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CHAPTER THREE

Epistemology

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INTRODUCTION: UNDERTAKING EPISTEMOLOGY AS AESTHETICS

Epistemology's significance arises from the fact that it declares what passes for knowledge within a specific theory, the limits of knowledge, justified belief, and acceptable ways of reasoning. Epistemology describes and indicates, in this sense, the production of knowledge in contingent historical situations or epochs. Various epistemologies, such as religious, feminist, Marxist, idealist, etc., are dependent on which principle is seen to be foremost for world building.

Aesthetic principles and, above all, the aesthetic subject constitute the referential and binding frame for this aesthetic epistemology. The aesthetic subject relies on embodied and situated cognition—with cognition in its broad meaning of information processing within the central and peripheral nervous systems and therewith emotion, motivation, volition, ideas, and so forth. From there, the aesthetic subject is further sketched as situated cognition to address its cultural embeddedness and regular actions by which cultural institutions are grounded and more permanent forms of organizational fields emerge that still carry the trace of their aesthetic shaping during this making. Therefore, the approach developed here balances on a thin line between highly specialized research in cognitive sciences, psychology, and medicine, on the one hand, and cultural studies interests, on the other hand.

This shaping of aesthetic cultural forms is not the outcome of pure taste and subjective prejudice but follows cognitive-aesthetic principles about which we learned a lot only recently from advanced theories of the mind. Aesthetic principles provide organizing rules—if not the only rules—for understanding vast cultural performances of all kinds. For this we will have to consider, for instance, the aesthetic organizing principle that people avoid sensorial monotony and search for variation instead. Nevertheless, this needs to be balanced with repetitive low-sensory activities, as has been shown by Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley with regard to rituals (2002). Otherwise, the acceleration of sensual pageantry may lead into the breakdown of the group's performance over time. So, the interpretation of some situations will have to take into account this aesthetic reasoning pattern instead of, or as supplementary to, other explications (historical, circumstantial, power-driven, social, theological) of why the action sequences look the way they do. Another example is the aesthetic organizing principle of exaggeration (Mohr, Chapter 12, this volume). This is a recurrent—surely culturally adapted—feature of aesthetic formation, like in the colossal, the hieratic (Mohr 2017), or in sensory pageantry that exaggerate either size, obtaining space, self-segregation or intensity, and multi-modality of sensescapes. These are some of those aesthetic organizing principles that are regularly disregarded or

underestimated in their significance for knowledge generation. It is the aim of this chapter to outline how they can and need to be integrated in the cultural study of religion.

Epistemology Reconsidered

The terms and the endeavors of epistemology—the same as of aesthetics (Johnston, Chapter 17, this volume)—stem from ancient Greek philosophy and are located in a Western context. From a postcolonial—Western as much as transnational—perspective, there have been many changes relative to the purview of epistemology. Whereas once epistemology was considered only as Western—often only a Cartesian-dualistic knowledge system or a rational-masculine knowledge, set against indigenous epistemologies—it is now acknowledged to result from political practices. Scholarly language differences also play a crucial role: when epistemology translates to "a system of knowledge" it becomes (at least for German ears) too fixed to a specific meaning. This translation prefigures the wider cognition (Greek: *episteme*; Ger.: *Erkenntnis*) to knowledge and system. Being a system implies that it could be substituted more or less easily through other systems and fixes the performance of cognizing something (Ger.: *erkennen*) to a stable inventory of knowledge. This said, we need to acknowledge that the proscribed Westernized epistemology is the framework for perceiving or adapting further epistemologies—either subsequently, complementary, or in altering the first. When strengthening the perspective of aesthetics and cognitive studies for "Westernized" epistemology, we first of all want to strike a blow to contemporary debated and differentiated theories of mind. One option within these advanced theories of mind rests upon an extended concept of cognition, and, through this, upon an alternative epistemology, "alternative" at least in regard to the Cartesian view. With this option of embodied, situated, and embedded cognition (see below) we have yet available an epistemology that regionalizes Europe. Therefore, we should not abandon too quickly the prevailing understanding of embodied cognition in favor of indigenous epistemologies, post-dominance approaches, and exoticism. This is because embodied cognition already connects the epistemological interests of cognitive and culture studies.

