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Senses, Religion, and Religious Encounter

Literature Review and Research Perspectives

Alexandra Cuffel
Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany

Licia Di Giacinto
Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany

Volkhard Krech
Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany

ABSTRACT An overview of the senses in the study of religion and religious encounter is provided, along with reflections on the ways in which various specific senses were imagined to serve as modes of communication between human beings and between humans and transcendent beings. How the individual case studies collected in this volume inform such a project and further research on religion, the senses, and the role of the senses in religious encounter is a core concern of this introductory essay. We end by suggesting new directions for additional research for an integrated and systematic examination of how senses shape and are used in human encounters with the transcendent and the (human) religious Other.

KEYWORDS senses, taste, olfaction, smell, touch, visual, hearing, grammar, language

Introduction

In his *Scented Ape*, David Stoddart has argued for an integrative approach to the study of smell, combing biology and anthropology, as he explored the functions of smell, ranging from practical communication regarding sexual readiness to the use of perfume to allure and incense to express worship of the divine. As such, his study shows that smell is an element in most forms of human and non-human interaction (Stoddart 1990). It is this communicative function, not merely of smell but of most of the senses, on which we intend to focus in this volume. Each sense on the one hand roots humans in their corporeal existence, while on the other provides the means, both literally and also within the symbolic imagination, of creating [1]

bonds and boundaries between other humans on a variety of social, political, personal, and religious levels. They also serve to link and demarcate between the human and the spiritual realm. In various religious systems, the latter has often been conceived as being outside the physical realm, or of being able to don or shed physicality at will, very often in order to interact/communicate sensorially with humans. Human rituals prompt sensorial experiences in order to shape these interactions, even as they become the foundation of symbolic communication within the religious imagination.

[2] There has been an increasing amount of scholarship on 'religion and the senses' during—at least—the last 20 years. Respective research is related to the body,[1] religion and aesthetics (German: *Religionsästhetik*[2]), and 'material religion.'[3] It is impossible to give a representative overview on the topic. With this introduction to the special issue of *Entangled Religions*, we, however, intend to stress some aspects with reference to the connection between senses and religion in general (1) as well as to religious encounter in particular (2), and raise some research questions (3) before introducing the contributions (4). By reviewing relevant literature, we tried to consider a broader spectrum of research on various religious traditions in different times and regions—however, without claiming representativeness.

Religion and the Senses

[3] When comparing religions diachronically and synchronically, it becomes obvious that taxonomies of the senses greatly differ in the history of religions.[4] While some scholars address the senses as a broad category for the analysis of religious experiences and practices (Promey 2014; Fishman 2014; Hallett 2013; Boer and Göttler 2013; Keane 2008; Barna 2007; Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012; Fraigneau-Julien 1985), others have chosen to focus on one sense in particular within a specific religio-cultural sphere, or a specific aspect of religious experience. *Smell*, for instance, is a prominent topic within the research on religion and the senses (Bradley 2015; Detienne 1972; Thurlkill 2016; McHugh 2015, 2012; Green 2011; Harvey 2006, 2001; Milburn 2016). According to Alfred Gell, smelling "is the nearest an objective reality can go towards becoming a concept without leaving the realm of the sensible altogether" (Gell 1977, 29). The elementary character has "led to the association of fragrant smells and perfumes not only with magic and dreaming, but also with transcendence and with rituals aimed at communicating with the divine" (Hamilakis 2013, 77). In the history of religions, smell is often associated with incense, which becomes a mediator between sensual perception and the transcendent realm (Nielsen 1986; Kenna 2005; Detienne 1972, xii, xviii–xxxi, 30–34, 38–40; Green 2011, 73–78, 117; Harvey 2006, 76–90, 92–95). The contribution to this

1 See the articles related to religion in Turner (2012) and the overview by Karstein and Burchardt (2017).

2 See the 'classical' article by Cancik and Mohr (1988); more recently Münster (2001).

3 See the programmatic articles by Meyer et al. (2010) as well as Meyer and Houtman (2012). Also see Plate (2014).

4 E.g., "discussions of the Yogācāra often make reference to its eightfold model of consciousness, which adds the store consciousness (*ālayavijñamna*) and the afflicted mind (*kliṣṭa-manas*) to the standard six consciousnesses of Buddhism (viz., the visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental)" (D'Amato 2003, 191). For the different ways of conceptualizing the senses in Early China, see Geaney (2002, 16–49). See also Slingerland's arguments against the holistic interpretation of sensory experience in the early Chinese context (Slingerland 2018, 36–43). Modern neuroscience also argues against the restriction to the Aristotelian concept of five senses (taste, sight, touch, smell, and sounding); see Jarrett (2015, 235). For an attempt to create a hierarchical taxonomy of senses, with an emphasis on smell, within the Indian context, see McHugh (2007).

volume by Paolo Santangelo on olfaction in Chinese literature demonstrates that within the Chinese context, incense was not only a means to communicate with deities but other spirits as well. Furthermore, incense served to convey emotion, such as satisfaction, veneration, or mourning/sadness, either to the other-worldly being to whom it was an offering, or to other humans, or both. Nor was incense the only way in which scent was imagined to converse between realms. Santangelo shows that in the Chinese novels he examined, as in many cultures, bad smell serves as a warning of evil or danger, just as pleasant smell is a marker of goodness/holiness (Cuffel 2007, 63–67, 128–37, 143–45; Harvey 2006; Boyarin 1992). Yet scent could convey more complex messages, such as alerting the living to a wrongful death, or, faced with the inability to speak, become the means of communication by ghosts.

