

4 Space and Place as Concepts Travelling through Disciplines

*But the Lord God called to the man
and said to him, »Where are you?«¹*

Whereas time has been a dominant concept in academic research in the humanities for many centuries, it was not until the advent of cultural studies in the 1950s that the concept of space was explored to the same extent. This is surprising, given the relevance of spatiality for understanding (human) beings, society and culture. Space has often been taken for granted, and as a result, as a concept, it has frequently been overlooked, naturalised or ignored.² In the study of religion, space remains a rather marginalised concept that needs more attention. As Kim Knott writes in *The Location of Religion*, space is a crucial aspect for researching religion within society that challenges the way religious traditions are described, reconstructed, and presented:

The value of beginning with the locally particular and seeking to understand the reciprocity of the religious, social, (other) cultural, political, and economic is one of the motivations behind this study [...]. It has a number of advantages, which I see as having the potential to make it a useful approach within the study of religions. One of these is the way in which – through its focus on specific locations (whether physical, social, textual, or virtual), the particular constellations of relations therein, and localised religious groups, places, and activi-

1 Genesis 3:9.

2 Danani 2013, 13–17; see also Schroer 2006, 46.

ties – it challenges the »World Religion« approach of religious studies with its focus on discrete, generic traditions, and normative beliefs and practices.³

Analysing religious symbol systems, practices, communities, and traditions in a particular place, profoundly challenges long-held assumptions that are often uncritically presupposed. A perspective which addresses religion as a complex system and a practice that takes place in a specific location and interacts with it is a momentous achievement resulting from the reception of cultural studies in our discipline. In this chapter, we explore theoretical approaches to space and place that may be helpful in addressing shared places where different religious worldviews, practices, and traditions interact.

In the previous chapter we focused upon transformations that occurred in representing places and space in a crucial period of the history of religion in Europe. The present chapter engages instead with contemporary transformations of space and place which function as tools for studying religion in culture. Accordingly, we consider both religious-historical explorations and theoretical debates as two aspects of the same dynamic: space and place, which were significantly shaped in early modern times, are best understood as »travelling concepts« *par excellence* that are moulded through crossings of time and disciplines. In the following pages, different perspectives from various disciplines are discussed in the light of their relevance for researching religion.

As a first step, we will briefly discuss the conceptualisations of space that can be inferred from the visual sources analysed in the previous chapter. The second step is an overview of the transformations that occur when shifting from considering space as an encompassing dimension to conceptualising space as being multilayered and relational. This transformation occurred in interdisciplinary debates that took place in the second half of the 20th century. As a third step, we will focus on space as a social practice, which leads to a fourth step, in which we focus on the role of the human body in a relational approach to space. These steps raise the issue of the tension between space and place as complementary concepts. In the fifth and final step, we will critically evaluate the results of this exploration of space, place and the body

3 Knott 2013, 118–119.

as »travelling concepts« and their relevance for researching places. In this analysis we will reflect upon how these »travelling concepts« bring together a plurality of religious worldviews, practices and traditions.

4.1 Space as a homogeneous dimension containing all things

The images discussed in the third chapter do not present abstract concepts such as »religion«, »space« or »place«. Instead, they represent places in different visual languages, some of them involving writing and cartographic conventions. Nonetheless, they do implicitly evoke concepts of religion, space and place.

In fact, a critical comparison of these images of the world highlights some of the significant transformations that occurred in the way that space was understood in the 15th century. In the case studies considered in the previous chapter it was observed that locating places within the delimited space of creation was both a spatial exploration and a religious practice. These images symbolically communicated an encompassing concept of space that allowed for both a cosmological and a biographical orientation. They merged theological, biblical, cartographic and geographical knowledge with devotional practices and a curiosity for discovering the features of the Earth that humans inhabit. As we have seen, even in a tiny medieval world map in a codex, for example, all of these aspects recur. However, in early modern times, the attempt to depict all the places within the encompassing space of creation became increasingly questioned as more of the world was explored and discovered through travel and travelogues. This is particularly evident in Fra Mauro's *Mappamondo* where medieval cosmological assumptions are still recognisable but, at the same time, challenged and broadened. The body of knowledge about the earth and the heavens vastly increased in this era, through the combination of rediscovered treatises from antiquity, new ideas based on the observation of the earthly sphere as well as on the movements of the celestial bodies. This wealth of new information initiated extensive and wide-ranging research on space, which became a subject of enquiry in a range of disciplines. The extension and the features of the earthly terrain and the universe itself became an object of study in theolo-

gy, philosophy, and the emerging natural sciences, which produced various concepts of almost limitless scope. Over the centuries, different approaches led to different conceptualisations of space that could no longer be harmonised and unified in one all-encompassing worldview.⁴

Overall, the visual sources we have considered rely on a concept of creation as an extension in space where all that has been created is located. This mirrors an Aristotelian idea, the dominant paradigm for conceiving space in the Middle Ages. Space is defined as a homogeneous, finite, ordered extension. Space contains all material things and the relationships between them; yet, it is not influenced by them, it exists as such, as an absolute entity.⁵ The concept of space as a container that exists independently of what it contains remains a prevalent approach down the centuries and in many cases continues to be relevant today, as we will discuss later. However, reflection on space using increasingly multifaceted approaches began to develop over time.