This article is interested in an epistemology that helps us to understand both human behavior and cultural institutions. To achieve this aim, we may not need a general theory of reality or of the universal self but rather a historical-systematic reconstruction, as in Alexandra Grieser's 2015b overview of aesthetics of religion. She distinguishes seven respective topics that intersect, including religion and somatophobia in the history of the senses; particular religious aesthetics, like asceticism, festivities, or the significance of the color gold; aesthetics in religious studies; aesthetics in knowledge production; religious art; and social aesthetics and political aesthetics in religion. A corresponding epistemology would already have to cover more epistemological issues than can be discussed here, like a theory of discursive stereotyping, aesthetic formalizations across different modes of creation—such as fine arts and media—and transformative aesthetics in society. Also, the vast array of cognitive studies and philosophical theories of mind adapted to the study of religion allows for several theoretical executions, for instance the re-elaboration of narratology based in cognitive linguistics (Johannsen and Kirsch, Chapter 13, this volume), the "materialist shift" of ecological perception theory (Vasquez 2011), or evolutionary theory conflated with power analytical affect theory (Schaefer 2015).

When we talk here of epistemology for aesthetics of religion in the singular, this does not mean, we found (or continue) the one and universal (only Western) theory of knowledge, but that it puts forth a particular theoretical understanding of knowledge—based on the double

aesthetic subject (see section 3). And, on top of this, it explains how various cultural-religious contexts are perceived in an aesthetic way. As such, it is not to intermingle or mistakenly take religious aesthetics of a historical and particular format, but rather as a tool of analysis, interpretation, and, at best, of explanation. Aesthetic principles organize institutions and the subject's world perception. They, therefore, are apt means of analyzing cultural production.

Consequences for Forms and Validation of Knowledge

As a consequence, distinctions of classical theories of knowledge—like the semantic, conceptual, practical, explicit, ethical knowledge—have multiplied into tacit and implicit knowledge, diverse perceptual types of knowledge, body knowledge, "interactional expertise" (Schilhab 2013), "engrained procedural knowledge" (Wilson 2010: 182), and the like. It should be added that knowledge appears to adapt to culturally divergent rationalities in registers of different knowledge hierarchies and of taste and sensory orders. For classical Western philosophical epistemologies, only propositions would qualify as knowledge. This is another significant difference to aesthetic knowledge and indeed a theoretical and methodological challenge insofar as classical criteria for establishing knowledge—like justification, reliability, coherence, and so forth—are either not applicable or have to be adapted, as is done later on in this article. An adaptation of formal and rational rules here means that they are comprehended as well under co-authorship with aesthetic organizing principles. For example, let's take the justification of a belief: symmetry may justify an impression or the congruence of cross-modal perceptions as much as reasoning by mirror inversion laws. By cross-modal perception, one understands that several items of sensory information within their culture specific hierarchy and evaluation—as for instance comfortable, ugly, or too loud—are jointly evaluated for action. In our case, a congruence would be stated through several sensory registers that are relevant for a specific information. Adaptation of concepts for aesthetic reasoning may also have the effect that the successful re-actualization of a body scheme (i.e., the cognitive representation of bodily state) instills reliability into the "true" performance of a religious practice. For example, therapeutic touch healing or the Tibetan sound bowl healing ceremony where the body scheme (see 2.2.3)—learned during earlier participation—is activated through the binding of a specific body part touch or weight and coldness of the metal bowl with a specific sound- and odorscape through synchronization. This binding might have the effect of mediating and making present the healing force imagined as sound. To date, aesthetics of religion has reached a finely differentiated conceptual register for this aim to hint at aesthetic conditions of knowledge production, like stereotyping by simplification, formalization, exaggeration—as in the excessive increase of size to colossal objects—or by the hieratic—as in the specific kinesthesia of paces, like striding as opposed to sliding on knees (Mohr, Chapter 12, this volume). After this anticipation of the applicability of aesthetic categories and their huge explanative benefit, we will start with a step-by-step introduction of the aesthetic subject.

