Enactive Cognitive Science And The Study of Religious Traditions

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Enactive Cognitive Science
And
The Study of Religious Traditions
by
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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Abstract

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Enactive Cognitive Science and the Study of Religious Traditions

Thesis directed by Assistant Professor Dr. Ruth Mas.

Keywords: agency, subjectivity, intentionality, Islamic Revival, cognitive science of religion, embodiment, enaction, affect, gesture, ritual, plasticity.

In this paper I consider work in the cognitive science of religion in light of anthropological work by Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind on the formation of religious subjects in contemporary Egypt to highlight how Foucault’s historical constitution of the subject involves the cultivation of perceptual, affective, and gestural aptitudes. In particular, I draw from Michel Foucault on subjectivity and Talal Asad on the function of disciplinary practices in the formation of religious subjects in order to investigate how subjects are historically constituted as such in ways that make possible certain forms of thought, experience, and interaction. Furthermore, I consider how this process of subject formation can be supplemented by research on the plasticity of the brain, as well as by the theories of enactive, embodied, and extended cognition. I do so in order to challenge the cognitive science of religion’s claims about the naturalness of certain ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting. Taking Harvey Whitehouse’s theory of “modes of religiosity” as a central example, I assert that the models of perception, memory, and cognition borrowed from cognitive sciences are, ultimately, elaborations of the same kind of natural human subject assumed by the kind of scholarship on the Islamic tradition critiqued by Mahmood and Hirschkind.
To my uncle John Thibodeau
Whose courage, commitment, and character
In the lives of his family and community
Will forever be an inspiration and aspiration for me.
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Introduction

The first chapter is an application of the critical project undertaken by scholars, such as Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad that draws from Michel Foucault's work, to the work of Harvey Whitehouse (as a representative of the field of the cognitive science of religion) in which I argue that the privileging of conscious intention through Whitehouse's application of the theory of mind not only forecloses possibilities for analyzing religious practices, but also normativizes forms of action and behavior by making certain unfounded assumptions about how all normal humans think, behave, perceive, and experience. In particular, in this chapter I show how the cognitive study of religious practices and of "intelligent" human behavior that employ conscious intentions as their primary mechanisms for explaining these phenomena do not adequately account for how such states are constituted, both historically and physically, what precise “causal” role they play in the forms of behavior, practice, and reasoning observed in scholarship on religious traditions, and lastly, the work done by these practices, and their authorizing discourses, on the bodies of individuals that make practitioners into religious subjects.

In chapter two I address Charles Hirschkind's work on cassette-sermon listening in Egypt specifically in order to make three arguments about the inadequacy of models of agency, with the implication that what is needed is not a new, more robust theory of agency, but a better understanding of how (religious) modes of thought and experience are made possible through the historical constitution of the subject. The three arguments made are that (1) changes in socio-political landscapes and relationships are not restricted to singular, ideological intentions regarding progress versus tradition, but involve more
fundamentally the transformation and construction of subjects with particular sensibilities and dispositions, (2) religious practices, such as listening to cassette sermons, function as disciplinary practices to construct the bodily sensibilities that affect social relationships and communities, and (3) in this act of listening, models of individual agency fail to account for the ways in which performers, listeners, and media interact to constitute the act itself.

The third chapter is a discussion of recent work in cognitive science that falls under the various headings of "extended," "embodied," and "enactive" that look to the varying roles of bodily capacities and environmental mechanisms in cognition, which I argue are research programs aimed at the study of interactions and intelligent behaviors, the causes of which are not restricted to the individual's head. My argument here is that these research programs, by focusing on processes of interaction with features that span brain, body, and environment, provide an approach to the study of cognition that would greatly benefit from the inclusion of social phenomena, including religious practices, and that these approaches provide some empirical backing to the argument that forms of thought and experience emerge and are constituted in relation to the historical constitution of the subject.

In the final chapter, I suggest three particular forms of social interaction found within the Islamic tradition that have not only been inadequately analyzed by scholars attempting to provide "scientific" explanations, but also that could serve as examples of social phenomena that could be studied from the "enactive" perspective in cognitive science. In order to frame the practices of dhikr, sam', and inshad as phenomena potentially available for study in this research program, I highlight the ways in which
they unfold in relation to a number of affective, perceptual, and environmental variables, and furthermore how these forms of interaction are constituted by dynamically coupled processes that are extend into the environment and into individuals' bodies. The overall goal, by focusing on these practices, is to illustrate the potential for an approach to the study of religious traditions that is able to account for the interactions of physiological, psychological, and sociological processes which function to constitute subjects capable of experience, thinking, and acting in certain ways.
Chapter 1: Agency and Subjectivity in the Study of Religious Traditions

The first chapter of this thesis deals with the issues of agency and subjectivity in the study of Islam in particular. However, the goal is not only to reflect on the study of religions, but also to look more deeply at the notions of agency, and their underlying assumptions, that permeate not just anthropological and religious studies, but the field of cognitive science broadly speaking, and particularly cognitive sciences applied across cultures. My argument is that the critique offered by scholars such as Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and Charles Hirschkind that centers on the decoupling of agency, in principle, from the conscious intention of autonomous subjects also has consequences for theories of intelligent social behavior that are founded on natural or intuitive assumptions about human action, such as a theory of mind grounded in the discernment of conscious intentions alone. As an example, I use work in the cognitive science of religion to demonstrate that the natural intentional subject of cognitive science, when applied to other cultures, parallels the normative subject of liberal theory in its interiority, its rational teleology, and its autonomy. The purpose is not to simply critique this field of study or to argue against any scientific approach to religious or anthropological studies, but to show how we need new conceptions of agency to account for the forms of social behavior encountered in the world and to elaborate on these alternative forms of agency as modes of living, experiencing, embodying, and enacting cultural norms and virtues in contexts like pre-revolution Egypt. By reflecting on these observations, it is possible to identify the ways in which agency can be accounted for in relation to the processes by and contexts in which subjects are formed, enabling us to gain a more sensitive
understanding of how and why people act in certain ways and of the potentials for engaging with the world.

In recent anthropological works, Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind explore aspects of what has been generally termed the Islamic Revival in the context of contemporary Egypt to highlight the variety of ways in which traditional values and virtues are constructed, lived, and discussed. The Islamic Revival refers broadly to the proliferation of Islamic discourses and practices throughout Muslim social and political landscapes that has taken place over the last half century. While the practices and participants of this movement are often framed within a binary opposing passive subjects suppressed or indoctrinated by religious authorities to active agents resisting Western values, Mahmood and Hirschkind look to the way in which participants use practices and discourse as a response to the unique challenges and problems posed by the complex socio-political conditions in Egypt today. In doing so they offer substantial insight into a model of the subject that accounts for the gradations, innovations, and subtleties of human behavior that are omitted in models that privilege conscious intention as the primary source of action. These types of models that rely on conscious intentions alone for explaining social action tend to reduce complex social phenomena, e.g. religious movements, to straightforward projects with singular and spurious goals, e.g. fundamentalist movements, thereby confining the effects of such movements on societies to what is inside of people’s head and foreclosing the possibility for such movements to have powerful effects not just on beliefs, but on individual bodies, forms of interpersonal interaction, and social landscapes as well.
The privileging of conscious intention in theories of agency has been critiqued by the anthropologist of religion Talal Asad who states in *Genealogies of Religion*, “My argument, in brief, is that contrary to the discourse of many radical historians and anthropologists, agent and subject (where the former is the principle of effectivity and the latter of consciousness) do not belong to the same theoretical universe and should not, therefore, be coupled.”¹ The point Asad makes here is that subjectivity, which has been linked historically to a particular theory of consciousness, has become a necessary condition for agency in modern discourse. With regard to the link between agency and subjectivity through an intentional consciousness, Asad writes in *Formations of the Secular* that, “Although the various usages of agency have different implications that do not all hang together, cultural theory tends to reduce them to the metaphysical idea of a conscious agent-subject having both the capacity and the desire to move in a singular historical direction: that of increasing self-empowerment and decreasing pain.”² In this model, consciousness becomes an essential and defining feature of both agency and subjectivity insofar as the subject must be conscious of its self, in particular its intentions, in order for it to act in a meaningful way, i.e. for it to have agency. In other words, Asad is arguing against the claim present in a significant body of scholarship that agency is necessarily the product of a self-constituting subject, where the assumption is that this self-constitution occurs through the subject’s autonomous consciousness alone.³ Asad opposes these general assumptions about the nature of consciousness, and human nature

