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The Governance of Aesthetic Subjects Through Body Knowledge and Affect Economies. A Cognitive-Aesthetic Approach

1 Introduction: Aesthetics as a Connective Approach

This chapter seeks to show that aesthetics, in the context of the study of religion, should first and foremost follow an epistemological approach rather than a neo-phenomenological, material religion or stylistic one. This is relevant for two reasons: such an approach takes into account how we, as scholars, perceive and conceptualise the object we are studying. In doing so it refers back to the epistemological process itself, and to the subjects involved in the process of knowledge generation. It is in this sense that an aesthetics of religion conceptualises its field of investigation through the lens of embodied cognition, that it offers to provide an epistemology that goes along with the core idea of transcendental philosophy which states that being aware of the conditions of knowledge production provides an understanding of the constructed nature of social and cultural reality. An important difference between this position and Kant's transcendental philosophy is that the conditions of knowledge are not referred back to "pure" and "practical" reason, but that knowledge is now understood as situated cognition by which the aesthetic subject is entangled with a related historical world. The rationale of reasoning in aesthetics of religion stems from the theory of perception (Greek *aisthesis*; see Mohr 2006) in psychology and philosophy (especially philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology, neuro-philosophy), and it includes concepts of mediality, figuration and form.[1] Therefore, the two most

1 The first programmatic article on *Religionsästhetik* is the merit of the German scholars Hubert Cancik and Hubert Mohr (1988). The authors locate the origin of their aesthetics in Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's eighteenth-century philosophical aesthetic that integrates sense perception into epistemology. While emphasising the role of perception, Cancik and Mohr still give most credit to the semiotic paradigm: the human body is determined being a *natural symbol* (to cite Mary Douglas's famous dictum) that has both language and expression. However, theoretical concepts that rely on the Western taxonomy of the "five senses" lack the organising somatic categories elaborated on in this chapter. In his *Philosophische Briefe des Aletheophilus* (1741), Baumgarten outlined an aesthetic theory encompassing sensory physiology, experimental physics, as well as poetology and rhetoric, focusing on the latter where he felt most competent

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relevant models of knowledge for a cognitive-aesthetic approach are those of sensorial knowledge (the "*sinnliche Erkenntnis*" of A.G. Baumgarten, 1714–1763) and theories of form and performance from rhetoric, design theory, ritual and media studies (Grieser 2015).

This sketch of an aesthetics of religion pursues the double aim of clarifying the scholar's and the object's constructive principles, or rather the epistemology and the principles of cultural sensory production. Mirroring this double task, the chapter starts by sketching a philosophical anthropology of embodied agents. Grounded in our present knowledge of cognition, the category of *body knowledge* is developed and operationalised for empirical use, and other analytical categories are derived from it. In the context of a field example, the descriptive power of the partly heuristic (or still hypothetical) and partly very applicable concepts is demonstrated. The categories are applied to a very telling example of body motion in a dance practice that emerged from the New Age ideology and the spirit of the Esalen Institute in California. In a third step, the argument is further developed by distinguishing more enduring forms of subjectivity constituted by (religious) practices and regulation. It is argued that such forms of subjectivity are discursive effects. They emerge at the interface of individual biographical, socio-cultural, and political formative powers and non-discursive practices, and they are continually transformed since these powers never come to rest.

These assumptions are related to the understanding of subjectivity in the work of Michel Foucault who, in his analysis of subjectivity, focuses on institutions (clinic, prison, marketplace, gender and psychiatry) as forms of objectification of human agents. At the same time he introduced the concept of *technologies of the self* in order to grasp power, symbol systems, the production systems and the self, and in order to understand how individuals are forced into specific cognitive schemes and forms of life (Foucault [1982] 1988). In continuation of the late Foucault's special interest in a *hermeneutics of the subject* ([1981–1982] 2005), historically contingent subjectivities will be distinguished: an esoteric subjectivity, a provisional and an agnostic subjectivity. Another type would be a traumatic subjectivity (for details, see Malabou 2007; Payne and Crane-Godreau 2015) or a confessional subjectivity, which I will not elaborate on here (for details, see Foucault [1979–1980] 2014). Some of the features of these subjectivities are closely linked with religious traditions in a narrow and explicit sense; others emerge from more general features of present cultures. I will trace these aesthetically conceived subjectivities back to aesthetic politics, relat-

(Knatz and Otabe 2005, 24). By integrating the conceptual-rationalist and the perceptive subject in his aesthetic-epistemological theory he opened up the aesthetic subjectivity of modernity.

ing them to consumer behaviour, neoliberal demands, and political power. Moreover, it is asked how these framing relations do not only affect the neoliberal subjectivity, but also the other forms mentioned. My overall concern is the opportunity to re-think the epistemological foundation of the study of religion through the lens of an aesthetic approach. This should allow for a better understanding of the link between cognitive agency and forms of practice as it becomes visible in the aesthetic pattern of subjectivities. For this purpose, connective concepts for the analysis of the entanglement of politics, subjects and knowledge are essential, as these are the inseparable media of world-making.