THE DOUBLE AESTHETIC SUBJECT: HISTORICAL AND COGNITIVE

There are two paths that will be taken to outline the aesthetic subject. In the first, subjects appear in historically conditioned forms of subjectivities. Subjectivities are abstract and

institutionally shaped formations that interlink with the power structures of social status, economic performance, affect regimes, ethnicity, and gender. If we think of subjectivities, we do not think of individual agents but a formation that is highly influenced by aesthetic formation rules or—which means the same—aesthetic organizing principles. Apart from that comes the aesthetic cognizing subject or embodied cognition that is also encultured and, thus, also goes beyond the individual, making it a social cognition.

Let's first consider the historical subject! Subjectivities constantly alter with each agitation. Judith Butler, building upon Jacques Derrida, uses the linguistic metaphor of re-citation to denote what is new with each re-use, examining performative in contrast to stable identities with view to gender (Rasheed, Chapter 16, this volume). With this approach she deconstructs the discourse of some original state, universalism, or biological ground (the position of naturalism) that is reiterated or actualized throughout a life. This comports with cognitive scientist Margret Wilson's summary of cognitive psychology on the mind re-tooled through culture, which means that not only the content of cognition is culturally dependent (perceptual patterns, memories) but also the mode of cognitive procedures. The modes of cognitive procedures are reflected in the cultural variety of cognitive tools used to accomplish tasks, like representing time, space, and numbers and experiencing music, harmony, and beauty or supernatural beings (2010). In relation to abilities and individual skill profiles, a culturally dependent engrained procedural knowledge is acquired. This is extremely relevant for knowledge and familiarity in the context of religion: we hear music on a regular basis, we learn when to join into singing, dancing, or moving our bodies and how to pay attention to different emotions, depending on what comes next in a scriptural recital or other ritual.

What we are interested in here are the aesthetic principles that guide, instruct, and trigger such developments and changes. A basic aesthetic principle is socialization via the acts of reward and repetition, resulting in habitualization of behavioral patterns and emotional styles. These habitualizations, in turn, are rewarded with pleasurable, varied, or just strong emotions. Language, cooperation, and body performance play crucial roles to inaugurate subjectivities into institutional biopolitics. The training and upkeep of particular subjectivities are everyday tasks religious groups have to master if they want to survive, for instance, the ideal of celibacy and 24/7 life-commitment. That said, we see how encultured and embodied cognition theory extends beyond the individual that is an effect of interactive cooperation, whether it be social, economic, or cultural. In this way, an aesthetic theoretical foundation is linked with system theory or structural and network theories. Only from there can we distinguish alternative conceptions of (ideal) (religious) subjectivities that are now described in their aesthetic production and regulation, like the contemporary Western "mindfulness-trained" subject that lives in the here and now, feels whole, is at one with itself, open towards the environment of this present moment, and escapes complicated involvement. Another example would be the "non-self" subjectivity within a (Western) Buddhist discourse that follows instructions and body and cognitive techniques to inaugurate an aesthetic subject that feels united or compassionate with all beings and freed from itself.

THE AESTHETIC COGNIZING SUBJECT

We will not delve into these really fascinating histories of subjectivities at different places and within different milieus throughout the history of religion—this time from an aesthetic point of view. Instead I will turn to the aesthetic cognizing subject and, with this,

to subfields of epistemology in which, thanks to new models and technologies of examining the human body, instructive insights have been gained over the past decades. These subfields are within the cognitive sciences, including psychological and medical research. How do we orient ourselves within the sociocultural world in 3D space or in 4D time-space structures? Why is a ceremony more touching when we cry or when the intake of drugs is involved? And are rituals always efficacious or what are specific parameters of ritual efficacy? These and similar questions converge in the aspiration to understand the processes around the gain and loss of knowledge, the framing of perception, and meaning-making.

