

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

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An introduction needs to gloss the name of the book. To do so for this handbook we will show what aesthetics of religion is about, what has already been accomplished in the field, and why the time has come to present the very first concise handbook of aesthetics of religion. Next, we will explain why and how research in cognitive sciences and cultural studies need to be connected in this endeavor, what readers may expect from the chapters to come and—warning!—how this might change the reader’s perspective of things. So, let’s go!

WHAT IS AESTHETICS OF RELIGION?

A central goal of our handbook is to advance the study of religion by paying special attention to sensorial, perceptible formations in religious practices and institutions within their social environments and specific to their time and cultural area. Part of this task is to historicize perceptual categories and sensorial figurations, revealing a *longue durée* of the history of aesthetic formations and corresponding institutional features. To achieve this, we balance comparative approaches with area studies and historical approaches, as well as praxeological and philological approaches with cognitive and universalizing approaches.

It is the Greek philosophical meaning of *aisthesis* as perception that the nomenclature of aesthetics of religion draws from. Human perception has been called the “doorway to the world,” or the interface between inner and outer experiences of the world. But this evokes unfortunate associations with a dualistic worldview, subject-centeredness, and black-box theories of the mind—ideas that aesthetics of religion strives to evade, because—as the essays in this book will show—these are inappropriate descriptions of how knowledge is produced.

Aesthetics of religion focuses on the sensational, or perceptual, side of culture and of human interaction, and rests upon such highly constructed and wide-ranging concepts as “nature,” “environment,” the “artificial,” “cultural,” “fine arts,” or the “artistic.” Perception—in the wide sense of cognition—culture exchange—happens in specific cultural patterns (or “sensational forms,” Meyer and Verrips 2008). Nevertheless, these patterns follow rules that are open to comparative study. These can be investigated in an “aesthetics of knowledge” as (limiting) cognitive processing conditions, semantic conditions, and sociocultural conditions of production (Borrelli and Grieser, this volume). Put more generally, our considerations here are part of the attention currently being paid to the aesthetic realization of practices, text cultures, belief systems, their transmission and environment interaction. The qualifier “aesthetic” has been used so ubiquitously as to almost lose its meaning, because it is reduced either to a sensational aspect of art or to

phenomenological descriptions of sensations without any further explanation. Against this, aesthetics of religion takes a stand. It is specific in its endeavor to systematically unfold a new field and to perform all the necessary tasks this requires.

Why is aesthetics so *en vogue* in the twenty-first century? One reason may be the overall process of aestheticization, lifestyle, and design in consumer cultures. Aesthetics needs to be carefully differentiated from this societal process (see our example of museality and lifestyle, Kugele and Wilkens 2011). Why this current fascination with materiality and earlier fascination with the body in the humanities? Many of the claims concerning aesthetic formations are situated between anthropology, the natural sciences, and (Christian-influenced) art history and theology. From our base in cognitive and cultural studies, we present this collection of essays to elucidate some of the contingent historical circumstances that have prompted these path dependencies in academia. Many of the essays trace the interdependency of aesthetic research on the topic in question and the style of respective academic discourses up to date.

What makes aesthetics of religion special is its pronounced perspective on its subject matter. Specialized vocabulary is developed by drawing on and merging existing concepts and models for analyzing aesthetic forms and styles in religion; that is, how we do things aesthetically or how we are manipulated aesthetically in religious traditions. Aesthetics of religion adds to the methodological and theoretical pluralism in the study of religion, overcoming the focus on social theories that too often frames the debate. Aesthetics of religion seeks an expertise that is interdisciplinary and open to collaboration where necessary, that is willing to involve empirical research, that considers explanative and interpretive accounts, and advances the deconstruction of religion on a highly reflexive level.

Aesthetics of religion is an umbrella concept for recent considerable and admirable work in a number of disciplines bringing this research to a new coherence by theorizing it as a specific approach in the study of religion. This is necessary because it does not suffice to state that prayer is “embodied.” What exactly does this mean? How can we formulate more specific questions and single out aesthetic features that are more relevant to one situation than another? Would prayer be the same intense experience without a particular soundscape, or with the soundscape but without the individual chanting alongside the chorus? Would the benefit from the prayers be equal without moving the upper body back and forth, without kneeling down or without sharing a drink? Does it make a difference, and if so, what difference, if someone has learned the prayers in early childhood or only as an adult, participates daily or only monthly? On the one hand, the aesthetic side of religion seems quite obvious, but on the other hand it remains analytically opaque if we do not develop a set of analytical tools, and a specific theoretical approach. In this regard, we share the concern of Aaron W. Hughes, a scholar of religion, in respect of the inflationary use of “theory and method” when no nameable theory, let alone philosophy of science, is employed (2017: 5–6). From a theory of science perspective, a theoretical approach is an explicit philosophical anthropology, a methodology that reflects a variety of methods and their combinability on a meta-level, a self-reflexive historical clarification of key terms and their hidden convictions. This is not exactly a simple task for the aesthetics of religion and the authors of the essays in this handbook.