2 The Aesthetic Subject: Body Knowledge and Synthetic Categories

What I call the aesthetic subject appears when cognitive scientific scrutiny is applied to culturally embedded situations. Recent research on embodied, distributed, enacted and situated cognition overcomes the binary of nature and culture by integrating concepts of social cognition and culturality (Wilson 2010; Davis and Markmann 2012; Lindblom 2015; Scarinzi 2015). In comparison to traditional approaches, cognitive studies increasingly take into account the historicity and cultural variability of neural processing. In this way, not only is the content of cognition addressed, but also the *how* of cognition—its mechanisms—are a subject of investigation. A good example is what Margaret Wilson called the *retooling* of the mind through the inventive practice of physical and problem-solving tools beyond an individual life span: many cognitive capacities are not genetically prescribed, but they are, rather, related to cultural inventions which affect cognitive procedures deeply. As cognitive "tools" themselves, they are then culturally transmitted as well (Wilson 2010, 180). Cognitive retooling entails a deep change in cognitive architecture. The precondition for this is sufficient plasticity of the neural system. Insights into the extent to which neural systems are flexible and adaptable have shown that the explorative-inventive ability of humans—working on the basis of habitual action and embodied cognition—can be understood as the source of innovativeness and functional inventions, even if used "off-line", without actual sensory stimuli (Wilson 2010).

In the history of emotions, cognitive studies have been combined with (Bourdieuan) praxis theory (Reddy 2001; Scheer 2012; Reckwitz 2012). In addition scholars in anthropology have applied embodiment theories in fruitful ways.[2]

2 Kathryn Geurts's work is a good example of how complex social categories such as moral val-

This is a development that tends to be neglected by neo-phenomenological approaches in the anthropology and sociology of the body (Gugutzer 2010) where, for example, pre-reflexive coordination of movement and communication between agents is referenced, but without addressing the question how this might happen, or how it could be explained. In the study of religion, Tanya M. Luhrmann explains the training of feelings and embodied experiences with the example of Christian prayer, especially charismatic ecstatic prayer techniques. Social learning of affective forms affects the perception in reverse. Similar to charismatic Christians who come to recognise God's presence in their bodily behavior in ecstatic prayer, participants in spiritual energy healing recognise the healing power in their body (Luhrmann 2013). Aesthetics as a connective approach bridges the explanatory gap between the rational subject, its environment and the non-rational dimensions of subjectivity. In doing so, it also binds together the classically separate disciplines of art (Scarinzi 2015), humanities and the natural sciences.

A way to provide a more specific type of cognitive epistemology for the aesthetics of religion and its potential use in cultural studies is to outline categories that help to describe and analyse implicit knowledge of agents. The following sections give an idea of how an aesthetic-cognitive analysis might be conducted by developing further a heuristic concept of *body knowledge* (somatosensory, viscerosensory, chemosensory), divided into different components. These elements are very similar to the "preparatory set" humans use to react to, avoid or adapt to environments. It is a term that was coined a hundred years ago for the rapid and sub-cortical perceptual and motor reaction time: "Preparation involves a coordination of many aspects of the organism: muscle tone, posture, breathing, autonomic functions, motivational/emotional state, attentional orientation, and expectations" (Payne and Crane-Godreau 2015, 178). This reaction is relevant for handling stress or trauma and to be able to perform new tasks. Religious traditions classically intervene here (with spiritual exercises and shared rituals), as will be demonstrated by the field example at the end of this section.

2.1 Body Scheme

The term *body scheme* denotes the self-representation of the body. It refers to how the body structures and determines self-perception. Antonio Damasio

ues rely on somatic categories; her case study of the African Anlo-Eve demonstrates that the names of walking styles communicate both moral and emotional states (Geurts 2002).

coined the "somatic marker hypothesis" of consciousness. By this he signals the well-proven fact that somatic and psychological self-awareness both emerge from an image of the homeostatic state of the body. This body scheme relies on interoceptions such as muscle tension, spatial position, and the symbolic meaning of body parts. It is therefore highly important for psychodynamic processes such as regression, repression, and the development of symptoms (Dornberg 2013). In fact, body schemes enable the awareness of the wholeness of the body. In recent research, body schemes are no longer understood as a class of neural representations, but rather, as a whole network of concepts (Holmes and Spence 2006). Many cultural interactions take place along the body scheme and trigger, change or manipulate it. In many rituals, body schemes become relevant when specific body parts of participants are addressed through somatic attention: for example, with rough or soft clothes, heavy masks, body paintings, the touching of body parts and their marking through singing, sensing, and bewitching. Through somatic attention, a specific body scheme is created, learned, and habituated. In this sense, Tanya M. Luhrmann uses the concept of metakinesis to describe how the self-representation of Christian-evangelicals is altered in expressive movement rituals. Evangelicals learn to identify bodily sensations, especially in trance-like prayer states, with the presence of god in their life (Luhrmann 2004, 519). For this aim, they psychologically organise what are at first bodily distinctive states, train their awareness of these states, and bind them to the semantic context of their religious group. They synthesise these sensations (Luhrmann 2004, 522) to form what one may call a specific body scheme. Luhrmann mentions "specific and dramatic mood elevations" that build up this new body scheme. This fits into recent findings on the coordination of human subjective feeling as coordination between the two hemispheres and two brain regions (the anterior insula cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex), where, as in our example here, the parasympathetic distension and connected positive emotions become relevant: "The model offers explanations for why positive emotions can reduce or block negative emotions (and vice versa), why the left (affiliative, vagal) side controls deictic pointing and verbal communication, and how increased parasympathetic activity (for example, activation of vagal afferents by gastric distension, slow breathing or electrical stimulation) can reduce negative emotions (for example, pain)" (Craig 2009, 64).

