of the participants (Goffman 1966: 18ff.). In addition to such action frames, contextual factors can function as reference points of interaction in social encounters. Due to their tendency to restrict action (and thus reduce options of action to choose), they help to cope with contingency and in this way assume a function of relief. In the next section, I will focus on these contextual factors of encounters in the shape of environmental qualities of a situation.

2.1.2 Situation as Environment: Spatiality as a Key Factor of Situations

In this chapter, I understand contextual factors in relation to the interaction that takes place in the course of a face-to-face encounter. In order to grasp the context in this sense, in the following I draw loosely on Goffman’s notion of *environment* as an immanent component of a situation (Goffman 1983: 2; also Giddens 1986: 71). I do not define environment as something that is opposed to the interaction order as a separate macrostructure, but that is made part of the situation via collective behavior and implicit knowledge in connection with the production and maintenance of a common definition of the situation.

I already referred to the spatiotemporal division of the world into different regions. Social occasions can be seen as providing temporal structures. In addition, the idea of a spatial division of the world is addressed. Taking this literally, the world is made up of different physical zones, many of which that are relevant to our daily lives are built by human hands. The material implication of this regionalization is important and I will start

5 The concept of implicit knowledge is a kind of synthesis of different practice-theoretical concepts, such as “practical consciousness” (Giddens), “habitus” (Bourdieu), and “know-how” or “practical knowledge” (Reckwitz), Limacher/Walthert 2021: 16f. Bohnsack also speaks of “performative knowledge,” Bohnsack/Sparschuh 2022: 130.

6 For better understanding, I use the term “role” here instead of Goffman’s original term “part.” Goffman 1956, 10.

with Goffman's notion of region to illustrate this. For Goffman, a *region* is "any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception." (Goffman 1956: 66) The regional boundaries of an encounter do not have to be identical with the boundaries of a specific room. Glass walls or thin sound-permeable doors, for example, in principle enable interaction across these boundaries. The question "Who is it?" in response to a knock at the door is a typical situation in which the boundaries of an encounter, the region, and the physical space are not identical, as the interaction takes place across the physical boundary of the door. Accordingly, a region can be identified only with respect to a particular encounter. Nevertheless, the door as a physical element must of course be understood here as an essential part of the situation (*ibid.*).⁷ This leads us to understand the material endowment of a region as something that modulates interactions, such as a physical structure. Gibson (1977) has proposed the term "affordance" as the sum of the physical properties of an object that offers itself as useful for a living being (Gibson speaks of animals) (79). Of course, not all affordances are taken up in the course of an encounter, and so situationally only some elements are incorporated into the action (in the example above, this concerns the door, but not the unused bell) or acquire meaning in the course of the encounter (Goffman 1956: 13ff.). However, some connections between action and material equipment are obligatory. A coffee party cannot happen without a table and place settings, a guided tour of a museum would not be possible without filled exhibition rooms and the discussion in front of concrete works of art, and last but not least, religious rituals are also clearly dependent on the material goods (ritual furnishings and objects, clothing, etc.) that are needed for their correct execution.

The fact that all these regions are generated in a repeatable way across space and time (Giddens 1986: 17of.; Löw 2012: 161–163; and Schatzki 2016: 33f.) paves the way for the consideration that "the regulations and expectations that apply to a particular social situation are hardly likely to be generated at the moment there." (Goffman 1983: 4) In other words: There are reference anchors for action that extend beyond the current situation. As Nagel (in this volume) makes clear, practice-theoretical approaches to the question of the relationship between agency and structure can be sorted along a continuum between these two poles. Nevertheless, all these approaches are concerned with a poststructuralist resolution of a hard opposition between agency and structure (Limacher/Walthert 2021: 15f.). Even though Goffman makes a strong case for interaction order in face-to-face-encounters as a separate sphere (Goffman 1983: 2),⁸ he clarifies that the respective "established biography" and "a vast array of cultural assumptions" (*ibid.*: 4) are brought into the situations from the outside. To concretize this theoretically, I would like to use Goffman's term "behavior setting." In doing so, I extend the concept of environment beyond the physical arrangement to more abstract aspects, which I see as deeply related to routine and implicit knowledge.