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¹ Asad 2003, 15.
² Asad 2003, 79
³ Therefore, for Asad, consciousness is linked to agency through the notion of self-constitution. As Asad writes, “The essence of the principle of self-constitution is “consciousness.” That is, a metaphysical concept of consciousness is essential for explaining how the many fragments come to be construed as parts of a single self-identifying subject” (Asad 1993, 15).
in general, which claim it functionsrationally, autonomously, and with a teleology of self-empowerment that have become normative in political and academic discourse on religion in modern society.\(^4\) One of the normative assumptions here places the causes of action in the internal intentions of an individual, largely disembodied consciousness operating according to a set of given rules. It is no so much a problem with intention itself, but with the fact that actions are understood with respect to the degree to which its intentions are produced through the autonomous operation of reason. Also, it is assumed in the normative model that for a rational agent intentions will necessarily be directed toward an increasing freedom from (or resistance to) subjugating powers because autonomy is both the necessary condition for and desired mode of thought in political and moral agency.\(^5\) So therefore in the model opposed here, actions can be assessed and explained by the degree to which the individual intentions guiding the actions conform to certain rules for reasoning, the primary rule being autonomy in operation. Consequently, if actions are discursively classified in terms of their intention, it becomes possible to generalize and categorize kinds of action based on types of motivations and whether or not those motivations are genuine or authentic to the individual (or are rational/irrational, secular/religious, just/unjust). By casting doubt on the privileging of intentions, Asad demonstrates the potential for questioning the usefulness and adequacy of intentions as a constitutive feature of agency, not only on epistemological grounds, i.e. our capacity to

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\(^4\) With regard to the notion of empowerment Asad writes, “‘empowerment,’ a legal term referring both to the act of giving power to someone and to someone’s power to act becomes a metaphysical quality defining secular human agency, its objective as well as precondition” (Asad 2003, 79).

\(^5\) To be free, according to Kant “is to be independent of determination by causes in the sensible world...” and “to the Idea of freedom there is inseparably attached the concept of autonomy, and to this in turn the universal principle of morality...” I use Kant here simply to give a more concrete definition of freedom and also to demonstrate the initial link between freedom, autonomy, and morality in liberal society. Such a move takes assumed facts about human nature (i.e. nature of consciousness) and asserts that this is how all people ought to be.
be certain about the causal roles of various mechanisms including intentional states, but also on the grounds that not all people reason about their behavior and the behavior of others on these individualistic terms. The issue is not simply that action can exceed people’s consciousness, but that a particular understanding of consciousness has become linked to both concepts of agency and to political principles of the freedom and self-empowerment of subjects.6

Saba Mahmood highlights how women’s participation in the Islamic Revival in particular poses significant difficulties for specifically feminist, but also more generally liberal, models of agency, especially with regard to women’s intentions to cultivate Islamic virtues, rather than to seek autonomy from the Islamic tradition. These feminist models, she argues in *Politics of Piety*, “share the assumption that there is something intrinsic to women that *should* predispose them to oppose the practices, values, and injunction that the Islamist movement embodies.”7 There is thus a normative assumption underlying these models of agency that makes it difficult for them to analyze women’s active involvement in a set of traditional practices and discourses that appear to subjugate these women. According to Mahmood the difficulty arises from the fact that, “feminists have sought to understand how women resist the dominant male order by subverting the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeploying them for their “own interests

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6 Asad writes in reference to various “religious” acts of violence, “There was no single or consistent motive for that complex action not only because there were several part-agents but also because of the diverse desires, sensibilities, and self-images involved. But beyond this recognition of agentive complexity we can press the question further: When do we look for a clear motive? … In brief, although “religious” intentions are variously distinguished from “secular” ones in different traditions, the identification of *intentions* as such is especially important in what scholars call modernity for allocating moral and legal accountability” (Asad 2003, 12). In the same way that the classification of actions in terms of religious motivations serves as a principle for separating acts of terrorism from acts of just war, so too does the classification of daily activities in terms of religious belief enable the foreclosure of certain ways of acting in the world.

7 Mahmood 2005, 2.
and agendas.” Drawing from Asad, Mahmood argues that in this kind of feminist scholarship in which models of agency have become normativizing, agency is grounded in the universal desire for the political and moral autonomy of the subject; or in other words, the desire to be free from external influences, such as religious authorities or state institutions, and to be free to act in accordance with one’s will or to express one’s true self and intentions. Normative models of agency are often founded on the notion of the subject that is, and if not ought to be, independent from the restraints of society, culture, or religion and operating according to a given set of rules for rational moral and political thought that empower the individual to realize its inner self. Thus, the autonomous agent in Western discourse freely acts to liberate itself from the processes of subjectivation that are said to be present in religious traditions but absent from the modern secular tradition. For Mahmood, the linking of agency to an autonomous subject forecloses analytic possibilities for exploring the myriad forms of relationship to one’s self and others in cases such as the women’s piety movement where moral and political action are not framed by practitioners in terms of the intentions of autonomous individuals and are instead framed in terms of traditional Islamic discourse on piety. This is so because the normative model fails to account for the fact that discourses and practices actually constitute ways of thinking, experiencing, and being. 

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8 Mahmood 2005, 6.
9 Interestingly, Asad points out that there is a kind of inherent paradox or “metaphysical conundrum” in this model in Formations of the Secular: “The paradox inadequately appreciated here is that the self to be liberated from external control must be subjected to the control of a liberating self already and always free, aware, and in control of its own desires” (Asad 2003, 73).
10 Mahmood writes, “My argument should be familiar to anthropologists who have long acknowledged that the terms people use to organize their lives are not simply a gloss for universally shared assumptions about the world and one’s place in it, but are actually constitutive of different forms of personhood, knowledge, and experience” (Mahmood 2005, 16).
where the subject is not treated as an autonomous consciousness but understood in terms of the effects of power operating on discourses that subjectify individuals, i.e. contribute to the subjectivation of individuals. In other words, while the subject is constituted by the conscious relationship one has with the self, it is not independent from, in a transcendental or historically universal sense, relationships of power; rather, how we experience and the operations by which we come to know ourselves, both for ourselves and in relation to others, are influenced to a large extent by practices, institutions and discourses.

The notion of a subject that is constituted through a variety of institutional, disciplinary, and pedagogical processes, i.e. by processes of power, is a critical aspect of Michel Foucault’s work that drives both Mahmood’s and Asad’s engagement with the Islamic tradition. For Mahmood in particular, Foucault’s analysis of the ethical and moral subject has strong parallels with the ethical project undertaken by members of the da’wa movement, and I use Hirschkind’s work to unpack not only the historical and political processes at play in the formation of pious Muslim subjects in contemporary Egypt, but also the embodied effects involved in this formation. In particular, Mahmood draws from Foucault’s theory of the ethical formation of subjects in order to analyze the construction of Muslim subjects, i.e. subjects of an Islamic moral discourse. While “morals” for Foucault are the sets of norms, values, and rules established by authoritative discourse, Mahmood writes that for Foucault, “‘Ethics,’” on the other hand, refers to those practices, techniques, and discourses through which a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, or truth.”

However, this process is not

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11 Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety*. P. 28. To be clear, neither Mahmood nor Foucault are arguing for the superiority of any particular “telos,” or ideal moral subject.
to be conceived as an independent, autonomous process of self-cultivation; instead, the formation of subjects takes place with respect to specific sets of moral codes and functions to establish particular relationships to one’s self and to moral codes.\textsuperscript{12} In other words, the ethical subject is neither fully determined by nor entirely free from power; rather, it is enmeshed in a field of possibilities (for thought, experience, and conduct) operated on by practices and discourses that work in the formation and transformation of ways of living, interacting, and thinking. Therefore, agency (as well as forms of reasoning, and affective and perceptual experiences) needs to be understood as arising from within the context of these subjectivizing parameters.