These very recent findings may be of use for closing a gap in our understanding of how interoception links to our feeling in, and with, our bodies. It indicates how afferent emotion is interrelated with the nervous system of inner organs, such as stomach, heart, lungs, muscles and skin, the endocrine system and metabolism, and directly influences our subjective well-being. These findings outline a regulatory dynamics of the body scheme: "endogenous homeostatic con-

trol mechanisms modulate the integration of afferent activity that produces the feelings from the body, which underscores the crucial dependence of subjective well-being on the physiological health of the body" (Craig 2003, 504).

As a first step, the afferent neural system represents the physiological conditions of the physical body (Herbert and Pollatos 2012). This provides a foundation for subjective feelings, self-awareness and emotions. Afferents that represent all tissues of the body project first to autonomic and homeostatic centres in the spinal cord and brainstem. As a second step, an autonomic and homeostatic interoceptive cortical image is created: "Together with afferent activity that is relayed by the nucleus of the solitary tract (NTS), it generates a direct thalamocortical representation" (Craig 2002, 655). Thirdly, "its re-representation in the anterior insular cortex of the non-dominant (right) hemisphere, possibly uniquely in humans, constitutes a basis for the subjective evaluation of one's condition, that is, 'how you feel'" (Craig 2002, 655).

What is of note is that this process can help us understand the efficacy of cultural practice: even if the neural pathway is autonomous and homeostatic, it can still be manipulated to a certain degree. This opens up the whole field of socio-cultural interaction that is always embodied, either face-to-face or by using tools of communication. Of course, for some practices or communications the manipulation of body scheme is more relevant than for others. For example, research on "breathwork", meditation and therapeutic touch have shown widely that such practices do influence self-perception and its regulation on all levels (Collins and Dunn 2005). Intensive research has been conducted on the feeling of time elapse during advanced levels of mindfulness meditation practice (Wittmann et al. 2014). *Pranayama*, for example, interferes with autonomic breathing. Some exercises double the length of exhalation; some enervate the organ systems (*uddiyana*) or reverse active inhaling and passive exhaling to an active exhale and passive inhale (*kapalabhati*) (Kuvalayananda [1931] 2010). The measurement of the heart-rate with active participants and anticipating bystanders in a fire-walking ritual reveals divergent emotional levels of anticipation: for instance, those who were carried over the live coals by relatives showed higher rates (Xygalatas et al. 2011).

Comparing the concept of the body scheme with earlier proposals of how to speak about the interplay of body, mind, and perception, G.W. Leibniz (1646–1716) comes to mind. For him, the unity of perception was an obscure representation, because the whole adds up to the entirety of imaginations he called perfection—which is conceptualised as beauty performed by the soul, not by the intellect or by perception. The body scheme as affective-embodied-cognitive representation takes on a similar role as a synthetic mode of cognition. In the implementation of a specific body scheme, rituals fulfil a range of social func-

tions, including differentiating one group from another or from the mainstream body scheme of society; highlighting aesthetic attractiveness, producing "wellness", or cultures of touching; and implicitly criticising or privileging social body practices.

2.2 Thermoregulation

Thermoregulation is a complex and mostly autonomous regulatory circuit. Blood flow, restricted blood flow and muscle tension are only some factors that take part in this organisation. In a pilot study by Karin Meissner and myself on the efficacy of spiritual healing, it was observed how a healer fosters a feeling of warmth that symbolises the healing energy. He managed to "guide" this energy, felt as warmth, through the body of the client (Meissner and Koch 2016, 423). The perception of temperature is closely linked to emotions, ranging from comfortable to uncomfortable (Craig 2003). A sensation of warmth attracts attention on its pathway along and through the meaningful body. This attention enervates the vegetative system over time, and it may establish an established script of the path of the warmth through the body by being touched. By "moving" the warmth, the healer manipulates the body scheme. Interviews indicate that the healer may change the subjective well-being into a feeling of being "whole and healthy", of feeling "at home in one's body" and of feeling integrated and present.

2.3 Covert Imitation

According to neurological findings, imitable perceptions such as body postures, auditory noises, language sounds, and mimicry are copied and stored as isomorphic representations in brain modules. This copying, or *covert imitation*, happens routinely and automatically, and in fact the recognition of emotions is dependent on covert imitation (Wilson 2006). Experiments have shown that the connection between facial expression and body posture associated with particular emotions reveals how a particular emphasis is realised through covert imitation. Case studies have found that disrupting the covert imitation of such mimicry (for example, by chewing gum) also affects memory efficiency. In social action covert imitation is an important device for interpreting other people's actual and anticipated behaviour. From the somatological perspective such behaviour is an expression of mental states, and of the ability to synchronise mental reaction with complex behavioural reactions. In other words, the somatic category of cov-

ert imitation helps to explain how the goals and intentions of other agents are accessed by body representations.

2.4 Tattooing

The interface of the skin is often reduced to its social function of marking identity and, to its spatial function of being a border; a "skinscape" as Plate put it (2012, 165), a space for projecting identity images onto each other's bodies. Even if scholars allude to findings in neurobiology they often confine these to a metaphorical paradigm. However, the skin is an organ that is permeated with receptors, and it is the source of a huge amount of information that is received through these neural receptors, such as humidity, pain, touch, temperature, tension, etc. Since the skin is a protective shield against germs it also mirrors the state of the immune system. As any other tissue of the body, the skin memorises exposure to sun or coldness. One might talk of a skin organ sense. Sigmund Freud mentions the meaningfulness of a body zone and skin passage for one of his female patients whose father had a venous ulcer that she had to bandage. The place where his leg lay on her thigh while bandaging gained symbolic meaning for their relationship. Today, this kind of meaningfulness of body parts is no longer seen in a topological way, but rather, as a body memory of the tissue, for example in secularist or spiritual healing techniques such as osteopathy or craniosacral therapy. Instead, a functional memory of suppressed emotions or impulses might be located in a body part, for instance, in the shoulder, causing chronic pain or skin irritation. Also, mental disorders might be connected with paraesthesia when the skin or hair is touched. In this sense, *tattooing* as a category reaches beyond the "inscription" of skin; it rather relates to all sensory memories stored and actively (re-)produced through the skin which is much more than a "surface" or a screen to be written on.