By way of a general orientation, it is common to identify two poles that set the parameters for debates about space across individual disciplines. On the one hand, there are approaches to space which consider it to be a homogenous container, an *a priori* entity, which are referred to as »absolute« concepts of space.⁶ On the other hand, »relational« concepts that focus on space as a process or a network have emerged. The sociologist Martina Löw describes the transformation of conceiving of space as a uniform, homogeneous dimension to an approach to space as being relational, developed in the light of lived experience:

The notion of »living in space« is based upon acquired Euclidean competence, the conflation of the difference between model and world, a socialization that makes space experienceable as uniform and continuous, and traditional ideas of space. Disruptions of this idea can initially only be brought about by bodily-sensory perception of the physical world going beyond Euclidean thought. Due to insularization

4 Crang / Thrift 2000; Dünne / Günzel 2006; Günzel 2009.

5 Schroer 2006; Günzel 2006.

6 For a detailed overview of different approaches to space in the history of philosophy see Dünne / Günzel 2006. A concise discussion of the transformations within absolute concepts of space that pay attention to their differences can be found in Löw 2001, 130–151 and in Schroer 2006, 17–46.

and contact with new media, space is no longer experienced as that which uniformly surrounds us, but as volatile, networked, and immaterial. My conclusion is that in addition to the idea of surrounding space, the idea of relational space emerges.⁷

4.2 From locating things to space as a multifaceted concept

We travel to a specific place: a city, a village, a house. We represent them on maps following cartographic conventions. We paint a wall in a room and hang a picture on it, put a laptop on a table and sit on a chair in front of it. All of this involves material things, human actions and bodily movements, relationships, planning and design, and above all, symbolic meaning-making processes. The city, the village, the house, the map, the wall, the painting, the table, chair and laptop are related to space and place but are not identical with them. Since »place« and »space« are concepts, resulting from different ways of thinking, categorising and differentiating, they remain abstract categories that arise from scholarly approaches to places humans inhabit, observe, and imagine. In everyday life, the concept of space seen in the visual sources of the third chapter is still relevant: we measure a room; we mark out the ground to lay the foundations of a building. Yet, there are also experiences that challenge assumptions of space as a homogeneous container. In the examples outlined above: the painting on the wall opens up a fictional space. In the case of a painting with a religious symbol on it, it allows for a relationship with a transcendent dimension and attributes a certain character to the whole room. The electronic device on the table opens a door to the Internet, a virtual space that – even if it relies on the materiality of the machine, the electricity, the room and the human body using it – detaches communication from a homogenous space (and time), allowing you, for instance, to be simultaneously alone at home and at work with colleagues in a Zoom meeting »room«.

Approaches to space respond to specific scholarly questions. As travelling concepts, they mirror the concerns people and disciplines are dealing

7 Löw 2018, 89.

with, at that time and in specific academic traditions. Space has been a central question in philosophy and the sciences for centuries. Yet, in the 20th century, new questions linked to spatiality arose: new technologies, colonisation, urbanisation, mobility, globalisation, digitalisation, gentrification, mass destruction and questions of sustainability – phenomena that are interrelated with each other – have radically changed societies and cultures across the globe and shed new light upon the question of space, place and the body. Consequently, these fields of inquiry appeared prominently on the agenda of the social sciences and the humanities.⁸

A different focus arose, centred on space as a dimension constituted by means of social practices. From this perspective, space is not only the material dimension that can be measured, planned and represented, but also a fundamental interrelation of multifaceted meaning-making processes. This new approach to space as a relational concept permeates cultural studies and the fields that were influenced by them. By way of illustration, Aleida Assmann explores the link between history, memory and space, emphasising that the spatial dimension is not simply a stage on which »history takes place«. Following the historian Karl Schlögel's *In Space We Read Time*, she conceives of history and space as being in a mutual relationship.⁹ The geographer Julia Lossau points out the shift that took place in her discipline from considering space as a physical-material extension to a concept highlighting the »symbolic meaning-making dimension of geographical reality«. ¹⁰ Space as a concept that embraces meaning-making processes became a central topic in literature, film, art, and media studies – to name just a few fields.¹¹ These illustrative examples indicate the transformation that arose in dealing with space within cultural studies and disciplines influenced by it, which has been variously labelled as the spatial, topographical, or topological turn.