7 Otherwise, the interaction here would only make sense with an imagined door in the context of an acting scene. And yet, playing around an imagined door is necessary to comprehend the definition of the acted situation, which makes the door an integral part of the situation either way.

8 This is expressed in particular in Rawls' Goffman reception of an "interaction order *sui generis*," Rawls 1987: 138f.

Goffman (1956) refers to the production process of (many) regions as creating purposeful and meaningful places of society (76). On the one hand, the purpose orientation is related to the affordances of the equipment in the region (a meeting room offers itself for use in a different way than a supermarket or the prayer room of a mosque). On the other hand, this physical arrangement and its embedding in wider regional complexes is linked to a knowledge of what a particular place is intended for, i.e. what kinds of uses are seen as appropriate and possible and which are not. In terms of these routinized attributions, Schroer (2015) highlights their force in shaping the roles assigned to and taken by people in particular places. Thus, a hospital and a church to some extent generate sick people, doctors, and visitors, as well as believers, people of other faiths, and non-believers (19f.). I want to use the term *behavior setting* to maintain the connection between the physical dimension of a region and the incorporated knowledge about its social intention, which is an important reference for the positioning and self-understanding of participants' roles in a situation. In my perspective, the behavior setting refers to learned abstract spatial types, i.e. spatial concepts that contain ideas about the usual localization of practices and are applicable to a range of concrete places (different types of religious places, like a church building, a pilgrimage site, or a house shrine). These ideas are closely related to a region's physical equipment, which generally can be attributed a potential for materially anchored depths of meaning. The symbolic-material design of a region refers to the meaningful intention in the creation of places and brings their change of meaning into view (e.g. industrial buildings converted for cultural purposes). Understood as intentionally designed to trigger certain experiences and interpretations, regions thus form an expression or at least provide sediments of currently dominant or historical (e.g., religious or political) imaginaries (Knott 2005: 162; Corrigan 2009: 168). Behavior settings are logically related to a simplified idea of functional differentiation. The notion of regionalization of the world as a spatial structure organized by fields, whose concrete regions can be assigned to situationally different behavior settings, is a useful idea of differentiation with respect to face-to-face encounters. Loosely following a functional differentiation, behavior settings can be distinguished according to social fields. Schroer (2006) lists, for example, politics, law, science, education, religion, family, art, and medicine as such distinct fields (142). Behavior settings form a potential reference anchor for orienting the participants in a situation and, I will argue further, are closely linked to *field-specific discourses*. Thus, I assume that each region – due to its assignment to a behavior setting (e.g., politics) – is also related to discourses (e.g., political discourses) associated with that field. As Becker (2021) points out, these discourses can be incorporated in terms of practice theory. Here, the discourses reproduced across space and time in practices can be understood as the situational “repetition in chains of quotations” (40). The lack of a “recourse to an authentic original” (ibid) enables a change in content in the context of an encounter. In this way, discourses linked to behavior settings form a situational reference option, i.e., a resource that the participants in an encounter can make use of to establish and maintain a shared definition of the situation.

In this section, I have presented environmental factors of an encounter as integral elements of a situation. Before I discuss religion and religious plurality as a situational condition, I want to emphasize once again the interaction order as a local performance and its tendency to be vulnerable and dynamic. Also, or precisely because, via the envi-

ronment of an encounter, limited but diverse possibilities of reference are offered for the production of a definition, these are not static and unambiguous. The fundamental ambiguity of the aspects of this environment poses dangers for the production of a common definition of the situation. Due to the demonstrated urgency of the work of definition in an encounter, as Krech (2018) makes clear, a situational unification of the references is necessary, at least to a certain degree. Different interpretations have to be hierarchized or temporalized in the course of social practice (65).