A Selection of Categories

The following categories are designed for understanding some basic aesthetic processes of the cognizing subject and allow for their analysis. This overview does not claim completeness, and the applicability to theoretical issues in cultural studies will vary with the sources and methods available. Complex cultural practices, like ritual, prayer, pilgrimage, dance, fine arts, renunciation, moving through architectural space, etc., rely on basic features of the human body's entanglement with a materially and socially rich world. Some of the following categories are higher-order concepts that explain how several aesthetic dimensions (like a single sensory system) interrelate, frame, and produce emotional and semantic meaningfulness. The following categories give a small insight into the huge progress in the fields of medicine, psychology, and neurosciences and their relevance if applied within cultural aesthetics of religion.

Embodied, Situated, and Embedded Cognition The most basic understanding of subjects is that of embodied cognition. Embodied cognition is itself a model that builds on a connection of embodiment and theory of mind. From this perspective, even linguistic, epistemic, and conceptual cognition are grounded in embodied cognition. Reasons for this are derived from acquisition history of learning language, which occurs while living in a practical relation within the world and from neuroimaging that displays the reactivation of sensorimotor areas even in language use and abstract processing. Following from the fact that all cognition is "derived embodiment" (Schilhab 2013), the aesthetic study of religion must recognize that aesthetic taste, aesthetic judgments, and epistemic knowledge are body-based because they involve basic cognitive, semiotic, and semantic categories that are shaped during developmental acquisition in a practical-sensorial environment. Embodied cognition is also embedded into social and material environments with which it interacts regularly on a non-propositional level. A good example of this is what ecological theory of knowledge calls "affordances." Affordances are sensorial qualities in relation with and in the environment of the perceptual agent (Vasquez 2011: 173–209). Small passages between bushes, for example, may cause (i.e., "afford") a passerby to crouch in order to move forward. Furthermore, with the example of emplacement, Manuel A. Vasquez rejects radical social constructionism and argues in favor of the agency of local places (2011: 313–15). A place exerts towards agents by impressing them, for instance by the colossal size, the natural spectacle, the overwhelming sound, and the sparkling of a waterfall. The theoretical involvement of environments is maintained in post-humanist materialism, referred to as "agential realism" (Bräunlein, Chapter 25, this volume, on spirits' agency). Situated cognition constitutes the framework of action, for instance by the mentioned emplacement (Sørensen 2007b).

The Senses: Perception The idea that we have "five senses" is not adequate for aesthetics of religion. For one, we know that there are many more senses in the sense of basal sensorial perceptive patterns of knowledge generation, like thermoception, humidity perception, and covert simulation, like the facial muscle twinkling imitation. Secondly, senses in action are essentially intermodal, and this sensory teamwork is not equal among the senses but rather dominated by specific sensual interplays dependent on additional factors, like the body part in focus, the urgency of an action demanded, or the complexity of parallel tasks. Hands are, for example, better protected against harmful objects approaching them than the lower legs since the visual sense prompts an earlier reaction of withdrawal; sometimes the lower legs even have to be touched to recoil. Sensory systems are attuned to each other to establish varied sensory configurations for various reasons, including joyful perception or the best protection of body parts.

In the same way, exteroception and interoception are interlinked and constitute several layers of sensuality. Exteroception addresses the perception of the "outer world," while interoception is the permanent awareness of the feelings of one's inner state. This inner state entails the degrees of tiredness, wakefulness, happiness, hunger, etc. Interoception includes nociception, the feeling of pain, the receptors of which, once again, are not evenly distributed across the body surface—meaning that the area of the body where pain is felt makes a difference. As such, flagellants are wise to hit their backs and not their fingertips, the latter having a higher density of nociceptors. Nociception is also a nice example of embodied cognition as it shows the inseparability of talking about and feeling pain. Another sense, the sense of time—the topic of chronobiology—is highly significant, for instance for rhythmic perception and the experience of euphony. It also impacts vigilance, as well as the fundamental ability to cooperate socially. Proprioception—the perception of oneself (proprium)—as part of interoception groups together balance (originating in a specific organ of the inner ear) and the relative position of body parts (indicated by muscle tension measured at specific points of the muscles) to locate one's position in space. Proprioception is also linked to kinesthesia, the sense of moving through space. Intermodality includes cross-modal evaluations such as hearing specific sounds related to a specific body movement towards the source of the sound and, by this action, establishing a temporal sequence and improving orientation in a given surrounding. Like this, intero- and exteroceptive sensory systems are interdependent with emotionality. For example, we could focus on the human voice as a very particular sound. Psychological reasons behind voice disorders indicate the possibility of somatizing inner states; voices carry informal and non-propositional information or, to put it differently, they have agency in psychic and social relationships. To give another example, the demarcation of space can be performed by sound, often accompanied by the feeling of being at home. Church bells and the muezzin's call are good examples of this.