Tasting is another sense that strictly embodies religious meaning (Detienne 1972; Hecker 2005; Fulton 2006b; Brubaker and Linardou 2007; Bynum 1987; Sterckx 2005a, 2011; Freeman 2015; Rubel 2015). Eating and drinking play an important role in the history of religions (Flood 2014). This covers ritual meals and banquets on certain occasions, e.g., the death of a person (Smith 2003; van Gelder 2000; Kleeman 2005; Draycott and Stamatopoulou 2016). The Christian Eucharist is a prominent example for the ritual development of theophagy, which is one of the most striking forms of religious embodiment (Smith 1922; Nieber 2017). Often however, discussions of the role of food and eating focus on with whom one eats and the ritual status of what is eaten, rather than on the taste of the food (Freidenreich 2011). James Watts, in his contribution to this volume, points out that analyzing the taste of food in the context of ritualized eating is rare. Nevertheless, while modern Christians may not discuss the 'bouquet' of the Eucharist wine, in earlier expressions of Christianity taste was very much part of the semiotics of religious sensorial experience. In the Middle Ages, the *taste* of the Eucharist—whether it tasted of flesh and blood or not, or of honeyed bread, or of a nauseating substance—served as evidence of the reality (or lack thereof) of the divine presence within the bread and wine, and by extension, of the incarnation itself (Cuffel 2007, 113–14, 150; Rubin 1991, 115, 118–19; Bynum 1987, 117–18, 153–54). The changing flavor of the Eucharist could likewise signal a moral failing on the part of the one eating it, prompting repentance (Rubin 1991, 115). The idea that one could 'eat God' and thereby taste divinity was satirized by Muslims, although at the same time, converts were asked if they had "tasted the sweetness of Islam" (van Gelder 2000, 82–83). Thus, not merely the act of eating but the *flavor* becomes a means of communicating religious truths, at least within medieval Christianity and its opponents. Similarly, Santangelo, in his contribution, pairs the moral communication of smell with that of taste, showing how pleasant taste was likewise attached to lovely fragrance as a moral marker in Chinese novels. In early Chinese philosophical writings, taste reflected spiritual and physiological transformation, and the ability to appreciate delicious food was an indication of good morals (Sterckx 2005a). Turning to this issue in Judaism, Joel Hecker, while refuting Gershom Scholem's contention that Psalms 34:9 ("Taste and see that the Lord is good") was a metaphor for mystical experience within Judaism, argued that: "…to be able to *taste* that the Lord is good is to experience bodily the nature of Divinity […]. It touches on the bodily transformation of the individual, representing him as a living expression of the Torah, having literally ingested the Torah and feeling fully satiated as a result" (Hecker 2005, 57). Similarly, Bynum has shown that tasting and eating was associated with knowledge of the divine. In tasting, a believer could distinguish the 'flavor' and nature of the trinity, or taste Jesus' suffering. Within such an understanding of eating, by ingesting the Eucharist, a Christian was literally being filled with God—among medieval Christians (Bynum 1987, 151–

[4]

60). Thus, while eating may be an act of incorporation, and transformation, the flavor itself is what communicates the nature of this transformation and contact between the spiritual and human realm.

[5] Not only humans, but goddesses and gods also need food and therefore have to be fed, for instance, through sacrifices and libations (Herrmann 1960; Graf 1980). In a number of cultures, however, it is not the physical food or its taste that matters, but rather its fragrance (Sterckx 2011, 85; Detienne 1972, 38–40). Objects and practices of tasting include alcoholic liquids and (ritual) intoxication through drugs (Gladigow 1993; Leuba 1917). Being 'high' or drunken (taken literally or metaphorically) is often a medium of individual ecstasy as well as of—what Émile Durkheims calls—"collective effervescence" (Shilling and Mellor 2011, 2011) and might be charged with religious meaning. Religious experience is also linked to the—partial or total, ritual or ascetic—renunciation of eating and drinking; fasting (Möller 2005) and vegetarianism (Broy 2016) are examples.[5] Thus, the choice of what a devotee ate was part of what prepared the body for approaching the divine, even as it also signaled to other people (and the gods) an individual's level of devotion.

[6] Next to smelling and tasting, *touching* also tightly connects religious meaning with sensual perception. It is not by accident that religious imagination needs embodiment through touching (Brown 2009; Witte 2015). This activity is a mutual one. Human beings can come into contact with the transcendent by touching statues, books, or relics (Vikan 1987, 5; Boustan 2015, 77; Most 2005).[6] However, transcendent beings or forces are also depicted as touching humans, sometimes mediated through laying-on-of hands by a religious expert, or other conduits (Witte 2011).[7] In some cases, it is not clear who or what initiates the touching, but proximity or direct physical contact with a holy or evil person, living or dead, or an object or space associated with them, may convey blessing (*baraka,* within the Judeo-Muslim tradition), torment within the grave, or death, in the case of unfriendly spirits (Meri 1999; Horowitz 1999; Cuffel 2008).[8] "[T]o talk of 'being touched' can extend the vagaries of touch even wider into the emotional, the intangible and the metaphoric" (MacKian 2012, 253). Within thermoception, which is related to touching, thermo-receptors detect both hot and cold, among other things letting bodies adjust to temperature change in their environment. In the history of religions, hell and fire, for instance, are related to thermoception (Bernstein 1993). Kissing might be considered as a special form of touching and is often parts of religious rituals—e. g., as the *osculum pacis* (kiss of peace) in Christian liturgies (Danesi 2013, 3).

[7] Within this volume, the contributions of James Watts and Ophira Gamliel explore touch in considerable detail, both as part of the language of ritual. Watts argues that the modern production of bibles with leather or leather-like covers is designed to make handling the bible a sensual, intimate experience. That said, he underscores the ways in which ritualized touching

5 For an overview, see Davidson (2003). For dietary regimes in medieval Daoist narratives, see Campany (2005).

6 "[T]the Early Byzantine pilgrim went to *touch,* to venerate" (Vikan 1987, 5). Besides the veneration of icons, relics have been and still are objects of touching veneration. In the Mediterranean world in Late Antiquity, "forms of embodied action—bowing, touching, embracing, and kissing—were not reserved for icons nor did they develop only with the full flourishing of the cult of icons in the byzantine world, but were already a fully articulated aspect of the veneration of relics from the late fourth to early seventh centuries" (Boustan 2015, 77). The motif of 'Doubting Thomas' is prominent in Christian art (see Most 2005).

