

SORAAAD 2016

Aesthetics and the Analytical Study of Religion

The Study of Religion as Analytical Discipline Workshop &  
Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik

November 18, 2016

Religious Studies Department

Trinity University

San Antonio, Texas

# Table of Contents

Aesthetics and the Analytical Study of Religion	4
Schedule	7
Our Sponsors	8
Registration	8
Social Media	8
SORAAAD 2011-2016	9
Program	11
Opening Remarks	11
Method and Theory of the Aesthetics of Religion	11
<i>Aesthetics of Religion – What It Is, and What It Is Good For</i>	11
Somatic Approaches to the Aesthetics of Religion	15
<i>Somatics, Body Knowledge, and the Aesthetics of Religion</i>	15
<i>Disability, Aesthetics, and Religious Studies Method</i>	17
<i>“In A Gadda Da Vida” (In the Garden of Eden)</i>	18
Sound and the Senses in the Aesthetics of Religion	20
<i>Sound Matters: the Case of Hindu India and the Sounding of Sacred Texts. An Applied Aesthetics of Religion</i>	20
<i>Immersion, Transcription, Assemblage: On Sonic Impermanence and the Study of Religion</i>	22
Religious Diversity, Collective Cultural Agency and the Question of Aesthetics	24
<i>Religious Diversity and the Question of Aesthetics</i>	24
<i>The Abiding Powers of Afro-Protestantism</i>	26
Media and Transmission in the Aesthetics of Religion	28
<i>Framing Religious Subjects in an Irreligious Place: Procedural and Ethical Hurdles in Studying the Religion of Japanese Manga and Anime</i>	28
<i>Should I Laugh Now? The Aesthetics of Humor in Mass Media</i>	30

Appendices	31
Appendix I. About Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik	31
Appendix II. Aesthetics and the Analytical Study of Religion: Background & Research Context	32
Appendix III. Aesthetics of Religion What it is, and What it is Good for	34
Appendix IV. Respondent Statements	36
<i>Sally Promey - Yale University - MAVCOR</i>	36
<i>David Morgan - Duke University</i>	38
<i>S. Brent Rodriguez Plate - Hamilton College</i>	40
Appendix V. - The Eight Theses from Sound and Communication	42

# Aesthetics and the Analytical Study of Religion

The coherence without apparent intention and the unity without an immediately visible unifying principle of all the cultural realities that are informed by a quasi-natural logic . . . are the product of the age-old application of the same schemes of action and perception.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 1990: 13

Taste classifies, and it classes the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classification is expressed or betrayed.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1984: 6

I . . . cannot directly perceive a worshipper's experience of beauty, nor can he describe the actual feeling of beauty to me, but we can talk about the things that make something beautiful for him. In addition, as a participant observer, I myself can experience something as beautiful and compare notes, as it were, with him about what made it beautiful; I can then use ethnographic writing to try to transmit not only the interpretive worldview but also my own grasp of that beauty to the reader.

Omar McRoberts, "Beyond *Mysterium Tremendum*: Thoughts toward an Aesthetic Study of Religious Experience." 2004: 200)

## Introduction

In its sixth year, SORAAAD, in partnership with the German [Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik](#), will focus on aesthetics as an analytical concept and the deployment of sensory data in the study of religion. We do so with two valences in mind. First, we ask: More than thirty years after Bourdieu's statements on schemes of action and perception, and on taste as a classifier of social subjects, how does aesthetics function as an artifact of power and social designation? Second, in keeping with McRoberts' assertion that aesthetics and sensation need to figure into our accountings of religious experiences: How do we deploy aesthetics as a valance of research design on religion? How do we broaden the capacity of social scientists to observe, analyze, and represent human sensation? This year, Birgit Meyer, Alexandra Greiser, Jason Bivins, Josef Sorett, Annette Wilke, David Feltmate, Jolyon Thomas, Rebecca Raphael, Deborah Green and Jens Kreinath will address aesthetics as both data and lens for the study of: religious pluralism and conflict, race and secularism, ritual, disability, sound, jazz, animation, and media. Sally Promey, David Morgan and S. Brent Rodriguez Plate will join the workshop as respondents.

Centering on the scholarly direction of the Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik, the 2016 SORAAAD Workshop presupposes a fundamentally revised understanding of aesthetics, which is not confined to a philosophy of art or an elite ideology of beauty, but is rather conceptualized in holistic terms by referring to the Greek notion of aesthesis or sensory perception (Cancik & Mohr 1988). While coming to terms with the politics and cultural impacts of the legacy of aesthetics in the study of religion, the aesthetic approach to religion engages with semiotic and sensuous proposals and challenges theories of human agency and perception (Taussig 1992; Gell 1998). Elaborating on the methodologies and results of different disciplines, including literary studies, mimetic theory, and art history (Iser 1993; Gebauer & Wulf 1996; Belting 2003), it offers a more systematic, comprehensive, and inclusive framework for studying how religion is based on the sensory design of the human body and how different religions cultivate and discipline the ways in which humans perceive, evaluate, and make sense of their life-worlds. The scholars presenting at the workshop will explore: the history and theory of the aesthetics of religion; the study of sound and sight in the aesthetics of religion; aesthetic study of genres in transmission and commemoration of religious traditions; somatic approaches to the aesthetics of ritual efficacy; and media, emotion, and imagination in the aesthetics of religion.

In the study of religion, a field still occupied with texts and logocentrism, this workshop asks how we can forge a more holistic approach to the aesthetics of religion that could systematically integrate aesthetic notation in ethnography, the collection of sensual data in structured interviews, visual analysis in sensuous scholarship, and perceptions of religious experiences mediated through discourse analysis? How can instances of reproducible visual, sonic, or even gustatory data sets allow us to develop parameters for critical analysis through comparison and contrast? How are aesthetic creation, imposition, and contestation meaningful for those we study?

“Aesthetics and the Analytical Study of Religion,” based around exemplary case studies, will be of interest to scholars who already employ social science and critical humanities research methodologies; to those who want to develop techniques to denaturalize aesthetics, or open up their work to recognizing, observing and communicating aesthetics components of the people, settings, and elements of their research; and to anyone who wants to rethink how aesthetics materialize, function, and are used to normalize specific power structures. The workshop will be particularly relevant for graduate students and scholars working in the following areas of research: history of religion, comparative religion, anthropology of religion, l’histoire des mentalités, conceptual history or historical semantics, art history, anthropology of the senses, ritual studies, spatial studies, museum studies, and gender studies.

Through this interactive work, we want to build bridges between the analytical study of religion and the aesthetics of religion. Re-energizing longstanding concerns about research design, we aim to join the analysis of sensory data with the sorts of questions the workshop has asked in years past with respect to [canon](#), [comparison](#), [norms and values](#).

[Jens Kreinath](#) and [Ipsita Chatterjea](#) for the SORAAAD workshop with, [David Walker](#), [William Arnal](#), [Rebecca Raphael](#), [Randall Styers](#), [Emma Wasserman](#), and [Ed Silver](#).

### **Suggested Readings**

Grieser, Alexandra. 2016. "Aesthetics", in: Robert Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.):

*Vocabulary for the Study of Religion* Vol. 1, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 14-23. \*\*

Kreinath, Jens. 2009. "[Virtuality and Mimesis: Toward an Aesthetics of Ritual Performances as Embodied Forms of Religious Practice](#)," in: Bent Holm, Bent Flemming Nielsen, and Karen Vedel (eds): *Religion – Ritual – Theatre*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 219-249.

Meyer, Birgit. 2009. "[Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion](#)." In *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent De Vries. Fordham University Press.

McRoberts, Omar M. 2004. "Beyond Mysterium Tremendum: Thoughts toward an Aesthetic Study of Religious Experience." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 595 (1):190-203.

