

Article

Aisthesis–Perception–Anaesthetics: Inspirations from Wolfgang Welsch’s Aesthetics for a Perception-Sensitive Theology

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Abstract: In contrast to “experience” (*Erfahrung*), the concept and phenomenon of perception is still underexposed in systematic theology. Aesthetics in the sense of *aisthesis* illuminates perception as an independent mode of existence and cognition and not merely as a preliminary stage of *Erfahrung*. This is made clear by the differentiations and concretisations on aesthetics by the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch. His work on aesthetics is valuable for systematic theology on an epistemological level on the one hand and is based on contemporary questions about a good life in an “experience society” (*Erlebnisgesellschaft*, Gerhard Schulze) and the ecological crisis on the other hand. As a result, cornerstones of a perception-sensitive theology become visible.

Keywords: systematic theology; aesthetics; perception; Wolfgang Welsch; spirituality; art

1. Introduction

“Experience”¹ (*Erfahrung*) has come into focus within the “anthropological turn” in theology, although Karl Rahner, for instance, defines the link between *Erfahrung* and (theological) knowledge much earlier: “The proposition that human cognition is first of all in the world of *Erfahrung* and that everything metaphysical is cognized only in and on the world is expressed in Thomas in his doctrine of the turning and the permanent turning of the intellect towards the appearance, of the ‘*conversio intellectus ad phantasmata*’” (Rahner 1996, p. 14)². As pleasing as it is that *Erfahrung* is given a central place in theology, it is irritating that many other modes of human existence, like the concept and phenomenon of perception, are still underexposed in systematic theology. The questions arise: Is it worthwhile to differentiate between perception and *Erfahrung*? Is this differentiation necessary?

Thus, to explore the relevance of the concept of “perception” and the approach to this phenomenon for theological reflection (of spirituality), an interdisciplinary engagement with art, cultural/art science theories or aesthetics is required. Contemporary aesthetics and art studies can draw on already-established methods and theories to approach the phenomenon of perception because of and based on their (new) material and formal objects. However, as soon as concepts and theories of “perception” from the fields of aesthetics and art studies are used to analyse religious perceptual phenomena, no fundamental separation may be drawn between aesthetic perception and any other forms and events of perception—which of course does not prevent a sensitive differentiation of different modes of perception and the processing of perceptual attitudes that are to be distinguished from each other. On the premise that there is no fundamental difference between aesthetic perception and other forms of perception, concepts and systematisations of aesthetics can also be used to deal with religious phenomena. In the following, I will focus on selected aspects of Wolfgang Welsch’s aesthetics to support this premise argumentatively on the one hand, and on the other hand, to work out aspects that can be helpful for reflections on perception in systematic theology. It should become apparent that the phenomenon of perception is not completely absorbed in the term *Erfahrung*.



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2. Insights into Wolfgang Welsch's Aesthetics

Although art and reflection on art are essential in Wolfgang Welsch's aesthetics, they are not predominant: "Art is certainly a particularly important province in the universe of meanings of the aesthetic. But it is not the only one. [...] One must therefore—in favour of the full concept of aesthetics—oppose the artistic narrowing of the aesthetic concepts, must keep aesthetics free of this obsolete narrowing" (Welsch 1996, p. 42). A "correct handling" of aesthetics even demands recognizing its "polysemy" as "powerful" as well as making adequate use of all the different "modes" of aesthetics. The aesthetic must not be narrowed (Welsch 1996, pp. 39–42).