7 For psychological explanations, see Hohwy and Paton (2010).

8 See also Santangelo in this volume. Within the Chinese novels that he analyzes, being touched by a ghost does not necessarily cause death, but is nevertheless harmful.

often avoids the actual sensation of touching, by touching a holy book through the medium of another physical object, rather than with human flesh. The avoidance of direct contact communicates respect, presumably to both the other human participants and to the divine, whereas participants also hope for blessing to be granted them through indirect touch. Tibetan rituals may not eschew direct contact with the ritually significant book or written word; however, Watts notes that again the effect rather than the sensation of contact is emphasized. In both cases, contact and identification with a particular set of scriptures and interaction with the physical form(s) of those scriptures signals the religious identity of the one doing the touching. As such, books as objects communicate religious meaning through ritual, independent of their written message. Gamliel elaborates on the linguistic character of ritual and, within that framework, touching. She argues that ritual, as a language, conveys meaning in two ways: 1) lexical-semantically and 2) functional-syntactically. When believers touch objects or a doorway in an Indian temple, synagogue, or mosque as a marker that the ritual is completed, the touching constitutes a functional-syntatic usage of touch, namely to indicate the completion of the ritual. A lexical-semantic form of touching would be in rituals where touching conveys blessing or healing, much like the *baraka* in Jewish and Muslim thought and ritual, discussed above. In both of these contributions, physical sensation, in this case touch, in ritualized context, is a language with its own grammar. It serves to communicate with other members of the religious community and between the spiritual and physical world.

[8] *Feeling* as mental associations and reactions to emotions is divided into many variations—depending on different cultural patterns in general and religious configurations in particular. It is evoked by different senses. The most prominent feelings include love and hate (Santangelo and Guida 2006). In the history of religions, feelings oscillate between ecstasy and serenity (Eskildsen 2015). Human feelings can be evoked and articulated through religious imagination and practice, but goddesses and gods have feelings, too; they can, for instance, be incensed (Asan 2014). Nociception, i.e., the sense that allows feeling pain, evokes a strong feeling. Religions try to overcome pain and suffering (Koslowski 2001) and evoke it at the same time. In the history of religions, pain is relevant, e.g., in the shape of martyrdom (Afsaruddin 2013; Cormack 2002), asceticism (Kroll and Bachrach 2005), and self-flagellation (Bräunlein 2010), but also as part of public events (Merback 1999). Like intoxication, pain can evoke extreme forms of religious experience (Fischer and Xygalatas 2014).

[9] Most of the contributions to this volume deal with feeling, both in the sense of physical sensation and of emotion, to one degree or another. In her article in this volume, Linda Zampol d'Ortia is primarily concerned with clothing as a visual signifier; however, she also demonstrates that the texture of clothing—silk vs. rough cloth appropriate for an ascetic—and the beauty or plainness of Jesuits' attire evoke a variety of emotions both within the Christian community, to which the Jesuits belong, and among the Japanese, whom the Jesuits are attempting to missionize. Santangelo provides evidence that in the Chinese literary tradition, often there is no distinction between physical feeling and mental feelings, i.e. emotions. Likewise, in her contribution to this volume, Ines Weinrich details the ways in which music in the medieval Islamic tradition was explicitly designed to affect human emotions, mental states, and physical well-being, all of which were understood to be inextricably linked within the musical-medical understandings of the Islamicate world.[9] She shows that these linkages were essential in various forms of religious communication, such as preaching, calling to prayer, the recitation of holy material, and singing or playing instruments. Watts mirrors her obser-

9 She points out that these understandings were, at least in part, drawn from Greek theories of music.

vations regarding the link between sound and feeling/emotion in a more general way within Islam, and points to similar phenomena within Christianity.

[10] The *sense of balance*, scientifically known as the vestibular sense or equilibrioception, is involved during standing, moving, or lying. Certain postures—such as genuflection prescribed at various points of the Roman Rite liturgy—are easily charged with religious meaning. In the history of religions, examples for the metaphorical use of the sense of balance being at work while moving or in certain postures are דרך (derekh; literally: way) and can be found in the Hebrew Bible (Zehnder 1999). In the Daoist classic *Laozi* 老子 (or *Daodejing* 道德經, the *Classic of the Way and Virtue*), the imagery of the Way (*dao* 道) is linked to the root metaphor of water and was rendered by means of the "wheel" simile ("thirty spokes are united in one hub. It is in its [space of] emptiness, where the usefulness of the cart is.") that conflated the ideas of motion and stillness (Allan 1997, 66–70; Moeller 2011, 27–36).[10] The conflation of motion and stillness was, on the one hand, the primary characterization of the cosmic 'matrix' called *dao* (the Way) and, on the other, exemplified the soteriological path of early (and late) Daoists: to be clear and quiet amidst the turmoil of changes and transformations. More specifically, clarity and stillness (*qingjing* 清靜) were to be achieved through specific meditative practices that were often described by means of bodily language.[11] For instance, one had to "align" (*zheng* 正) the body in order to acquire (*de* 得) the Way, to grasp, embrace, and hold the One (Roth 1999, 114–18, 148–50). Furthermore, religion is related to *seeing* (Morgan 2012, 2005; Classen 1998; Williams 2015). The language of sight—and its auditory counterpart (hearing)—is in many ways a primary code of religious communication. Besides being probably one of the most 'intellectual' linguistic images—not only in the Platonic and Neo-Platonic tradition (Reding 2004, 143–56)—sight is basically a metaphor for truth, or the grasping of ultimate reality, with the lack of light (or blindness or obscurity) working as metaphors for misconceiving or intellectual/religious failure to understand.[12] Hence, ordinary seeing and religious visualizing/realization turn into opposites.[13] Unsurprisingly, the sight metaphor seems to be quite ubiquitous in the layers of religious semantics. Religious 'seeing' may refer to the soteriological target of the believer (nirvana or awakening); it may be related to the inner gaze, dream, and vision.[14] Dreams and visions, however, not only pertain to soteriology. They might become media of divination or revelation (McNamara 2016).

[11] The semantic field of sight greatly affects the ways in which religions are rooted in the material world, since religion is—to a great extent—'visible religion.' Since the transcendent cannot be seen, it has to be made visible through objects (Meyer 2015). Objects of religiously attributed seeing include statues, reliefs, images, relics, frescos, buildings, symbols (like the Christian cross, the Jewish menorah, or the Muslim half-moon), clothes, and—in modern

10 On the relevance of the semantic field of water in the early Daoist conception of the Way, see Allan (1997, 66–70). On the wheel simile, see Moeller (Moeller 2011, 27–36).