Viladesau, Richard. 2013. "Aesthetics and Religion." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, edited by Frank Burch Brown. Oxford University Press.

n.b. Where a reading is suggested by either another presenter or in another segment, it will be marked with an "\*\*"

# Schedule

- 10:15 Pre-Workshop Refreshments & Check-In
- 10:45-10:55 **Opening Remarks:** Jens Kreinath, SORAAAD & Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik
- 10:55-11:45 **Method and Theory of the Aesthetics of Religion**  
Alexandra Greiser, “Aesthetics of Religion – What It Is, and What It Is Good For”  
Sally Promey, Respondent  
David Walker, Moderator
- 11:50-1:20 **Somatic Approaches to the Aesthetics of Religion**  
Jens Kreinath, “Somatics, Body Knowledge, and the Aesthetics of Religion”  
Rebecca Raphael, “Disability, Aesthetics, and Religious Studies Method”  
Deborah Green, ““In A Gadda Da Vida” (In the Garden of Eden)”
- 1:25-2:10 **LUNCH** *and continued conversation*
- 2:15-3:20 **Sound and the Senses in the Aesthetics of Religion**  
Annette Wilke, “Sound Matters: the Case of Hindu India and the Sounding of Sacred Texts. An Applied Aesthetics of Religion”  
Jason Bivins, “Immersion, Transcription, Assemblage: On Sonic Impermanence and the Study of Religion”  
Ipsita Chatterjea, Moderator
- 3:25-4:35 **Religious Diversity, Collective Cultural Agency, and the Question of Aesthetics**  
Birgit Meyer, “Religious Diversity and the Question of Aesthetics”  
Josef Sorett, “The Abiding Powers of AfroProtestantism”  
David Morgan - Respondent
- 4:35- 4:45 **BREAK**
- 4:45-6:00 **Media and Transmission in the Aesthetics of Religion**  
Jolyon Thomas, “Framing Religious Subjects in an Irreligious Place: Procedural and Ethical Hurdles in Studying the Religion of Japanese Manga and Anime”  
David Feltmate, “Should I Laugh Now? The Aesthetics of Humor in Mass Media”  
S. Brent Plate - Respondent
- 6:00- 7:00 **SORAAAD RECEPTION**

## Our Sponsors

We want to thank our hosts the Religious Studies Department at Trinity University, most especially Angela Tarango and Sarah K. Pinnock. The 2016 SORAAAD workshop is sponsored by the University of Regina Religious Studies Department, Texas State University's Philosophy Department, Wichita State University's Department of Anthropology, and Wellesley College's Department of Religion. SORAAAD wants to thank Dr. Craig Hanks and Rebecca Raphael for Texas State University's sponsorship, Peer- H Moore- Jansen and Jens Kreinath for Wichita State University's sponsorship, and Ed Silver and Stephen Marini for Wellesley College's sponsorship. Since 2014, the SORAAAD workshop has been underwritten by the University of Regina, Religious Studies Department, whom we thank for its ongoing support and the support of William Arnal, Head of Department.

SORAAAD's committee would like to thank Matt Sheedy and *The Bulletin for the Study of Religion* blog for their ongoing support of the workshop.

## Registration

Please send an email to [soraaad@gmail.com](mailto:soraaad@gmail.com). Place "registration" in the subject line, and include your name, indication of rank (independent scholar, graduate student, professor, etc.), and institution if applicable in the body of the email.

Registration is free. SORAAAD thanks its sponsors for making this possible.

Registration Limit: 45

You might wish to review the [SORAAAD Workshop Ethos](#).

## Social Media

#SORAAAD2016 is the official hashtag for Aesthetics and the Analytical Study of Religion.

Please follow @SORAAADWorkshop. SORAAAD is also on <https://www.facebook.com/SORAAAD>, for news about the workshop and news about analytical scholarship in religion and cognate fields, the latest from our partners and your peers, and issues facing higher education.

This program and SORAAAD's previous programs are available for download via [Academia.edu](http://Academia.edu), and can be found from the research interest "Study of Religion as an Analytical Discipline."

# SORAAAD 2011-2016

## **2016 - Aesthetics and the Analytical Study of Religion**

In partnership with [Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik](#)  
[Trinity University, Religion Department](#) - Institutional Host,  
with thanks to Angela Tarango & Sarah K. Pinnock  
[University of Regina, Religious Studies Department](#)  
[Texas State University, Department of Philosophy](#)  
[Wichita State University, Anthropology Department](#)  
[Wellesley College, The Religion Department](#)

## **2015 - Canon and the Analytical Study of Religion**

[Georgia State University, Religious Studies Department](#) Institutional Host,  
with thanks to Monique Moultrie & Kathryn McClymond  
[University of Regina, Religious Studies Department](#)  
Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion Group - AAR  
Cultural History of the Study of Religion Group - AAR  
Metacriticism of Biblical Scholarship Consultation - SBL  
Redescribing Early Christianity Group - SBL

## **2014 - Comparison and the Analytical Study of Religion.**

[University of Regina, Religious Studies Department](#)  
Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion Group - AAR  
Redescribing Early Christianity Group - SBL  
Sociology of Religion Group - AAR  
Cultural History of the Study of Religion Group - AAR  
Metacriticism of Biblical Scholarship Consultation - SBL

## **2013 - Methodologies and the Analytical Study of Religion**

Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion Group - AAR  
Cultural History of the Study of Religion Group - AAR  
Sociology of Religion Group - AAR  
Ideological Criticisms of Biblical Studies Group - SBL  
Metacriticism of Biblical Scholarship Consultation - SBL  
Bible and Cultural Studies Section - SBL

## **2012 - The Analytical Handling of Norms and Values in the Study of Religion**

Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion Group - AAR

Cultural History of the Study of Religion Group - AAR

Sociology of Religion Group - AAR

Ideological Criticisms of Biblical Studies Group - SBL

Bible and Cultural Studies Section - SBL

Equinox Publishing

## **2011 - The Study of Religion as an Analytical Discipline**

Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion Group - AAR

Sociology of Religion Group - AAR

Ideological Criticisms of Biblical Studies Group - SBL

Bible and Cultural Studies Section - SBL

### **SORAAAD Co-Chairs**

[William Arnal](#)

[Ed Silver](#)

[Ipsita Chatterjea\\*](#)

[Randall Styers](#)

[Jens Kreinath\\*](#)

[David Walker](#)

[Rebecca Raphael](#)

[Emma Wasserman](#)

### **Former Co-Chairs**

[Greg Alles\\*](#)

2011

[Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley\\*](#)

2011-2012

[Randall Reed\\*](#)

2011-2013

[Craig Martin](#)

2012-2013

[Jacques Berlinerblau](#)

2012-2013

\*Founding Co-Chair of the SORAAAD Steering Committee

# Program

10:45-10:55

## Opening Remarks

Jens Kreinath, SORAAAD & Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik

10:55-11:45

## Method and Theory of the Aesthetics of Religion

Alexandra Greiser

Aesthetics of Religion – What It Is, and What It Is Good For

Sally Promey, Yale University, MAVCOR, Respondent - see Appendix IV, p 36

David Walker, Moderator

Aesthetics of Religion – What It Is, and What It Is Good For

Alexandra Greiser, Trinity College Dublin

Since the 1990s, scholars studying culture started to apply concepts of an “aesthetics beyond art” to their work. Especially in the course of the cultural turn in the Academic Study of Religion in the German-speaking areas, an Aesthetics of Religion has been proposed as a framework to study religion as a sensory and mediated phenomenon and to highlight the importance of sensory perception as a theoretical background to understand the persistent “efficacy” of religion throughout history and in recent post-secular societies. This paper takes three steps to sketch out what has been achieved to date, and what further potential an Aesthetics of Religion has as a connective concept within the larger academic study of religion.

### Why Aesthetics?

Aesthetics is an ambiguous term and it is mostly associated with the philosophy of art and beauty, or with normative ideas about the beautiful and the sublime. However, the term has a long history, and reaching back to the Aristotelian notion of *aisthesis*, it is related to the

fundamental question of how human beings make sense of their environment and of themselves through their senses. From this early tradition on, aesthetics developed as an intellectual tradition that revolved around the question how the “sensory side of knowledge” can be understood, linking *aisthesis* (the process of making sense of stimuli through the senses) to *semiosis* (the ability to communicate on the basis of signs), to *phantasia* (the ability to represent what is not present to the senses) and to *noesis* (the ability for abstract thinking). Yet, *aisthesis* was mostly given a position of subordination, merely serving rational thinking rather than being subject of cultivation and refinement itself.

It is not by accident that in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe Alexander Baumgarten, and his interpreter Immanuel Kant, took on the quest for “sensory knowledge” (*sinnliche Erkenntnis*) as complementing “rational knowledge” (*Verstandeserkenntnis*). It is also not by accident that idealist philosopher and romantic theorists dwelled on the “aesthetic experience” as a metaphysical concept, redefining religion in terms of “awe and wonder”, a concept that recurs in Otto’s “*fascinans et tremendum*” so well known to scholars of religion in its influential epistemological afterlife.