Integrity: the Body Scheme Perhaps you think it is odd to start with perception and then to proceed to the body because of the latter being the overall umbrella—which is correct. But now we arrive at the aesthetic second-order concept of the body that is a pattern of its own. Following from the discussion on the senses above, one can imagine that the human body is also more complex than embodiment literature would lead one to expect. Like human faces, the body in its entirety has a special cognitive representation that is called the body scheme. This maps the degree of momentary bodily integrity and the feeling of "I" (Holmes and Spence 2006). The body scheme provides precious information on the present state of emotionality, the degree of sexual excitement, and further

interoceptive states, like intentions, fatigue, and hunger. At the present state of research, the body scheme is a hypothetical second-order concept that can be addressed in cultural interpretations, for example of how healing interventions affect the recipients' wellbeing. There are also methods to prove or specify how the body scheme is relevant, like the psychological method of letting people make a drawing of their body figure. This indicates how this corresponds to the given body shape and posture, and may display subjective feelings in the body and, by this, psychological disturbances. Bedridden people, for instance, are known to lose their ability to estimate body boundaries after a while and will tend to draw themselves bigger and less contoured in shape.

Processing: Body Knowledge The second-order concept of body scheme is grouped together with an even higher-order concept of body knowledge that comprises further subcategories, like peripersonal space, tattooing, muscle tone, and prosthetic perception (Koch 2017a: 391–9). It is only via this perspective that the psychophysiology of religion is paid necessary attention, and the involvement of human metabolism, body substances (like opiates, hormones, and neural transmitters), pain, tiredness, nervousness, and so forth are considered. To a large degree, feeling and experiencing are embodied and agitated through our body due to our afferent emotion, that is the emotion performed in our inner organs and such parameters as muscle tone, sweating, degree of vigilance, heart and breath rate, and digestive system activation levels. Afferent emotion is also closely linked with kinesthetics, like movement, motor skills, and movement-based contemplative practices (Schmalzl and Kerr 2016) or the aesthetic appreciation of kinesthetics, like in dance. Afferent emotions and their manipulation are salient in many spiritual performances, such as healing and praying.

An interesting point of action for body knowledge is the autonomous nervous system because it is widely unconscious and—as the name says—autonomously steered. It regulates breathing, heart rate, body temperature, blood pressure, etc. Its various ways to manipulate emotional states is widely recognized. Let us look at just some examples from my interdisciplinary research with placebo studies to illustrate the significance of body knowledge in ritual healing practices. Placebo is a nonspecific effect grounded in expectation, learning, psychobiological processes, and the performative mode. More complex interactions have been proven more efficacious, for instance, in increasing the pain threshold. Complex interventions, like symbolically loaded rituals, are of pivotal interest in religious studies. In a pilot study on spiritual healing through chakra cleansing and the sending out of colorful light into the body's energy channels and centers, we found that the activation of the sympathetic system, the activating part of the nervous system, during the healing performance predicts improved subjective wellbeing (Koch and Meissner 2016). Sympathetic arousal is detectable in skin conduction, stomach motility, respiratory rate, heart rate, and heart-rate variability that are interpreted as strong involvement emotionally and imaginatively. This connects with relaxation via the anticipatory stress response that is known to precede relaxation. In the specific context of our pilot study it was especially the respiratory rate that increased, whereas other psychophysiological parameters did not change significantly in correlation.