May we invite you at this early stage to a preview of what aesthetics of religion allows us to see by mentioning the example of a practice known variously as “erasing” or “drinking the Quran” (Wilkens, this volume). This is a ritual of healing and blessing in which a specialized healer writes down verses from the Islamic scripture and then erases

the ink by washing it off. This infusion of Quranic ink-in-water is drunk as medicine for any physical, mental, economic, or social ailment. Efficacy is achieved by literally embodying the word of God. The practice is deeply rooted in a knowledge of the effects that a socially sanctioned form of blessing can have on a person's mind and body. But it also requires knowledge of the scriptural religious system. Without its foundation in Prophetic medicine and scriptural theology, this procedure would not be as popular as it is. It is surprising to note, however, that this practice has been neglected both by Islamic studies scholars, who regard it as too "superstitious" (if it attracts their attention at all), as well as by anthropologists, who regard it as too "theological" and thus outside their field of competence (even though they see it practiced routinely). The aesthetic perspective binds together systems of knowledge that relate on the one hand to the body and materiality, and on the other to intellectual reasoning. Thus, we are interested in physical aspects of text usage: what layers of non-semantic (or semiotic) meaning are present? How do semantics and somatics interact and depend on each other? What do we know from placebo studies about the efficacy of the intake of a remedy compared to outward application? Many kinds of material text practices are present in a variety of scriptural traditions: how do they compare? We hope this appetizer will tempt you to continue reading.

STATE OF THE ART

The Working Group "Aesthetics of Religion" and the AESToR Network

A core assumption of aesthetics of religion in the German-language discourse from a very early phase declares that sensory-perception theory is indispensable for understanding cultural religious practices (Cancik and Mohr 1988; Mohn 2012). It is upheld that new theories of interpretation, philosophy of mind, and cognitive sciences are indispensable for understanding actors—if not as the only at least as an important way of understanding cultural practices like sign production, symbol recognition, linguistic generalizations, emplacement, ritualization, and so on.

This handbook is the outcome of more than ten years of work, starting in 2007 with a loose network of more than thirty scholars in the working group "Aesthetics of Religion," linked to the German Association for the Study of Religion. These scholars have regularly met for workshops, conferences, and panels at international conferences. Several publications illustrate our research collaboration (most prominently Kugele and Wilkens 2011; Traut and Wilke 2015a). This collaborative and often co-authored research culminated in a research network entitled Aesthetics of Religion (AESToR) supported from 2015 to 2018 by a grant from the German Research Council.

The network's latest book, *Aesthetics of Religion: A Connective Concept* (ed. Grieser and Johnston 2017), is highly reflective, binding together important dimensions of aesthetic formation. This trajectory, ranging from perceptive processing beyond semantics to analyses of form, style, and rules of formation, is an exciting endeavor within the study of religion, aiming to understand the sensorial, wo/man-made, and embodied side of religion. The potentials of the approach systematically relate to five fields: heuristics, history and politics, comparison, reflexivity, and connectivity (Grieser and Johnston 2017a: 20–32). Being a connective concept means addressing questions as to how the semiotic and aesthetic approaches relate to one another and how aesthetics adds to the decoding paradigm of semiotics. The authors of the essays in the volume apply themselves

to the literary aesthetic of Expressionism, to emotion, form, and sensory effects of the Christian Bible, to religious documentary films in the US and the aesthetics of the nonfictional, and to the aesthetics of a reformed city. Others consider particular religious aesthetics like that of spiritual matter in esotericism or the fascination with blue brains in popular scientific images. Some, finally, develop conceptual categories of disfiguration, transfiguration and figuration, collective effervescence or a non-reductive materialism.