Since then, a critically revised understanding of aesthetics has emerged that shifted from its idealist-romantic normative legacy to a concept for the critical analysis of culture. As a theory of sensory knowledge, aesthetics has to offer an elaborate repertoire of concepts and debates that can help to understand religious traditions in the light of sensory perception and its inherent historicity. This is especially true for contemporary developments in aesthetics that bridge psychological and evolutionary theories of perception, neuro-aesthetics and cultural studies’ understandings of aesthetics, highlighting the socio-cultural, political and governing qualities of how humans perceive themselves and the world they are part of. Binding these diverse modes of academic knowledge together, the concept of formative (and de-formative) processes stands central, which allows the integration of material and conceptual aspects, intentional and unintentional qualities, and individual as well as collective perspectives. In addition, aesthetics changes the way we look at subjects and at subjectivity – in contrast to traditional Enlightenment assumptions of an ideal rational subject, the aesthetic subject includes decision making on the basis of preferences, affective knowledge, or what people like or dislike. Integrating this into the study of religion is seminal.

### *Religious aesthetics, or an Aesthetics of Religion?*

Studying religion through the lens of how humans perceive their world offers a double perspective: i) the analysis of sensory practices *within* religious traditions (for instance, how a religious body is created, how distinctions and norms are persuasively imagined and embodied, or experiences of “other worlds” are trained by specific engagements of the senses), and ii) the analysis of how perceiving and meaning-making in a larger culture is influenced *by*

religious cultivation and judgment of the senses, independent of whether people see themselves as adherents, or not.

Studying *religious aesthetics* does not aim to revive any essentialist notions of *sui generis* religious sensing and feeling. Rather, what makes religion/s “experientiable” is linked to a new interest in the body and in material aspects of religious practice and in how religion/s create long lasting and influential “perceptual orders” and patterns of appearance and actions that “migrate” throughout time, globally and between societal sub-systems.

Describing and comparing *religious aesthetics*, however, does not yet make an approach. An *Aesthetics of Religion*, therefore, reaches beyond a heuristic potential that accounts for bodily and sensory phenomena; as a systematic framework it responds to methodological and epistemological challenges as well, especially with regard to the long history of text-centrism and focus on belief and cognition in the early disciplinary history of the study of religion which had limited religion to their theologies or to a singular, individual “religious experience” of which all lived religion is seen as merely an expression. This tradition explains the hesitation of realizing that religion/s are as much danced, sung, played, and built as they are believed and written; it also explains why there is a lacuna in methods, theories, and epistemologies that would not simply transfer text hermeneutics to images, movements or buildings, or would not confine the multi-sensory creation of sacred realities to a “code” that could be “read” and “decoded” as texts. It is an explicit goal of this approach to contribute to the “work on terms” in the study of religion, and to add to a descriptive language that enables scholars to analytically engage with aesthetic phenomena (for example, terms such as synchronicity, extended cognition, imagination, museality, but also monumentality, or the “deprivation of the senses”). In dialogue with, yet different from, other major movements in the field (material culture, anthropology of the senses, for instance), it is the specific intent of this approach to create a framework for understanding the interplay between sensory, cognitive and socio-cultural aspects of world-construction.

#### Aesthetic ideologies: the critical potential of the approach

An Aesthetics of Religion is not an exclusive concept. Rather than *opposing* historical, sensory, or interpretive approaches, aesthetics serves as a *connective concept* in several ways: by allowing scholars to recognize a broader range of sources, media, and data; by offering a link between perception and the history of aesthetic forms, and between individual practice and cultural ideologies; by enabling scholars to question dualist notions of body and mind, or spirit and matter; and by paving the way to critically engage diverse academic knowledge cultures – not least the polarized debate on cognition and culture – and claims regarding how religion and the secular can be distinguished.

This last part highlights an important aspect of the aesthetic approach, and also of its significance for interdisciplinary scholarship. The political character of the aesthetic lies in the simple question how perceptual orders within a society organize and govern what is possible

to feel, think and perceive at all. Examining sensory knowledge is not confined to “meaning”, and also not to the fact that objects or practices such as the Islamic veil, or Jewish circumcision, *become* political in conflictive situations. Rather the very structure of how members of a culture perceive what is real is politician in determining exactly this. In relation to the concept of “semiotic ideologies”, it is asked to what extent “aesthetic ideologies” can be analyzed. Starting from the assumption that there are no “uncultured senses”, and that what we get through our senses is always more than “raw material” for the “refinement” of signification, an example from my own work on scientific imagery and its cultural usage is presented. Analyzing the aesthetic form of “Blue Brains” that emerged together with the dominant position of the neurosciences shall demonstrate that such aesthetic forms are doing far more work than expressing or representing an idea “behind” the notions of what it means to be human. Rather, aesthetic forms create and maintain the realities being created.

### **Suggested Reading**

Grieser, Alexandra. 2015. “Aesthetics.” *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 1, 14–23, edited by Kocku von Stuckrad and Robert Segal. Brill: Leiden. \*\*

Grieser, Alexandra. 2017. “Blue Brains: Aesthetic Ideologies and the Formation of Knowledge between Religion and Science,” in Grieser, Alexandra; Jay Johnston (2017). *The Sensory Sacred. Aesthetics as a Connective Concept for the Study of Religion*. Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter.

Mohr, Hubert. 2005. “Perception / Sensory System.” In *The Brill dictionary of religion*, Vol. 3, edited by Kocku von Stuckrad, 1435–1448. Leiden: Brill.

11:50-1:20

## **Somatic Approaches to the Aesthetics of Religion**

Jens Kreinath

“Somatics, Body Knowledge, and the Aesthetics of Religion”

Rebecca Raphael

“Disability, Aesthetics, and Religious Studies Method”

Deborah Green

““In A Gadda Da Vida” (In the Garden of Eden)”

### **Somatics, Body Knowledge, and the Aesthetics of Religion**

Jens Kreinath, Wichita State University

Somatics combines a variety of topics in the inquiry into body memory and knowledge, forms of bodily awareness and perception, as well as embodied schemes of sensation and perception that include the study of bodily movement, gesture and posture. Somatics, defined as ‘the study of the human body from within,’ focuses on the soma as the perceived body and draws from a wide range of different approaches including social psychology, critical theory, social anthropology, and cultural studies and queries the conditions that shape the perception of the human body while accounting for expressions mediated through the human body. I will focus on how somatics can be utilized by applying this perspective to the design of ethnographic research. My aim is to illustrate my approach to somatics, body knowledge and the aesthetics of religion through research on healing practices at pilgrimage sites in Hatay, the southernmost part on Turkey. My theoretical proposition dwells on mimesis as a means to conceptualize how ritual postures, gestures, and movements are techniques in religious practice that are inhabited and learned by the participants in a specific manner. I utilize approaches that focus on the perception and use of the human body. In order to gain the full advantages of a holistic approach to somatics, it is necessary to also include how touch and smell, words and acts, as well as dreams and visions in healing practices are integral to implementations of somatics to the aesthetics of religion approach. This inclusive, multi-sensory aesthetic approach to somatics helps to provide an analytical framework for studying the role of the perceived body in the healing rituals at local pilgrimage sites in Hatay. These rituals entail a variety of physical interactions, sensory experiences, and healing practices, for example the burning of incense, the kissing of the saint’s tomb, and the sealing of a vow, or the virtual encounter with the saint in dreams and visions, and the experience of the healing of a brain tumor. However, not only does this multisensory approach apply to the ways in which

the researcher perceives the bodies of those persons being researched through participant observation and interviews, but also how the body of the researcher is perceived by those studied through observation and conversation. Besides the fact that fieldwork based on participant observation presupposes the various ways in which the bodies of the researcher and the researched are mutually and reflexively perceived during the times of social human interaction, but it is also the precondition for the co-presence of the researcher and researched at the local pilgrimage site. These material temporal and spatial conditions of ethnographic fieldwork provide the foundation to explore the cultural perceptions of the human body that are integral for conceptualizing the aesthetic and normative components of the various concepts of the health and illness as they relate to the human body.

### **Suggested Readings:**

- Kreinath, Jens. 2014. "[Virtual Encounters with Hızır and Other Muslim Saints: Dreaming and Healing at Local Pilgrimage Sites in Hatay, Turkey.](#)" *Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia* 2 (1):25-66.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2015. "Virtuality." *In Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, vol. 3, edited by Kocku von Stuckrad and Robert Segal, 574-578. Leiden: Brill.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2015. "[The Seductiveness of Saints: Interreligious Pilgrimage Sites in Hatay and the Ritual Transformations of Agency.](#)" *In The Seductions of Pilgrimage: Sacred Journeys Afar and Astring in the Western Religious Tradition*, vol., edited by Michael A. Di Giovine and David Picard, 121-143. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Meyer, Birgit. 2011. "[Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideologies and the Question of the Medium.](#)" *Social Anthropology* 19 (1):23-39.