2.2 Religion and Religious Plurality as a Situational Condition

What I have said so far about my understanding of situation applies fundamentally to any kind of face-to-face encounter. With the focus on situations of religious plurality, religion and religious diversity are added as conditional factors that need to be illuminated. However, I want them to be understood as optional factors in the sense of the model. Depending on the object of research and the leading research question, completely different factors can also play a conditional role.

First of all, I want to explain the wording of situations of *religious plurality*. In this regard, I follow the thoughts of Beinhauer-Köhler (2015), who proposes the term *religiously plural spatial arrangements* (own translation of the German original *religiös plurale Raumarrangements*) as a “terminological possibility” (75) with regard to so-called “rooms of silence.” She does so in contrast to normative interpretations of conventional terms such as multireligious or interreligious. Thus, they harbor ambiguities for scholarly use and can be used both as general categories and as descriptions of specific modes of religiously plural encounter (e.g., as coexistence or a cross-religious activity). In certain emic discourses, too, there is criticism of the term interreligious, which is coupled with a fundamental skepticism about cross-religious activities in which one’s own theological or liturgical goods are seen to be relativized. In contrast, Beinhauer-Köhler positions religious plurality as “a descriptive category referring to empiricism: there is religious diversity.” (ibid, own translation of the German original)

Looking at situations of religious plurality, then, means focusing on a particular kind of situation, namely, first of all, those involving people from different religious backgrounds. Now I would like to turn to the question of in which respect religion and religious plurality reflect the understanding of a situation presented in this chapter. Assuming that identities are not usually holistically constituted in religious terms, but rather that we can assume multifaceted points of reference for identity formation, a very broad situational landscape of religious plurality is conceivable, in principle. It therefore seems to me to make sense to limit situations of religious plurality to those situations in which religious plurality becomes relevant with regard to the definition of the situation. I deliberately do not limit the perspective here to “institutionalized forms of religious contact that [...] are based on a programmatic understanding of religious differences” (Nagel 2015: 60, own translation of the German original), i.e. religiously plural events in a narrow sense. But I certainly also mean informal gatherings in which religious plurality is a factor in the definition of the situation (e.g., an informal conversation among colleagues in a tea kitchen). In my conceptualization of situation, I have paid attention to implicit knowledge, that is, the kind of knowledge that can be mobilized situationally and serves

as an orientation anchor for the production of a shared definition of a situation. In the following, against this background, I want to highlight where religion and religious plurality interface to concretize situational understanding with regard to situations of religious plurality. In essence, I address three aspects: a) religions have shaped landscapes materially to some extent, b) religion can act as a cultural pattern of interpretation in situations, and c) religious discourses and discourses with regard to religious plurality can become meaningful in relation to discourses of certain behavior settings.

In a foundational article on the connection between religion and “perception/sense system,” Mohr (2000) refers to a diverse religion-specific environment that appeals to the senses through various material expressions (e.g., visuals, sounds, smells). Each religious tradition has produced its own unique set of expressions and has helped to *shape social landscapes* in their own way (623). Sacred buildings, pilgrimage sites, religious landmarks, and boundaries, places understood as “sacred,” and entire stretches of land – as I have already emphasized in the general view of regions above – thereby form a link between material forms and imaginary religious worlds (625; Ipgrave 2019: 105ff.). Regions of situations of religious plurality are linked to certain customary practices as places in the religious field and can situationally each generate specific roles (e.g., guests and hosts) (Ipgrave 2019: 103f.).

The religious imprints of the environment, e.g., in the form of buildings or also sign-like markings, presuppose that these material forms of expression are accordingly recognized by the participants in a situation. At this point, religion and the “bodily enculturation” (Carp 2011: 478) of religious knowledge come into view as the basis of *specific cultural patterns of interpretation*. This aspect is relevant to situations of religious plurality, since in them behavior (e.g., religious gestures or certain statements) and outward appearance (e.g., signs of a religious office or religious clothing and accessories) can be interpreted as tradition-specific (Knott 2013, 41f.). These attributes help to clarify the mutual positions and are thus part of the production of a definition of the situation.