2.5 Muscle Tone, Posture and Movement

Research on muscle tone, posture and movement are correlated. Work on contemplative movement practices like yoga, tai chi and contemplative dance singles out four dimensions in which self-regulation becomes operative: steering of bodily attention, meta-cognition, training of interoception and emotional regulation (van Vugt 2016). *Muscle tone* is the concept that describes the pressure at the muscle plates perceived by proprioception. Every human being has an individual tension based on connective tissue and musculature. High muscle tone

lowers the risk of injury and accelerates reaction time. Sprinters, for example, stimulate their muscle tone by jumping on the spot before running, and then stretching afterwards to lower or relax their muscle tone. In meditation, the muscle tone is lowered, since breathing, like warmth, relaxes the muscles. With this in mind, body movements, breathing, and temperature fluctuations have to be taken into account in any discussion of religious rituals. Exertion, relaxation, stretching, and warming up are equally important. The physicist Edmund Jacobson's muscle relaxation therapy (which has deeply influenced Western postural Yoga) emphasises that working with muscle and body tone has strong psychological effects. Muscle tone is also important for rituals insofar as it relates body knowledge to emotionality, especially since stress and strain are localised in, or realised through, the musculature, thereby influencing posture, the power of concentration, and pain (Garde et al. 2014).

Thomas Csordas subsumes muscle tone under his concept of somatic modes of attention: "The imagined rehearsal of bodily movements by athletes is a highly elaborated somatic mode of attention, as is the heightened sensitivity to muscle tone and the appetite for motion associated with health-consciousness and habitual exercise" (Csordas 1993, 139). Mental training often addresses muscle relaxation, just as hybrid religious healing methods, for instance *reiki*, use muscle relaxation combined with activating muscle or tissue memory to recover the results from an injury or violent experiences. Hypnosis and trance often engage kinaesthetic images, and in fact the efficiency of such practices involving muscle tone—practices that can be explained by symbolic learning processes, attention focusing, and by intentional targeted muscle arousal—has been empirically proven by electromyography (EMG), a method for measuring the electricity of muscle fibres. Muscle tone is closely linked to physical and emotional *posture* aspects in a bidirectional way. Appropriate breathing may support posture. Imitation of postures and gestures has proven pivotal in psychological development. Posture influences a person's attitudes, affections and expectations. Studies have investigated this by relating expansive, involuntary or contractual postures, facial and vocal expressions with changes in endogenous substances (Payne and Crane-Godreau 2015, 7–8). Research "suggest[s] that conscious proprioceptive awareness of reflex postural preparedness may give rise to pleasant experiences of stability, readiness, and self-efficacy, or unpleasant feelings of lack of confidence and anxiety" (Payne and Crane-Godreau 2015, 7–8). Other studies have shown that "botox injections in facial muscle decreased the strength of emotional experience [...] and amygdala activity" (Ticini, Urgesi, and Calvo-Marino 2015, 107).

2.6 Prosthetic Perception

As discussed, the body scheme is highly relevant for well-being, integrative body-awareness and holistic representation. Neural plasticity lays the ground for the capacity of the body to integrate prostheses, transplanted organs, and tools or fake limbs into this representation. Part of it is the feeling of "being at home in one's body", knowing the size, expansion, and moving in a way that fits the body, for example, the doorframe, without colliding. This is the framework allowing for *prosthetic knowledge:* the sensation of a walking stick is a good example (see Polanyi 1966). We do not feel the cane in the palm of our hand, where the pressure is objectively located, but we feel the uneven, soft, or solid ground through it, as if we had a sensorium at the end of the stick. In other words, the stick is an extension, and enlargement of our sensory organ of touch. This distance perception through tool use means that tools can be integrated into the body scheme (Làdavas and Farné 2006). It does not matter if the distant object is real or imagined, if it is my limb, an imagined limb, or an artificial limb. For somatic ritual theory, this variance means that in order to explain identification (with things, movements, entities) we don't need to refer to higher cognitive processes; using the concept of prosthetic perception these effects can be explained on a sensory-action level. Also, the link between individual and collective experience in ritual action—an issue that challenges some ritual theories – need not necessarily be explained only by participation. Prosthetic enlargement and the incorporation of tools, as well as the somatic activities of other actors such as drinking or dancing, can all be displayed somatically in the embodied agent.

2.7 Peripersonal Space

Another speciality humans have developed in their way of perceiving the environment is their *peripersonal space*. This is a perceptive sector around body parts that can be detected by its specific relation to visual and tactile stimuli. The peripersonal space for hands, for example, is forty to forty-five centimetres around them, because hands are our most precious tools; it might be as narrow around the elbows, but wider around other body parts that often also have a smaller density of nociceptors. Neurological structures correspond with these specific perceptive fields. The perceptive field of the hand, again, is characterised by the cross-modal enhancement or by the extinction of visual and tactile stimuli. Another consequence of prosthetic perception is the multi-sensory coding of space, since space in relation to bodies is not metric or linear; therefore, by ex-

tension, prosthetic perception can also build on the peripersonal space. Space, at least related to the somatic dimension of agents, depends on zones of importance for protection and cross-sensory integration (Lavàdas and Farné 2006, 101). Extending the body by the use of tools, as well as reactions due to habituation and peripersonal space, show this to be the case, and violating or respecting this space makes up for a variety of ritual usages.