11 For the ideal of Clarity and Stillness, see the entry by Miura Kunio in Pregadio (2008, 799–800).

12 As Blumenberg noticed, the dichotomy light/obscurity is "unparalleled. From its beginnings, the history of metaphysics has drawn from these characteristics to adequately reference its ultimately intanglible issues" (translated by authors; German original: "…unvergleichlich. Von ihren Anfängen an hat die Geschichte der Metaphysik sich dieser Eigenschaften bedient, um für ihre letzten, gegenständlich nicht mehr faßbaren Sachverhalte eine angemessene Verweisung zu geben"), Blumenberg ((1957), p. 432); see also Bultmann (1948); Colpe (1965); Chidester (1992).

13 "When a man rightly sees, he sees no death, no sickness or distress. When a man rightly sees, he sees all, he wins all, completely" (Olivelle 1998, 273).

14 "*Uidere* [seeing] with God as its object is clearly a metaphor of cognition" (Finney 1994, 279). Regarding Buddhism, see McMahan (2002). With regard to China, see Santangelo (1998) for the role of dream in late imperial literature and Lin (1995) for a catalogue of dream visions in Daoism.

times—photos, videos, and films (Morgan 2005). Some of these objects can 'look back' and transform the beholder (Gifford 2011). Sometimes, statues of gods and goddesses are considered to have emotions and agency of their own (Chaniotis 2017; Bremmer 2013). For instance, Orthodox "icons and their use belong to a visual paradigm of 'seeing into being,' where what one puts before one's eyes has profound effects on the kind of person one becomes and the reality one lives in" (Luehrmann 2016, 238). And according to the Hindu concept of *dársan* (seeing), "[t]he central act of Hindu worship, from the point of view of the lay person, is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one's own eyes, to see and be seen by the deity" (Eck 1998, 4).

[12] In the history of religions, the identification of the object with the transcendent, i.e. the "conflation of sign and signified," (Freedberg 1989, 32) and concepts of representation oscillate (Graf 1997, 947).[15] There are at least aspects of representation in reflected concepts of iconic veneration. A good example is the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*, the fleshy protuberance on the top of the Buddha's head in Buddhist iconography.

> [13] We are told that this *uṣṇīṣa* remains invisible because no one can look down on the Buddha. On the one hand, it is but one of the thirty-two signs that configure the Buddha's body, obfuscating it while revealing it. On the other hand, it is a paradoxical, formless sign that implies its own negation. […] The *uṣṇīṣa* is the unseen top of the Buddha icon, symbolizing its *nirguṇa*, or unqualified aspect, the paradoxical quality of the supramundane or transcendent Buddha (Faure 1998, 789).

[14] Yet there is another aspect to the visual, besides the embodiment, or at minimum, the evocation of the unseen and transcendent, through which the worshipper may contemplate and even be seen by holy beings. Visual stimuli and symbols also serve to communicate concepts, status, and aspirations within a religious community and to those outside of it. The visual quality of objects imbued with religious meanings are also frequently designed to provoke emotional reactions based on the aesthetic values of the culture from which they come. Watts, in his article for this volume, calls attention to the creation of visually beautiful books in order to convey messages of political and religious status, all without requiring the viewer to read the book at all; while not negating their written meaning, much of their signifying power lies in their aesthetic impact as a visual object. Such objects obtain other, often non-religious meanings as displays within museums.[16]

[15] Not only books, images or sculptures serve to communicate visual messages. In her essay, Linda Zampol d'Ortia analyzes in detail the visual meanings of clothing, in terms of color, texture, and form within both early modern Catholic and Japanese culture. Parallel to the Watts and Gamliel's assertion that ritual is a kind of language, Zampol d'Ortia carefully chronicles the ways in which Jesuits had to learn and accommodate the Japanese 'language' of clothing in order to communicate effectively on other levels, such as preaching. The Jesuits could not be heard without first addressing the disparity between the Japanese visual language of clothing and their own. That the difference in visual culture both within and outside of a

15 Regarding the Hindu concept of *darśan*, see Eck, 1998: 4: "Since, in the Hindu understanding, the deity is present in the image, the visual apprehension of the image is charged with religious meaning. Beholding the image is an act of worship, and through the eyes one gains the blessings of the divine."

16 The enduring religious meaning of objects displayed within museums and the negotiations between museums and the communities from whom the objects came has become an increasingly complicated issue (see, for example, Sullivan 2015; Paine 2012; Duncan 1995).

religious context represented such a powerful barrier to other forms of communication regarding religion is a testimony to the power of the visual, not merely between the human and the transcendent, but also between human beings themselves. Nor is this peculiar to the Japanese-European encounter. Elisheva Baumgarten has amply demonstrated that hairstyle, the choice of hats, stitching, material, and color of clothing served as visual signifiers to members of the medieval Jewish communities of Northern Europe. However, these signs were also in dialogue with Christian symbolic understandings of clothing, so that clothing in all of its variations became a way of communicating both intra- and inter-religiously, much as it did in early modern Japan. In both contexts, clothing was an expression of piety and thus also communication directed toward God (Baumgarten 2014, 172–96).

[16] At times, these various functions—the embodiment of the unseen transcendent, the provocation of emotion, and the communication with both the divine and the human—coincide. For example, Carol Duncan has shown that among spiritual Baptist women in Toronto, clothing variously calls down and 'embodies' spiritual power in(to) the wearer, serves to communicate religious, historical, ethnic, social, and spiritual status to those who understand how to 'read' the clothing and other visual signs of the community, and of course, also constitutes an expression of worship of the divine (Duncan 2008).