In AESToR's next joint publication, we will devote ourselves to studying narrative cultures aesthetically (Johannsen, Kirsch, and Kreinath 2019). Here, narrative cultures are established as a key concept in the study of religions, acknowledging the complex dynamics with which narratives unfold their social, ideological, and aesthetic potential, across narrative genres, boundaries of identity rhetoric, cultural domains, and social clusters. The concept of narrative cultures is useful for highlighting the vernacular storytelling settings, approaching the religious imagination from a theoretically informed perspective, and analyzing and theorizing narrative formations through aesthetic means with regard to their cognitive and social effects. The volume uses current narratological frameworks for analyzing aesthetic formations and sensations of storyworlds, in their varying historical and intercultural contexts and across narrative sources, from canonical texts to the dynamic, adaptive, multimedia, and polyphone practice of vernacular storytelling. The essays will focus on how storytelling and narrations educate perception, how they affect the sensing of storyworlds, and the role of performative framings in experiencing the narrated world.

Further Afield

Besides our own efforts, there are many research initiatives with similar aims. Recent studies of sensuous knowledge address a large number of heterogeneous topics, such as visibility and religion (Pezzoli-Olgiati and Rowland 2011; Morgan 2012), performativity and gender (Brunotte 2013), spatial religion (George and Pezzoli-Olgiati 2014), sensuous cultures (Promey 2014), comparative study of sensuous cultures (Michaels and Wulf 2014), material religion (Apostolos-Cappadona 2016), object history (Plate 2014), ritual (Bull and Mitchell 2015), cognition and ritual (Xygalatas 2014), body knowledge (Taves 1993), symbol theory (Lanwerd 2002), the persistence of ideas like supernatural agents, folk art and pop art, emotional images (King 2014), media (Morgan 2008; Meyer 2009a), dance and film (Meyer 2014), consumer goods, practices from healing to pilgrimage, or how gender regimes are aesthetically reproduced.

We seek to connect up with similar trends in the academic field, and have invited some renowned scholars to contribute to this handbook: Tanya Luhmann writes about her long-standing anthropological research with Pentecostals and their mental states during prayer, Chris Klassen about body, the monstrous, and gender in the comic genre, and Shaireen Rasheed about her research in Pakistan on empowerment and engendered religious protest at the interface with political aesthetics and in line with the work of Saba Mahmood. Sally Promey, the director of the Yale University institute MAVCOR, was kind enough to attend one of our AESToR workshops and introduce us to testimonial aesthetics of billboards and signs in US public space as a form of visible religion.¹ At the same workshop, Jesper Sørensen of the Centre of Religion, Cognition and Culture in Aarhus, Denmark,² presented the cognitive study of religion as understood and elaborated by himself and his colleagues, Armin W. Geertz (2004), Uffe Schjoed, Jesper Jensen, and others.

WHY AESTHETICS OF RELIGION IS BOTH CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE

Study of Culture

Aesthetics of religion as a new subfield of research within the study of religion is interlinked with other fields of cultural studies and natural sciences. Since the turn in the 1970s that marked the beginning of cultural studies (Ger. *Kulturwissenschaft*)—but less specifically defined than in the Birmingham school—various tendencies in academic research have been labeled “turns”—interestingly enough, most of them denoting aesthetic entities, such as the iconic, spatial, body, material, brain, or pictorial turns. We will not be able to pay respect to all achievements for the advancement of aesthetics of religion, from media studies to the anthropology of the senses (see Münster 2001; Traut and Wilke 2015b; Grieser and Johnston 2017b: 9–15 for more comprehensive overviews). Ritual studies and performance studies were among the first research fields to question the dominant paradigm of philology in the study of religions. Aesthetics of religion takes up the “material turn” and adds a specific focus: sensual or bodily ways of knowing. In the background of aesthetic theories, the Hegelian theory of art is a potent and evolutionary pattern in intercultural history, as in Aby Warburg’s reflections on similar religious, aesthetic and economic developmental steps (Johnston, “Aesthetics,” this volume). A critical strand of aesthetic considerations at a time of mass communication and art beyond the representation of societal processes came from Theodor Adorno. Then, as a postmodern continuation of grounded theory, complex, praxeological, and particularistic social situations came to be considered central. They are conceived of as interacting with objects of material culture and environments in a way that agency is ascribed to the latter (e.g., Bruno Latour, Adele E. Clarke). As a consequence for social theory, practices and social relationships appear with an aesthetic dimension.

Such debates over the evaluation of aesthetic issues are mirrored within the religion discourse. Religion has been seen, for example, as a symbol system within a semiotic model of culture, or contra-factually determined by visual religion versus book religion, iconic versus aniconic (Aktor, this volume), or as Greek versus Hebrew thinking, also characterized in aesthetic terms. Aesthetics of religion may disentangle various sensory ideologies and material practices included implicitly or explicitly in definitions of religion. To give an example: Emil Durkheim’s (1912) functional definition of religion based on an experience of collective effervescence takes recourse to a different set of emotional practices from Rudolf Otto’s more pietistic definition of the numinous as a feeling of being overwhelmed.