Concerning Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein 2006, p. 278), Welsch differentiates the various dimensions of the meaning of the term "aesthetic" from one another and, at the same time, holds them in (mutually fertilising) relation to one another. The "sensuous" ("Sinnenhafte") runs like a thread through the different dimensions of meaning; the other dimensions of meaning, such as "sensitive" ("sensibel"), "beauty" ("kallistisch") and "subjective" ("subjektiv"), tend only to overlap in places.³

Already in his habilitation treatise, Welsch focuses on the "sensuous" or perception respectively (Welsch 1987). Following Aristotle, he based his aesthetics on perception, in the sense of *aisthesis* (Greek). Furthermore, in a critical discussion with Kant, he distinguishes the sensual according to a "meaning of knowledge" ("Erkenntnisbedeutung") on the one hand and a "meaning of feeling" ("Gefühlsbedeutung") on the other hand (Welsch 1993, pp. 13–47). The "meaning of knowledge" corresponds to sensory perceptions. The "meaning of feeling" evaluates the sensory perceptions regarding the sense of pleasure. This sensation of pleasure can be further differentiated into an immediate sensation of pleasure and a sensation with the influence of cognition, the "specifically aesthetic pleasure" ("spezifisch ästhetische[...] Lust", (Welsch 1993, p. 27)) or the reflected taste. The latter can then be concretised again by determining the specific influence of cognition on the level of purposes, the level of pragmatics or the level of ontology.

In all his books and articles, Welsch emphasises the independent knowledge-generating power of perception. Referring to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (Baumgarten 1988), who is regarded as the founder of aesthetics as a scientific discipline and who did not merely establish it as an "art-centred aesthetics" ("[k]unstzentrierte Ästhetik", (Welsch 1996, p. 135)), Welsch points out that the beginnings of aesthetics were already accompanied by an "epistemological aestheticisation" ("[e]pistemologischen Ästhetisierung", (Welsch 1997, p. 487)). Welsch emphasises the independent rationality of aesthetics but does not separate it from the other types of rationality; instead, he pleads for a transversal reason ("transversale Vernunft") that holds the different rationalities together (Welsch 1997, pp. 761–82).

In addition to these conceptual systematisations of the aesthetic, which are inspired by philosophy, Welsch also looks at the diachronically different understanding of perception. Whereas in antiquity, perception was closely connected with truth, above all based on a separation between perception and judgement,⁴ in the Middle Ages, the "autonomous[...] and unassailable[...] core of the meaning of perception" (Welsch 1996, p. 186) disappeared as it was deemed to be related to salvation and disaster. Since modern times, perception has been strongly associated with subjectivity, which has, thus, further disempowered it. However, precisely at this point and in the confrontation between perception and generalization, Welsch sees the strength of perception. Perception calls for the manifold instead of fixing the uniform. Thus, perception is the mode of existence and cognition that emphasises "freedom" and individuality. Welsch emphasises the link between perception and diversity with aesthetic reflections on art: in art (history), there is a "plurality of different paradigms and styles, which remain attractive even when they are long behind us in history" (Welsch 2016, p. 29). Welsch concludes: "Art experience is a school of plurality" (Welsch 2016, p. 30).

Welsch is particularly interested in the paradigm shift initiated by the contemporary arts (cf. Welsch 2016, p. 25). He recognizes here "a transition from a view of the world

according to substance ontology to a view in the sense of process ontology" (Welsch 2016, p. 102). Production and reception of art on a substance ontological basis would focus on "representation". Representationalism as well as fictionalism diametrically oppose art and the "world". An "artlike being-in" ("kunsthafte[s] Innesein", (Welsch 2016, p. 93)) that dissolves the separation between human being and the "world", is "realised"⁵ using contemporary art under process-ontological premises.⁶ The dualism between art and the world or human being and the world has to be abolished: "Spirit and nature do not in fact represent two heterogeneous orders but stand in relations of continuity and implication" (Welsch 2018, p. 33). Overcoming this dualism is a major moment in his "evolutionary aesthetics" ("evolutionären Ästhetik", (Welsch 2018, p. 63)). Here, he emphasises again that the "sensuous" is the unifying factor between human being and the world.