### **Further Readings:**

- Csordas, Thomas J. 1990. "[Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology.](#)" *Ethos* 18 (1):5-47.
- Kapferer, Bruce. 2004. "Ritual Dynamics and Virtual Practice: Beyond Representation and Meaning." *Social Analysis*:35-54.
- Shusterman, Richard. 1999. "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (3):299-313.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stoller, Paul. 1989. *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

## Disability, Aesthetics, and Religious Studies Method

Rebecca Raphael, Texas State University

Religious ideologies and practices necessarily incorporate concepts of embodiment. Far from a simple representation of what it is to be or to have a body, such concepts embed the valuation and disqualification of various types of bodies, as these are conceived in specific historical contexts. Further, as representations, these images are implicated in aesthetic distancing: concepts of embodiment both express valuations and potentially open those valuations to critique. This presentation explores how disability criticism provides a more thorough analysis of the body in religious aesthetics. In particular, attention to disqualified bodies helps us to avoid uncritically normative assumptions in method (Garland-Thomson, 1997) and to broaden our understanding of how disqualified bodies construct the normative (Davis, 1995). That preparation then leads us to two major questions. First, if we consider the valuation or disqualification of bodies as a spectrum, might religious ideologies and practices of the body be conceptualized as motion along a horizontal axis? The presenter shall illustrate this possibility using disability and medical anthropological treatments of Ancient Near Eastern material (Avalos, 1995; Raphael, 2008.) In particular, we will look at how "barrenness" is treated in earlier Hebrew biblical texts, ANE temple rituals, and later in early Christianity. This part of the discussion will focus on the recent volume by Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (2015). Second, does the representation of bodies in religious art introduce a vertical dimension, that is, the construction of a space for reflection on the actual and encultured body? Does aesthetic perhaps undercut the cultural spectrum of value by rendering variant embodiments as candidates for beauty? Here, the book of Job will provide the main example for examining whether "aesthetic transcendence" can work as an analytical category, rather than as an eraser of difficult human experience or as savior of textual authority.

### Suggested Readings:

Joel Baden and Candida Moss, "Introduction," in *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton, 2015).

Lennard David, "Constructing Normalcy" (1995)

[https://www.academia.edu/1134554/Constructing\\_normalcy](https://www.academia.edu/1134554/Constructing_normalcy)

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Becoming Disabled" (2016)

<http://nyti.ms/2bIKkUm>

Tobin Siebers, "Introducing Disability Aesthetics" (2010)

<https://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/9780472071005-ch1.pdf>

## “In A Gadda Da Vida”<sup>1</sup> (In the Garden of Eden)

Deborah Green, University of Oregon

In my current work on gardens, and the Garden of Eden in particular, I am deploying a similar combination of methods that I used in *The Aroma of Righteousness* (2011). In that work I focused on olfaction, aroma, and the use of incense and perfume in daily life to examine how experiencing scents influenced biblical and rabbinic interpretation. To this end, I employed literary analysis; the collection, classification, and evaluation of cultural and archaeological artifacts; historical contextual inquiry; and some physiological/cognitive psychological work related to the senses, memory, and perception. In my current project, I again employ these methods with an overall objective of discovering the roles that gender, space, and power play in the stories that include the Garden. That said, these methods that worked so well for “smell” play out quite differently on a “concrete” and spatially defined subject such as “the garden,” no matter how contrived and imaginative that subject may be. This presentation will focus on an analysis of the senses in the Garden of Eden narrative and interpretations in three different types of texts from three different historical periods: The biblical narrative (Genesis 2-3), the description of the “Mountain of God and the Tree of Life” (in 1 Enoch 22), and two *midrashim* (plural for *midrash*) (Genesis Rabbah 15 and 19). By evaluating the senses, along with other key features, we will explore the connection and separation between daily life and the interpretations, thereby exposing subtle meanings and theological implications not readily apparent at first “glance.”

### Suggested Reading:

Green, Deborah "Fragrance in the Rabbinic World." In *Smell and the Ancient Senses*, edited by Mark Bradley, 210. London: Routledge, 2015.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Come South Wind, Blow Upon My Garden That Its Spices May Flow: Experience in the Ancient Jewish Garden ". In *Sound and Scent in the Garden: Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture XXXVIII*, edited by D. Fairchild Ruggles. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Forthcoming.

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<sup>1</sup>Iron Butterfly 1968

**Further Reading:**

- Avrahami, Yael. *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2013.
- Classen, Constance, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott. *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Corbin, Alain. *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Detienne, Marcel. *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. 1994 ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Green, Deborah. *The Aroma of Righteousness: Scent and Seduction in Rabbinic Life and Literature*. University Park, Penn.: Penn State University Press, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Garden of Eden in the Hebrew Bible." In *A Global History of Literature and the Environment*, edited by John Parham and Louise Westling. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Forthcoming.
- Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Miller, William Ian. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Rindisbacher, Hans J. *The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992.

LUNCH *and continued conversation* 1:25-2:10

2:15-3:20

## Sound and the Senses in the Aesthetics of Religion

Annette Wilke

Sound Matters: the Case of Hindu India and the Sounding of Sacred Texts. An Applied Aesthetics of Religion

Jason Bivins

Immersion, Transcription, Assemblage: On Sonic Impermanence and the Study of Religion

Ipsita Chatterjea - Moderator

Sound Matters: the Case of Hindu India and the Sounding of Sacred Texts. An Applied Aesthetics of Religion

Annette Wilke, Westphalian Wilhelms University Muenster

Within the German speaking section of the Study of Religions' "aesthetic turn," the question has become how do images, sounds, gestures, material culture, movements, and the expansion or reduction of sensory stimuli socialize, channel and form religious identities, experiences and knowledge cultures and create social effervescence and emotional bonds. The innovative strength of this shift towards sensory perception is illustrated by *Sound and Communication. An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism* (Wilke/Moebus 2011; for summaries see Wilke 2014a; 2014b; 2008). This work (SaC), throws new light on textual studies and Hinduism. Notably the study demonstrates that texts have a material aspect – their sound – and exert their impact not only via content, but also to a great extent via their physical presence in sounds, vocalizations, and the human voice, their embodiment in rites, and their sensory-aesthetic and emotional appeal when being 'sounded out.' The composition, performance, and transmission of the vast lore of sacred literature in Hindu India is a particularly powerful example that texts are not only meaning bearers, but also sound events. Arguably, sometimes the sonic aspect is more important than the semantic meaning. Sound is seen as an independent medium of expression, communication, and efficacy.

*SaC* may be called an inductively developed and applied Aesthetics of Religion. Experiences in the field and text studies allowed us to access religion as theoretically required by the Aesthetics of Religion, as we became aware that sound and sonality, the spoken and the sounding word, enjoy exceptional importance in India since ancient times through the present day. Hinduism – in all the various traditions covered by this generic term – is a pronounced

performance culture, in which texts are recited, chanted, preached, danced, and staged. In the past, texts were never composed just for silent reading, but to be memorized, heard, and performed. “Reading” out (*pāṭha*) a religious text in Sanskrit means “reciting” it in a musically pleasing way and with the utmost care regarding correct pronunciation. Simply listening to the sound of a religious text is already held to be auspicious and purifying. In the scholarly traditions, as well as in everyday life, in written texts as well as texts in practice, we find a great focus on the sonic dimension. Acoustic piety like *mantra* repetition or devotional *bhajan* song belong to the most widespread religious practices, and also deities like the vedic goddess “Voice” (*vāc*) or the great god Śiva of classical Hinduism, who creates the world by the sounds and rhythms of his hand-drum, are an integral part of the sonic paradigm. It is noteworthy that this predominance of sensing the world through sounds is not confined to religious life only, but pervades even the most complex symbolic representations in arts and sciences linguistics, mathematics, poetry, and philosophy. In various ways sound and its subtle yet very physical quality have been a powerful medium of communication chosen to invoke ordered relationships, furnish ritual effectiveness and generate sources of power and value, and not least to construct “the sacred,” embody assumptions about people’s place in a larger order of things and bring about emotional absorption.

The Aesthetics of Religion’s approach opens up this sound-centered cultural matrix. Regarding methodology and method the situation of audible text leads to an expanded hermeneutics and a more sensuous and holistic approach than mere philology. In Appendix V, the 8 theses at the core of the approach used in SaC are presented. The strength of such an approach may be seen, among other things, in the result that the focus on sound uncovers a unifying bond among the otherwise highly pluralistic Hindu cultures, cutting across traditions, historical changes, and even media transformations. Hindu India makes us aware of the cultural contingency of the value of the written and the printed word and of the unbroken continuity of the oral and the written in sonic practice. This challenges well-established theories of orality and literacy, and gives the debates new fuel and material for amendment.