Finally, religion and religious plurality gain importance with regard to the discourses tied to a behavior setting. If religious plurality becomes a relevant condition in a situation, *religious discourses and discourses with regard to religious plurality* also become potential reference anchors of an encounter. This is relevant with regard to religiously connoted settings as well as to non-religiously connoted settings. Thus, as I will make clear, a situation of religious plurality within a political behavior setting can make the relationship between religion and politics an important object of the encounter and position the group of participants in relation to each other against this background.

3 Situations of Religious Plurality: An Analytical Framework

3.1 Empirical Context of the Framework

The analytical framework described below focuses on the situatedness of religiously plural encounters, with particular attention to the spatial context. My remarks are based on several years of research on the spatiality of interfaith activities. I have investigated four different series of events that occur regularly at different religious and non-religious lo-

cations in Hamburg. Specifically, these are an interreligious celebration in a church hall, an interreligious discussion group in the tea kitchen in the basement of a pastorate, a lecture and panel event in the Hamburg City Hall, and an interreligious discussion series in the Hamburg Art Gallery. In each of these places, I was interested in the interrelationship between religiously plural action and, in a broad sense, spatial context. Within the framework of an open approach using grounded theory methodology, I pursued this epistemological interest by means of participant observation, guided interviews, visitor surveys, architectural representations, self-descriptions in various documents, and my own ethnographic reflections (Kalender 2023).

I would like to extend the theoretical framework developed in my research on the spatiality of religiously plural events to a broader understanding of situations of religious plurality, including informal forms.

3.2 Analyzing Situations of Religious Plurality: A Proposal

Against the background of my research and according to the concept of situation I have outlined here, the spatial context intertwined with action can be concretized as a physical, symbolic-material, and discursive context. This forms an outline to guide the following presentation of the analytical framework in three layers, i.e. the physical, symbolic-material, and discursive arrangements of religiously plural encounters. I do not assume a hierarchical relation between these layers, but – according to a “flat ontology” (Schatzki 2016: 30, own translation of the German original) – understand them as three reference anchors potentially effective in the course of a situation for the production and maintenance of a definition of the situation.

3.2.1 Layer One: Physical Arrangements of Encounter

The basic physical structure of a region, be it a hall in Hamburg's City Hall or a small tea kitchen, enables and limits the possibilities for movement and positioning of the participants in an encounter. By physical arrangements of encounter, I mean the interrelation of the basic physical structure of a region within the course of a gathering. This means not only the body positions in space, as given locations and the mere dynamics of movement, but also the social meaning of these locations and movements in the context of the encounter. For the physical arrangement, I would like to establish three foci and differentiate them into formations of those present, the dynamics of movement in the course of the event, and the social determination of relations between the participants embedded in both.

Group formation

I distinguish between the *frontal* and the *circular* arrangement as, in principle, two different basic formations of a group. These two forms may be supplemented by others depending on the type of a gathering. Especially on more informal occasions the participation of a few people is conceivable. Here, a *side-by-side* arrangement might be a form of its own. A potential example from my research context could be the joint preparation of an event as a situation of religious plurality with a side-by-side arrangement in which a place is prepared communally. For the cases I studied in detail, the event in the town hall

and the celebration in the church hall show up as classic performance arrangements with a *frontal* orientation of the audience towards an ensemble. In contrast, a *circular* arrangement around a table is crucial to the discussion group in the tea kitchen. The Art Gallery event also tends to be a circular arrangement, as the participants position themselves in the shape of a teardrop around an artwork. The different formations of a group are coupled with the requirements of the occasion and the affordances that the equipment of the region provides (and which usually, of course, has been deliberately provided for the appropriate use).