In addition to the diachronic and synchronic systematisations of approaches and concepts to the aesthetics already presented, I would also like to address Welsch's "tableau of contemporary processes of aestheticisation" ("Tableau der gegenwärtigen Ästhetisierungsprozesse", (Welsch 1996, pp. 9–23)) and highlight their relevance for a contemporary theology in the final section of this paper. Welsch sees an essential task of contemporary aesthetics in the (critical) analysis of contemporary and everyday processes of aestheticisation. He divides the aestheticisation of the reality of life into an aestheticisation process on the surface as well as an in-depth process of aestheticisation, whereby both levels are related to one another and influence the other. Surface aestheticisation is particularly evident in urban space, both in the "prettification" ("Verhübschung", (Welsch 1993, p. 16)) of the environment and in the "styling of subjects and ways of life". "Thereby, the world becomes an *Erlebnisraum*. 'Erlebnis' is a central keyword in these processes of prettification" (Welsch 1993, p. 14). With this "central keyword," Welsch refers to the work of sociologist Gerhard Schulze on the "experience society" ("Erlebnisgesellschaft"). Schulze emphasises the "relatively great importance of experiences for the construction of the social world in historical and intercultural comparison" (Schulze 1993, p. 15). Schulze states: "*Erlebnis* is moving to the centre. Under the pressure of the imperative 'Experience your life!' ('Erlebe dein Leben!'), a perpetuating dynamic of action is emerging, organized within the framework of a rapidly growing *Erlebnis* market that influences collective patterns of *Erlebnis* and shapes social milieus as communities of *Erlebnis*" (Schulze 1993, p. 33). The decision for an *Erlebnis* orientation is not a private matter; the whole of contemporary society is characterised by the imperative "Experience your life!" throughout all areas of life. *Erlebnis* must be "beautiful". In this context, "beautiful"—as Welsch, in particular, continues to emphasise—is associated with a certain "superficiality" ("Oberflächigkeit"). Superficial "beautiful" *Erlebnisse* replace deeper insights. In an *Erlebnisgesellschaft*, aesthetics is merely reduced to beauty or pleasantness, which are imputed to the common judgement of taste. An addiction to *Erlebnisse* arises, which points to the hedonistic impetus inherent in these aestheticisation processes. A deeper longing could not be satisfied by these kinds of *Erlebnisse*. Economically, we see that aesthetic categories are already becoming a "leading currency" of our time and that the benefit of a product or service takes second place. The most diverse processes of aestheticisation, however, do not only affect surface phenomena and, thus, individual aspects of our culture, but shape the "form of culture" ("Form der Kultur", (Welsch 1993, p. 20)) in its entirety. In order to not get completely lost in an aesthetics of the surface and the accompanying flood of stimuli, Welsch develops the concept of anaesthetics ("Anästhetik", (Welsch 1991)). Welsch argues for the inclusion of the anaesthetic and the dialectic between aesthetics and anaesthetics into the discussion of a scientific aesthetics. Anaesthetics is also characterised by an enormous range of meanings. On the one hand, anaesthetics is a kind of "counter-concept" ("Gegenbegriff", (Welsch 1991, p. 68)) to aesthetics, although it is not to be equated with an antiaesthetics or with the unaesthetic, but rather to be concretised as a loss of sensitivity to sensuality and sensibility. A certain withdrawal of sensitivity is even necessary in our times in which a constant flood of media stimuli affects human beings to protect oneself from the tendencies of "hyper-aestheticisation" ("Hyperästhetisierung", (Welsch 1991, p. 73)). Without these "anaesthetic