For Mahmood, the relationship between ethical subjects and moral codes can take on many different forms and is achieved through specific ethical practices that operate on individual bodies, “each of which establishes a particular relationship between capacities of the self (will, reason, desire, action, and so on) and a particular norm.”\textsuperscript{13} Importantly for Mahmood, “These practices are technical practices for Foucault and include corporeal and body techniques, spiritual exercises, and ways of conducting oneself – all of which are “positive” in the sense that they are manifest in, and immanent to, everyday life.”\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, through daily practices such as wearing a veil, praying, or listening to cassette sermons, subjects are able to effect change in themselves in terms of desires, values, experiences, perceptions, bodily comportments, and ways of thinking, as well as in their social environments in terms of forms of relationship, interaction, and deliberation.

\textsuperscript{12} Foucault discusses the particular historical and discursive form of moral injunctions as “the mode of subjectivation, that is, the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations. Is it, for instance, divine law that has been revealed in a text? Is it natural law, a cosmological order, in each case the same for every living being? Is it a rational rule? Is it the attempt to give your existence the most beautiful form possible?” (Foucault \textit{On the Genealogy of Ethics} 1990, 264).
\textsuperscript{13} Mahmood 2005, 29.
\textsuperscript{14} Mahmood 2005, 29.
Consequently, by employing Foucault’s analysis of the formation of ethical subjects, Mahmood claims that “Instead of limiting agency to those acts that disrupt existing power relations, Foucault’s work encourages us to think of agency: (a) in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions; and (b) as ineluctably bound up with the historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed.” Framing agency in relation to the formation of ethical subjects, rather than as the constitution of the self by an autonomous consciousness, opens up possibilities for analyzing religious traditions with respect to the contingent social conditions and various embodied forms it takes in ethical practices, which adds to our understanding of how Islamic practices and discourses function with diverse, and often unexplored, effect within contemporary societies.

Elaborating on the decoupling of the autonomous subject from agency, Mahmood writes, “if the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes “change” and the means by which it is effected), then the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity.” In a context like present-day Egypt, the dimensions along which change can occur or by which differences can be assessed far exceed the possibilities afforded by normative models of agency which collapse the varieties of ways of living, embodying, experiencing, and thinking about norms, values, and virtues discursively authorized within traditions into simple binaries. By shifting the focus to

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16 Mahmood 2005, 14-5.
17 For Mahmood, the binary involves primarily the trope of resistance/suppression, while Hirschkind deals with the trope of fundamentalism.
how traditions are lived and experienced and by keeping open the conception of agency within which traditions are lived, she not only opens up analytic possibilities for investigating the depth and diversity of religious movements like the Islamic Revival, but also for reflecting critically on our own understandings of intelligent social behavior more broadly. In this sense, the analytic standpoint offered by Mahmood, within which Hirschkind’s analysis of the practices of listening operates and which unfolds out of work by Talal Asad and Michel Foucault on the formation of subjects, provides insight into the dynamics of religious traditions within contemporary societies and also forces us to challenge our own thinking about how we relate to ourselves and to others.

For Mahmood, the goal is not to present these practices uncritically as necessarily justified practices or as practices that ought to be embraced by all women. “Rather,” Mahmood writes, “my suggestion is that we leave open the possibility that our political and analytical certainties might be transformed in the process of exploring nonliberal movements of the kind I studied, that the lives of the women with whom I worked might have something to teach us beyond what we can learn from the circumscribed social-scientific exercise of “understanding and translation.”” The point made here then is not simply one about the importance of studying a tradition in terms of its embodied and discursive practices of its participants, before transforming it into a given vocabulary or framework, but is also an ethical question addressing how we deal with religious difference in a global landscape in which differences are increasingly being drawn along secular lines. In short, by reflecting on how others think about and experience the world they inhabit, we can begin to reflect on our own modes of thought and experience and the degree to which these particular ways of relating to others and ourselves vary cross-

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culturally. Through this form of analysis perhaps we can discover alternative ways of conceiving of agency and change that enable us to engage as critical yet sensitive persons in a complex, fluid world.  

The central insight of Mahmood and Asad’s work is that agency cannot be assumed to take a particular form for all people at all times, particularly in the case where agency is said to arise exclusively out of the conscious intention of the autonomous subject because this normative model carries with it a prescriptive dimension about how people ought to think and act grounded in a particular historical, political project. However, what I want to expand upon here is how exactly intention functions in the theory of mind model of social agency, and how that functioning parallels the role of intention in the normative model critiqued by Mahmood and Asad. In doing so, my goal is to extend the critical project to fields where our mode of thinking about intelligent behavior has been guided predominantly by assumptions in Whitehouse’s kind of application of the theory of mind. The point is not that these assumptions are necessarily false, in fact I think they accurately describe how many people in secular, liberal societies think about intelligent behavior, but to highlight that some of those assumptions are more historically and culturally specific than they are often thought to be. Consequently, when applied to different contexts, these ways of thinking about agency not only preclude but also privilege and prescribe modes of thought and action.

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19 The notion of critique I draw from begins with Foucault and has been employed by scholars such as Talal Asad and Ruth Mas. For these scholars, critique is not an epistemological process aimed at uncovering or at pointing out what is not right. Instead, “it is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest” (Foucault 1990, 154). He adds later in the article that, “If at the base there has not been the work of thought upon itself and if, in fact, modes of thought, that is to say modes of action, have not been altered, whatever the project for reform, we know that it will be swamped, digested by modes of behavior and institutions that will always be the same” (Foucault 1990, 156).
One particular area of research that has utilized a general notion of the theory of mind to analyze the behavior of members of religious communities is the cognitive science of religion. There has been a substantial increase in research in the fields of religious studies and anthropology of religion that draws upon cognitive and neurosciences to explain the nature of religious belief and its transmission, and religious experience, resulting in the recent development of the field generally termed cognitive science of religion (CSR). While work in this field has produced insights into aspects of religious thought and experience, there remain unexplored assumptions about the nature of human beings underlying these cognitive explanations. These assumptions, which in the case of CSR are often bound up in universal cognitive mechanisms, privilege a particular way of thinking about, interacting with, and experiencing oneself, others, and the world. In short, the natural human subject of CSR is characterized by its interiority, its rational capacities, and its autonomy in operation (it mirrors the natural agent-subject disposed toward autonomy critiqued by Mahmood and Asad). Consequently, the human subject is taken as a constant, or a given, in CSR’s analysis of religious experience and thought, and while the subject does change and develop as a human being, the way in which it experiences, perceives, and interacts with itself, others, and the world remains unchanged across time and space. Taken in this way, the subject can ultimately be eliminated from the analysis because it is no longer necessary to ask whose experience or whose thought when explaining religious thought and experience since the who, i.e. the subject, remains the same. Thus, in general for CSR, religious experiences, thought, and behavior can be compared and explained through their

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20 For examples, see Whitehouse 2004, and Whitehouse and Laidlaw 2007.
21 By this I mean that its actions are understood in terms of internal psychological mechanisms.
deviation from so-called “natural” or “intuitive” forms of experience, thought, and behavior, and as a result, religious subjects, beliefs, and practices can be classified and criticized to varying degrees in accordance with their level of deviation from the norm. My point is that these natural or intuitive forms posited by CSR need to be investigated not only in terms of the cognitive and neurological mechanisms that enable them, but also with respect to normative models of moral and political subjects that have been essential to explanations of religious movements and traditions, particularly within the context of Islam.