Dynamics of movement

Different emphases can be established for the movement dynamics of the participants in an encounter. With regard to the mobility of the overall group in a gathering, the distinction between settled and nomadic seems to me to be helpful. *Settled* arrangements are those in which the participants occupy a region whose boundaries do not change much, if at all, until the end of the situation. Classic stage events function in this way, but this is also true of the tea kitchen conversation circle. A *nomadic* dynamic, on the other hand, is when the participants do not stay in one place (e.g., sitting on chairs), but move through the space, thereby expanding the physical boundaries of the region of a gathering. An exciting example of this is the interfaith conversation series at the Hamburg Art Gallery, in which the group moves through the museum's exhibition spaces according to a schedule, following the leader. An informal example would be a conversation during a walk through a park.

Proportionality

Both group formation and movement dynamics contain social meanings that are important for situations of religious plurality because they are a reference for and an expression of important aspects which define the situation. Thus, they provide the observer with information about how the relationship between the participants in a situation is formed in light of the social occasion. This also concerns fundamental questions about the distribution of power in a situation. As a guiding distinction, I will suggest proportionality and antiproportionality here. While a *proportional* distribution of participants around a kitchen table expresses a certain degree of equality, in more performative occasions, for example, with an audience and a performing ensemble, participants are clearly *antiproportionally* opposed to each other, the ensemble often clearly set apart from the audience, e.g., by a physical stage or the seating of the audience. Interestingly, this is also true in the nomadic event at the Art Gallery, where the audience can be given mobile folding chairs and thus position themselves as a provisional audience in front of the respective next artwork. Rights and restrictions also potentially accompany the roles that individuals assume in the context of a (primarily formal) social occasion on freedom of movement. Thus, in the context of the performance of ensemble members, there are possibilities of movement that tend to be denied to the audience. On the other hand, it is also conceivable that ensemble members are more spatially bound, for example, in an awards ceremony in which the person being honored is more in demand than a person from the audience who left the event to go to the restroom.

3.2.2 Layer Two: Symbolic-Material Arrangements of Encounter

I have emphasized the symbolic-material meaning embedded in certain material elements of a region as a potential reference in the context of a gathering. In this respect, the material design of a region can become an interactive source in the production and maintenance of a definition of the situation. Against this background, one can ask about the form of the relationship between symbolic-material design and definition, i.e. the ways in which the participants turn towards or away from the design.

Turning towards symbolic-material design

An *explicit turn* to the aspects of the symbolic-material design of a region seems to be rather rare. Exceptions here are contexts in which symbolic-material design is a core feature of behavior settings and social occasions and in which a turn to the material is programmatic. A prime example from my research is the series of events at the Art Gallery. Here, the symbolic-material design is rooted in the artworks that turn the Art Gallery's rooms into a museum in the first place. The interfaith conversation series additionally focuses on an interpretive engagement with the artworks. It is irrelevant whether the interpretations here are in accordance with the intentions of the artists or whether reinterpretations and new interpretations arise in the course of the religiously plural conversation. Something similar can be observed in a more informal guise in spatial arrangements that are explicitly religiously plural, such as "gardens of religions" or certain types of "rooms of silence," which at least afford an examination of the design. In addition to this explicit approach, a kind of *implicit turn* to the symbolic-material design can also be identified. For example, as part of the interfaith celebration in the church hall, a Hindu temple group played music, which in itself created a special effect in the context of the church arrangement. When a Hindu priest then set out to dance on the altar steps, he thereby triggered an ambiguous stage setting. An audience member later interpreted the dancing priest in front of the cross as an expression of reconciliation and joyfulness. This is an interesting example of how meaning, and thus an understanding of the situation, emerges implicitly through the connection between performance and symbolic-material design.