Study of Cognition

A second essential goal is to rebuild, supplement, or inspire the cultural study of religion³ with knowledge about how to connect the cultural and cognitive aspects of world construction.

Linking cultural and cognitive reasoning has a momentous prehistory. Our guiding principle is the turn in eighteenth-century philosophical aesthetics toward recognizing a “sensorial knowledge” that overcomes a long history of mind–body dichotomies by devaluating the pole of the body, the irrational, the lived, and the material-sensual side of culture and especially of religion in favor of the rational mind. The fresh start in the disciplinary history of the aesthetics of religion is very much indebted to philosophical

aesthetics, starting with the new epistemology developed by Alexander G. Baumgarten (1714–67) which introduces “sensorial knowledge.” We may also refer to Kant’s judgments of taste and his concept of the sublime (for a more detailed appreciation see Johnston, “Aesthetics,” this volume), Frank Rosenkranz’s domain-specific aesthetics of the ugly (von Ohain, this volume), historical anthropology after the cultural turn with of its focus on bodies, senses and their histories within religion, as well as cultural semiotics and the theory of signs (Cancik and Mohr 1988). Heidegger’s being-in-the-world and his remarks on readiness-to-hand anticipate what later came to be the counter model to classical cognitivism in the anthropology of embodiment (e.g., Thomas Csordas). An interest in entangled and embodied cognition is also prefigured in philosophical phenomenology or philosophy of perception, from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to Bernhard Waldenfels, who take into account perception, Gestalt theory, and cognitive psychology, as far as they were developed in their time.

Cognitive study of religion The most specialized work in this regard is provided by the cognitive study of religion (CSR) beginning in the 1990s. Reservations in respect of CSR concern its predominantly universal and mentalist assumptions. But, as the renowned CSR proponent Justin Barrett puts it: “CSR should reserve a special place for considering how human minds work such that humans entertain and communicate certain types of thoughts that become so widespread and stable as to become cultural” (2017: 194). Thus, culture is understood as institutionalized communication. As this approach starts with situated cognition in historically diverse situations, with their specific and diverging challenges, as cultural studies scholars we have nothing to oppose to this view. Since its beginning, CSR has extended its field of interest from evolutionary topics to action theory and social cognition (for a recent overview, see White 2017). We share with CSR an interest in (a) cognitive mechanisms and the “centrality of the role of the human mind” (White 2017: 95), (b) mind–environment interaction, and (c) cross-cultural comparison of recurrent features. Like cognitive sciences and CSR, aesthetics of religion has recourse to several methodologies and theories of the mind. Like CSR, we also seek to offer explanations and not just a collection of case studies. Our questions above concerning embodied prayer point exactly in this direction. They add analytical depth to the concept of embodiment and provide explanatory insights based on psychological, medical, and social cognitive psychological rules, as well as historical-interpretive explanations.

With embodied cognition, we favor a model of mind that includes non-propositional elements. That is, cognitive mechanisms can to some extent be related to neuro-cognitive operations and recurrent features of interactions in research designs. But the argumentative force of these recurrent features lies in situated knowledge and patterns of perception that are learned, as the enactivist view spells out in more detail.

Research in other disciplines Besides the specific and comparably small field of the cognitive study of religion, the aesthetics of religion benefits from medical research, especially in medical psychology, psychosomatics, and placebo studies. We invite experts in these fields to add to our aesthetics approach and demonstrate how helpful their categories are. If scholars dedicated to the study of culture were to neglect the biological aspect of cognition, they would promote a simplified understanding of cognition. These fields have some axioms in common and diverge in others. A computational model of the mind, for instance, differs from the mind as a plastic organ. So, what is the mind? There is no single definition of cognition. We find it useful for our purposes to approach

the mind as embodied cognition, with only slight differences from discourses on the encultured brain, situated agents, and embedded cognition (Taves and Asprem 2017).

While several of the essays in this handbook make embodied cognition their main point of departure, Dirk Johannsen and Anja Kirsch adopt a different approach. They start with prediction theory from a computational model of the mind, and make this fruitful for explaining the crucial functioning of narratological gaps that are filled by firing off a stream of predictions through our cognition. This can explain the intensity and “realness” of our imagination predicting future actions following from a range of shifting interpretations of a complex situation still unfolding in front of us.