decisions" ("anästhetische[n] Entscheidungen", (Welsch 1991, p. 80)), it is not possible to adopt an aesthetic attitude. The positive connotations of the term anaesthetic arise. "Anaesthetic decisions" lead to the fading out of the unessential and to the concentration on the essential. Anaesthetic is a competence that is very important in our time. Otherwise, human beings lose themselves in the "noise" of external influences. Anaesthetics in relation to aisthesis is, thus, a critique of traditional aesthetics, which has developed into a theory of the "high arts" and neglected "aesthetics as a theory of perception". Contemporary aesthetics should include anaesthetic aspects: "An aesthetic conscious of anaesthetics in this way would become a school of otherness. Lightning, disruption, blasting, strangeness would be basic categories for it. Against the continuum of the communicable and against beautiful consumerism, it relies on divergence and heterogeneity" (Welsch 1991, p. 86). An aesthetics that includes a dialectic to anaesthetics also critically delimits the "phantasmata of power" ("Machtphantasmata") of modern society fostered by hyperaestheticisation. Against this background, Welsch's plea for a "culture of the blind spot" ("Kultur des blinden Flecks", (Welsch 1993, pp. 46–47)) becomes clear. This plea is a counterproposal to the *Erlebnisgesellschaft* and a culture of "hyper-aestheticisation" that absolutises an aestheticisation of the surface. A "culture of the blind spot" has an inherent ethical dimension: it is a "critical culture" ("kritische Kultur", (Welsch 1991, p. 86)) that does not allow itself to be completely determined by the processes of an aesthetics of the surface. A critical culture gives its place to vital aspects such as rest, silence, and interruption: "In this way, aesthetic culture can also contribute, at least indirectly, to political culture." (Welsch 1993, pp. 46–47). In his papers on "Ästhet/hik", this is clarified: "The word coinage 'aesthet/hics'—formed by contracting 'aesthetics' and 'ethics'—is meant to designate those parts of aesthetics that inherently contain ethical moments" (Welsch 1994, p. 4). In particular, papers which focus on the aspects of justice in aesthetics (Welsch 1996, p. 128) are highly connective to (liberation/political) theology.

3. On the Relevance of Welsch's Aesthetics for Theology

A perception-sensitive theology needs a differentiated approach to the terms that concretise the phenomenon of perception, of course without ignoring their "family resemblances". Without direct reference to aesthetics, conceptual analyses and elaborations on perception are visible in the context of the theology of spirituality. In works on contemplation, for example, Simon Peng-Keller emphasises the "sensually perceptible reality" ("[s]innlich wahrnehmbare Wirklichkeit", (Peng-Keller 2021, p. 50)) and systematises the "diversity of contemplative perception"⁷. Selected systematic-theological works dealing with art, art studies, or aesthetics show an awareness of the problem, but in contrast to *Erfahrung*, the concept and phenomenon of perception is still underexposed. Systematic theological elaborations on the relationship between theology and art, such as Günter Rombold's (Rombold 1998) or Gerhard Larcher's (Larcher 1998, p. 301)⁸, often use the term *Erfahrung*. A differentiated doctrine of perception is not to be found. This is understandable, of course, since the relevance of art for theology had to be clarified via aesthetic theories and, thus, (art) aesthetics and not perception was in the foreground.

A sharpening of the concept of "perception" can be achieved by relating it to and distinguishing it from "related" terms. This will become apparent in the following, when the presentation of Welsch's aesthetics is summarized again based on the concepts of *Erlebnis*, *Erfahrung*, and perception:

Welsch relates *Erlebnis* to the aesthetics of the surface. With the designation of our society as an *Erlebnisgesellschaft* and the quotation already cited—"'*Erlebnis*' is a central keyword in these processes of beautification or prettification" (Welsch 1993, p. 14)—the negative connotation of this term becomes obvious. There is an "addiction to *Erlebnisse*" that cannot satisfy deeper anthropological longings. Experiencing and chasing after "*Erlebnisse*" can even be a hindrance to certain modes of perception. The term *Erlebnis* is diametrically opposed to the term "perception".

The term *Erfahrung* seems to have a higher conceptual accuracy for aesthetic–anaesthetic questions than *Erlebnis*. Although *Erfahrung* is so closely intertwined with perception that a scientific differentiation is difficult, with reference to Alexander Baumgarten, Welsch emphasises the independent knowledge-generating potential of perception (not art-aesthetic perception but perception in general). Perception is, thus, by no means regarded merely as a subordinate moment of *Erfahrung* or as a preliminary stage of the rational process of generating knowledge. Even though Welsch does not concretise *Erfahrung* more precisely, he maintains that perception should be regarded as an independent phenomenon.