Prosthetic perception and peripersonal space are also closely linked to the feeling of body-ownership that is of great relevance to the cultural study of religion and is vastly neglected. Body-ownership has been studied, for instance, by fake-limb experiments, like the rubber hand experiments. Again, the protection or reaction space around the hand is tested but this time one sees at the place of one's hand a rubber hand. As a first result, the proprioceptive drift denoting the felt distance of actual and fake hand location can be measured, with the result that the rubber hand is mostly felt slightly more as one's own hand (Kerr, Agrawal, and Nayak 2016). Tai chi, which emphasises bodily attention during moving, manipulates low level sensorimotor control. It alters tactile sensation in being more aware of afferent sensory activity. In regard to all of these fine-grained experiments, further conditions have to be taken into account, like the level of mastery and the age of practitioners. Besides extending ownership, peripersonal space is intentionally manipulated in contemplative gaze training, as in yoga practice with prescribed gaze focal points (*dristi*). This strategy of looking at specific body parts (e. g. a point at the front, an imagined point in prolongation of the outstretched arm) may enhance tactile acuity and spatial attention (Schmalzl, Powers, and Blom 2016, 108).

2.8 Example: Gabrielle Roth's "5 Rhythms" Dance

To conclude this section, the fruitfulness of applying these categories can be demonstrated by the example of the contact improvisation dance called *5 Rhythms*. The preparatory set as interrelated factors of action-response is relevant insofar as this dance is widely non-reflexive. *5 Rhythms* dates back to the culturally productive time in the USA when the Esalen Institute became a centre for alternative lifestyle and humanist-psychological innovation (founded in 1962 in Big Sur, California). One of its founders, Michael Murphy, called it an "intellectual ashram" that seeks to avoid formal religious structures but nevertheless assumes a universal mystical experience (Kripal 2005, 5). Among other cultural creatives, psychologists, artists and intellectuals, Gabrielle Roth developed this dancing style from the mid-1960s; it is organised around an arc of suspense of the "wave" consisting of five phases characterised by different rhythms that

stand for five energetic-affective experiences of life. The performance aims to replace a fragmented and alienated body image with an integrated, holistic image. The ultimate goal is holistic healing mediated by the dance performance and realised by the bodily expression of emotions (the unleashing of trauma) and extraordinary experiences. Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls, whom she worked at the Esalen Institute, led Roth to recognise the therapeutic potential of her dance. She further refers to an original shamanic knowledge as a source of her practical movement practice, along the lines that all human bodies "know what they need" (Roth 1997). The somatic categories sketched above may be used to explain the realisation of the holistic body experience of this dance and the healing process it promises.

Figure 1: The five rhythmic phases of the *5 Rhythms* dance by Gabrielle Roth, and how they relate to body tone; from Kunas, Markus. 2013. 'The Dancing Sangha': Die 5 Rhythmen als holistische Körpertechnik zwischen Tanz, Therapie und spätmoderner Spiritualität. Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich. URL: http://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/21723/, published 13 November 2014 (last accessed 4 December 2015), 83. © Markus Kunas. Reproduced with permission of the author.

	Flowing	Staccato	Chaos	Lyrical	Stillness
Body tone	Initial state—progressively relaxing	Growing tension	Switching between easing and elevating the tension	Releasing of tension	Deeply relaxed
Bodily co-presence	Self-centred, some cautious contacts	Some two-person interactions, shared acceleration	A circle around expressive solo dancers may be formed which fortifies the loss of control in the spectator dancers	Horizontally connected	Attention to own body and exhaling

"Flowing" constitutes a preparatory phase for the wave of emotions. In this phase the feeling of sinking into the ground may occur, comparable to the practice of "earthing" in Yoga, Qi Gong and other body practices which draw attention to the soles of the feet, their sense of the temperature and texture of the ground, and their imaginative connection with the floor. Some dancers say they feel their feet are "some centimetres below floor level" (Kunas 2013, 82). This rooting is due to the prosthetic perception of an enlarged identity. The secure feeling of the ground, the walls of the building and the building itself anchored in the soil is part of imaginative training in trauma therapy, as described by Peter Levine (2005). Usually, exercises stimulating the body scheme, such as tattooing, forego the task of connecting. In tattooing, for instance, the left hand feels the right hand which lightly knocks the inner palm of the left hand, and

vice versa. This knocking or sweeping of the "outer skin" of one's body can be continued with other parts of the body and can be accompanied by auto-suggestive murmuring.