The »spatial turn« is commonly employed as an umbrella term to indicate all these new approaches to space as a relational concept. The term became prominent in the work of the US American geographer Edward W. Soja,

8 Assmann 2008, 153; Günzel 2017, 7–23; Jackson 1989; Soja 2010, 1–23; Rau 2017 and 2019.

9 Assmann 2009; Schlögel 2016. The original German version is from 2003.

10 Lossau 2009, 31 (translation from German by the author).

11 For an anthology containing an overview of space concepts in different fields see Günzel 2009.

who introduced it in his volume *Postmodern Geographies* in 1989.¹² Later, in the first page of *Thirdspace*, a book from 1996, Soja describes the new relevance of space as follows:

It is to encourage you to think differently about the meaning and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent *spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography. In encouraging you to think differently, I am not suggesting that you discard your old and familiar ways of thinking about space and spatiality, but rather that you question them in new ways that are aimed at opening up and expanding the scope and critical sensibility of your already established spatial or geographical imaginations. Mobilising this objective of a belief that the spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical and political relevance than it is today. Whether we are attempting to deal with the increasing intervention of electronic media in our daily routines; seeking ways to act politically to deal with the growing problems of poverty, racism, sexual discrimination, and environmental degradation; or trying to understand the multiplying geopolitical conflicts around the globe, we are becoming increasingly aware that we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities. Perhaps more than ever before, a strategic awareness of this collectively created spatiality and its social consequences has become a vital part of making both theoretical and practical sense of our contemporary lifeworlds at all scales, from the most intimate to the most global.¹³

The spatial turn has generated a broad debate about both terms, »spatial« and »turn«, stimulating different responses and results. To characterise this approach to space, alternative terms have been proposed. Within European cultural studies, the term »topographical turn« has been suggested, in order to highlight that space is a cultural texture that can be decodified. This latter

¹² Soja 1989, 39.

¹³ Soja 2010, 2.

term is often associated with a polemical stance: in defining the topographical turn, it serves as a reminder that relational space concepts are far older and better rooted in the philosophical and sociological history of research than Soja assumed.¹⁴ The topological turn is more of a methodology which deals with the social construction of space, focusing on structuralist approaches, rather than a consistent focus on transformation within spatiality.¹⁵ As far as the idea of a radical »turn« is concerned, some, like Soja, use it to underscore the change in dealing with space, which is no longer viewed as a background for human activities but as an interaction of social practices. Others tend to focus more on continuities within relational conceptualisations of space down the centuries and, therefore, relativise the idea of a sudden, radical transformation.¹⁶

For our exploration of the interrelation of religion and space, two points from this debate are most significant. First, relational approaches to space arise in an inter- and transdisciplinary exchange.¹⁷ Second, »spatial turn« implies a re-definition of the concept of space as a multifaceted interrelation of social practices which leads to a re-thinking of the position of researchers investigating it. If space is the production of social practices, the analysis of these practices can stimulate a transformation of spatial arrangements and therefore of society.¹⁸ Consequently, a common thread that has emerged in cultural studies research on space in Anglophone and European scholarship has been an interest in its political dimension. This common interest in the political dimension of space has cut across other wide-ranging differences in conceptualising that fundamental dimension of human life.

14 Weigel 2002.

15 Günzel 2017, 114–140.

16 For an overview and characterisation of the different »turns« see Döring / Thielmann 2008; Günzel 2008.

17 For a short introduction to the terms inter- and transdisciplinarity see Pezzoli-Olgiaati 2020.

18 Soja 2008, 255.

4.3 Space as a social practice

Edward W. Soja's conceptualisation of space as a social practice has been widely received, contested, and further developed, and the idea of a relational space has been adapted according to the scope of several research fields and disciplines. His approach to space is rooted in the interaction between history and society:

As we approach the fin de siècle, there is a growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and their interdependence. And this three-sided sensibility of spatiality-historicity-sociality is not only bringing about a profound change in the ways we think about space, it is also beginning to lead to major revisions in how we study history and society. The challenge being raised in *Thirdspace* is therefore transdisciplinary in scope. It cuts across all perspectives and modes of thought, and is not confined solely to geographers, architects, urbanists and others for whom spatial thinking is a primary professional preoccupation.¹⁹

Soja addresses the interrelation of history, society and space with a spatial concept as a conglomerate of three interacting dimensions. *Firstspace* epistemologies embrace approaches to space as a »material and materialised ›physical‹ spatiality that is directly comprehended in empirically measurable configurations«. ²⁰ Firstspace concepts tend to focus on objectivity and materiality: »Spatiality thus takes on the qualities of a substantial text to be carefully read, digested, and understood in all its details«. ²¹ *Secondspace* epistemologies are characterised by an explanatory character. They assume that »spatial knowledge is primarily produced through discursively devised representations of space, through the spatial workings of the mind. In its purest form, Secondspace is entirely ideational, made up of projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies.« ²² Finally, *Third-*

19 Soja 2010, 3.

20 Soja 2010, 74.

21 Soja 2010, 75.

22 Soja 2010, 79.

space epistemologies embrace all critical approaches to the interaction of Firstspace with Secondspace: »*Thirdspace epistemologies* can now be briefly re-described as arising from the sympathetic deconstruction and heuristic reconstruction of the Firstspace-Secondspace duality.«²³ First-, Second- and Thirdspace are different though overlapping facets of conceptualising space. They are formulated as tools to analyse the interaction of space, society and history.