Consequently, in its failure to investigate how bodies disciplined by norms established by religious traditions and the subjects that are produced out of this disciplining afford possibilities for thought, experience, and agency that lie outside normative possibilities, the cognitive science of religion reinforces an understanding of agency in terms of intentions that enable distinctions to be drawn in relation to cognitive mechanisms that are fixed and normalizing. In particular, versions of the theory of mind have served as an essential cognitive mechanism in the cognitive science of religion for identifying and classifying agency. An example of the normativizing function of the theory of mind can be seen through its application in Harvey Whitehouse’s work *Modes of Religiosity*, where he writes:

The technical term “theory of mind” (TOM) is used by developmental psychologists (e.g., S.A. Gelman et al. 1994 and Leslie 1994) to describe a domain of intuitive knowledge concerning the intentionality of animate beings. As previously noted, all normal adults assume that the behavior of other persons is caused by invisible properties (intentions) informed by beliefs that may or may not be correct. Among the crucial categories employed by the TOM are agent,  

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22 The mechanisms and assumptions to which I refer involve the theory of mind, representational redescription, hierarchies of senses, modularity of mind, emotion and affect, and memory.
action, patient, and instrument... Once these principles and categories have fully
developed (approximately by school age), they remain roughly stable throughout
life.\textsuperscript{23}

What underlies Whitehouse’s use of the theory of mind here is first of all his contention
that intention necessarily precedes all intelligent action. In this sense, outward behavior
is necessarily caused by an individual intention, i.e. belief, desire, goal. This allows
analyses of action to invoke the language of expression and representation, framing
action as primarily symbolic or representative. Such a view of action fails to account for
the ways in which actions cultivate, evoke, and transform beliefs, desires, and
experiences.\textsuperscript{24} In conjunction with this structuring of intentions in Whitehouse’s model is
the idea that the form of intentional states is necessarily propositional or linguistic, and
therefore that intentional explanations or meanings are readily available to verbal report
in normal humans. One problematic consequence of this presupposition about how
people understand their own actions and the actions of others is that it fails to account for
the embodied and practical, i.e. skillful, forms of knowledge and social interaction
present in religious traditions and practices that may not be reducible to a specific beliefs
or intentions. In short, the many mechanisms present in intelligent social behavior
suggest that this first underlying supposition needs to be rethought to take into account
how intentional states are constituted and manifested, both physically and historically.
The second underlying assumption in Whitehouse’s model of the theory of mind is that
intelligent social behavior is necessarily guided by conscious intentions inside the head of
the subject. Instead of focusing attention to mental processes exclusively as Whitehouse
does, how people employ bodily capacities and dispositions to interact as well as how

\textsuperscript{23} Whitehouse 2004, 34, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{24} I think of this in terms of the structure of action, particularly in terms of its temporal structure, and I
rethink this structure through ideas of gesture and dynamic coupling in chapter 4 specifically.
external mechanisms contribute to that interaction in order to appreciate complexity of the systems involved needs to be examined.\textsuperscript{25} Finally, one of the pitfalls of Whitehouse’s engagement is that it can be read as positing that these intentions are the products of a specific form of rational thought and thus universal, or else are the product of evolutionary processes, also resulting in universal intentions. However, this poses the question of what happens in a case like pain where scholars assume that agency is necessarily directed toward the dissipation of pain, because it is not always clear that we can assume that people will experience and relate to pain in the same ways.\textsuperscript{26} It is in this third sense that the theory of mind grounded in conscious intention is not only a causally insufficient and theoretically inadequate, but also normativizes conceptions of agency, because it presupposes particular ways at arriving at and expressing internal intentional states, thereby privileging and foreclosing certain possibilities for action and thought.\textsuperscript{27} For instance, in Whitehouse’s model, the existence of high-frequency, high-arousal religious practices is deemed virtually impossible as it is too unnatural, even though as we see in Charles Hirschkind’s work, there do exist in the world today practices that are both highly affective and highly repetitive.

One might object that the theory of mind used by Whitehouse does not function normatively because it states that intentions can be “informed by beliefs that may or may

\textsuperscript{25} This could be thought of as the causal or constitutive principle of agency
\textsuperscript{26} On the topic of pain in relation to the natural sovereignty of the human subject Asad writes, “The assumption here is that power – and so too pain – is external to and repressive of the agent, that it “subjects” him or her, and that nevertheless the agent as “active subject” has both the desire to oppose power and the responsibility to become more powerful so that disempowerment – suffering – can be overcome. I shall argue against this assumption” (Asad 2003, 71).
\textsuperscript{27} I suppose we could call this the logical principle of agency, i.e. by what rules do our thoughts and actions operate? Mahmood argues that agency ought to be thought of in terms of the grammar of the concepts in which agency emerges, and my point is that through disciplinary practices these “grammars” have deep physiological and neurological effects, which include the weighting of patterns of coactivation across different brain regions, the tuning of neurological oscillators that can strengthen or dampen the role of certain neural mechanisms, and the reconfiguration of perceptual and emotive systems.
not be correct.” In other words, since people can act on false beliefs, there is nothing in this model that privileges actions based on true beliefs over actions based on false beliefs. However, especially in its application to the field of religion, the ability to classify beliefs, or intentions, as true or false serves as the driving force behind the decision of what phenomena need to be explained. In addition, in this model it is assumed that some beliefs are more intuitive than others, and so the goal becomes to explain how false or counterintuitive beliefs guide action, and how they are transmitted and acquired. From the start, religious beliefs in this model are placed on the side of false and counterintuitive beliefs, and it is in this way, i.e. by positing forms of intuitive knowledge and a “natural” model of agency that is causally connected to intentions, that the normative assumptions about the nature of agency are sustained in a strictly intentional theory of mind. It might be argued that although intention is essential in this model, the intentions may be unconscious and therefore not necessarily linked to consciousness in the way I have suggested. On one hand, if one is using unconscious in the Freudian sense, then it must be admitted that despite the sophistication of his theory of the unconscious, there still exists, in principle, the capacity for the trained practitioner to formulate the dynamics of the unconscious in terms of propositional intentions. Therefore, to employ the unconscious in this context is not to detach consciousness from agency, but to tell a slightly more intricate story of how consciousness relates to agency. On the other hand,

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28 This refers to different domains of knowledge, such as intuitive physics or biology, or the theory of mind. For Whitehouse, “These forms of “domain-specific” knowledge appear to be acquired by the children quite naturally and are not subject to significant variation cross-culturally” (Whitehouse, p. 30). Religious concepts for Whitehouse for the most part only minimally violate these kinds of intuitive knowledge, but little attention is paid to how this knowledge is actually acquired.

29 Asad makes this argument in *Formations of the Secular*, “It should be added, however, that although Freudianism has an exceptionally sophisticated sense of the internal dynamics of the passions (mediators between mind and body), it holds out the problematic promise that the passions can ultimately be mastered by reason through systematic observation and interpretation, thereby giving rationality primacy in the constitution of the modern, secular subject” (Asad 2003, 69).
unconscious may be used to refer to intentions or beliefs as embodied or habitual, but if
this is the case then intentions need to be rethought in terms of their structure, i.e. the
systems that compose these intentions, and in terms of their causal role in agency.

Considering agency in terms of habitual engagement is a significant theoretical
reconstruction, but does not appear to be a position that scholars in the cognitive science
of religion would readily embrace because both religion and ritual are defined explicitly
in relation to propositional beliefs about supernatural agents. The point here is that given
the kinds of ethnographic work dealt with in this thesis, a theory of mind based in
conscious intentional states as formulated in Whitehouse’s theory, cannot be assumed to
be the basis for intelligent social behavior in all cases, and that using the theory of mind
as espoused by Whitehouse to define religion in such a limited fashion serves to confine
religious thought and practice to the private sphere of opinion where they ought not
influence political and moral reasoning and policy, i.e. public sphere, in a modern,
secular society. 30 The argument being made by Asad here is that, while many scholars
would accept the fact that personal histories, emotions, and bodily experiences play a role
in people’s actions, “conscious intention is assumed to be central to the concept of
agency in most anthropological work,” 31 and I am arguing that the theory of mind carries
with it these assumptions about agency indicating that we need to rethink the theory of
mind as the grounds for social agency.

30 On the topic of the separation of public and private as a principal doctrine of secularism, “If secularism
as a doctrine requires the distinction between private reason and public principle, it also demands the
placing of the “religious” in the former by “the secular.” Private reason is not the same as private space; it
is the entitlement to difference, the immunity from the force of public reason. So theoretical and practical
problems remain that call for each of these categories to be defined. What makes a discourse and an action
“religious” or “secular”? ” (Asad 2003, 8).
31 Asad 2003, 69.
Asad’s critique of the concept of a category of religion is therefore not simply a complaint about how the term religion has been used in modern societies or a defeated abandonment of conceptions of religion; instead, it is a call for attention to the complexity and subtlety of the mechanisms and processes that actually constitute what religion is and has been for people at different times and in different places. Harvey Whitehouse, for instance, refers to Asad’s critique in his book *Modes of Religiosity*:

> It is certainly the case that the contrasts commonly drawn between the religious and the secular— for instance, in modern liberal societies—are the product of a unique history; in the course of which it has taken a rather astonishing variety of guises. But just because folk notions of religion are somewhat variable and have been put into the service of all kinds of dubious imperialist projects, it does not follow that we should give up on the search for scientific theories of religion. A scientific theory of religion must tell us what, for the purposes of that theory, constitutes religion.  