### **Suggested Readings:**

- Wilke, Annette. 2014a. Sonic Perception and Acoustic Communication in Hindu India. In: Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf (Hg.), *Exploring the Senses*. New Delhi: Routledge, 120-144.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2014b. Banaras - City of Sound: Reflections on the aesthetics of religion and spaces of cultural perception. In: Keul, Istvan (ed.), *Banaras Revisited: Scholarly Pilgrimage to the City of Light*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 95-112.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. Sound and Sense: Sonic perception in Hindu India. In: Lidia Guzy (ed.), *Religion and Music: Proceedings of the Interdisciplinary Workshop*. Berlin: Weissensee, 15-60.

### **Further Readings:**

Wilke, Annette. 2013. Sound. In: Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism. Vol. V. Ed. by Knut A. Jacobsen. Leiden: Brill. S. 134-149

Wilke, Annette and Oliver Moebus. 2011.: Sound and Communication: An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter. (1112 pages, with music CD)

### **Immersion, Transcription, Assemblage: On Sonic Impermanence and the Study of Religion**

Jason Bivins, North Carolina State University

One prevailing misconception about improvisation holds either that it involves the eschewal altogether of formal convention or that form posits determinatively the shape of improvised materials through theme and variation. The oft-misunderstood music called “jazz” calls this assumed dualism/contrast into question since part of its history involves meta-reflection on just what constitutes “jazz” and its cultural/terminological limits, an impulse that resonates suggestively with Religious Studies. This talk will explore the multiple interpretative and authorial challenges this condition poses, not only when thinking about the aesthetics particular to jazz and improvised music but how they can be heard in/as/around religions. Thinking about the resonance of these considerations to the study of religions more broadly, I explore the use of “jazz” to trouble the aesthetics and conventions of Religious Studies, and the use of academic aesthetics to problematize “jazz.” I will do so in part by tracing the shapes of my recent research into jazz and American religions, but also by delineating the links between my work on sound and my research in political religions. This entails first a broader claim about these key terms: improvisation is more than simply an index of expressive form; rather it might usefully be thought of as both substance and medium of experiences, identities, relations, and performances that lack stable referents, categories, or analytics. Improvisation, then, is both a family of practices and a conceptual vocabulary. Building on these claims, the talk then explores (and thinks about what it means to explore in this way) how the sensibilities particular to improvised musical practice shape (or perhaps even are coterminous with) a range of “religious” self-understandings and practices. In this I engage most directly the problem of locating language and category in a confluence of musical/cultural traditions often resistant to naming and categorization. Beyond this, I think through the use of “jazz” and “religion” as way of establishing — through alternate histories, institutions, and modes of embodiment — particular ways of understanding social and political location.

**Suggested Reading:**

Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, “When the Music's Happening and When It's Not: Evaluating Group Performances” Chapter 14, University of Chicago Press, 1994

Jason C. Bivins, *Spirits Rejoice! Jazz and American Religion*, First Meditations Chapter 1 and The Tao of Mad Phat: Jazz Meditation and Mysticism, Chapter 6, Oxford University Press, 2015. \*\*

Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music*, “First Truth, Second Hearing Audible Encounters in Antebellum Black and White” chapter 3, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

**Further reading:**

Paul Austerlitz, *Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race, and Humanity*, “Jazz Consciousness, U.S.A.,” Chapter One, Wesleyan University Press, 2005

John Corbett, *Extended Play: Sounding Off from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein* “Brothers from Another Planet: The Space Madness of Lee “Scratch” Perry, Sun Ra and George Clinton,” Duke University Press, 1994.

George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Culture*, “Popular Culture, This Ain't No Side Show.” Chapter 1, University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

3:25-4:35

## Religious Diversity, Collective Cultural Agency and the Question of Aesthetics

Birgit Meyer

Religious Diversity and the Question of Aesthetics

Josef Sorett

The Abiding Powers of AfroProtestantism

David Morgan, Duke University - Respondent, See Appendix IV, p 38

### Religious Diversity and the Question of Aesthetics

Birgit Meyer, Utrecht University

A number of years ago, I coined the notion “aesthetic formations” as a (sympathetic) critique of Benjamin Anderson’s notion of the “imagined community”. My point was to expand the latter notion so as to accommodate the role of the body, the senses and objects in inducing in people a sense of being part of a real, lived community. I used aesthetic in the broad Aristotelian sense of *aisthesis*, pointing at the sensory engagement with the world at large. The notion of aesthetic formation, I argued, is well suited to grasp the genesis of a divine presence for believers and hence the intensity of religious world-making. It ties in well with the aesthetic approach to religion developed around the same time by the *Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik* in Germany. Arguably, this approach is helpful to undertake a detailed, multi-level analysis of the politico-aesthetic regimes of specific religious groups and traditions, pointing at the ways in which imagined worlds become real and true via a strong recurrence to the body and the senses, on the one hand, and material culture, on the other. However, in the light of the co-existence of people in highly and ever more diverse societies, a pressing question arises: how to extend - and in so doing reconfigure - this approach to the analysis of settings of religious plurality? This is important in order to understand clashes, convergences and potentials in current settings of religious diversity. In this tentative, open and programmatic presentation, I will reflect about the conceptual need for, and explanatory potential of, an aesthetic approach to research co-existence in religiously diverse and at the same time secular settings. My central point is that a focus on various media of religion things, buildings, images, food, texts and the ways in which they relate to the body and the senses offers a productive starting point for exploring this question. Taking a number of cases especially in relation to images charged with being offensive or blasphemous as an entry point I seek to work towards a clearer understanding of the at times well articulated, at times

diffuse clashes between religious-sensorial regimes in settings characterized by (super)diversity. Which different aesthetic practices are at play on the part of different religious and secular protagonists? Where and how and over which issues do they clash, overlap and synergize? How is the other sensed and thought about? What is the larger political, legal, and cultural frame in which different senses and sensibilities meet? The overall aim is to contribute to developing an aesthetic approach to the study of tensions and conflicts stemming from coexistence across difference.

### **Recommended readings:**

- Meyer, B. 2009. [Introduction. From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms and Styles of Binding.](#) In: Birgit Meyer (ed.), *Aesthetic Formations. Media, Religion and the Senses in the Making of Communities*. Palgrave. 1-28.
- Meyer, B. 2015. How to Capture the Wow. R.R. Marett's Notion of Awe and the Study of Religion. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. (N.S.) 22, 7-26
- Reckwitz, A. 2012. Affective Spaces: A Praxeological Outlook. *Rethinking History* 16(2): 241-258.

### **Further readings:**

- Asad, T., Brown, W., Butler, J. and S. Mahmood. 2011. *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*. Fordham University Press.
- Rancière, J. 2006. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London: Continuum.
- Prohl, I. 2015. Aesthetics, in: Plate, S. Brent (ed): *Key Terms in Material Religion*. London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic. 9-15.

## The Abiding Powers of Afro-Protestantism

Josef Sorett, Columbia University

In the public imagination, whether as a source of pride or the site of shame, black churches have overwhelmingly been figured as political formations. As recent histories of the field have illuminated, instrumentalist interpretations and functionalist accounts have long held sway. Protests, political sermons, and preachers in black suits, à la Martin Luther King, Jr., are definitive images that stand in for the black church as whole. Yet these icons, and this popular preoccupation, obscure as much as, if not more than, they reveal about the actual workings of the institutional arrangements, cultural politics and doctrinal positions that comprise the constellation of congregations that have been mapped under the singular rubric of “The Black Church.”

The awareness of “The Black Church” as an intellectual problem has, in turn, created the conditions for a strident critique of the category. Moreover, it has inspired a robust effort to move the study of African American religion beyond the constraints (categorical, methodological, political and substantive) of Christianity. Most prominently, this has meant a turn away from theology, on one hand, and to non-Christian religions. In this paper, however, I turn to the language of “Afro-Protestantism” not to suggest an entirely different phenomenon that operates outside of (or mutually exclusive from) black churches. Instead, I mean to rethink African American religion in a different register that recognizes Protestantism’s powers have never been bound by doctrinal or institutional lines. Here, Afro-Protestantism is understood as an aesthetic formation that aims to resist the political over-determination associated with “The Black Church.”