To sum up, when we talk of cognition, we do not think primarily of the brain or neurological activity. Rather, cognition is distributed and performed throughout the entire body, and is a result of the entangled environment-interaction of agents. Cognition is a psycho-physiological dimension of the central nervous system (the brain) and equally of metabolism, inner organ states, and enervating and calming nervous systems (parasympathetic and autonomic nervous systems) (Koch, this volume).

WHAT READERS MAY EXPECT

When Jonathan Z. Smith was editing the *HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*, he engaged in a discussion of taxonomies of religion, and the specifics of a handbook as compared to an encyclopedia or a dictionary. He came to the conclusion that a handbook “is arranged by some stated principle of order” (1996: 390). It is this order that has been the subject of extensive discussions in our working group and research network AESToR. A handbook is not an encyclopedic project that needs to give a complete account of the field, nor is it an open-read-and-apply textbook for the classroom. This makes it easier to explain the order we finally decided to choose following current key features of the field of research and the methodological approach.

We are convinced that we are witnessing the emergence of a new theoretical approach to the cultural study of religion and we will start by making a clear statement to this effect (Section I). We follow this up with Section II dedicated to analytical categories with which we further profile the aesthetic perspective. Third, we all agree on the foundational importance of power and discourse analysis, and cannot close our eyes and ears to strategies, manipulation, and governance; in Section III, these will be uncovered in their aesthetic realization. In Section IV, the aesthetic categories introduced will be illustrated by those of us who are historians of religion with philological, regional, and comparative competences, describing aesthetic dynamics, interrelations, and rules of cultural production in specific aestheticscapes.

In Section I, we show that in our understanding the Western tradition of aesthetics is not just about (fine) art, diverse religious aesthetics (as in Brown 2014), aestheticization, and politicization of aesthetics (fine arts as high culture), but about the theory of sensorial knowledge (Johnston, “Aesthetics,” “Art”). As such it engages in many more fields, and pushes to the front new questions, foremost in epistemology, about the aesthetic subject and today’s understanding of the world as being culturally dependent on perception and interaction with the environment (Koch, Mohr). In view of findings in recent research on the theory of mind, for instance, there cannot be a chapter on each of the “five senses,” as this would be to ignore the intermodality of perception, and to neglect sensorial loops of utmost significance, like pain, sexual stimulus, temperature, humidity, and other perceptive systems.

A further consequence is that studies in embodied cognition in religious contexts have provided new ways of thinking about aesthetic knowing. This is one reason, besides advances in the theory of knowledge and science, why we elaborate an aesthetics of knowledge (Borrelli and Grieser). The cultural and historical shaping of human perception and knowledge systems is an exciting new topic. Also, the history of science is linked to the history of religions, especially in Europe and the US. Thus, certain aspects of Catholic and Protestant theology have shaped secular academic theory making. The validation of knowledge, even in the natural sciences, has aesthetic qualities, for instance symmetry, the plausibility of certain icons, or fascination with certain topics.

Severe challenges arise for the aesthetics of religion approach when it comes to its methodology (Kreinath). The methods used range from specific tools for textual analysis, or cross-cultural comparisons, to using one's own perceptual body as an instrument of investigation. In a chapter on teaching aesthetics of religion (Laack and Tillessen), we demonstrate how the diverse range of methods can be appropriated in specific projects changing the perception of the students on their topics.

We decided to include a discussion of analytical categories to highlight interfaces with debates in other disciplinary fields. Our chapter here offers a list that includes mental states (imagination, Traut and Wahl; absorption, Luhrmann), and aesthetic forms that are at the same time formations in the history of science and an aesthetics of knowledge (aniconicity, Actor; museality, Kugele; ritual, Sørensen; sonality, Wilke).

The section on aesthetic strategies lays open the agencies of sensation. It is a duty of responsible scholarship to address power relations, referring here to aesthetic forces that reign in groups and institutions. Even if the social power relations are often only implicit, they may exert a powerful regime as explicit aesthetics (e.g., fasting, sexual behavior). Here, we may think of gender performativity of veiled, weapon-bearing women in Pakistan (Rasheed), visualization of (hero) bodies in comics (Klassen), film techniques (Hermann and Lokshina), or the manipulation of bodies and embodied mental states (Mohr).