Karlheinz Barck also perceives a preference for the concept of perception within the current aesthetic discourse. In his history of aesthetics, he points out that, currently, perception as a model of aesthetic perception is replacing the model of aesthetic *Erfahrung*. With the orientation towards the “model of aesthetic perception” (Welsch 1993, p. 312), contemporary aesthetics seems to detach itself from the primacy of hermeneutic methods (cf. Mersch 2002). A perception-orientated aesthetics reinforces the limits of the reflexive linguistic approach to certain (perceptual) phenomena. With Barck, it can be stated that with the “model of aesthetic perception”, as opposed to the model of “aesthetic *Erfahrung*”, one commits oneself to the model that appears to be “riskier (more risk-oriented) and less elitist and deterministic” (“riskanter (risikoorientierter) und weniger elitär und deterministisch”, (Barck 2000, p. 313)). This does not mean, however, that this perception-sensitive aesthetics completely evades the usual standards of science; rather, it means a constant inclusion of the limits of scientific activity. In this way, the limits can be expanded (cf. anaesthetics).

Has theology already embarked on the “riskier” enterprise? In the context of a theology of spirituality, for example, the work of Clara Vasseur and Johannes Bündgens should be mentioned (Vasseur et al. 2016). In their work on spirituality, which is oriented towards phenomenological thinkers, they impressively place the phenomenon of perception at the top of the list and make it rationally accessible. They also refer to Gerhard Schulze’s “*Erlebnisgesellschaft*” and, quoting Thomas Fuchs, emphasise that sensuality and perception are necessary countermoment to the “*Erlebnisgesellschaft*”: “Dealing with reality sensually and through action, and thus re-learning the art of perception through practice, is therefore not a question of aesthetic enjoyment of life, but a vital requirement for our species” (Fuchs 2008, pp. 221–22).

Finally, I would like to highlight what this riskier enterprise can contribute to a perception-sensitive theology by looking at topics relevant to society and ecology:

Welsch’s elaborations on “surface aesthetics”, “anaesthetics”, and “Ästhet/hik” react to the challenges of an “*Erlebnisgesellschaft*” and seek appropriate solutions within the plea for a “culture of the blind spot”. In order to not completely fall into life-hindering processes of aestheticisation of the surface, the “anaesthetic decision-making competence” can be trained. The theology of spirituality can link up with this. On the one hand, theology has the task of ensuring that lived spirituality does not fall into a “surface aestheticisation” and merely degenerate into “experiential spirituality” (“*Erlebnisspiritualität*”) ⁹. Spirituality must go hand in hand with an in-depth process of aestheticisation to experience the depth of faith. The theology of spirituality that engages in this “deep aestheticisation” can, thus, show that spiritual practices (such as contemplation) also train the “anaesthetic decision-making competence”. Through a theologically embedded training of an “anaesthetic decision-making competence”, the socially relevant and political moment of spirituality comes to light. The “anaesthetic decision-making competence” trains relational skills. Only by actively dealing with the “flood of stimuli” we are exposed to can human beings become capable of relating. Spiritual practices that train perception implicitly or directly criticise an “*Erlebnisgesellschaft*” by proactively practising the ability to relate. Sensitising perception, through training perception, is, thus, an essential contribution to shaping society well and to participating in the realization of the Kingdom of God in the here and now. Prayer is, therefore, not to be equated exclusively with a passive withdrawal from society; it has an active potential to change society (cf. Trawöger 2019). The praying person withdraws from the “*Erlebnisgesellschaft*” for a short time to direct the attention actively away from the manifold *Erlebnisse* shaped by

“surface aesthetics” towards the relationship and encounter with God. The withdrawal serves to realign oneself and to consciously participate actively in the diverse relations in which one finds oneself. Perceptual capacity and relational capacity correlate with each other. Training the perception leads to a deepened relationship with God as well as with oneself, other human beings, and the whole of creation. In order to clarify the link between perception, relationality, and the kingdom of God, I would like to refer to Gisbert Greshake: Greshake places elaborations on the Trinity at the centre of the doctrine of God. He emphasises that God in himself is a relationship. The intra-Trinitarian relational event is crucial for eschatological hope: “*Trinitarisierung*” of the whole of reality is central. “What God is as a Trinitarian God, we should and may become” (Greshake 2022, p. 70).