This very specific result begs further investigation into breathing techniques and their particular effects. Breathing is prominent in pop cultural spirituality associated with East Asia, like mindfulness, all kinds of meditation, and the yoga path of *pranayama*. It is common knowledge—and an easily accessible bodily experience—that slow breathing and deep exhaling has a calming effect. But why is this so? And how else can we manipulate

our moods and mental states via breathing? Breathing exerts vagal stimulation and has circulatory effects. Several breathing techniques are differentiated and have been researched under a medical psychological perspective, like inverse breathing (called "*kapalabhati*" in yogic *pranayama*), which is an active exhalation (by strongly pulling the belly towards the vertebra) and passive inhalation (letting the belly go and by this slowly sucking in the air). The stretching of lung tissue causing inhibitory signals that reset the autonomous nervous system is one of the neural elements considered alongside non-neural elements in explaining the efficacy of inverse breathing (Jerath et al. 2006). It has also been shown that only deep and slow breathing can decrease pain susceptibility. However, this only seems to happen when the focus of deep and slow breathing lies on relaxation rather than attentive breathing (Busch et al. 2012). Another Yogic exercise is the principle of double exhalation time in proportion to inhalation time (e.g., four seconds inhaling to eight seconds exhaling or ten to twenty seconds). This slows down the arousal level of the autonomous system as well. Beside this metabolic impact and the emotional effect of calming, often a strengthened self-confidence is reported.

Some weeks after I returned from an intensive week of fieldwork in Fukui, Japan, with *pranayama* teacher Shri O. P. Tiwari (Kaivalyadhama Institute, Pune, India) and twenty very dedicated Japanese yogis fastidiously practicing *pranayama*, I went on a field excursion with my Munich students to a Catholic pilgrimage church in the Alps dedicated to St. Mary. It so happened that we had the chance to observe the rosary prayer performed by five elderly nuns in the Loreto chapel. After a while, I—or perhaps my "body knowledge"—recognized the same breathing rhythm of double exhalation as in *pranayama* exercises. Due to the monotonous and repetitive stimuli of the rosary speech song—a choral speaking—the praying person falls into an unmindful routine of breathing and singing. The speech parts of exhaling are longer than the short inhale in between the verses or even a couple of verses. It is the breathing that gives the rosary prayer its typical soundscape, so long as it is performed over a certain time span. I would hypothesize that the calming effect and the nervous, tissue, and fibroblasts regulatory circuits are comparable to, if not the same as, that of some of the double exhale *pranayama* exercises.

This is a good example for demonstrating, first, how our trained body competence can be an instrument of research and, two, the potential of aesthetics of religion for a comparative research model (Kreinath, Chapter 5, this volume). Regarding the little case study of the rosary and *pranayama* double exhalation, one could further look into the breaks in between the breathing, the falling quiet of one group in the antiphonal murmuring of the rosary, and the pausing or laying down on the back between *pranayama* exercises. Are these kinds of interruptions comparable from an aesthetic point of view? In some regards they may be compared (like the routinization, the calming effect, the permanent soundscape of a chorus respective of other practitioners); in others, they are different (the sound of potentially meaningful syllables, the sound of breathing—that may be a meaningful sound if the om-philosophy is transmitted in the setting).

Social Cognition

According to some scholars in cognitive study of religion, the strength of the cognitive study of religion is not to understand individual but rather group behavior (Barrett 2017: 194). Among the most momentous abilities—abilities that distinguish us from close evolutionary relatives—is cooperatively based social human cognition that allows for imitation (Wilson 2010), understanding others' intentions, and behavioral change through