[17] *Hearing* (with speaking or singing as its counterparts) is a further significant sense in the history of religions. It is relevant in recitation, prayer, auditions, hearing voices (McCarthy-Jones, Waegeli, and Watkins 2013), and oral communication (Wilke and Moebus 2011; Staal 1986; Elson 2004; Denny 1989; Wild 2006), as well as in performance (Brown 2008; Cupchik 2015) and music (Chen 2001; Harris and Dawut 2002; Sterckx 2000; Shannon 2004; Belzen 2013; Guzy 2008; Hoffman and Walton 1992; Wuthnow 2003; Hirschkind 2006; Laack 2015). Rhythm, especially, can evoke sensual states of transition (Needham 1967). Like seeing, hearing bears an 'intellectual' dimension, because it is easier to charge religiously, especially when it is evoked by speaking and recitation. Thus, hearing—and deafness as its opposite—is easily metaphorized (Graham 1987; Tournay 1991; McDermott 2013). Despite this 'intellectual dimension,' the emotive, sensual and extremely physical sensations provoked by music need to be taken into account as equal, and sometimes more powerful, partners in conveying religious messages through sound, as Ines Weinrich abundantly demonstrates in her essay.

[18] Among those scholars who have attempted to take a systematic approach, examining the role of multiple senses within a given religious tradition, some have attempted to provide a hierarchy of senses and the religious meanings assigned to them in that tradition (McHugh 2007); others focus on synesthesia. David Chidester, for instance, highlights the significance of a "pattern of synæsthetic events" in the Christian tradition: "The most important manifestations of the sacred in the tradition were symbolically structured by the convergence or interpenetration of visual and auditory modes" (Chidester 1992, 21).

[19] Certain *religious activities* evoke or accompany the mentioned senses. Rituals are prominent among them (Bull and Mitchell 2015). Many rituals are designed to evoke certain sensory experiences (e.g., the multifarious effects of a given type of sensory input such as sound in the lives of members of a given community) or concentrate on the symbolic meanings attributed to a sense in a given group's conceptualization of holiness, the divine, or evil (Thurlkill 2016; Hallett 2013; Morgan 2012; Green 2011; Pentcheva 2010; Morrison 2008; Harvey 2006, 2001; Fulton 2006a; Shannon 2004; Chen 2001; Sterckx 2000; Lewisohn 2008; Detienne 1972; Fraigneau-Julien 1985). Ritual action is "thick with sensory meaning" (Grimes 1982, 545), including smell (Howes 1987), sound, and body movement. Ritual sounds are of at least two

varieties, namely human-made and not human-made, and the two can be further subdivided in speech and musical sounds (Jackson 1968). Other activities stressing the senses include performance, sacrifice, liturgy, praying (Fulton 2006a), and sexual intercourse (Roper 1994).

Senses in Religious Encounter

[20] Surveys of international trade in Antiquity and the Middle Ages shed considerable light on the ways in which the circulation of goods affected premodern cultures.[17] It is certain, for instance, that China began to develop its role as part of the Eurasian trade in the second century BCE, when models of Middle East incense burners arrived to the capital Chang'an. In the first centuries CE, the development and blossoming of the Silk Road was to definitively transform the sociocultural landscape of the Middle Kingdom (Milburn 2016, 444–45).[18] Rarer are investigations of the role of the senses, in their plurality or individually, in religious encounter, whether in the form of polemic and other methods of demarcation/*Othering* processes, or in processes of transfer, adaption, or resistance. One notable exception to this lacuna is the visual, which is the one field where long-standing and substantive research has been done on its functions in interactions between different religious communities. Much of this research has been dedicated to the area of visual polemics, where the field of medieval Jewish-Christian visual polemics is especially rich (Lipton 2014, 1999; Epstein 2011, 1997; Shalev-Eyni 2010; Harris and Dawut 2002; Higgs Strickland 2003; Mellinkoff 1993, 1999; Block 1995). The role of visual and material culture in the transfer of religious ideas and symbols has also garnered considerable interest, however. Scholars of religious and cultural interaction in pre-modern India are particularly notable in this regard, although this is certainly not the only region for which such research is being undertaken (Owen 2012; Pons 2011; Flood 2009; Mollier 2008; Allsen 2002). Sometimes examinations of intercultural and interreligious exchange have been combined with explorations of visual polemic, as scholars increasingly consider representations from both cultures/communities, rather than focusing on one alone.

[21] Yet, visual polemic is not merely confined to artistic productions. For example, in times of war or as political or moral statements, it was often common to publically display the 'mutilated' bodies of opponents, criminals, or hated religious minorities. Such displays were very much intended to assault the visual experience of passers-by (Egmond 2003; Merback 1999; Cohen 1993; Kisch 1943). The physical appearance of humans is frequently imbued with religious meaning (Kopelson 2016; Hochman 2014; Resnick 2012). While old age, disease, and infirmity often characterize the religious other in polemic, emaciated ugliness might be seen as a marker of holiness within an ascetic context (Bynum 1987). By contrast, well-fed youthful male beauty in certain Sufi circles was an impetus to divine contemplation (El-Rouayheb 2005; Kugle 2007). Characterizations of the religious other in terms of what a given culture or religious traditions considers ugly, sinful, or holy serves as another way of marking the religious Other or individuals within a religious community as outsiders or otherwise undesirable. An example for this would be the ways in which elderly women were sometimes associated with the evil eye or witchcraft in general in late medieval and early modern Europe (Karlsen 1987).

[22] Another way in which the visual functions as a marker of Otherness is through sumptuary laws. During the Middle Ages in the Islamic, Byzantine, and Western, Latin Christian-

17 On religion and trade, see, for instance, Wick and Rabens (2013).
18 For the role of trade in the eastwards expansion of Buddhism, see Neelis (2011).