This threefold concept is largely informed by the work of Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), a French scholar to whose rediscovery Soja contributed. Lefebvre not only witnessed almost the entire 20th century, but articulated his thinking, which was widely influenced by Marxism, in an impressive body of writings that cover topics in philosophy, sociology, geography and urbanism. In 1991 his *La production de l'espace*, a volume originally published in Paris in 1974, was translated into English. This led to a reassessment of his oeuvre and approach to space, making Lefebvre retrospectively a leading thinker of the spatial turn. *The Production of Space* begins with a programmatic sentence:

Not so many years ago, the word »space« had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area. In scholarly use it was generally accompanied by some such epithet as »Euclidean«, »isotropic«, or »infinite«, and the general feeling was that the concept of space was ultimately a mathematical one. To speak of »social space«, therefore, would have sounded strange.²⁴

For Lefebvre space is not primarily a matter of materiality – his concept of »nature«, he notes, tends to be relegated into the background – but is rather a social product: »l'espace (social) est un produit (social)«.²⁵ Each society produces its own space that is characterised by particular modes of production. According to him, social space embraces various levels: the social rela-

23 Soja 2010, 81.

24 Lefebvre 1991, 1.

25 Lefebvre 2000, 39. The entire sentence in translation (1991, 30): »As a programmatic foretaste of the topics I shall be dealing with later, I shall now review some of the implications and consequences of our initial proposition – namely, that (social) space is a (social) product.«

tions of reproduction which refers to bio-physiological relations according to specific gender, generation, and family organisation as well as relations of production such as »the division of labour and its organization in the form of hierarchical social function«. ²⁶ Forms of production and reproduction are inscribed in social space; space merges them by means of symbolic representations, which allows for stabilising social relationships of coexistence and cohesion:

Thus space may be said to embrace a multitude of intersections, each with its assigned location. As for representations of the relation of production, which subsume power relations, these too occur in space: space contains them in the form of buildings, monuments and works of art. Such frontal (and hence brutal) expressions of these relations do not completely crowd out their more clandestine or underground aspects; all power must have its accomplices – and its police. ²⁷

To analyse this complexity and its role in representing and legitimating power structures, Lefebvre distinguishes three interacting dimensions of the concept of space as a social practice: first, *la pratique spatiale*, »the spatial practice«; second, *les représentations de l'espace*, »the representations of space«; third, *l'espace de représentation*, »the space of representation«.

The first layer of Lefebvre's concept, the spatial practice – or *l'espace perçu*, the perceived space – is defined as follows:

The spatial practice of a society secrets that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectic interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space. ²⁸

²⁶ Lefebvre 1991, 30–31.

²⁷ Lefebvre 1991, 33.

²⁸ Lefebvre 1991, 38.

Lefebvre's perceived space corresponds to the materiality of space as it is perceived by the senses and can be measured.²⁹ It is the space of geography, more or less what Soja names Firstplace.³⁰

The second layer, the representations of space – or *l'espace conçu*, the conceived space – refers to:

conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent – all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived. [...] This is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production). Conceptions of space tend, with certain exceptions to which I shall return, towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs.³¹

This aspect of space is linked to design and planning imagination, it is associated with ordered structures, readable, conventional signs and production processes. Representation of space encompasses conceptualisation of space. It corresponds to Soja's Secondspace.³² Finally, representational spaces – or *l'espace vécu*, lived space – are the domains of symbolic representations:

space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of »inhabitants« and »users«, but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs.³³

29 Günzel 2017, 78–80.

30 Soja 2010, 66–67.

31 Lefebvre 1991, 38–39.

32 Günzel 2017, 78–80; Soja 2010, 66–67.

33 Lefebvre 1991, 39.

Whereas perceived and conceived space are strongly linked together, what Lefebvre denominates as lived space – and Soja Thirdspace – grasps a different aspect of the production of social space. The interrelation between spatial practices and representation is placed at the centre of scholarly attention:

here we can find not just the spatial representations of power but the imposing and operational power of spatial representations. Combining the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the other *a priori*, these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of »counterspaces«, spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral, marginalised positioning.³⁴

This articulated concept embracing perceived, conceived and lived space redefines space not as an *a priori* category but as a process. Social space results from multifaceted relations and is moulded and formed slowly, over periods of time. Soja proposes a re-reading of Lefebvre that particularly emphasises representational spaces. He keeps the definition of Thirdspace open, rather blurry. Thirdspace is both an approach to space and a research programme promoting a critical attitude.