Instead, I hope is to illustrate how, through the forces of history, the very cultures and structures of Afro-Protestantism were woven into the fabric of black subjectivity and social life. To be sure, black churches have made citizens (and raced, gendered and class subjects) out of their members even when they were not recognized as such under the law. Yet the history of Afro-Protestantism is also the story of a spiritual technology and a set of literary practices developed to name, make and imagine a modern black subjectivity and social life on a terrain more expansive than the law or nation-state. In this vein, I argue that black literary and cultural expression is also a peculiarly Afro-Protestant mode of inquiry, cultural inheritance, and religious repertoire. Afro-Protestantism, then, is both an ethical apparatus and an aesthetic performance. In short, Afro-Protestantism emerged and continues as a quintessentially American assemblage—simultaneously a political project and aesthetic vision.

Afro-Protestantism’s powers traverse the borders between church and spirit, religious and secular, culture and politics, emotion and reason, politics and aesthetics. Through an entangled set of cultural practices, intellectual exchanges, and historical circumstances, the

creative repertoires and organizing logics of Afro-Protestantism made modern black life in the likeness of a “the church.” It might even be plausible to say that the very formulation of “the race” that is, of black people is an Afro-Protestant one. More than a political apparatus, and despite the demands of race politics, Afro-Protestantism is, more appropriately, a set of entangled cultural and social performances. It is a sign and a symbol that simultaneously marks religious similarity and racial difference (and vice versa). Ultimately, Afro-Protestantism is perhaps best understood as an assemblage of affiliations, affirmations, and allegiances, as well as ambivalences, animosities, and aspirations. It involves ideas, institutions, and interests. It contains participatory patterns and performative practices, as well as individual predilections and collective preoccupations. Even in dissent, denial, and departure, “The Black Church” has proven unwilling to die quietly. This is because church is both a set of emotional dispositions and a form of literary reasoning. Afro-Protestantism is, in short, an aesthetic a modern racial and religious *raison d'être* at once. Afro-Protestantism, I argue, provides an affective mode of experience and expression, as well as an ordering logic a veritable structure for thinking and feeling black.

### **Suggested Readings:**

Bivins, Jason C., *Spirits Rejoice! Jazz and American Religion*, “First Meditations” Chapter 1 and “The Tao of Mad Phat: Jazz Meditation and Mysticism,” Chapter 6, Oxford University Press, 2015. \*\*

Sorett, Josef, *Spirit in the Dark A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics*, Prologue, Introduction and “The Church and the Negro Spirit,” Chapter 1. Oxford University Press, 2016

### **Further Readings:**

Fessenden, Tracy, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular and American Literature*, Princeton University Press, 2006

Jackson, Gregory S., *The Word and Its Witness: The Spiritualization of American Realism*, University of Chicago Press, 2009

Sorett, Josef, *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, 2016

Warren, Kenneth, *What Was African American Literature?* Harvard University Press, 2008

Winters, Joseph, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy and the Agony of Progress*, Duke University Press, 2016

BREAK 4:35-4:45

4:45-6:00

## Media and Transmission in the Aesthetics of Religion

Jolyon Baraka Thomas

Framing Religious Subjects in an Irreligious Place: *Procedural and Ethical Hurdles in Studying the Religion of Japanese Manga and Anime*

David Feltmate

Should I Laugh Now? The Aesthetics of Humor in Mass Media

S. Brent Plate, Hamilton College - Respondent, see Appendix IV, p 40

Framing Religious Subjects in an Irreligious Place: Procedural and Ethical Hurdles in Studying the Religion of Japanese Manga and Anime  
Jolyon Baraka Thomas, University of Pennsylvania

By most observable measures, contemporary Japan is one of the least religious societies in the world. Professions of religious belief are low, professions of religious affiliation lower still, and perceptions of religion as a force for public good generally abysmal since the infamous March 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system. Yet when observing Japanese *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animation), the striking preponderance of apparently religious themes suggests that the situation is somewhat more complicated than a simplistic narrative of religious decline would suggest. This complexity is compounded by ethnographic evidence suggesting that manga and anime are sites for the formation of religious ideas and identities, including ritual behavior such as *cosplay* (costume play, the act of dressing up as fictional characters), contents tourism (travel to geographic sites related to fictional settings, cheekily called “pilgrimage” in Japanese), and rare but noteworthy instances in which manga artists have founded religious movements or have otherwise served as quasi-religious leaders.

My work on the religion in and of manga and anime takes metaphorical inspiration from the mediums in question, adopting the language of “frame” and “framing” to describe ways that artists and viewers imaginatively juxtapose static panels and cels to create meaningful stories and worlds. In the case of comics, an imaginative process termed **closure** allows viewers to suppress the gaps between panels, seeing them not as a series of discrete, unrelated pictures but as a synchronous moment or a diachronic timeline. In the case of animation, a technique known as **compositing** allows directors to superimpose multiple transparent cels in a single frame, manipulating the depth and lateral position of the cels to create the illusion of

movement. Both techniques can be fruitfully used metaphorically to show how viewers who engage with manga and anime sometimes collapse the boundaries between fiction and reality, using comics and cartoons as models for living an examined life, traveling to locales that serve as settings for their favorite series, and importantly supporting local religious institutions while simultaneously changing the nature of longstanding ritual practices like shrine festivals. Such behaviors collectively serve as evidence of what I have termed “religious frames of mind” (Thomas, 2012).

Yet describing audience members’ engagement with illustrated media as “religious” risks framing them (that word again) for an act they do not think they have actually committed. My remarks will advance some tentative solutions to this methodological problem while at the same time showing how the experience of reading manga or viewing anime can be productively and persuasively described, in some cases, as indisputably religious.

### **Suggested Readings:**

Berndt, Jaqueline. “[Considering Manga Discourse](#),” in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Exploring Worlds of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Press, 2008): 295–334.

Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: Toward a Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 3–44.

Thomas, Jolyon Baraka. *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012): 1–34. (Alternatively, watch this 12-minute video: <https://youtu.be/6H0BfNAp8rA>).

### **Further Readings:**

Andrews, Dale K. “Genesis at the Shrine: The Votive Art of an Anime Pilgrimage,” *Mechademia* 9 (2014): 217–233.

Davidson, Markus Altena. “[Fiction-Based Religion: Conceptualizing a New Category against History-Based Religion and Fandom](#),” *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14, no. 4 (2013): 378–395.

Yamamura, Takayoshi. “[Contents Tourism and Local Community Response: Lucky Star and Collaborative Anime-Induced Tourism in Washimiya](#),” *Japan Forum* 27, no. 1 (2014): 59–81.

## Should I Laugh Now? The Aesthetics of Humor in Mass Media

David Feltmate, Auburn University at Montgomery

Finding ways to get people to laugh is a human universal, but what we laugh about, when we laugh about it, and how we use that laughter is fraught with navigating a variety of micro and macro social interactions and assumptions. Humorists will use the senses, especially sight and hearing, to appeal to audiences and get them to laugh. On the one hand, this is seemingly a very straightforward, social action, but humor also exists in a rarified social status—some things are funny, right? Certainly people who find things humorous discover something inherently funny in what they laugh at. Meanwhile, the world of professional humor creation is filled with justifications for why some people do not laugh, whether it is to argue that they “don’t get the joke” or “are easily offended” the implicit argument is that the humorist’s attempt unveils an intangible, inherently laughable insight that they bring into being through their efforts. The sociology of humor, however, argues differently and demonstrates that the aesthetics of humor are shaped by one’s social status and political ideologies. How can we use these polarizing perspectives when trying to understand religious humor—especially the kind of humor which is created for mass audiences? What is funny about religious humor? How do we dissect jokes so that we can gain a holistic understanding of how people encourage others to laugh? What are the analytic toolkits that we bring to the task of understanding religious jokes? What critical apparatus should we bring to the task of analyzing humor? How do we write about what we find when some of the jokes will strike our own aesthetic senses as hilarious or disgusting? This presentation will approach two different types of mass media animated cartoons and standup comedy to illustrate how I continue wrestling with these questions.