dominated world, religious minorities were sometimes required to wear clothing or some other form of decorative item which distinguished them from the majority. Sumptuary codes continue to delineate boundaries between class, gender, as well as religious affiliation from the early modern era to the present day (Garber 2011, 21–40; Killerby 2002). This requirement was extended to prostitutes in parts of Western Europe, and this tactic was later adopted by the Nazis in World War II (Caplan 2010, 86). Yet the marking of otherness through clothing is more complicated than a one-to-one identification of an undesirable via regulated dress. Sara Lipton has shown that the European Christian iconography of Jewish sumptuary difference changed substantially as the culture of looking/seeing shifted during the Middle Ages (Lipton 2014). The study of Linda Zampol d'Ortia for the current volume shows how early modern European sumptuary regulations within the Jesuit order were challenged by the very different dress-codes of Japanese society, so that to fit in and communicate across religious boundaries, Jesuits had to 'dress up." Here, the work of Johann Huizinga may provide useful clues for new ways of thinking about clothing and the visual as an element in cross-religious encounter and interaction. He posited that play and ritual were manifestations of the same impulse, and that integral to both was the breakdown of hierarchy and disguise (Huizinga 1950, ix–x, 8–27). In the case presented by Zampol d'Ortia, it is not so much the disintegration of hierarchy, but rather the attempt to refashion oneself to fit into another hierarchy to disguise or camouflage oneself as a member of the new religious Other. The Jesuits 'cross-dressed," to use Garber's broad understanding of the term, in order to facilitate encounter. Such a strategy needs to be seen in conjunction with sumptuary laws, for it was precisely out of fear of religious 'transvestism' that Muslims and Christians sought to regulate the clothing of the religious Other, lest the boundaries between communities become lost.

[23] One has seen a curious reversal of the impulse to keep religious minorities distinct in modern Europe. Instead of requiring members of a religious minority, in this case Muslims, to set themselves apart from members (at least nominally) of the religious majority, Muslims have faced pressure to abandon religiously distinct clothing in favor of the styles current among the majority population (Amer 2014). Here the emphasis is on fear of difference and the implied challenge presented by the conscious choice of a religious group to not 'disguise' themselves, i.e. adopt the habitus with which non-Muslim Europeans are accustomed. In both efforts to impose distinctive clothing and to prohibit it, one sees religious anxiety and questions of inclusion vs. identity focused on a very clear visual marker, namely clothing. The reversal raises questions of how Western Europeans' strategies for coping with difference have changed over time. It should be noted, however, that positive connotations may be attached to distinguishing dress as well; for example, in the ways that members of religious orders, Christian and Buddhist monks, or Sufis choose to adopt a particular garb which clearly signals their religious vocation. Again, clothing becomes the visual clue, par excellence, of religious belonging, even as clothing can evoke more than mere seeing, in the religiously sensual experience of the wearer.

[24] A final way in which the visual is significant in religious encounter has to do with its capacity to inspire religious awe in the members of the community, on the one hand, and to potentially attract individuals outside that community, on the other. James Watts has already alerted us to the importance of beauty as a tool in religious ritual and display. However, this beauty can have a more active role in the context of religious encounter, namely to attract members of the religious Other. For example, Muslims from the Umayyad and Abbasid period praised the visual (and other sensory) delights of Christian monasteries and alluded to their

resultant religious pull (Zakharia 2001–2002; Kilpatrick 1999, 2003; Fowden 2007; Campbell 2009; Troupeau 1975). Very often the capacity of the visual to successfully lure members of the religious Other to holy spaces or rituals also comes from successfully engaging a common visual symbolic language which one or more neighboring communities share. Ophira Gamliel focuses on the ritual grammar of touch in her contribution to this volume; however, as she mentions in her article, this method could be applied to the ways in which various religious communities in South India use other sensual, including visual, elements in their rituals which serve to distinguish a community but remain comprehensible enough to outsiders to allow easy participation. Presumably much the same principle is at work with the transfer and transformation of visual religious symbols, such as the representation of various goddesses, St. Sebastian, or the Virgin Mary, from one religio-cultural milieu to another. Thus, having a common sensual 'vocabulary' and 'grammar' becomes fundamental for creating a milieu in which shared practices between multiple religious groups may take place.

[25] While scholarship on the role of the visual in religious encounter may be the most developed, many of the same patterns apply to other sensory realms. A number of scholars has focused on the role of sounds as a religious demarcation strategy. Alain Corbin has discussed the control of church bells in marking religious festivals in the phase of the French Revolution (Corbin 1994). Nicholas Jaspert and Olivia Remie Constable have explored the role of religious sound such as the Muslim call to prayer and church bells and the attempt to control religious noise as an integral part of Christian-Muslim encounter in the Middle Ages; this continues to be relevant in Muslim-Christian relations in the modern period (Jaspert 2009; Constable 2010; Harris and Dawut 2002). Music, more aesthetically attractive than mere talking, further serves as a venue for both polemic and/or missionizing, whether in medieval Jewish or Christian liturgical songs or in modern hip hop (LeVine 2008; Aidi 2014). In her essay for this volume, Weinrich, while less focused on sound as factor in direct Muslim/non-Muslim encounters and relations, also notes the importance which Muslims from the Abbasid period placed on the quality of voice, modulation in tone, and the spacing of words for effective preaching. Presumably, such expectations would be all the more important in luring non-Muslims to Islam. The beauty of certain types of religious noise, such as that of the Qur'an being recited, is sometimes portrayed as having the potency to inspire religious outsiders to convert. In considering sound and its religious meaning, it is important to grasp sound as a medium unto itself: sometimes it can convey verbal meaning, as when a particular song is sung. Alternatively, specific sounds may be imbued with religious meaning, often through ritual —that of a bell, or tune, or even the recitation of a text—to provoke religious experiences in the hearers or producers (i.e. singers, chanters, etc.), regardless of whether they understand the verbal, narrative component of the sound. In the instance of a religiously plural society, sounds having a common, or at least recognizable, religious significance across multiple communities or religious traditions would be quite powerful as potential attractors from one religion to another. As for the visual, one may consider the impact of a common auditory symbolic vocabulary between communities and the degree to which such commonalities might foster shared religious practices or conversion.

[26] As already mentioned earlier, in a number of cultures, pleasant fragrance or the lack of smell served as a marker of holiness and spiritual accomplishment, whereas foul smell was an indicator of false religion, heresy, and the demonic, respectively (Green 2011; Sizgorich 2008; Harvey 2006; Cuffel 2007; Halevi 2011; Kugle 2007, 65; Tolan 1998; Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994, 52; Brown 1988, 5–8, 26–28. 85-86, 92-102, 293-303). Such a schema

lent smell an obvious role in religious polemic. Much foul smell as polemic sprang not from actual smell but described or imagined smell within written texts, so that attributing foul smell to a person, place, or animal was to mark it as evil or, at the very least, religiously defective. Therefore, the production of pleasant scent in a religious context could serve as an olfactory witness to the 'truth' of a given religious tradition, holy person, etc. As with seeing and hearing, having a common 'language of odors' would potentially facilitate shared rituals or even conversion from one tradition to another. The examples from Chinese literature presented by Santangelo in this volume challenge scholars who wish to explore the role of smell in religious polemic and encounter to consider a more complex system of meanings than the neat dichotomy of foul vs. fragrant present in Chinese, European, and Middle Eastern cultures.