In addition to these challenges to our society and the interactions between humans, spiritual practices and theological reflections that foreground perception also have an impact on another challenge of our time, the “ecological crisis”. As Welsch points out in the diachronic walk-through of the understanding of perception, contemporary human beings access the “world” primarily through dualistic models of thinking. Contemporary human beings provoke the juxtaposition of human beings and the world while cementing it. Human beings do not regard themselves as part of nature, but confront it. It is precisely this way of thinking that poses a problem for a sustainability-sensitive approach to nature. Because in the juxtaposition of human beings and the “world”/environment, a power relationship is established that facilitates the exploitation of nature. In his elaborations on “evolutionary aesthetics” (“evolutionären Ästhetik”, (Welsch 2016, p. 63)), Welsch, based on a combination of the concepts of “sensation” and “perception” and a differentiated approach to the “sensuous”, points out that the “sensuous” connects human beings with other living beings or with the “world”.¹⁰ As described above, the “sensuous” is a way of being that unites humans and other living beings. Aesthetics, art studies, and (contemporary)¹¹ art must clarify the interconnectedness of the human being and the “world”. Welsch speaks of “being within” (“Innesein”). (Contemporary) art should not merely “represent” this “being within”, but “realise” it. A creation spirituality that engages with this “being within” can contribute to practising the “aesthetic/anaesthetic attitude” towards nature from the “objective” attitude (Welsch 2016, p. 80) towards nature. It is necessary to practise “human being-world relations” (Welsch 2016, p. 43) that do not merely “use” (“vernutzen”, (Welsch 2016, p. 84)) the world. We need to practise perceptions of the “being within” to think and act in the world in a new and sustainable way. We acquire a lot of knowledge on the topic of sustainability, but usually, we lack the strength to implement this knowledge on an individual as well as on a societal level. The insights on the topic of sustainability must be embedded in the nondualistic ways of thinking that have already been described and lead to new ways of being that do not merely exploit the environment. In addition, we must also implement the diverse theoretical findings already available on a sustainable approach to the environment. The sociologist Ingolfur Blühdorn states that we need to be more aware of the “logic of non-sustainability” (“Logik der Nicht-Nachhaltigkeit”, (Blühdorn et al. 2020, p. 74)) in our times. With the help of perception training, we can counteract this destructive logic. We need to work on “closing the gap between theory and practice; many know what needs to be done, and yet year after year nothing is done” (Gabriel et al. 2022, pp. 68–69). “Aesthetic knowing” can motivate closing the gap between theory and practice. Because human beings are not only motivated to act through cognitive knowledge, but through other forms of knowledge such as aesthetic knowledge, the gap between theory and practice can be bridged.¹² Thus, spiritual practices, as well as a theology that includes aesthetics in the sense of *aisthesis* with its epistemological potential, can also contribute to this.

In the encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis pleads for a relativisation of the “misguided anthropocentrism” (Pope Francis 2015, chp. 118–19) in the face of the ecological crisis. Liberation theology and political theology must not only be focussed on human beings—the whole of creation must be adequately included. Thus, this calls for a theology of creation that does not separate human beings from the “world” but emphasise their

interconnectedness with creation (cf. [Trawöger 2023](#)). In addition, a theology of creation that explores a viable path between misguided anthropocentrism and biocentrism also requires a close relationship between the theology of creation and creation spirituality to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Aesthetic approaches which focus on perception and (with reference to Baumgarten) include the epistemological level can both rethink the human-world relationship and help to practise it. Theology can make use of these approaches.