Aestheticscapes is the name we give to our panorama of aesthetic-sensory forms and elaborated codes. Continuing the language game of scapes (which started with Appadurai's ethnoscapes and later produced mediascapes or soundscapes), we profit from this metaphor to denote the complex connectivity of sensorial layers which have relevance for further comparative studies beyond the frontiers of a single religion's institutions. The aestheticscapes presented here clearly reveal specific historical constellations which can then be taken up by you, our esteemed reader, and used to re-think similar situations in other contexts. You will be fascinated to read about corpses in Buddhist meditation manuals (Pabst von Ohain), or communicating with believers through fragrance and stink in Chinese sources of the fifteenth century (Guggenmos), the theological debates implicit in musical harmonies (Yelle), atheist appropriations of Hindu rhetoric forms (Binder), or the sheer reality of spirits and ghosts throughout the world (Bräunlein).

In our case studies, analytical categories and sensory strategies are always considered in delineating aestheticscapes. Textuality is discussed with a view to its sounding of ritual texts (Wilke), techniques of narration (Johannsen and Kirsch), literacy ideologies between medicine and hermeneutics (Wilkens), and pictorial semiotics in Aztec divination manuals (Laack). Images can be used in ritual practice (Luchesi), their iconic or aniconic form, or their graphic-scriptural form, can be reflected against a Western notion of what an image should be (Actor, Laack), or image production and reception can be discussed as sites of critical enquiry and engagement with embodied knowledge (Johnston, "Art").

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION: AESTHETICS WILL CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Sometimes people are still surprised that religion has a material basis, and, more importantly, is processed through the senses. This is a basic fact that has to be addressed. How does aesthetics help us to better understand religion? And how does it change our perspective? With our focus on aesthetic strategies, our intention is to create an awareness of strategies of perception (Ger. *Wahrnehmung*) and sensation (Ger. *Empfindung*), while at the same time offering the necessary tool kit to unfold them in detail. Modalities of perception and sensation include social components. Thus, we can also contribute to social theory.

Research results deriving from the aesthetics of religion approach contribute to debates on sensorial knowledge, taste judgment, or matter and form; we can gain historical insights into the relations between religious formations and secular aesthetics; or we can develop new kinds of interreligious comparison. Religious traditions have developed an impressive variety of theories on sensual perception, the materiality of the world and the functioning of the human body. Religious traditions throughout history have appealed to different senses in their rituals. Their myths make use of a huge array of different perceptual metaphors. The comparative aspect of descriptive research in this area is of paramount importance. Exploring and describing different sensoriums underscores the dynamic nature of culturally ordered perceptions. The comparative approach demonstrates the methodological necessity of developing abstract categories of analysis. As we have hopefully succeeded in showing, religion is a category of aesthetic knowledge, and a manner of cultivating perception. Thus, aesthetics of religion contributes to the analysis of religion and the self-reflexivity of scientific knowledge production.

Compiling a handbook like this requires the help of many people. We have greatly profited from discussions over the years with our colleagues at international conferences, and in particular with Sally Promey, Emily Floyd, and Birgit Meyer who also kindly agreed to write the Foreword to this handbook, Ann Taves, Laura Feldt, Fred Cummins, Sebastian Schüler, Ulrike Brunotte, and Mareike Smolka. Several people have helped with editing the manuscript. Our warmest thanks go to Meg Bernstein, Ruth Schubert, and Maxime Klausing for all those hours spent on this book! Lalle Pursglove and Lucy Carroll from Bloomsbury acknowledged the potential of our proposal and were very supportive throughout the process. The conferences from which this handbook arose were generously supported by the German Research Council (DFG). Copy editing was also supported by a grant from the LMU Mentoring Program for Excellent Young Women Researchers.

RECOMMENDED READING

Grieser, Alexandra K. and Jay Johnston (2017b), "What is an *Aesthetics of Religion*? From the Senses to Meaning—and Back Again," in Alexandra K. Grieser and Jay Johnston (eds.), *Aesthetics of Religion: A Connective Concept*, 1–49, Berlin: De Gruyter. Provides the most recent overview of the history of aesthetics as relevant to the study of religion and details analytical categories and areas of relevance of the aesthetic approach.

Borrelli, Arianna and Alexandra Grieser (2017), "Recent Research on the Aesthetics of Knowledge in Science and in Religion," *Approaching Religion*, 7 (2), special issue: *The "Beauty Fallacy": Religion, Science and the Aesthetics of Knowledge*, guest edited by Arianna Borrelli and Alexandra Grieser: 4–21. An in-depth summary showing how aesthetic forms, and specifically religious aesthetic forms, render scientific knowledge plausible.