On the same page, Whitehouse goes on to explicitly define what constitutes religion, and in doing so defines in advance what mechanisms will constitute religion.  

> Certainl[y] these sorts of belief do exist in religions, but to define religion solely as a set of propositional beliefs about supernatural agents necessarily limits our understanding of what religion is and has been for religious subjects. Some might say that the point being made is simply a distinction between “know-how” versus “know-that” which is a common distinction drawn in cognitive and psychological literature. However valid this distinction is, we must ask if religion can be restricted to the realm of know-that, and what are the stakes of restricting religion in this way? Religion is for many people of practical concern, as opposed to theoretical concern. It is about how people live their lives, rather than about what they believe. What constitutes religion, or the secular for

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32 Whitehouse 2004, 2.
33 “For the present purposes, let us simply say that religion consists of any set of shared beliefs and actions that appeal to supernatural agency” (Whitehouse 2004, 2).
that matter, is not only historically and culturally variable, also extends beyond internal beliefs in supernatural agency to include the sensibilities, gestures, emotional dispositions, discourses, and ways of living and relating to others. A scientific theory of religion then ought to look at the varying roles of these kinds of processes in social activities and discourses in order to identify the gradations of activities that are often categorized as either religious or secular.

One set of “problematic” religious activity that is central to Whitehouse’s theory is ritual, which he argues is defined as an action that lacks inherent intentional meaning.\textsuperscript{34} For Whitehouse, religion consists of semantic knowledge transmitted or self-produced in the processes of exegesis of ritual actions, the frequency of which determines the “mode of religiosity.” Ritual action poses an analytic problem for Whitehouse because it is a category of behavior that does not have an apparent purpose or technical function, and so exceeds explanation in terms of the theory of mind, i.e. interior intentional states.\textsuperscript{35} What Whitehouse means by this is that ritual actions lack any intentional meaning that can be reasonably inferred by another individual, or in some cases such as the puja he cites, the practitioners themselves. These ritual actions are universally recognizable for “normal” humans, and for Whitehouse they are understood in contrast to “non-ritual actions, such

\textsuperscript{34} On ritual Whitehouse writes, “Since rituals are actions that lack intrinsic meanings, in terms of both what they intend and what they accomplish, they open the floodgates to an indefinite flow of possible interpretations or symbolic motivations” (Whitehouse 2004, 4).

\textsuperscript{35} With reference to the problematic nature of ritual as a category of behavior Whitehouse writes, “rituals are also irreducible to the intentional states of those who produce or perform them. This constitutes a violation of the intuitive expectations delivered by “theory of mind” mechanisms … Barring certain pathologies, people continually try to read the intentions of other animate beings, especially other humans. Although they do so with varying degrees of success … they nevertheless do it as automatically, unconsciously, and effortlessly as they would recognize a voice or respond to their own names. Yet ritual actions confound this most basic of cognitive mechanisms insofar as they foreclose the possibility of inferring anything about the actors’ intentions. Catholics do not cross themselves for any transparent reason… The intentions behind ritual actions do not lie buried in the particular actor, and so our mind-reading mechanisms either engage in a frustrated search for intentional meaning or, if taxed too heavily, give up altogether” (Whitehouse 2004, 166).
as placing a lid on a pot of water suspended over a fire, have an intrinsic intentional meaning. As long as we can reasonably attribute to the cook certain basic understandings about the physics of heating liquids, he or she is clearly intending to rap heat in the pot and hasten the process of boiling or to prevent unwanted materials from falling into the pot or both.\(^\text{36}\) However rituals, for Whitehouse, “lack intuitive relations between means and ends,” thereby preventing the attribution of particular intentional states.

The point here is that the theory of mind is serving to define religious thought and behavior and that defining them through this mechanism enables Whitehouse to assert that in contrast to nonreligious forms of education like evolutionary biology that foster creativity and innovation in thought, religious forms of learning are so rigid that they not only prohibit new forms of questioning and knowledge, but also more generally lead to a kind of indifference and detachment over time in which religious subjects practice their religions without any thought or reflection.\(^\text{37}\) Consequently, in his application of the theory of mind defined in terms of conscious intentions, Whitehouse draws a normative distinction between secular forms of learning that are said to promote creativity and progress, and religious forms of learning that repress creativity and innovative thought. In short, in failing to act in accordance with the given expectations of the theory of mind, religious subjects can be stripped of their agency in the world because their actions are not intended to produce the kind of useful change in people’s experiences, thoughts, and

\(^{36}\) Whitehouse 2004, 96

\(^{37}\) “In the case of art criticism and evolutionary biology, however, the application of expert knowledge can (and should) foster curiosity, thereby encouraging the formation of new questions, whether interpretive or theoretical … For experienced adherents to a religious orthodoxy, however, new questions and new answers are few and far between.” He goes on to write, “When people end up performing rituals largely as a matter of automated habit, they become far less likely to reflect explicitly upon the possible symbolic meanings of these rituals.” (Whitehouse 2004, 5). The key point here is that for a number of reasons, religious rituals stifle change.
relationships produced by secular forms of education. However, if we were to look at religious practice outside the lens of ritual, i.e. as an action in need of interpretation in terms of explicit semantic knowledge produced by a conscious subject, it would be possible to analyze how religious practices function within the everyday lives of subjects to construct sensibilities, perceptual aptitudes, and affective dispositions that provide embodied possibilities for actions, and also to enact sensory landscapes and social relationships that afford potentials for participants to take control of their own conduct, and to establish relationships with themselves and each other. By analyzing religious practice in this way, ritual becomes less a transmission of information to passive recipients, and more a disciplinary practice aimed at the proper performance of certain techniques, not in order to discover or express a singular meaning, but to hone the forms of life that enable one to act and think as a member of a particular community.

In *Genealogies of Religion*, Talal Asad takes up the task of rethinking ritual as disciplinary practice through the example of monastic communities in medieval Europe. Asad’s analysis of ritual highlights that the common interpretation of ritual as a symbolic behavior, in the sense that it either represents or communicates a meaning that can be translated, has not only restricted the study of religious practices to the domain of

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38 As Asad writes, “In brief, it does not seem to me to make good sense to say that ritual behavior stands universally in opposition to behavior that is ordinary or pragmatic, any more than religion stands in contrast to reason or to (social) science” (Asad 1993, 167).
39 A description of religious practice on these grounds is the project undertaken by Charles Hirschkind, which will be explored in more depth later.
40 Asad is clear that he is not attempting to provide an alternative theory of ritual but is attempting a different project: “While I take it for granted that communicative discourse is involved in learning, performing, and commenting upon rites, I reject the idea that ritual itself encodes and communicates some special meaning. In what follows I present a specific historical analysis of monastic rites as disciplinary practices. Monastic rites are analyzed in relation to programs for forming or reforming moral dispositions (that is, for organizing the physical and verbal practices that constitute the virtuous Christian self), in particular, the disposition to true obedience” (Asad 1993, 130).
41 With regard to these sorts of interpretations of ritual Asad writes, “But both share the idea that ritual is to be conceived essentially in terms of signifying behavior – a type of activity to be classified separately from practical, that is, technically effective, behavior” (Asad 1993, 58).
propositional knowledge, but has also developed out of particular historical conception of ritual as a text prescribing religious behavior. Asad goes on to ask with regard to this historical development of ritual, as a script for action, into ritual as a form of readable action, “Is it possible that the transformation of rites from discipline to symbol, from practicing distinctive virtues (passions) to representing by means of practices, has been one of the preconditions for the larger conceptual transformation of heterogeneous life (acting and being acting upon) into readable text?”42 In other words, could it be possible that the symbolic and semantic modes of thought assumed to be universal, such as the theory of mind, are historically dependent on more than the philosophical and scientific discovery of rational thought?43 If so, how else might we be able to analyze not only religious practices, but also varieties of social behavior broadly speaking? What if these kinds of interactions don’t function solely to transmit information between an internal world and an external world, but also function to condition the role of emotional, perceptual, and bodily systems in forms of reasoning? And it is precisely these ways of engaging religious, and more generally social and political, action that Asad’s discussion of disciplinary practice makes possible.