[27] As briefly noted above, while taste certainly can carry religious meaning, in terms of the dynamics of religious interaction, what matters more than taste per se is eating, cooking, and the manners of eating. The establishment of specific food laws, different from the surrounding cultures, served to create a distinguishing religious identity, even as mocking those who failed to follow these laws established further borders between religious groups (Freidenreich 2011). Yet demarcation often does not end with official regulations. Regularly in religious texts, the adoption or retention of foodways that are technically not forbidden yet still associated with the practices of members of another religious community are censured. Here, rather like the modern argumentation regarding Muslim women's clothing, foodways which are not the same as those practiced by the groups in power are seen as threatening or problematic (Cuffel 2017).

[28] Assigning transcendent meaning to food, drink, or the act of eating a particular substance or at a particular time—for example, the Christian Eucharist or a Hindu Puja—creates a powerful, physical path to the divine for the participant, but also becomes a potent form of exclusion of the Other—not merely from a given religious community, but, symbolically, from the transcendent yet embodied encounter with the holy. Accusing the religious Other of eating the wrong food is a further form of exclusion, increasingly so when the 'Other' is accused of cannibalism, as were the early Christians, or of eating or drinking a foul substance, for there, the religious Other becomes not merely 'Other', but monstrous.

[29] Touch can be imbued with religious meaning through expectations that sanctity, and with it healing and blessing, may be transferred through direct contact. While in few traditions one could directly, physically touch God, once could touch the holy man or woman. Failing that, a garment or other object that had come into direct contact with the holy man/woman or grave space, etc., all have the ability to transfer sanctity and healing (Brogan 2015; Meri 1999). The hope of such blessing and healing often serves as a powerful draw to members outside of a given religious community to the holy person or site (Mayeur-Jaouen 2012; Poujeau 2012).

[30] Unpleasant touch, and resulting emotions, also served as a tool in the rhetoric and physical manifestations of religious encounter. In particular, pain, especially the pain of martyrdom, is frequently perceived as sanctifying (Glucklich 2001). The description or witnessing of pain endured for the sake of God, in turn, becomes a way of creating religious identity by provoking awe and empathy on the part of the viewers/readers, and by denigrating the religious outsiders who inflicted such pain (Einbinder 2002). Demarcation through touch was and is often an imaginary or metaphorical one, such as imagining that witches had sexual intercourse with the devil (Roper 1994). Witchcraft trials or inquisitional trials of Jews or Muslims who had converted to Christianity and were suspected of 'regressing' to their former beliefs and

practices as a kind of ritual, particularly when they involved public executions, presents a powerfully negative example of senses and religious encounter. In such situations, in which the 'heretics' were burned, multiple senses were recruited in a moment of violent religious demarcation—the pain of the one being burnt, the smell of smoke and burning wood and flesh, the screams of the ones suffering, and of course the visual spectacle, which such an execution displayed for all present.

Research Perspectives

Research on religion and the senses has to consider the facts that a) there is no direct access to sensual perception and b) sensual perception can have various meanings, among them religious ones. None of the senses or activities which evoke sensory experiences are, in and of themselves, 'religious.' It is the religious context which makes them so, even as it is context which frames evocations of senses in efforts to create or dismantle boundaries between religious communities or individuals. That being said, the senses are no less vital for our understanding and analysis of religion, for not only are they that which allows us to interact with the physical world but they become the symbolic building blocks for human imagining about the divine and demonic world, and, it seems, the religious Other. [31]

If sensual perception is only a socio-cultural issue that needs specifically charged meaning, the crucial question with regard to the topic of religion and the senses is: How does religion make sense of the senses? Not all of the research on religion and the senses considers the mentioned conditions. Furthermore, how do the senses, and religious meanings assigned to them, make sense of religious encounter? How does the relation between objects (including their affordances and agency) and sensual perception work? The direction of getting an answer is shown by Edwin Hutchins. He characterizes physical objects as "material anchors" for conceptual blends (Hutchins 2005; Korsvoll 2014). [32]

Very often, scholars focusing on one or more of the senses, or on an activity which *per se* is intimately involved with sensory experience (for instance, eating and/or fasting), address the tension between embodiment and existence in the physical world and aspirations to come into contact with a largely transcendent, disembodied divine sphere or being (Hecker 2005; van Gelder 2000; Bynum 1987). This issue refers to the metaphorical use of the senses in religious communication. For instance, smell has to be referred to metaphorically (Ibarretxe-Antuñano 1999) and, vice versa, can serve as a metaphor, and food can be both metonymy and metaphor for religiously attributed emotions (Toomey 1990). When are the senses referred to metonymically, when and with which consequences metaphorically? A hint to answering the question why religion makes metaphorical use of the senses might be what Hartmann Tyrell calls "sociomorphic implicatures" in religious communication (Tyrell 2008). [33]

Another research question concerns the alternative between affirmation and rejection of sensual perception, e.g., the (ritual) rejection of eating (Germano 1997), sounding (Chen 2001), or of sensing at all (Wasserstrom 2000), for instance, through meditation (Franco 2009). Asceticism versus libertinism (Jonas 1958) or the Byzantine iconoclastic debate (Brubaker 2012) are prominent examples for the oscillation between affirmation and rejection of sensual perception in the history of religions. [34]

Last, but not least: How does religious encounter affect the use of and reference to senses? During the early Byzantine period, for instance, parts of Judaism were increasingly interested in images—due to the contemporaneous Christian intensification of the cult of images and [35]

preoccupation with the nature of religious images (Neis 2007). Paying greater attention to various forms of visual polemic—on public buildings, in manuscripts, on the internet—is one obvious area which would benefit from deeper, more systematic research. In such investigations, however, other forms of public display, such as executions, punishment, couture, and rituals, need to be regularly incorporated into any examination of the role of the visual in religious encounter. Furthermore, while it is clear certain eating regulations might help to demarcate one religious tradition from another (Freidenreich 2011; Johnson et al. 2011), *taste,* as opposed to just eating, as a mediator or demarcator of religious boundaries has not been explored sufficiently. Additionally, the discrepancy between the role of taste in the Eucharist during the Middle Ages vs. James Watts' observations of Christian de-emphasis of taste in the modern ritual highlights the need to consider how the significance of certain senses change over time in a given culture.