Sociological debates have reshaped our thinking on space as a practice. Significant theories, notably Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social fields have informed spatial approaches. Although it is not possible here to study this aspect in more depth, it is important to mention how the concept of space, as a central concern in analysing social practices, arose from complex debates in different disciplines and countries.³⁵

Considering our interest in the mutual relationship between religion and space, the concept of space as a social practice is illuminating. First, it points out that thinking of space as a practice embraces material, mental and symbolic dimensions. Second, it emphasises the plurality of perspectives facing space: the perspective of everyday life; of space perceived as simply being there; the perspective of designing and planning that translates imagina-

34 Soja 2010, 68.

35 See particularly Foucault 1984; Bourdieu 1994.

tions of living together into the material fabric of society; and the perspective of critical approaches to perceived and conceived spaces and the force that emerges from the different practices of spatial representations.

The interrelation of different approaches to space as a practice is also very much at the heart of Martina Löw's *Sociology of Space* from 2001.³⁶ For the German sociologist, space is:

a relational arrangement of living beings and social goods. Space is constituted by two processes that must be analytically distinguished: spacing and the operation of synthesis. The latter makes it possible to unite ensembles of goods and people to one element.³⁷

Being a social practice, space happens within a daily routine, which is enabled and stabilised through everyday institutions. Resources and social structures allow collective processes of spacing and synthesis. On the one hand, spacing designates the relational dynamic of the positioning of human beings and goods: space is constituted through positioning human beings and social goods, which encompass both material goods (like a wall) and symbolic goods (like a rule). On the other hand, space is constituted by an act of synthesis: by means of perception, imagination, and memory people and goods are aggregated into spaces. Löw defines the potential of a space for being received as atmosphere.³⁸

This approach to space may be illustrated by the following example. By entering a Christian basilica and sitting on pews fixed to the floor and arranged in a regular, parallel order, the bodies of the believers are placed in a specific relationship towards each other, the altar, the representative of the congregation performing a specific ritual, and the immaterial imagination of a transcendent good. The arrangement is perceived as being typical for a service in which a certain worldview and idea of the divine, the role of the different actors and the power hierarchies between them mould this very space. The spatial constitution is based on a specific order, which, in the case of a ritual in a church, is strictly regulated through the repetitive performance of arranging bodies, architectural elements, liturgical things, the progress of the

36 *Raumsoziologie* was translated into English in 2018.

37 Löw 2018, 135.

38 Löw 2018, particularly 129–188 and 232–233.

ritual, and standardised behaviours into a specific order. People respond to the place they contribute to constructing by perceiving it in different ways.

Although we are unable to fully address the complexity of Lefebvre's, Soja's, and Löw's theories, this concise discussion of influential positions within the spatial turn has sought to illustrate the range of meanings and approaches to the concept of space. It maps these theories as travelling concepts across time, disciplines and academic traditions.

Approaches to space as a social practice underscore the interaction between society and spatiality, highlighting a mutual influence. Space is defined as a relational concept, used to analyse spatial relationships of goods and humans, of practices of production, reproduction and representation. Space is conceptualised as being transitory, in continuous transformation. Moreover, these approaches, albeit distinct, consider the manifold perspectives interwoven in and through spatial practices. Overall, the concept is extended and captures adjacent, paradoxical dimensions that are not to be reduced to an absolute concept highlighting homogeneity and continuity.

4.4 The role of the human body

The concept of space as a social practice not only analyses society but also critically reviews its own analysis. The concepts we have considered scrutinise spatial agencies of different actors, such as people perceiving places or institutions, planning and designing them, by privileging a certain placement of living beings and material and immaterial goods. Within the spatial turn, place as a relational concept was introduced to open up conceptions of place beyond an absolute *a priori* condition, in order to respond to the challenges of modernity.

In this way, thinking of space as a multifaceted process involving material, mental and symbolic practices is a concept that carries a political momentum, a concern for society that goes beyond academic analysis. The concept of space as a social practice focuses on relationality, conceiving of space as an interaction, a network that transforms and is continuously transformed. Therefore, I would argue that a relational approach to space is inherently anthropological, since a human being interacts on many levels in the network of spatial connections that constitute space and are constituted by it.

A person interacts as a body in relation to other bodies and goods, as a subject or object of planning and designing, as a critical reviewer of spatial practices. Consequently, addressing space as a social practice implies a specific attention to the role and the location of the human body as both a physical matter and a spatial agency.

The role of human beings is at the core of Martina Löws analysis of the social construction of space:

People as components of a space construction have the special feature that they place themselves and vacate placements. Furthermore, they influence space construction with their facial expression, gestures, language, and so on. Although people are more active than social goods in their possibilities of moving and making decisions, it would fall short of the mark to assume that in contrast to people social goods are passive objects. Social goods also have an external effectuality, for example in odors and sounds, and thus influence the possibilities of space construction.³⁹

The author highlights that people interact with space and social goods, and they take an active part in the process of spatial construction. As individuals, they perceive different aspects of space, responding in different ways. In the mutual relationship between human beings and space, when a space is perceived, a spatial atmosphere is created.