Disciplinary practices, for Asad, turn our attention away from questions of interpretation and symbolic meaning and instead enable us to look at how the formation of subjects, whether they be religious, moral, or political subjects entails not merely processes of subjugation and repression, but also productive processes that transform the subject’s relationship with themselves and with authorities. As Asad writes in reference

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42 Asad 1993, 79.
43 My goal here is not to provide a genealogy of a symbolic theory of cognition, but to point out that the notion of action as having some sort of symbolic meaning, i.e. expressing something, that is discoverable through introspection, or exegesis, is actually a relatively modern one linked to a number of disparate elements spanning religious, political, legal, and social processes.
to the Christian monastic program, “The primary object of that transformation was the
development of the Christian virtue of willing obedience, a process that did not “reduce
peoples’ perception of available choices” (Paine) but ideally reorganized the basis on
which choice were to be made.”

Even a case like Christian monasticism where the
common interpretation focuses on the denial or renunciation of the self’s will that is
replaced with the will of an other for the purpose of keeping order, Asad demonstrates,
must be addressed with respect to the formation of the dispositions and desires that do not
naturally inhere in individuals, such as the desire to willingly obey. With regard to the
function of the monastic program Asad writes:

The rites that were prescribed by that program did not simply evoke or release
universal emotions, they aimed to construct and reorganize distinctive emotions –
desire … humility … remorse – on which the central Christian virtue of
obedience to God depended. This point must be stressed, because the emotions
mentioned here are not universal human feelings, not “powerful drives and
emotions associated with human physiology” … They are historically specific
emotions that are structured internally and related to each other in historically
determined ways. And they are the product not of mere readings of symbols but
of processes of power.

Therefore, for Asad the daily disciplinary practices of the monks did not result in the
monk’s loss of sense of self and consequently its unconditional submission to the
authority of the monastery, but instead worked to restructure ways of relating to and
understanding one’s self, i.e. will, desires, thoughts, actions, as a member of the monastic
community and in relation to a specific monastic program.

In contrast to the results of repetitive religious practice offered by Harvey

Whitehouse’s modes of religiosity in which repetition leads to indifference, Asad writes:

44 Asad 1993, 135.
45 Asad 1993, 134.
The Christian monk who learns to will obedience is not merely someone who submits to another’s will by force of argument or by the threat of force – or simply by way of habitual, unthinking response. He is not someone who has “lost his own will,” as though a man’s will could be truly his only when it remained opposed to another’s. The obedient monk is a person for whom obedience is his virtue – in the sense of being his ability, potentiality, power – a Christian virtue developed through discipline.46

The monastic subject, through the disciplinary program, is therefore actively engaged in a process of transformation and change in modes of feeling and thought, i.e. in actively altering its relationship with the world, in order to make possible the forms of communal (and individual) life authorized by powers.47 Furthermore, Asad emphasizes that the disciplinary practices involved in these monastic programs, such as penance, manual labor, liturgy, recitation, and memorization also underwent significant changes that “constitute what we today would describe as discursive interventions in the practice of a social psychology that aimed at reforming its categories to make them coherent and effective.”48 Amongst and within these communities there existed an authoritative discourse surrounding these practices that responded to the institutional and historical circumstances faced by monastic communities, such as the growing number of initiates with prior lay experience.49 One of the categories or domains of intervention in the process of forming monastic subjects became the reconfiguration of the monk’s relationship to those previous experiences, particularly in the case of sensual desire. The question at hand for the monastic authorities was not the suppression of memories or

46 Asad 1993, 125.
47 A point that Asad makes here is that power not only functions to authorize knowledge by deciding on interpretation, but also more generally authorizes the rules by which the production of knowledge can be authorized. By defining the practices that produce knowledge, power can also define the language, grammars, logics, histories, desires, intentions, beliefs, etc. that are allowed in the production of knowledge. How do structures of self authorized through practices make possible forms of knowledge employed in the observation and regulation of individuals within communities?
48 Asad 1993, 164
49 Asad 1993, 112 and 151.
desires, but the transformation of sensual desire into the desire to obey God, and one of
the primary means for this transformation was the performance of liturgy and the
recitation of sacred texts.\(^\text{50}\)

The formation of the monastic subject therefore did not involve the establishment
of a straightforward relationship of domination and submission, but instead a complex
rearticulation of the monk’s relationship with self, fellow monks, monastic authorities,
and God that enabled the monk to live properly in the monastic community. However
what defined proper living, in the sense of the way practices and duties were to be
performed, was not a monolithic form of life that spanned all the monastic communities.
Instead, the monastic authorities within the communities, which were each faced with
different sets of problems, capabilities, and necessities, developed alternative readings of
sacred texts in ways that adapted to their institutional circumstances. These monastic
programs therefore were not the product of a single intentional process that an authorized
individual put forth; rather, they were constellations of discourses, historical
circumstances, practices, disciplines, and selves that operated on individuals’ desires,
memories, gestures, and sensibilities in order to develop virtuous subjects.\(^\text{51}\) It is for this
reason, i.e. that intention is contingent in both individual and communal change, that

Asad concludes his discussion on monastic communities by writing, “But unless we try to

\(^{50}\) For Asad, “In this context, speech is not simply a mode of communication or of conventional
representation. It is not an instrument of “social control.” Speech in this context is a dialogical process by
which the self makes (or fails to make) itself in a disciplined way.” The agency of sermon speaking and
listening will be explored through Charles Hirschkind in chapter 2. The rite of confession, although
distinct, is based around this kind of dialogical process in which the monk’s desire and memory are
observed and reshaped in the process of verbalizing them within a ritual context and through authoritative
language.

\(^{51}\) On the intention of these programs Asad writes, “It was only through such discursive work that a
program’s intention was integrated, and thus a measure of (temporary) coherence achieved. The coherent
program had no existence independent of such authoritative interpretations” (Asad 1993, 153).
Interestingly, as Asad points out, “it can be argued that it was the established of new disciplines that
defined new readings as authoritative rather than the other way around” (Asad 1993, 147).
reconstruct in detail the historical conditions in which different projects and motivations are formed, we shall not make much headway in understanding agency.”

Again, this is more than a question of evaluating a religious group in the terms used by practitioners in the religious community; it asks about the structures, conditions, possibilities, and causes of agency, as they exist within traditions, communities, and historical contexts. Asad’s investigation also demonstrates several important, yet often ignored, domains in which religious practices operate to shape subjects with particular modes of thought and experience.

To sum up the kind of distinction in the approach made here, I am arguing that for many scholars of religion, participating in practices that are intended to enable us to “think freely” are naturally intuitive to us and therefore can be classified in terms of intentions, while practices intended to enable us to become virtuous subjects in the sense described by Asad that would, for Whitehouse, no clear technical function or intention, challenge the explanation provided by Whitehouse’s theory. Thus, only actions whose intentions can be clearly articulated within an authorized vocabulary or which align with an already- assumed natural purpose can be attributed agency, leaving the religious projects explored by Mahmood, Asad, and Hirschkind, in which subjects are formed, bereft of the power to “make history.”

The point is that agency, as the ability to effect

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52 Asad 1993, 167.
53 In chapter 2 I discuss this in the particular context of Islam, listening, and the aural subject, while in chapter 3 my goal is to elaborate on how gesture, affect, memory, and perception function in relation to thought and cognition. By elaborating on that connection from a cognitive scientific perspective, it will become possible to see how work done on these areas through religious practices has a much deeper impact on modes of thought and experience. Therefore, by reworking gesture, for instance, one can reorganize how one thinks, and in so doing open up the possibility for change.
54 Asad refers to this as the second assumption of the history-making thesis, “that an agent cannot make his “own” history unless he is autonomous. It is not enough that he acts purposively; his purposes must be in conflict with others” (Asad 1993, 15). The point here is that with such an assumption, the agent must be acting against the imposition of external forces. However, as we have seen and will continue to show,
change in one’s self or in the world, is present in these disciplinary practices even though, by the standards of the theory of mind and normative models of agency, they are restrictive of agency and change. In the same way, the pious Muslim subject in contemporary Egypt can be analyzed through similar processes of subjectivation, and Asad’s rethinking of religious behavior enables an understanding of agency in terms of embodied capacities that are cultivated, shaped, and constituted through varieties of disciplinary, discursive, and social practices. It is this cultivation and reorganization of affects, sensibilities, gestures, and desires that are central to the Islamic reform movement explored by Charles Hirschkind, to which I now turn.