[36] The recent debates regarding the regulation, or rather prohibition, of the Muslim call to prayer in modern Europe and its parallels in medieval Europe have obscured other ways in which sound can and has played a role in religious encounter. For example, Ines Weinrich notes that al-Ghazālī discusses the tone and rhythm appropriate for songs and music of warfare. This special category of music raises the question of how music and other sounds from armed combat served to incite or demarcate. Was/is there a difference in the 'sound' of religious warfare as opposed to that belonging to warfare which has not been assigned religious meaning, not only in Islam but in other cultures as well? Finally, in some constellations of religious encounter, the senses are in a competition with each regarding the question which one leads to God and salvation, e.g., hearing and seeing during the times of the Protestant Reformation. Why and how are certain senses stressed in different constellations of religious contact? How are different senses made to work together in moments of cross-religious communication? For example, Nathanael Andrade has argued that the fifth-century Christian leader John Chrysostom used the public performance of Christian processions and hymns in imitation of and competition against similar displays by other imperially sanctioned cults in Roman Constantinople as a way to Christianize public buildings and space (Andrade 2019). Here, the visual and auditory are combined in a provocatory act designed to demarcate between Christian and non-Christian space while at the same time co-opting imperial religious space for Christianity. The contributions of James Watts and especially Ophira Gamliel invite us to think about other ways in which multiple senses may be evoked simultaneously in rituals, though not always in a directly confrontational fashion like the one analyzed by Andrade. If the symbolic meanings attributed to various senses, and the mode of their evocation, constitute a 'language' complete with its own 'grammar', then future examinations of the senses in religious contexts will involve an exploration of both the semantic and functional/syntactic uses of all senses within specific cultural-ritual contexts and how a culturally shared grammar of the senses facilitated both intra- and inter-religious communication. What happens, as in the case-study by Zampol d'Ortia, when cultures having very different grammars of the senses attempt to communicate would be a fruitful further area of research. Finally, as indicated in the beginning of this essay, senses are not inherently 'religious'; rather, they are assigned religious meaning in specific contexts. Thus, how non-religious meanings and uses of the senses related to their religious constructions in any given culture and, in turn, how the interplay of religious and non-religious meanings and functions of the senses were transformed in instances of religious encounter all remain desiderata for further investigation.

Contributors

[37] Ines Weinrich, in her "Sensing Sound: Aesthetic and Religious Experience According to al-Ghazālī (d. 1111)," places al-Ghazālī's book on the etiquette of sound, *Kitāb Ādāb as-samāʿ wa-l-wajd*, in the broader context of Islamic musicological, theological, medical, and philosophical discussions regarding the power of music. She notes the ways in which al-Ghazālī and his contemporaries expanded upon Greek musical theory, but focuses most particularly on the ways in which, according to al-Ghazālī, music could serve to guide the hearer in a variety of ways to a salvific experience, in part because of its transformative power over the body and soul.

[38] Paolo Santangelo, in "Olfaction and Other Senses in Chinese Culture: A Comparative Analysis, with Special Attention to the Use of the Term *Xiang*," underscores the importance of literary texts for understanding religious meanings attributed to smell and the function of olfaction in various forms of religious encounter in Buddhist, Dao, and Confucian thought. Notable in his findings are the extent to which smell, whether disgusting or lovely, serves as a mode of communication between the living and the dead, as well as between the human and the divine. He argues that smell, especially (but not exclusively) smell emanating from incense, was powerful not merely for its effect on the physiological sensation of smelling, but because of its capacity to provoke and express strong emotion.

[39] In "The Dress of Evangelization: Jesuit Garments, Liturgical Textiles, and the Senses," Linda Zampol d'Ortia examines the Jesuit Catholic efforts to accommodate Japanese values placed on modes of dress, including color, type of cloth, and cut of clothing. Clothing, according to her, constituted a kind of non-verbal communication. Jesuits had to learn to 'communicate' in the Japanese style before being able to effectively convey verbal clarifications of their religious belief. At the same time, this accommodation came into conflict with European expectations of humble dress appropriate to Jesuits and other religious orders. She shows that attempts to reassert these European expectations of proper dress on Jesuits working in Japan mostly undermined Jesuit effectiveness and attempts to be accepted within early modern Japanese society.

[40] Focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on the sensual function of books in religious rituals, James Watts in his "Sensation and Metaphor in Ritual Performance: The Example of Sacred Texts" provides a broad overview of how the five senses function or do *not* function in religious ritual. He argues that rituals in fact deemphasize the sensual aspect of acts such as touching and tasting. On the other hand, at times sensual experience is used even when it is not explicitly evoked, for example in the creation of leather-bound bibles, which create a sense of intimacy with touch. The aesthetic quality of beautiful books has functions which have little to do with written content; these may have to do with prestige, or evoking awe. The sensorial meanings and functions of books have power to communicate that is powerful and different than their lexical content.

[41] Ophira Gamliel, in her "Syntactic Roles of Touch in Shared Festivals in Kerela: Towards an Analysis of Ritual Categories," argues that rituals constitute a language of their own, and may be analysed both for their semantic and syntactical roles. Drawing from linguistic theory, Gamliel provides a detailed examination of how touch functions in Hindu, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish rituals in Southern India, both in terms of its symbolic meanings but also in its power to signal various transitional moments within given rituals. While she concentrates on touch, she shows that having commonly understandable symbols and syntactical/practical

functional roles empowers senses to draw members of various religious communities to the rituals of others.

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