Turning away from symbolic-material design

In my view, *turning away from* the symbolic-material design of a region is characterized by a fundamental absence of awareness or the perception of a potential conflict between the social occasion and the assumed symbolic content of the material design. In the *absence of awareness* of the design of a region, the material design plays no role in the definition of the situation and can therefore be neglected. However, the perception of a tension is interesting. The event in Hamburg's City Hall is a vivid example of this. This takes place regularly with the participation of religious and public representatives in the so-called *Kaisersaal* (i.e. emperor's hall), a richly decorated room. In welcoming speeches, and also in the discussion, reference is made from time to time to the beauty of the *Kaisersaal*. The permission to speak in this extraordinary hall is described as honorable, which also enhances the event as a whole. The elaborately designed ceiling of the hall, which depicts the history of Hamburg's trade, primarily in images that today must be read as part of

colonial history, is not addressed. It is not very surprising that the colonial heritage, symbolically and materially anchored here, is not addressed in the context of an event that focuses on religious plurality and its potential for the city. Rather, the material expression is emphasized. In other words, there is a *reduction* of the material design to its decorative quality, while the symbolic content remains unmentioned. Critically questioned about this, both organizers and selected participants react by *historicizing* the place. In this context, the hall is described as a relic of another time. The event in the town hall thus becomes an exemplary symbol of overcoming what is materially still present from the past.

3.2.3 Layer Three: Discursive Arrangements of Encounter

Since cultural (e.g., religious) ideas are materially expressed in the design of regions, the discursive dimension is already addressed through symbolic-material arrangements. Aspects of the symbolic-material design and its situational interpretations can thus be understood as references to existing citation chains. Nevertheless, I would like to pay separate attention to the discursive layer as its own, in order to be able to show discursive processes emanating from it via the association of a region with a behavior setting and corresponding discourse spaces. In the following, I will focus on two aspects: a) the potential of a behavior setting to channel roles and b) the cluster of discourses spanning the course of an encounter.

Discursive channeling of religion and religious plurality

I have shown that a place is made socially relevant by routinely assigning a region to a behavior setting and thereby to a discourse space. This assignment, based on implicit knowledge and realized through practices in space and time, potentially affects what happens in an encounter in two ways. First, it frames the way religious plurality is addressed. Second, it suggests a set of typical roles that people can play in a behavior setting. Both contribute significantly to the channeling of religious expressions and the relations between the participants of an encounter. In my consideration of religiously plural events, this connection has become apparent in the various cases presented. The church as a behavior setting in the religious field, for example, potentially situates religious plurality in the picture primarily as a variety of religious communities. Religious roles are thus often tied to a representative function for a particular religious community, be it Christianity as the host or non-Christian communities as guests. In contrast, in the town hall as a political space, religion and religious plurality are often viewed in light of the relationship between the state and religion and the state's neutrality, which is repeatedly emphasized and even demanded. Thus, religion is considered here primarily in the shape of interest groups along with other groups in society. Overall, two tendencies can be identified with regard to the situational transfer of a behavior setting into religious behavior: either participants assume a representative function for a specific religious community, e.g., by taking a tradition-specific position on an issue or being seen as personifying it. Or religious references are expressed as a component of identity alongside other components. In this case, religion is understood, for example, as subordinated to primary non-religious components (depending on the social occasion, e.g., the role as

a scientist) or as an equivalent to other reference points of individual biographies. In particular, the latter consideration of religion as a personal facet is likely to be important in informal encounters.

Situational discourse clusters

I have addressed the process of attributing a region to a field of action. I use the term situational discourse clusters to conceptually capture that while, on the one hand, places generally share assignments in terms of primary behavior settings that can have situational effects, on the other hand, there can be discursive references in the course of an encounter that make other discourse spaces relevant. In the course of my research so far, I have identified three different types of these discourse clusters that can shape situations of religious plurality. One type is a bit removed from this concept and is *focused on the primary behavior setting*. This is especially true of the solemnity of the church space. Here, general social discourses (e.g., on cultural conflicts or wars) are addressed, but this is always done through the perspective of the religious field itself. A further type, which in my study applies to the genuinely non-religious behavior settings, spans a *cluster of discourses of primary and other behavior settings*. In the Art Gallery event, therefore, we find a combination of art historical and religious discourses, while in the town hall political and scientific (including theological) discourses come together. The last type can be especially significant for more informal encounters, because here we find only a *loose coupling to the primary behavior setting*, in the sense that the “everyday setting” offers a behavior setting of its own. The tea kitchen in the basement of the parish house is an example of a quite decoupled region in which, depending on the type of encounter, a broad cluster of quite different discourse spaces can emerge.