Bodies form space and space moulds bodies. An illuminating perspective on the role of the body in constructing space has been proposed by the philosopher Edward S. Casey. His approach to space, place and the body is embedded in a philosophical phenomenological discourse. His motivation to rethink space arises from a similar concern within cultural geography and sociology, namely, to formulate an alternative to defining space as an absolute, monolithic entity. Casey distances himself from a conceptualisation of space as »a neutral, pre-given medium, a tabula rasa onto which the particularities of culture and history come to be inscribed, with place the presumed result«. ⁴⁰ In line with his phenomenological approach, he address-

³⁹ Löw 2018, 132.

⁴⁰ Casey 1996, 14.

es space from the experience of perception. Casey's approach to spatiality is based on place: »Yet we do always find ourselves in places. We find ourselves in them, however different the places themselves may be and however differently we construe and exploit them«.⁴¹

Experience happens in places, which means that our body is always located. Referring to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Casey stresses that »the lived body integrates itself with its immediate environment, that is to say, its concrete place. The integration is effected by various ›intentional threads‹ that bind body and place in a common complex of relations«.⁴² The human being is thus defined as »a lived body, as body (in) a living place, ›the natural subject of perception‹« – here he quotes Merleau-Ponty.⁴³

The experience of perceiving that I discussed earlier requires a corporeal subject who lives *in* a place *through* perception. It also requires a place that is amenable to this body-subject and that extends its own influence back onto this subject. A place, we might even say, has its own »operative intentionality« that elicits and responds to the corporeal intentionality of the perceiving subject. Thus place integrates with body as much as body with place.⁴⁴

Being a lived body means being-in-place. For Casey, the body serves as a field of localisation through all the senses which allows a multifaceted perception of places; the body connects to spatial settings with the bodily dimensionalities of up and down, front and back, right and left. Furthermore, perception is possible through the concreteness of the body, its physical features, that answers to the concreteness of a given place. The relationship between a given lived body and an experienced place tends to be particular; both the body and the place are not well delimited, as the skin and the physical body as well as the place are porous, the corporeal and the spatial borders uncertain, body and place interpenetrated.

41 Casey 1996, 17.

42 Casey 1996, 22.

43 Casey 1996, 22. The quote is from Merleau-Ponty 1962, 208.

44 Casey 1996, 22.

The lived body Casey describes is a body that moves in place. Movement is paramount in the interaction of body and place. Bodily movement can happen in a given place or connect different places by means of travel.

There is much more to be said about the role of the body in place, especially about how places actively solicit bodily motions. At the very least, we can agree that the living-moving body is essential to the process of emplacement: lived bodies belong to places and help to constitute them.⁴⁵

The living, moving body perceives and assesses a place, and the place forms the body. The relationality of body and place is a premise to define the link between space and meaning-making processes. Perception happens in space, where living bodies, material and symbolic goods are interwoven. In this relationship, human beings become part of the cultural and social setting they inhabit. Places carry cultural processes to humans and humans carry culture into places.⁴⁶ Embodiment is the condition and the result of being part of a cultural setting, since it is a constitutive part of a spatial practice.⁴⁷

4.5 Place happens

The centrality of the human body and of perception raises further questions about how space functions as a social practice. For Lefebvre and Soja, the question of humans perceiving space is embraced in the concepts of *espace perçu*, of spatial practice, or in Firstspace. For Löw human beings are elements of the spatial flowing network, having agency. The three approaches discuss the role of the human body within theories that focus on space as a multifaceted concept for analysing and moulding society. Casey's phenomenological approach differs in its scope, since it addresses, within a philosophical tradition, the question of the human being as a subject that perceives, as being-in-place. Therefore, he addresses spatiality by starting from the concept of place:

45 Casey 1996, 24.

46 Casey 1996, particularly 33–37.

47 See Danani 2013, particularly 19–47.

Given that we are never without perception, the existence of this dialectic means that we are never without emplaced experiences. It signifies as well that we are not only *in* places but *of* them. Human beings – along with other entities on earth – are ineluctably place-bound. More even than earthlings, we are placelings, and our very perceptual apparatus, our sensing body, reflects the kinds of places we inhabit. [...] place, rather than being a mere product or portion of space, is as primary as the perception that gives access to it. Also suggested is the heretical – and quite ancient – thought that place, far from being something simply singular, is something general, perhaps even universal.⁴⁸

Places and living bodies mutually influence each other. Humans perceive places, inhabit them and link them together by means of travelling through them. Places form living bodies and assume the qualities of their inhabitants:

Rather than being one definite sort of thing – for example, physical, spiritual, cultural, social – a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they *happen*.⁴⁹

For instance, a specific place may evoke particular memories for a person of experiences that occurred in this place. According to Casey the »power of place consists in its nontendentious ability to reflect the most diverse items that constitute its ›midst‹.«⁵⁰ Place are events, they embody culture, they merge space and time. Places are relational and inherently regional, they are never isolated but grouped through living bodies in movement. Aleida Assmann defines the concept of *Ort* – the German term for place – similarly. While the concept of space aims at doing and planning, looking forwards to the future, place is a concept that, in a certain sense, implies a retrospective approach. In places something has already happened: it has