### Suggested Readings:

- Feltmate, David. 2013a. “‘It’s Funny Because It’s True?’: The Simpsons, Satire, and the Significance of Religious Humor in Popular Culture.” *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (1): 222-248.
- . 2013b. “The Sacred Comedy: The Problems and Possibilities of Peter Berger’s Theory of Humor.” *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*. 26 (4): 531-549.
- Kuipers, Giseline. 2008. “The Sociology of Humor” in *The Primer of Humor Research*, ed. Victor Raskin. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. (Available at academia.edu: [https://www.academia.edu/1166958/The\\_sociology\\_of\\_humor](https://www.academia.edu/1166958/The_sociology_of_humor)).
- Morreall, John. 2008. “Philosophy and Religion” in *The Primer of Humor Research*, ed. Victor Raskin. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Oring, Elliott. 2003. *Engaging Humor*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. (Chapter 4 on the humor of hate)

# Appendices

## Appendix I. About Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik

[Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik](#), a major working group founded in May 2007 in Munich, and affiliated with the German Association for the Study of Religion has been developing further the field of aesthetics of religion. Since 2007, the Aesthetics of Religion working group has been meeting regularly, and it has organized numerous panels at international conferences (2007 EASR meeting in Bremen, 2010 IAHR congress in Toronto, 2012 EASR meeting in Stockholm, 2013 EASR meeting in Liverpool, 2014 EASR meeting Groningen, 2015 IAHR congress in Erfurt). Group members have published work on some analytical key terms in the aesthetics of religion, namely on ‘museality’ (Kugele/Wilkens 2011) and ‘imagination’ (Traut/Wilke 2015). The international conference on the topic of the aesthetics of religion at the 2013 EASR meeting in Groningen brought together scholars from seven countries, and it will lead also to the publication on “Aesthetics as a Connective Concept for the Study of Religion.” In March 2015, Aesthetics of Religion was designated a Research Network and funded by the German Research Council to organize conferences and publications in the European context. The aim of holding a workshop under the canopy of SORAAAD is to present and discuss the concept of the Aesthetics of Religion to a wider international audience, and to collaborate with scholars in North America working on materiality, the senses and the body, and the visual and spatial study of religion.

For more information we encourage you to contact Jens Kreinath and Alexandra Greiser. See also: <http://www.religionsaesthetik.de/> and the Aesthetics of Religion Network - <http://aestor.net/>.

## Appendix II. Aesthetics and the Analytical Study of Religion: Background & Research Context

Jens Kreinath, Anthropology, Wichita State University

Aesthetics has long been an underrepresented field of research in the study of religion. Aesthetics of religion only emerged in the late 1980s out of the German tradition of *Religionswissenschaft*, the critical study of religion. First included as a programmatic entry to the *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (Handbook of Basic Concepts in the Study of Religion), a landmark in the critical and analytical study of religion, Hubert Cancik and Hubert Mohr outlined the aesthetics of religion as one of the new fields of research that includes the anthropology of the senses and the iconographic and iconological traditions in art history (1988). The objective was to establish aesthetics not only as a critical and analytical concept for the study of religion but also as a method of research by outlining key paradigms and laying the groundwork for future research in the historical, ethnographic and cognitive study of religion.

The focus on aesthetics as an analytical concept presupposes a fundamentally revised understanding of aesthetics, which is not confined to a philosophy of art or an elite ideology of beauty, but is rather conceptualized in holistic terms by referring to the Greek notion of *aesthesis* or sensory perception. In close collaboration with the development of semiotic proposals, the aesthetic approach to religion engages with a set of theories on human perception and builds on the results of different disciplines to offer a more systematic and inclusive framework for studying how religion is based on the sensory design of the human body, and how different religions cultivate and discipline the ways in which humans perceive, value, and make sense of the life-worlds that surround them.

### Foundational Readings for Aesthetics

Adorno, Theodor W. 2004. *Aesthetic Theory*. London/New York: Continuum.

Belting, Hans. 2003. *Art History after Modernism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 1978. *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, edited by Peter Demetz. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Cancik, Hubert, and Hubert Mohr. 1988. "Religionsästhetik." In *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, edited by Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow and Matthias Samuel Laubscher, 121–156. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.

- Gebauer, Gunter, and Christoph Wulf. 1995. *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gell, Alfred. 1998. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press.
- Hobart, Angela, and Bruce Kapferer. 2005. *Aesthetics in Performance: Formations of Symbolic Construction and Experience*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Iser, Wolfgang. 1993. *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Plate, S Brent. 2005. *Walter Benjamin, Religion, and Aesthetics: Rethinking Religion through the Arts*. New York: Routledge
- Taussig, Michael T. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York - London: Routledge.

## Appendix III. Aesthetics of Religion What it is, and What it is Good for

Alexandra Greiser, Trinity College Dublin

### Further Readings:

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- Traut, Lucia and Annette Wilke, eds. 2015. *Religion – Imagination – Ästhetik: Vorstellungs- und Sinneswelten in Religion und Kultur*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Scarlinzi, Alfonsina (ed.), *Aesthetics and the Embodied Mind. Beyond Art Theory and the Cartesian Mind-Body Dichotomy* (Dordrecht: Springer) 2015.

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## Appendix IV. Respondent Statements

Sally Promey - Yale University - MAVCOR

Respondent, *Method and Theory of the Aesthetics of Religion*, p 11

Sally M. Promey is Professor of American Studies and Professor of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and Professor of Religion and Visual Culture at the Institute of Sacred Music, at Yale University. She also holds Affiliate Faculty status in History of Art.

Professor Promey is founding Director of the Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion ([mavcor.yale.edu](http://mavcor.yale.edu)), generously supported by grants awarded in 2008 and 2016 from the Henry Luce Foundation as well as by the ISM and Yale University. The MAVCOR website is a born-digital scholarly journal and born-digital e-gallery with a substantial and growing material objects archive. Emily Floyd (Tulane University) is editor and curator of the website. MAVCOR's second project cycle, a five-year international scholarly collaboration titled "Material Economies of Religion in the Americas: Arts, Objects, Spaces, Mediations," numbers 40+ Fellows at all academic ranks and has its first Fellows Seminar in June 2017. Sarah Rivett, Princeton University, will co-direct this project cycle.

On Yale's campus, Promey convenes the interdisciplinary Sensory Cultures of Religion Research Group, a monthly gathering of graduate students and faculty. Prior to arriving in New Haven in 2007, she was chair and professor in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Maryland, where she taught for fifteen years.

Promey's scholarship explores relations among visual, material, sensory cultures and religions in the United States from the colonial period through the present. Current book projects include volumes titled "Religion in Plain View: The Public Aesthetics of American Belief" and "Written on the Heart: Christian Sensory Cultures in the United States." A third project in the making demonstrates the co-constitution of American artistic and religious modernities. Recently, Promey was contributing author to and editor of *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (Yale University Press, 2014). This multi-author collaborative volume was one outcome of MAVCOR's first project cycle. She is also coeditor, with Leigh E. Schmidt, of *American Religious Liberalism* (Indiana University Press, 2012). Among earlier publications, *Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent's "Triumph of Religion" at the Boston Public Library* received the American Academy of Religion Award for Excellence in the historical study of religion, and *Spiritual Spectacles: Vision and Image in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Shakerism* was awarded the Charles C. Eldredge Prize for distinguished scholarship in American art. Recent articles and book chapters include essays titled "Material Establishment and Public Display"; "Hearts and Stones: Material Transformation and the Stuff of American

Christianities”; “Sensory Cultures: Material and Visual Religion Reconsidered” (coauthored with Shira Brisman); “Mirror Images: Framing the Self in Early New England Material Piety”; and “Taste Cultures and the Visual Practice of Liberal Protestantism, 1940–1965.”

Professor Promey is the recipient of numerous grants and fellowships including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a residential fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, two Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellowships (1993 and 2003) at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, and a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for University Teachers. In 2001 she received the Regent’s Faculty Award for Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity from the University System of Maryland, and in 2002 the Kirwan Faculty Research and Scholarship Prize, University of Maryland. She was codirector (with David Morgan, Duke University) of a multiyear interdisciplinary collaborative project, “The Visual Culture of American Religions,” funded by the Henry Luce Foundation and the Lilly Endowment Inc. A book of the same title, coedited by Professors Promey and Morgan, appeared in 2001 from University of California Press. In 2004 she was senior historian in residence for the Terra Summer Residency Program in Giverny, France. She serves on the editorial boards of *Material Religion* and *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture* and is editorial adviser to *American Art*. She is a member of the Advisory Board for De Gruyter’s new series of publications called “Introductions to Digital Humanities: Religion.”

### **Recommended Reading**

Promey, Sally M. "Material Establishment and Public Display" Mediation. In *Conversations: An Online Journal of the Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion* (2016). <http://mavcor.yale.edu/conversations/mediations/material-establishment-and-public-display>

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David Morgan - Duke University

Respondent, Religious Diversity, Collective Cultural Agency and the Question of Aesthetics, p 24

David Morgan is Professor of Religious Studies and chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University with an additional appointment in the Department of Art, Art History, and Visual Studies at Duke. Morgan's doctoral work at the University of Chicago was in modern European art history, culminating in a dissertation on the history of German art theory and aesthetics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He published revised portions of the dissertation in *Journal of the History of Ideas, Eighteenth-Century Studies*, and the *European Romantic Review*.