learning in the eminent sense of cultural accumulation of knowledge and its cultural transmission. The older cognitivist view of sociality as mindreading in the sense of fully inferring the other's state of mind (wishes, beliefs, motivations, errors, etc.) is today opposed by an enactivist view that emphasizes the social environment and embodied, extended, and embedded cognition as discussed above. Cognition is seen as relational meaning-making amidst co-agents and artificial social group settings (Schjoedt et al. 2011). Social cognition is basically cooperation oriented or, put differently, bodily co-presence. Dimitrij Xygalatas and colleagues underscore the role of psychophysiological synchronization between agents as a marker of strong inner participation and empathy (Xygalatas et al. 2011). For instance, most of the ritual participants in a fire-walking ritual feel for the fire-walkers; however, close relatives empathize with their familial fire-walkers to such a degree as to even synchronize within some psychophysiological parameters to those performing the walk. This debate is perhaps better known in its popularized version of the mirror neurons debate. World-construction that is the outcome of meditation or specific forms of prayer, like trance and absorption (Luhrmann, Chapter 8, this volume), may be similar across cultures and situations in some regards due to the psychological state involved and to the (religious) narrative through which it is learned. It is interesting to consider how one might approach examining the social cognition in aesthetic settings, as was done in the breathing and rosary comparison. The rosary prayer has a clear "us"-perspective in its textual content and is addressing the personal imaginary counterpart of St. Mary. *Pranayama* can be practiced alone (as can the rosary) or in groups, the latter case of which occurs in mostly a teacher–pupil relationship. Analogous structures and differences should be followed up as suggested here and should be examined further for aesthetically relevant parameters.

CONCLUSION

Many of the described phenomena are based on a complex interplay of various factors that are not yet fully understood. On one hand, the concepts introduced here are well established in cognitive science and will be further elaborated in the future. On the other hand, they remain hypothetical in historical interpretations, partly due to methodological challenges (Kreinath, Chapter 5, this volume). But, this need not weaken their explanative force.

Nevertheless, the approach of aesthetics of religion described here already changes our comprehension of religion and will complement our understanding of cultural phenomena in the future as it concerns epistemology. These deliberations are also a rejoinder towards accusations of reductionism, biologism, naturalism, and universalism towards the cognitive interest in aesthetics of religion that goes beyond a pure psychophysiological reconstruction of collective and historical aesthetic formations.

The epistemological aesthetic vocabulary is organized into a hierarchical order of conceptual complexity (and not the order of reality, as in Geertz 2010: 315). Social and communicative interactions rely on embodied cognition, symbol and language use, and learned mental states—all of which are grounded in specific aesthetic situations. First-order concepts such as attention can be elaborated into an anthropological concept such as "somatic modes of attention" (Csordas 1993) that address shared codes of directedness, and to third-order concepts that can connect aspects of body knowledge with aesthetic regimes.

Epistemology in aesthetics of religion attempts to resolve conflict lines from cultural studies, such as those between hermeneutists and materialists or between Cartesian dichotomists and integral thinkers. With the trend of bringing culture and cognition

together, cognitive aesthetic study of religion emphasizes psychological principles of culture over external materialist ones, like architectures, dances, and perfumes. The challenge is to strike a balance between our knowledge and explanations from both sides—the language and habits side and the ecological and embodied cognitive side.

RECOMMENDED READING

Geertz, Armin W. (2010), "Brain, Body and Culture: A Biocultural Theory of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 22 (4): 304–21. DOI: 10.1163/157006810X531094. Outlines an understanding of cognition and of a non-mentalistic but embodied cognitive studies of religion for which groundwork is shared here and extended to cultural institutions.

Koch, Anne and Karin Meissner (2016), "Holistic Medicine in Late Modernity: Some Theses on the Efficacy of Spiritual Healing," in Annette Weissenrieder and Gregor Etzelmüller (eds.), *Religion and Illness*, 414–35, Eugene: Cascade Books. Uses a case study to show how the placebo effect conceptually binds together mental states with performance sequences and the timely production of the body's own substances.

Mohr, Hubert (2006), "Perception/Sensory System," in Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion Vol. 3*, 1435–48, Leiden: Brill. Introduces the basic vocabulary of sensory perception relevant for religion, starting with the example of the complex and dense sensorial situation of a child kneeling during a Catholic Mass.