48 Casey 1996, 19.

49 Casey 1996, 27.

50 Casey 1996, 28.

been done, experienced, or suffered. Places are moulded by the history that takes place in them.⁵¹

4.6 Navigating space and place for researching religion

The debates summarised here trace the transformations that the concept of space has undergone in its displacements between time and disciplines. Originally conceived as an absolute, homogeneous, all-encompassing dimension, space has become a practice that constitutes and is constituted by social interactions between things and (human) beings. Overall, the concept of space today integrates many debates and perspectives. Just as in the case of »religion«, it is not possible to reduce the complexity of spatiality to a single approach to space.⁵² In addressing selected perspectives, questions and approaches within this complicated, long-standing debate, the tension between space, place and body emerges. Material, mental and symbolic approaches to space interact as do different perspectives on this social practice: places can be perceived by individuals and groups; in places cultural processes are embodied that mould the living bodies that inhabit and produce them. The concepts we have scrutinised are basically abstractions grounded on an anthropological (or even anthropocentric) perception. Thinking of space as a social interaction means, finally, relating the constitution of social space to humans.

The concept of place, in particular, highlights the dynamics that occur between living bodies and perceived place. More than the concept of space, place emphasises the transitory character of spatiality and the role of perception through the senses. Perception is always located, and in places that arise from relations to living bodies, culture is received, transformed and transmitted. Although there is a tension between space and place, nonetheless, the two concepts complement each other, since they gather different questions and perspectives.

In the various arrangements of material and symbolic goods and living, perceiving, moving bodies, socialisation processes take place. In turn,

51 Assmann 2009.

52 Schroer 2006, 179.

through socialisation processes and cultural practices, places are constituted and transformed. Religion is a crucial part of received, lived, transmitted, transformed and adapted cultural practices.

It is striking to realise that often contemporary space theories do not consider religion as being a relevant aspect of society. The Marxist influence transmitted through Lefebvre or an uncritical reception of secularisation discourses – understood as dismissing religion from society – may explain this. On the other hand, the study of religion has historically addressed space and place with approaches to religion that have largely marginalised these concepts. Today, although a growing interest can be traced, the significance of space as a general approach to religion is still often underestimated.⁵³

In the last decades of the 20th century, emerging from a sometimes controversial dialogue between geography, theology and the study of religion, a varied approach to spatiality and religion has been elaborated.⁵⁴ The geographers David E. Sopher and Manfred Büttner, in particular, have shaped the agenda for the field of geography of religion, systematically addressing the relevance of geography to analyse religion and the impact of religion on geography.

Cultural geography is concerned with man, not as an individual, but as a sharer and bearer of culture. Its particular concern is with two kinds of relationships: the interaction between a culture and its complex earth environment, and the spatial interaction among different cultures. The geography of religion investigates these relationships, concentrating its attention on the religious component in culture.⁵⁵

From the very beginning, the idea of an interrelation prevailed. On the one hand, »geographical facts of the environment (rain, snow, mountains, rivers, lakes, cities, economy, transport etc.)«⁵⁶ were analysed in light of their impact on various religions. On the other hand, interactions between religion and geography were analysed by correlating changes in theological speculation and religious practice with geographical transformations. In order to estab-

53 Knott 2010, 29–30.

54 See. e.g. Bürkle 1990.

55 Sopher 1957, 1.

56 Büttner 1980, 99.

lish this new field, the history of research in geography, the history of the-ology and the study of religion were scrutinised with the aim of providing a *status questionis* and of promoting a solid interdisciplinary exchange.⁵⁷ By reading Büttner's and Sopher's revealing publications today, the difficulties they encountered in establishing their research programmes shine through. Geography of religion had to negotiate a clear focus and a shared methodological and theoretical basis in order to allow a fruitful exchange between the disciplines involved.

Divergent ideas about how the geography of religion had to be positioned in religious studies and in geography had to be negotiated. This debate about the positioning of the geography of religion and the profile that distinguishes this field is well documented in a broad range of publications.⁵⁸ In the transition between the 20th and the 21st century, under the influence of the spatial turn in geography and the study of religion, this interdisciplinary field has developed a defined agenda. The geographer of religion Lily Kong offers a panorama of these »new geographies« with a survey of the development within her field in the 1990s. Her approach widens the field to religious practices considering the transformation and challenges of the contemporary world. Overall, Kong makes a strong case in favour of mobilising concepts and adapting them for understanding the interaction between geography and religion as a mutual relationship that takes place in social practices:

To sum up, in conditions of modernity, »new« geographies of religion must take on board more actively: 1) different sites of religious practice beyond the »officially sacred«; 2) different sensuous sacred geographies; 3) different religions in different historical and place-specific contexts; 4) different geographical scales of analysis; 5) different constitutions of population; 6) different dialectics; and 7) different moralities.⁵⁹

57 Sopher 1957 and 1981; Büttner 1974, 1980 and 1998.

58 Overviews of the development of geography of religion in the 20th century are provided e.g. by Cooper 1992; Hoheisel 1988; Kong 1990; Knott 2010 and 2013, 104–110; Rinschede 1999, 20–28.