4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a thought-provoking theoretical framing and a proposal for a space-sensitive analytical focus on situations of religious plurality that can be derived from my research on interfaith event series in Hamburg. Following Goffman's notion of situation, I have particularly emphasized the connection between religiously plural encounters and the spatial context of these encounters, focusing on the double-sidedness of the concept of situation: situations are a combination of the active organization of the gathering of people (definition of the situation) and the environment in which this gathering takes place (regions, behavior settings). Religion and religious plurality represent a condition for these processes, insofar as religion has materially shaped landscapes, acts as a cultural pattern of interpretation, and generates discursive spaces. The connectivity of the analytical framework presented remains to be proven for social occasions beyond interreligious events and with regard to purely informal encounters.

Against the background of my interactional and spatial theoretical perspective on situations of religious plurality, I conclude with a brief reflection on the relationship and added value of these considerations with regard to the topic of the present anthology. For this purpose, I would like to relate what has been said to selected aspects of the discourse around the term conviviality. First of all, the large areas of overlap between the view of

situations of religious plurality presented here and reflections on conviviality are striking. Both concepts refer to “human modes of togetherness” (Nowicka/Vertovec 2014: 342), “place the negotiation (or negation) of cultural difference in the center of the problematic of how people live together” (Wise/Noble 2016: 424), and point to the aspect of spontaneity of direct interaction (Nowicka/Vertovec 2014: 344). Spatiality is also given attention in both discourses; for example, Wise and Noble (2016) refer to the “situated nature” (426) of encounters, addressing not only a temporal structure but also spatial contexts, each of which requires its own practices and generates relationships (*ibid.*). In this context, the spatial focus shows itself to be a quite diverse frame of reference that considers concretely limited places, neighborhoods, or larger urban contexts, each of which can form a point of reference for people’s togetherness (Nowicka/Vertovec 2014: 9ff.).

Among other things, Wise and Noble mention two critical demands on the conviviality discourse, which my reflections may be helpful in refuting. First, from a certain post-colonial perspective, there is a critical view of a too “peaceful” coloring of the conviviality concept. In contrast, Wise and Noble (2016) emphasize that practices of negotiation involve not just “‘happy togetherness’ but negotiation, friction and sometimes conflict” (425). Here, my impression is that the notion of conviviality can benefit from the notion of situation. The latter starts with a more fundamental understanding of encounter that does not need the distinction of being joyful or conflictual. The focus is on the social management of a gathering of people. The way of encountering that is focused on the object (in essence, the definition of the situation), which has a dynamic character and can also change in the course of an encounter, opens the view of situational ambivalences or gives space to the complexity of everyday action and cancels dichotomies of “cooperative and conflictual” (Heil 2015: 322). In doing so, I again emphasize the performance character of this process. In essence, this means that even “‘happy clappy’ togetherness” entails “hard labor” (Wise/Noble 2016: 425) and constitutes “a ‘performative’ phenomenon” (*ibid.*: 426); i.e. interaction order as local practice. The second critical demand on the conviviality discourse that Wise and Noble point out is the limitation of the subject matter to a too small section of everyday life, which disregards the ramifications of the event with regard to history and other social structures. In contrast, the authors want to include “structural and wider forces that shape race relations and distribute opportunity” (425) as important contents of the conviviality concept (*ibid.*). My analytical framework, divided into three layers, is a possible proposal to systematically capture at least some of the spatial structures that go beyond the situational but are addressed in situations. I do not advocate a situationism that sees everything social as anchored in face-to-face encounters, but I do think that the focus on smaller, circumscribed situations, as a gateway to bringing other social structures into view, is relevant for the conviviality of people.

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