external forces are logically built into any form of action, and thus the strict requirement of autonomy upon which Kant’s notion of moral reasoning is based is severely limiting and simplifies what are in reality complex historical and extended processes.
Chapter 2: Listening and the Aural Subject in the Islamic Tradition

In the previous chapter I engaged in discussions of agency in order to highlight the tendency in scholarship on religion, particularly in the context of the Islamic tradition, to emphasize individual intentions as the defining feature of agency. The consequences of the application of models such as Whitehouse that privilege conscious intention are that religious practices are analyzed as inhibiting change, in both individuals and communities, and that religious subjects are understood as passive receptacles into which the Islamic tradition deposits itself. The framing of religious subjects as passive, i.e. as lacking agency, is made possible by the assertion that conscious intention is both a necessary and sufficient cause for agency, in conjunction with the claim that religious practices, particularly repetitive “rituals,” lack any conscious intention. In contrast to normativizing frameworks in which religious subjects and repetitive practices are relegated to meaningless people and actions, i.e. they have no intentional content or serve no clear purpose, and building from the critiques offered by Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood, my argument is that analyzing religious practice through the lens of intentional states, i.e. beliefs, desires, and motivations, exclusively forecloses a closer analysis of (1) how such states are constituted, both historically and physically, (2) what “causal” role they play in the forms of behavior, practice, and reasoning observed in scholarship on religious traditions, and (3) the work done by these practices, and their authorizing discourses, on the bodies of individuals that make practitioners into religious subjects. In short, the critique offered by Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad on the application of normativizing models of agency to the Islamic tradition opens up questions about how religious traditions are embodied, lived, and experienced in diverse and
constantly changing forms.\textsuperscript{1} Considering religious practice as an enaction of religious traditions enables a more complete analysis of the contexts within which agency takes place, i.e. the multiple factors other than intentions that function to constitute an agent in a given circumstance, as well as the investigation of the specific mechanisms through which religious subjects with particular modes of thought, experience, and action are constructed. The investigation undertaken in this chapter is therefore a demonstration of the inadequacies of intentional models of agency, not to provide a more robust theory of the agency that can be applied to religious practices, but to call into question the structures, causes, and effects of people’s actions broadly speaking.

In this chapter I focus on Charles Hirschkind’s work, *The Ethical Soundscape*, in order to highlight specifically how the use of cassette sermons in contemporary Egypt analyzed by Hirschkind challenges models of agency grounded in individual intentions. Cassette sermons are recorded and often rerecorded sermons sold, distributed, and played throughout many neighborhood shops, restaurants, and mosques in Cairo, and Hirschkind identifies the cassette sermon as a principal practice within the Islamic Revival, and specifically within the *da’wa* movement in Egypt. Some of these recordings are designed specifically for distribution and may address current political or social issues, while others are recordings from sermons at Friday mosque and may deal more directly with religious content, but what is significant about these cassette sermons for Hirschkind’s analysis is the way in which these sermons creatively draw from the Islamic tradition of

\textsuperscript{1} There has been a substantial turn to “embodiment” in a variety of disciplines, including religious studies, anthropology, and cognitive science, and as I will explore in chapter 3, the theory of “enaction” in cognitive literature provides a framework that enables us to discuss the impact of not only individual bodily experiences, but also interactive engagements with other people and environments, on forms of reasoning and action. Thus, the categories of my analysis include affect, gesture, perception, and memory, though part of my point is that these mechanisms cannot be separated neatly from each other or from intelligent behavior broadly speaking.
listening (sam’) in modern contexts. My argument is that Hirschkind’s work on cassette-sermon listening reveals the inadequacy of intentional models of agency in analyzing the forms of social interaction and their effects on individuals and communities.

First, I consider Hirschkind’s discussion of the da’wa movement as a counterpublic in order to illustrate how the sociopolitical effects of this movement cannot be reduced to the increased transmission of fundamental religious doctrine or militant anti-Western ideologies, because it involves more fundamentally the transformation of relationships between individuals, i.e. the formation of ethical subjects. The point I make in this section is that changes in the sociopolitical landscape, i.e. forms of social agency, are not restricted to the transmission of ideologies, but also include the restructuring of affective sensibilities and embodied capabilities that underlie forms of social action and deliberation. As such, attention to these categories enables a fuller appreciation of the roles of religious practices and discourses within modern societies. What is important about this analysis is that the “political” intentions and goals of the Islamic Revival, the movement with which the cassette-sermon has been linked in Egypt, must be understood with respect to the ethical project undertaken by practitioners that functions to construct sensibilities, affections, and environments that are vital to the lives of individuals and the umma, or Islamic community.

In the second section I discuss the practice of cassette-sermon listening as a disciplinary practice in order to show how a practice that would be considered non-intentional in models such as Whitehouse’s actually has a number of significant bodily and environmental effects. While many scholars focus on the role of cassette sermons in the dissemination of religious doctrine, for Hirschkind the primary roles of these cassette
sermons has become: (1) the cultivation of affective dispositions, i.e. ways of feeling and experiencing others, (2) gestural habits, i.e. patterns of movement, perceptual aptitudes, i.e. ways of perceiving others’ actions and words, and (3) memories, i.e. ways of relating past, present, and future. It is through the structuring of these embodied capacities as well as their contribution to the transformation of a sensory environment that cassette sermons exhibit a form of agency that is not reducible to the conscious intention of a speaker trying to persuade or indoctrinate listeners. Consequently, my point in this section is to demonstrate that framing religious practices as disciplines opens up alternative conceptions of the agency of religious subjects that remain outside the scope of analyses based in the theory of mind.

Lastly, I address the relationship between listening and agency present in the traditions of *sam*’ and *tarab*, traditions in which strict lines between listener and speaker cannot be drawn, in order to reflect more generally on the relationship between perception and agency in forms of social interaction. Listening, as understood within these traditions, relies on an interactive model of perception in which perceiving can be seen as a kind of intelligent social interaction in itself, one which not only receives but also constructs forms of knowledge. The framing of the act of listening in this interactive fashion enables me to argue that *sam*’ can be understood as a kind of gesturing in the sense offered by the scholar of religion Sam Gill, a framework which I employ in chapter three to analyze the relationship between perception, cognition, and action, and in chapter four to analyze the manifestation of *sam*’ in Sufi *dhikr* and dance. However, the point with respect to my argument in this chapter about the inadequacy of models of agency that privilege conscious intention is that the example provided by *tarab* in which
performance is dependent upon both speaker and listener illustrates how some forms of social interaction are more effectively modeled as a single dynamic system unfolding along a number of embodied dimensions, rather than as one-dimensional exchanges between two independent systems, as would be the case in theory of mind models focused on the communication and identification of intentions.

Section I: The da’wa movement and social agency

For Hirschkind, the cassette sermon has been a widespread technological medium in the Islamic Revival, a movement that has taken shape within Muslim societies and that has transformed many aspects of the social and political landscape since the late 1970s. In Egypt, such transformations include a proliferation of religious media and discourse, adoption of the veil and certain styles of dress, increased attendance at neighborhood mosques by both men and women, and fundamentally a reworking of social relationships, practices, and environments in response to the “secularization” of Egyptian society. The Islamic Revival for Hirschkind, much like the monastic communities for Talal Asad, does not have a singular sociological or political structure and function, but is instead “a contingent and shifting constellation of ideas, practices, and associational forms.”

It is important to highlight that this project is not simply aimed at the transmission of religious knowledge and doctrine, but more significantly aims at the ethical formation of subjects and the community in order that the daily lives of Muslims, both in the present and in the

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2 Investigating a different aspect of the same movement, Saba Mahmood writes, “‘Islamic Revival’ is a term that refers not only to the activities of state-oriented political groups but more broadly to a religious ethos or sensibility that has developed within contemporary Muslim societies” (Mahmood 2005, 3).

3 Saba Mahmood writes that in the view of many of the participants of this movement, “secularization” is “a historical process which they argue reduced Islamic knowledge (both as a mode of conduct and a set of principles) to an abstract system of beliefs that has no direct bearing on the practicalities of daily living” (Mahmood 2005, 4).