59 Kong 2001, 228.

Kim Knott's *The Location of Religion*, published first in 2005 and already quoted above, represents a turning point in receiving the programme of Kong's »new geographies« of religion and the challenges of the spatial turn for analysing religion as a social practice. The author scrutinises the results of the spatial turn for developing an approach to the role of religion in everyday life and re-discusses the commonly (uncritically) assumed divide between religious and secular places. For Knott, the concept of space in the study of religion serves as »a medium in which religion is situated«; it is a productive tool to question the common, sharp gap between secular and religious places, which confine researching religion to places that are marked as religious in political-medial debates. Her interest lies in the production of space by religions, religious groups and individuals in contemporary western societies.⁶⁰

Knott's approach to space as a concept for the study of religion highlights the role of the body in perceiving, conceiving and producing space, which is understood as »multi-dimensional, being physical, mental, and social«. Social relations are always embedded in space; in space all things converge. Space is multidimensional, different places overlap and interconnect in it. Place is paramount to understand power, »not only hegemonic power, but also the powers of resistance, strategic incursion and ironic collusion«. Space has an active agency, it brings places into being, reproduces and adapts them. Sacralisation of space requires a spatial agency.

Finally, Knott emphasises that space is both material and symbolic and remains a contested issue.⁶¹ Her exploration of the spatial turn, and particularly of Lefebvre's approach, aims at focusing on the role of the body in constructing social space. Knott's volume analyses the religious significance of body concepts that regulate everyday life beyond religious practices. In particular, she focuses on the left hand in western societies, scrutinising the effects of the dualistic opposition between the left and the right that permeates many facets of society. In her works on space, place and religion, Knott proposes a concept of space that is also a methodology for »examining the location of religion in the fabric of the secular«: space may be analysed considering the role of the body as »a source of space«, the different dimensions of space as well as its properties, aspects and dynamics.⁶² She

60 Knott 2013, 3.

61 Knott 2013, 127–130; quotation 128.

62 Knott 2010, 35–36.

highlights that research on space opens up new perspectives on religion, it stimulates an interdisciplinary exchange between disciplines, and extends the focus beyond established topics, such as pilgrimage and sacred space. It adds to the agenda questions like the link between religion and power, gender, the body, social practices and religious-secular tensions.

The present book picks up the thread of Kim Knott's exploration of space and develops it further, exploring in more depth a different question. Inspired by the variety of cosmological and cartographical representations of places and living beings from medieval and early-modern times, as the title *Shared Places* indicates, this book focuses on places where a plurality of worldviews, religious orientations and practices are negotiated. On the one hand, we look at spatial practices that foster religious plurality, and on the other hand we analyse how places explicitly dedicated to a plurality of orientations mould a vision of what religion in public space is, may or should be. We consider how the interaction between religious plurality and spatial practices is formed on a material level, on the level of planning and regulation and which symbolic dimensions arise from them. How is plurality spatially perceived and received? What visions, imaginations and utopias are mirrored in those places? What do they make possible and create?

The theoretical debate we have addressed in the present chapter aims to provide a conceptual foundation, which functions as a tool for understanding spatial practices as multifaceted and complex. It allows for a conceptualisation of space as an aggregation of different approaches and perspectives, focused upon a fundamental dimension of culture and society. Therefore, we delineate the concept of space as a practice encompassing at least three different dimensions: first, space as it is perceived in everyday life; second, space as a matter of planning and design, a product of mental processes; and, finally, space as a medium of representation and of critical confrontation with the other two dimensions of space: perceived and planned space.

The concept of place implies a different perspective on this multilayered concept of space, since it emphasises the relationship between living bodies receiving and moulding spatial dimensions. Place happens: it is a transitory experience of moving bodies.

Both, space and places are relational approaches to spatial practices that, in very general terms, can be rendered as social arrangements of material

and symbolic goods and (human) beings in a transitory, continuous transformation.

In this approach to space and place, the human body plays a crucial role. Humans interact with space and place in everyday corporeal practices and generate meaning-making processes and symbolic orientation by such interaction. Concepts of space, place and the body are not to be aligned into a single consistent, all-encompassing concept, rather, they can be related to each other in order to constitute a theoretical frame for addressing the case studies that are explored in this volume.

In this volume, theoretical reflection on spatiality is merged with the concept of religion addressed in the second chapter. Religion as a symbol and communication system that shapes processes of belonging and exclusion, is transmitted over time, permeates different spheres of society and shapes cultural imaginaries: religion, as a social practice, contributes to shaping space and is moulded by it.

In the next stages of our imaginary journey, we will travel to mountains and visit funerary places, sacred buildings in urban contexts, museums and art exhibitions. In the selected case studies, plurality is gathered and formed in spatial practices. In the analysis of specific places, further theoretical debates will be discussed to illuminate particular features and transformations of the spatial practices that constitute them.