The prosthetic ability to temporarily integrate tools and parts of the environment into one's own body scheme is sometimes close to experiences of disembodiment. In disembodiment the location of the body is more stable, and it is performed imaginatively, whereas prosthetic perception comes with practice. In using a tool, in moving through a space, in co-acting with other embodied agents, the tool, floor or figuration of bodies is integrated into the body. Its centre of gravity changes over the time of contact improvisation (Gugutzer 2010). In the staccato phase of *5 Rhythms* the movements intentionally come from within the body centre to address other dancers. Gestures are directed and forceful, comparable to the ones used in martial arts. Other bodies become part of prosthetically imagined motion figures. This accelerated phase leads to the next phase called "chaos" in which the activated body progresses to vibrations and uncontrolled movements or screams echoed by others. After this disintegrative phase, in the playful "lyrical" phase, the pace slows down and the centre of gravity rises to the upper body. Rotating movements become soft and light. Hands are up in the air. Within the last phase, "stillness", proprioceptive sensations are in focus. The dancers may lie on the floor, eyes closed, and direct their attention to subtle movements and sensations. The floating style of music without any song lyrics (and their semantic content) aims at supporting this susceptibility. Emotions may burst out in the form of crying.

This description gives an impression of what can be developed further as a ritual somatology. Such an approach finds support in studies based on a neuroaesthetic hypothesis, and using Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). For our case, it has been shown that people respond stronger, and more positively to movements that belong to the observer's repertoire (Ticini, Urgesi, and Calvo-Marino 2015). The same is valid for the soundscape of movements. These studies are "suggesting that the degree of covert simulation of the movements is correlated to the level of liking" (Ticini, Urgesi, and Calvo-Marino 2015, 105). The implicit aesthetic configuration corresponds to the person's own preferred postures, and this, in consequence, results in an intense non-theoretical, "simulative" understanding (Koch 2003, 187–192).

These findings are only the beginning of a more systematic way of investigating religion and ritual from a somatic point of view. Together with other parameters—for instance, kinematic properties such as speed, body parts used, directedness of motion, perceiver's ability to reproduce the movement, and vertical and horizontal displacement—can be investigated for their relevance to the implicit aesthetics of embodied agents. This approach offers a wide range of op-

tions for future research that aims at reaching beyond the limitation of non-embedded measuring and isolated interpretation of scientific imaging. As can be seen in the *5 Rhythms* example, we can describe and explain how a body-centred subjectivation process is supported. Knowledge about how to use movement for healing is performed through the bodily co-presence of the group members and through reconfiguring the body scheme during the ephemeral and non-propositional dance that constitutes a sequence of liminal phases.

3 Rethinking Subjectivity from an Aesthetic Point of View

It is a difficult task to clarify how to speak about the 'subject', the 'person', 'individual', and the 'self'—seen as some of the many historically bound inventions of human performance. As my focus is on subjectivity, I do not want to subscribe to current approaches that attribute core elements to individuals that are conceptualised within liberal social theories and their notions of freedom, singularity or referentiality. If, however, we want to talk *about* historical patterns of being ruled or being authentic in the Foucauldian sense, we will employ the concept of subjectivity, and at the same time rethink it.

What is it that makes an aesthetic approach to subjectivity special? First, from its background in cultural studies it allows for a *plurality* of modern subjectivities across sub-milieus of a society. The recent philosophical concept of subjectivity is bound to empirical findings rather than promoting singularising concepts such as a general *homo oeconomicus* or the *animal symbolicum* from which prominent cultural theories take their distance. Second, the aesthetic understanding of subjectivity relates body knowledge to political and social forms of exerting power and ruling citizens. It constructs a mid-scale layer of observing subjectivities above the individual and below the social. Subjectivities are embodied displays of behaviour, status symbols and practices (for example, which medical treatment people chose, which products they buy, what homestyle decoration they prefer, where they travel). These practices need not be coherent, they may change and intensify temporarily around cultural symbols, such as the new tablet, or Valentine's Day with its ritual of love displayed towards a chosen partner. By *subjectivity* I understand an assemblage of such clippings from social life. Subjectivity should neither be conflated with self-identity (individually felt) nor be taken as a closed unity with clear-cut borders. Subjectivity is essentially a (battle) field (if one favours war metaphors, as Bourdieu does) or a marketplace of emotional tensions, altering tastes, embodied feelings that change along with an aging personality. Some constitutive features of aesthetic subjectivity are going to be demonstrated by the following examples.

3.1 Subtle Bodies—Esoteric Ethical Subjectivity

Subtle bodies are a common concept in contemporary alternative healing and spirituality, and in practice and ideas they reach beyond the *res cogitans-res extensa* distinction of the Cartesian subject insofar as they are based on the subtle continuum ontology of the modern esoteric worldview, particularly present in the theosophical doctrine (Johnston 2012). Subtle bodies are popularly imagined as invisible energetic entities consisting of several layers or oval shapes beyond and beside the physical body characterised by energy centres and channels. They are cosmically interlinked subjectivities that are rhizomatically interwoven with the tissue of being and all humans. Jay Johnston calls them a "bridge between the individual self and the spiritual world" (Johnston 2012, 153). There is a high level of morality involved in concepts of the subtle bodies, based on their ontological "radical intersubjectivity" and indispensable subtle causalities (Johnston 2011, and in this volume). In Kandinsky's art theory, this is the rationale of why artworks can have a huge emotional effect on the beholder—it mediates materiality and form. Johnston traces the relationship of this art theory and theosophical self-conception historically and demonstrates its great impact on healing practices such as Aura Soma and most of the other forms of popular energetic healing. Modern cognitive art theory considers that displayed body movements or brushstrokes of paintings may trigger sensorimotor experiences as embodied simulations of the performed action of the painter (Ticini, Urgesi, and Calvo-Marino 2015, 104). The reason for the emotional response is also linked to materiality, even though the explanative mechanism is a neural body. The subtle subjectivity, in this view, is porous to the energetic flows of the cosmos and other human beings.