The relevance of an in-depth preoccupation with perception and the training of perception was argued above based on questions relevant to society and ecology. Welsch's systematisations of aesthetics and perception, which do not merely refer to the field of art, make one ask whether the "powerful" "polysemy" of the aesthetic has already been recognised and systematically explored within systematic theology. A more consistent differentiation between perception and *Erfahrung*, as well as a more in-depth treatment of the "polysemy" of perception, leads to highlighting the epistemological content of aesthetics/aisthesis. The focus on perception is not meant to replace reflections on *Erfahrung*, but to complement them. In (the didactics of) systematic theology, epistemological flexibility¹³ can be trained with the help of aesthetic concepts, so that phenomena can be perceived and developed more comprehensively from a theological point of view.

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Notes

- ¹ In German language, "Erlebnis" and "Erfahrung" can be terminologically differentiated. In English, this possibility does not exist. Therefore in this article the term is highlighted: "experience". To avoid confusion, I will use the German words.
- ² For the purpose of this essay, I have translated this and the following German quotes into English.
- ³ To deepen the different dimensions of meaning, cf. ([Welsch 1996](#), pp. 23–39).
- ⁴ Cf. on this: "Simple perception is infallible; only the judgements that attach to it can be false" ([Welsch 1996](#), p. 185).
- ⁵ Cf. on arts that do not merely "represent", but "realise" ([Welsch 1996](#), p. 89).
- ⁶ Although Welsch does not equate perception with art (studies), at selected points he clarifies perception, and here explicitly "artlike being-in", with the help of contemporary art. This does not mean that he leaves out the relevance of art from other epochs of art history. What he explains, coming from philosophy, as a shift from substance ontology to process ontology, is more strongly described in art historical discourses as the turn—not an absolute replacement—from *Werkästhetik* to *Ereignisästhetik* (cf. [Trawöger 2019](#)).
- ⁷ Peng-Keller systematises the "diversity of contemplative perception" into "undivided perception—beyond or within action processes" ("[u]ngeteilte Wahrnehmung—jenseits von Handlungsvollzügen oder in ihnen"), "extraverted and introverted perception" ("[e]xtra- und introvertiertes Wahrnehmen"), "distancing and approximating perception" ("distanzierendes und annäherndes Wahrnehmen"), while speaking additionally of "focused and wide attention" ("[f]okussierte und weite Aufmerksamkeit", ([Peng-Keller 2021](#), pp. 64–67)).
- ⁸ Larcher is one of the few theologians who also includes Welsch's aesthetic works (cf. [Larcher 1998](#)).
- ⁹ I would like to thank Martin Freitag for this term. On the difference between prayer and relaxation meditation, see ([Trawöger 2019](#)).
- ¹⁰ The term "evolutionary aesthetics" is deliberately used here. For a critical discussion of Welsch's "evolutionary ontology" from an analytical-theological perspective with a focus on classical philosophy and less from the perspective of aesthetics, cf. ([Kraschl 2018](#), pp. 273–92).
- ¹¹ Cf. note 6.
- ¹² To clarify this theory-practice bridge, I would like to return to contemporary art (studies): As mentioned in note 6, art studies differentiates between *Werkästhetik* and *Ereignisästhetik*. To say it bluntly, a *werkästhetischer* approach assumes that art and observer can be clearly distinguished from each other. An *ereignisästhetischer* approach, which is mainly used in the analysis of performances, does not allow this clear separation. Observing the performance from a standpoint outside is usually not possible, but one participates in the art event (cf. [Fischer-Lichte 2004](#)). Here, someone cannot acquire cognition "theoretically" exclusively from the safe position of an observer, but demands participation and "practical" implementation during the art

process. *Ereignisästhetik* can be illustrated very well with many contemporary art forms. Of course, *Ereignisästhetik* can also be applied to art that is not assigned to contemporary forms.

- ¹³ Welsch's elaborations on transversal reason ("transversale Vernunft") emphasise the plurality of rationalities. Between the different rationalities, reason can also unfold transitions and entanglements (cf. Welsch 1997, pp. 774–82).

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