After graduating, Morgan became interested in American religious history and popular imagery, resulting in a series of books including *Visual Piety* (1998), *Protestants and Pictures* (1999), and *The Lure of Images* (2007). His work sought to balance the study of production with reception and to study popular imagery and visual practice as lived religion. He was also concerned to explore Protestant visual culture as something widely overlooked. Mass-produced imagery became a primary focus in order to understand better how images circulated in modern social life. In *Visual Piety* he sought to move beyond the aesthetics of disinterestedness by examining the deeply interested way in which images operate in popular piety. He began exploring what a popular aesthetics of images might look like. At the same time, he became active in the study of religion and media, which suited his focus on mass-produced imagery. This area of activity resulted in his edited volume, *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture*, which appeared in 2008.

In work that followed the 1990s, Morgan developed great interest in working out a definition of visual culture that would inform historical practice. *The Sacred Gaze* (2005) sought to lay out the elementary features for scholars of religion interested in making images primary evidence in their work. This continued and came to fruition in *The Embodied Eye* (2012), which set out to theorize seeing as grounded in the body, pressing the study of visual culture toward the study of embodiment, the senses, and emotions. This book challenged Sartre's notion of "le regard" understood as a single, commanding gaze, which has unfortunately been used to flatten the study of visuality and denigrate vision. Instead of a single imperial gaze, Morgan identified no fewer than eight discrete visual fields or gazes that structure not only human vision, but the relationship of seeing to the other senses, social patterns, and the sacred.

Morgan's most recent book, *The Forge of Vision: A Visual History of Modern Christianity*, published in 2015, originated as the 2012 Cadbury Lectures at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. In this book he offers a visually-driven history of Catholicism and Protestantism from 1600 to the present. His current project is a book tentatively titled *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment*. This project seeks to define enchantment as a

universal feature of human thought and feeling, extending throughout religious experience and far beyond. The aim is to consider what images do to facilitate experiences of enchantment.

Morgan is a founder and co-editor of the journal *Material Religion*, which is now in its eleventh year of publication. The journal has become a leading venue for historical, anthropological, and theoretical work on artifacts, embodiment, and the senses in religions around the world and throughout history. It has often included material of direct relevance to the aesthetics of religion (see for instance vol. 6, no. 2, July 2010, pp. 237-47, for a forum on “Religious Aesthetics in the German-Speaking World,” organized by Inken Prohl). The journal identifies itself with the major turn in aesthetics toward the study of sensation and perception as fundamental features in the study of materiality.

S. Brent Rodriguez Plate - Hamilton College

Respondent, *Media and Transmission in the Aesthetics of Religion*, p 28

A lifelong fan of museums and cinema, Plate got interested in aesthetics as a mode of religious analysis during his graduate studies: from a 1995 masters thesis at the University of Glasgow that re-viewed modern art (and the modern self) via Søren Kierkegaard's aesthetics and Julia Kristeva's semiotic/symbolic categories, to a 1999 PhD dissertation on contemporary video artist Gary Hill's intertwining of words, images, and bodies. Along the way, Walter Benjamin became an important interlocutor, and Plate's 2004 book *Walter Benjamin, Religion, and Aesthetics* sought, as the subtitle suggests, to "rethink religion through the arts."

At the heart of these pursuits was a comment by Terry Eagleton in *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990) that recounted Baumgarten's 18th century development of aesthetics, particularly with regard his bifurcation of *aesthetica naturalis* and *aesthetica artificialis*. Eagleton claimed that aesthetics was born as a discourse of the body, but that enterprise was subsumed into discourse on taste and beauty. Plate's work has continued to toggle between the "natural" and the "artificial" aesthetics, seeing aesthetics as a dialectical work-in-progress.

After graduate school, and motivated by David Morgan's groundbreaking work (esp. 1999) Plate began using the language of "visual culture" for his research, and his 2002 volume *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture* sought to ground religious visual culture in an embodied aesthetics. Beginning with visual perception, religious visual culture can be analyzed beginning with the perceptual apparatus of the body, moving outwardly to encompass external images, their relation to words, space, and memory, all set within particular socio-cultural dynamics. Plate has used similar categories to approach cinema, sacred texts, and blasphemous art in a series of publications in the last ten years.

At the same time, opening up visual culture to aesthetics and the body means that cross-sensory analysis is also important. Plate began research on what he thought would become "a religious history of the senses," but as he recounts, "the objects took over." The result is the 2014 book, *A History of Religion in 5½ Objects*, which explores the objects that are sensed, as much as the senses. In recent studies he has taken his explorations in art history and philosophy, supplementing them with cultural anthropology and cognitive science.

Plate is a writer, public speaker, and part-time professor. He is co-founder and managing editor of *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief*, president of CrossCurrents/Association of Religion and Intellectual Life, and serves on several advisory boards. His edited and authored works continually come back to relations between bodies and objects, aesthetics and ethics. Recent publications include the edited *Key Terms in Material*

Religion. Forthcoming next year is his co-edited *Religion in Museums* (Bloomsbury), and a revised and greatly expanded version of *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World* (Columbia UP). He currently lives and writes in Madrid, Spain and holds a visiting position at Hamilton College in New York. [www.sbrentplate.net](http://www.sbrentplate.net). Twitter: [@splate1](https://twitter.com/splate1)

### **Recommended Readings:**

Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Meyer, Birgit. 2009. "[From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms and Styles of Binding.](#)" In *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion and the Senses in the Making of Communities*, edited by Birgit Meyer, 1-28. New York: Palgrave.

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## Appendix V. - The Eight Theses from Sound and Communication

Annette Wilke, Westphalian Wilhelms University Muenster

The research design demonstrated in *Sound and Communication: An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism*, can be summarized in eight theses (Wilke 2014b, 110-111; see also 2014a, 121):

1. The fundamental thesis is that texts in Sanskrit Hinduism – whether they occur in everyday religious culture or in the traditions of scholars – are always texts to be heard, and this aspect should be incorporated into hermeneutics itself – the hermeneutics of texts and the hermeneutics of culture.
2. As the focus in India remained on the spoken and sounding word, even after the introduction of writing, a purely philological approach relating only to semantics misses important information. In India one can only speak of texts at all in a sense that includes audible words. This demands to be aware that the medium (voice and sound) belongs to the message and may even add extra meaning it.
3. This means there is need of an expanded method for text interpretation by including the sensory aesthetic dimensions – such as sound patterns and language rhythmicity, poetic diction, and the intonations, pitches and colors of the voice. By including the self-communicating message of the medium text (like rhymes) at the same time its poetic function and performativity is included.
4. The aesthetic approach automatically implies an orientation on actual practice, i.e. the ritual, meditative or musical performance, the performance contexts, the expected results, and the agents – including possible social restrictions or expansions to non-human agents. Texts are often regarded as icons of the divine, and sounds, particularly *mantra* sounds, as personalities and agents in their own right.
5. Definitely, also content and processes of semiosis must be considered: the cultural imaginations, and collective and subjective interpretations and meanings ascribed to language, sound and voice, their cosmological framing and religious coding. There is

need to contextualize the role of language and sound in the cultural system of symbols and the multidimensional constitution of meaning.

6. A very important axiom of the aesthetic approach is that language is effective in both its terminological, discursive and logical aspect and its sensory, emotive aspect. The main function of language is the creation of sense and this takes place on a very great number of levels, both semantic and non-semantic. In fact, non-semantic sounds are also media of utmost importance of communication in India. In the religious field they are often considered particularly sacred. This pertains to the Veda as an oral canon, the tantric mantras, the role of music in devotional traditions, and cosmologies which view sound as the very basis of the universe.
7. Like in the case of text and language, we have to expand our understanding of communication. Anyone speaking about communication – at least in today’s western cultural area – will not necessarily think of sound as an independent medium of expression and communication, and anyone studying texts is interested in the content and hardly aware that texts also always have a material quality – their sound – and can be perceived in a sensuous and emotional way. But this is precisely what is different in Hindu India, because the life world is full of sounds and acoustic piety a major way to relate to the divine.
8. The inclusion of the emic perspective is fundamental. Sound and music have not only been a very effective means of tuning into the deity and melt with the divine, but also a means to structure and organise abstract ideas in the traditional sciences and train formalistic thinking. The styles of doing science are also of great interest for an aesthetics’ approach.

### **Full Citation**

Wilke, Annette and Oliver Moebus. 2011.: *Sound and Communication: An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism*. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter. (1112 pages, with music CD)