Subtle bodies can only fulfil their anthropological or spiritual task of transforming to a higher state of consciousness when they gain space in the surrounding consciousness dimensions to do so. They have to "clean up"; transforming is cleaning, and can "burn away" anger, for example. This imaginary makes Ayurveda cooking and the *agni* fire so attractive to subtle bodies, being an appropriate tool for transforming by extinguishing lower forms of consciousness. The same affect economy guides "wellbeing spirituality" for which the self is the "artwork" (Johnston 2012, 156, 162–167). Subtle body subjectivity is activist: its exposure is not a gateway for harm but for work. Jay Johnston (2011), like Binder (2011; see below), derive the formation of subtle subjectivities from (popular) esotericism, well-being spirituality, art and continental philosophy, so that we can consider it a dispositive of esoteric ethical subjectivity.

3.2 Provisional and Agnostic Subjectivities

An example of postmodern subjectivity can be found in "engaged Buddhism" groups in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. I rely here on Stefan Binder's empirical work which involved participant observation and interpretation of journals kept by a Munich group of "Community of Mindful Being in Bavaria" (*Gemeinschaft für achtsames Leben Bayern e.V.*) (Binder 2011). The main practice during the weekly meetings is sitting and walking meditations, and a guided meditation with a "moderator" who reads texts authored by Thich Nhat Hanh and others in the religious tradition; the moderators also encourage further thought about and appropriation of the readings. This activity comprises prostrations towards the Buddha statue and bodhisattvas, the so-called 'earthing.' The ritual ends with dharma-sharing of experiences during meditation and of thoughts about the texts. This type of communicational exchange is called 'inter-being.' It is deeply indebted to the Buddhist doctrine of the interrelatedness of all beings. This includes the world of ancestors within the subject and causal ethical relations beyond the individual's reach (karma). The daily routine of this conditioning and being aware of emotions and sensual states is a task for lay people. A specific subjectivity is induced by the practiced techniques and by the interpretive teachings. This specific subjectivity is characterised by modality, insofar as it permanently monitors the web of meaningful relations with others and with the environment. It is also characterised by alertness in respect of an inwardly directed perception. What Binder (2011, 60 – 69) has formulated as a "subjectivity on hold" ("*unter Vorbehalt*") is a provisional, tentative and non-intellectual form of self-assurance. The status of being "on hold" can be seen as a technology of the self that creates the opportunity for the self to be aware of postmodern problems without resolving them. The high level of self-reflexivity contains elements of a permanent self-questioning of one's identity, and it incorporates the basic insight that all social life is constructed, contingent, related (karma-causal relations) and somehow relativistic. There is no one truth or narrative about the self, but a stream of insights and 'dazzlement' within the modal subjectivity that is 'on hold'. Instead of solving the problems, the provisional characterisation is reiterated in specific practices within the group and in individual practice. The group of the *shanga* fulfils the role of an ideal environment enforcing technologies of the self that help to intensify awareness and love towards all creatures. Awareness is the main instance for permanent self-distancing (since there is no essential self, according to Buddhist convictions) and self-observation. This absence of a fixed, or core self is counteracted by the high demand and ideal of presence through awareness, and it is this that is understood to vault the subject into the modality of being 'on hold'.

Binder also identifies this kind of subjectivity in relational psychoanalysis and sociological academic literature, as well as in forms of therapy (Binder 2011, 80 – 114). This is why he argues for a dispositive of "subjectivity on hold"; the discursive formation reaches out beyond the academic societal subfield, such as psychotherapy and spiritual practice. A similar result is to be found in attitudes towards post-mortal existence: even Christian agnostic spirituality leaves open the question of whether there is such any such existence and what it will be like (Wohlrab-Sahr, Karstein, and Schaumburg 2005).

4 Governance of Aesthetic Subjectivities

Through political forces plural subjectivities accrue in specific social milieus. The process of aestheticisation within modern societies describes a way of identity building through lifestyles which is implicit in the commodification of subjects in the context of consumer culture. In addition, recent scholarship has begun to take into account the role of matter and environment, and how they affect subjectivities. In the meantime it is well proven that the aesthetic environment of artificially featured space and healing rooms plays a significant role for optimal healing (Kohls et al. 2012). On the basis of theories of reflexive modernisation which presume the exchange of expert systems and processes in the empirical field (for instance Lash 1993), the question can be asked as to what extent the modern aestheticisation process and academic approach of New Materialism converge. According to Foucault, the main strategy of regulating subjects in neoliberalism is self-regulation. Subjects are "responsible" for their behaviour on the market (Turnes 2008); they engage in fitness and high performance practices such as mindfulness meditation, or cosmetic surgery. Andreas Reckwitz (2006), in his historical genealogy of "subjectivity-cultures" (bourgeois modernity, organised modernity and the instable and hybrid subject of postmodernity), has recently enquired if aesthetic subjectivities necessarily have to be creative. This leads to the question of whether we can speak about post-growth-economy subjectivities, such as a 'sustainable subjectivity', characterised by attitudes and practices that aim at extinguishing one's own CO_2 footprint, and at leaving the earth without a trace of our presence.

The critical potential of applying aesthetics to the analysis of subjectivities can also be demonstrated by looking at debates on the "dispossessed subject" and on "epidemic emotions" (Athanasiou and Butler 2013). The tired, irrational, subversive and emotional body considered as dwelling in industrial societies has been a sustained focus of attention, and the concept of body knowledge is explicitly part of this discussion in the areas of sociology of knowledge, sociology

of the body, in sports and training sciences, as well as in popular discourses of health. As diverse as these approaches may be, in general they relate body knowledge to practices that promise great benefits for the capacity of memory, the inner organisation of the body and health improvement. Despite the critical concerns these discussions draw on, a new mode of suppression is developed by them: to ascribe knowledge means to ascribe an order, a hierarchy of truths, a refined system of doctrines that support or contradict other interpretations or ideologies. The moment we talk about body knowledge, we rationalise the body, and the body can be subjected to new forms of regulation. At this moment the body becomes an even more colonised landscape were governmentality is performed within a knowledge society. Introducing, and promoting the body as knowledgeable means to present the body to be the addressee for education, training and health prevention; and it also means to bring it under the rule of the political affect economy of neoliberalism. As soon as we provide a concept of body knowledge, new calculative and technocratic techniques can be applied to bodies. Neoliberalism steps into the inner body – into its intimateness of self-sovereignty. The insurance and health industries want to know what we eat, management training wants to improve our motor skills and well-being, the recreation industry offers Pilates and Co.—in order to keep people going.

Against this, dispossessed bodies may strike back. Erdem Gündüz, the Turkish dancer, choreographer and performance artist, spontaneously initiated a political performance on 16th June 2013. His intention was to protest against the construction of a new shopping mall in an urban park. He stood for eight hours in Istanbul's Gezi Park, his eyes directed towards a poster showing a portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Through social media such as Twitter, many inhabitants of Istanbul came to know of this protest, and they copied the gesture of standing in public squares the next day, gathering together in silent protest which reached far beyond the initial shopping mall (Talbi 2013). Simply presenting the knowledgeable body, and not moving at all (see Mohr on the "hieratic" in this volume), created a new form of "movement" that differs from political demonstrations, walking, chorusing, being moved. As critical reflection shows, body knowledge can be invaded by neoliberal technocracy, being the target of rationalising manipulation; but it can also be the means of protest by repossessed bodies that were previously thought to be part of a rational choice subject that strives only to maximise gain (Athanasiou and Butler 2013). Also in *Mille Plateaux*, and much earlier than current debates, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980) argue for an environmentally entangled, embodied subject, and against its limitation to a bourgeois affect economy.

5 Conclusion

Speaking about an aesthetic subjectivity does not claim to provide a general philosophical theory of the subject; rather, it helps to theorise a specific form of relatedness of subjects within their socio-political historical environment. On the one hand, the concept of an aesthetic subjectivity results from the insights we gain from contemporary cognitive sciences, and the heuristic approach developed from them. On the other hand, it enables description of a contingent, yet complex, "body-world reference system": facial expression conditions feelings, and vice versa (Levenson, Ekman, and Friesen 1990; Lerner, Dahl, Hariri, and Taylor 2007); voice mirrors stress and emotions (Seifert and Kohlbrunner 2005); subjective repertoires of body posture condition the liking of how other bodies move; ways of problem-solving in the past alter the *how* of one's cognitive processing in the future. The few examples presented here demonstrate the analytical and innovative potential that lies in drawing consequences from current insights into the constitution of subjects in terms of epistemology, but also in applying these insights to the political relevance of leaving simplistic notions of the autonomous and rational subject behind—analysing the place, the agency, and the governance of the aesthetic subject should provoke a much more vigorous debate about cultural aesthetics.

The first sections of this chapter outlined how we, as scholars, conceptualise the subject we are investigating. It proposed to take as a foundation point an embodied cognition that is entangled with culture in various ways, and to use the category of body knowledge—including the outlined sub-categories – in order to describe how embodied subjectivities emerge from their interaction with societal systems. On the level of epistemology, this proposal responds to the provocative claim that a cognitive-aesthetic perspective not only focuses on other objects of research, but also changes the way we can study religion. It does this in two ways: first, it makes clear that the conceptualised agent subject we investigate is the same as the epistemological subject of the scholar: us (Koch 2003, 171, 192–212). From this follows that far more aspects than "rational" and "propositional" argumentation have to be taken into account. Further, the field under investigation in the study of religion can be developed on the assumption that it is structured by embodied agents and the historic objectification of aesthetic subjectivities.

Going back to the discussion of the relevance of how we conceptualise the subjects that we are, and that we investigate, I argue that it is important that we provide concepts such as a "project-self", and an understanding of the relatedness between the embodied subject and ethical implications. Only then we can account for, for instance, the subtle and the provisional subjectivity, as they are

realised in the historically contingent religious practices and narratives that we investigate. It is here that the impact of power-knowledge from political regulation can be identified, be it intentional or unintentional. It determines how affects are evoked and then regulated, enclosed, staved off or postponed into an indeterminate future. The mastery over affect economies has a lasting effect on individuals and societies: an effect that is arduous to detect and criticise because affects are only partly connected with the linguistic realm.

On a larger scale, the concept of aesthetic subjects also changes the view of the much contested difference between the religious and the secular, and the debated (and thereby invoked) norms and forces of secularism—a not entirely new, but actual aspirant appearing on the scene, organising affects into affect economies—meaning specific discursive affect configurations, and taming them within the ties of this relatedness. I do not hold "religion" to be untranslatable to other societal systems, a *sui generis* quality, as do Jürgen Habermas or Etienne Balibar (2012). The epistemic aesthetic subject is common to all systems and, thus, religious regulation is not confined to the religious sphere. The moment the embodied agent is manipulated this transformation will also inform his and her action within other societal systems. Against this backdrop the analysis of subjectivities emerging from religious practices is highly relevant and illuminating.

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