4 Hirschkind 2006, 207.
future, can be lived in accordance with Islamic virtues. In this sense, the act of listening itself possesses agency and the listener, by listening to sermons, also becomes an agent, insofar as she fashions her self and her environment in relation to both traditional discourses and contemporary social dilemmas. As Hirschkind writes, “From its inception in the twentieth century, this movement has centered on a critique of the existing structures of religious and secular authority. For those who participate in the movement, the moral and political direction of contemporary Muslim societies cannot be left to politicians, religious, scholars, or militant activists but must be decided upon and enacted collectively by ordinary Muslims in the course of their normal daily activities.” This enactment has important implications for agency in the context of religious movements because it highlights the fact that members of the community, even as listeners, are actively engaged in processes of reform. Therefore, practices like cassette-sermon listening serve to ground and orient individuals such that contemporary social and political problems, e.g. feeding and caring for the poor, finance and banking regulations, listening to music, styles of dress, and forms of education, can be discussed and decided upon collectively. The project is therefore aimed at a continual collective engagement with contemporary issues and as such, the agency that can be attributed to the movement itself as well as its members cannot be reduced to a singular intention, i.e. anti-Western or militant or fundamentalist.

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5 Hirschkind 2005, 2, emphasis added. I emphasize critique here because its use here is related to the notion of critique offered by Foucault, which sees it as an ethical, as opposed to an epistemological project. The movement is about how people live their lives and relate to one another as religious subjects in a world that is marginalizing those modes of living and relating.

6 As an example of the capacity for the cassette sermon to cultivate this collective sensibility, Hirschkind cites a public discussion on the acceptability of listening to music, which illustrates the extension of religious discourse into public lives in ways that were not possible within traditional Islamic institutions. See pp. 109 – 110.
The use of aural media such as the cassette sermon is a product of both a deep tradition of listening (sam’) in Islam, as well as historical shifts in the Egyptian state in which the government increased its intervention into religious institutions, bringing many of them under state control. In particular, the Egyptian state stepped in to regulate and make use of Friday sermons in mosques to construct modern Egyptian citizens with modes of affect and appraisal that authorities deemed conducive to modern life. To counter the state observation of many religious institutions, the aural tradition from which sermons draw their authority and value was adapted to a modern technology, giving cassette-sermon listening its current form and function in contemporary Egypt. In short, Hirschkind argues that, “While the ear acquired the features of a national sense organ, it continued to resonate with sensory memory grounded in the tradition of ethical affect and sensibility I began with, a tradition that encompasses the music of tarab, Quranic recitation, practices of mystical discipline, and sermon listening.” What is important to highlight is that this was not just an ideological battle between the modern state and the Islamic tradition, but was instead a labor over the attitudes, affections, and sensibilities that enable and sustain the forms of social deliberation and ethical practice which function to constitute the moral subject and community. This particular form of media,

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7 As Hirschkind notes, while there was a period of entrainment between the state and the traditional aspects of sam’ that is exemplified in the popularity of the rhetoric of Nasser and the music of Umm Kulthum in various forms of media, the lack of people within the state who were able to fill these roles led to an increasing divergence between the function of sermons for the state and their function in the daily lives of Egyptians. For example, he writes, “Nasser and Umm Kulthum had, in different ways, helped to define a modern national auditory practice that connected traditions of ethical listening with emerging media practices of political discourse and musical entertainment. However, as neither of the two had a successor in his respective field, the sole inheritors of their legacy were the media-based preachers associated with the rising Islamist trend that has progressively gained ascendance since the 1970s” (Hirschkind 2006, 53).

8 Certainly as forms of technology and media change and become more accessible there will be modifications in the role of cassette sermons, but regardless of the technologies employed, they will nonetheless operate not simply through the transmission of information, but also through the construction of modes of thought and experience that enable discourses to take shape.

9 Hirschkind 2006, 66.
i.e. the cassette-tape, is contingent upon a number of historical, sociological, and political factors, but according to Hirschkind, “For da’wa activists, the ever-more pervasive Western cultural forms – movies, television, music, dress styles, and protocols of sociability – insinuate themselves into the senses most directly, shaping the repertoires of affect, gesture, and sensibility that animate and orient practical reasoning.” In other words, by listening to religious media, engaging in ethical conversations about the proper enactment of virtues, and wearing the veil, for example, the members of the da’wa movement are acting on themselves and their communities to make possible the living of a virtuous life in the world today.

The collective moral obligation associated with the Islamic Revival is given specific form through the concept of da’wa, which means a summons or a call. In the context of the contemporary Islam, Hirschkind writes that the notion of da’wa connotes “a duty, incumbent upon some or all members of the Islamic community, to actively encourage fellow Muslims in the pursuance of greater piety in all aspects of their lives.” In this sense, aspects of people’s lives that are deemed trivial to a community’s functioning or that are left to the realm of personal preference in liberal societies are actually brought into the public and exposed to public deliberation and debate. Hirschkind argues that from the liberal perspective, “Da’wa, for this reason, constitutes an obstacle to the state’s attempt to secure a social domain where national citizens are free to make modern choices, as it repoliticizes those choices, subjecting them to a public

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11 On the interdependence of ethical discipline and public deliberation in the da’wa counterpublic, Hirschkind writes, “Inflected by the discourse on moral action organized under the rubric of da’wa, the new form of public is grounded in the tendency of ethical public discourse toward self-correction, toward an approximation of what is understood to be divinely sanctioned comportment. As politics, both national and global, impinge on the structures of moral life, the ethical discourses of da’wa necessarily extend to political topics” (Hirschkind 2006, 117).
scritiny oriented around the task of establishing the conditions for the practice of Islamic virtues.”\(^{13}\) There is thus a tension between the Islamic Revival and the secular state in Egypt that affects the political landscape, but this interaction is not reducible to an opposition of traditional religious thought to modern secular thought. More precisely, for Hirschkind the tension present between the state and the Islamic Revival that has come to shape the contemporary political landscape of Egypt is not one of necessary opposition, but of orthogonal transformation.

Consequently, as Hirschkind argues, the \textit{da’wa} movement’s “political impact lies not so much in its participation in electoral politics but in the changes it effects in the social and moral landscape of Egyptian society.”\(^{}^{14}\) The changes in the social landscape however are not simply changes in sociological conditions, i.e. the movement cannot be reduced to differences in social class, but are the products of the changes in relationships among members of the community that are effected through practices such as cassette sermons and \textit{dhikr}.\(^{15}\) It is therefore the ethical work done by practices and discourses of the movement that not only illuminates the aspects of the Islamic tradition that are often overlooked and gives a more adequate description of the complex interplay of the Islamic tradition and the modern Egyptian state,\(^{16}\) but also allows Hirschkind to consider that the embodied forms of social deliberation and interaction practiced in the \textit{da’wa} movement might open up alternative conceptions of social action that enable a rethinking of issues

\(^{13}\) Hirschkind 2006, 112.  
\(^{14}\) Hirschkind 2006, 209.  
\(^{15}\) See Chapter 4 on \textit{dhikr} and social interaction.  
\(^{16}\) While many scholars have viewed the opposition between the project of the Islamic Revival and the project of modernity as fundamentalism on the part of Muslims, i.e. as a desire to resist progress and creativity and to return to the past, Hirschkind argues that “The judgment encoded in the appellation “fundamentalism” is singular: contemporary Islamic movements, while undeniably of considerable sociological and political significance, are essentially uninteresting and contribute very little to our understanding of human value and creativity, let alone our capacities of moral and political imagination” (Hirschkind 2006, 205).
of difference (religious, sexual, gender, cultural, etc.). For instance, as Hirschkind demonstrates, rather than exploring these differences as expressions of resistance to authorities and norms, which would be an analysis in terms of conscious intention, it is more productive to analyze such differences with respect to the variation in practices and their effects that make possible the changes in modes of thought, experience, and interaction found within and between communities. Consequently, investigating the processes through which ethical subjects are formed in the Islamic tradition opens up an analysis of social agency that doesn’t collapse the discussion into individual intentions alone. Instead, the social agency observed here must be understood as extended, insofar as it is constituted by both other members of the community and technological media, enacted, insofar as the practitioners are actively engaged even as listeners, and embodied, insofar as specific sensibilities and affective dispositions are both a precondition for and effect of the cassette sermons.

Furthermore, these developments in the *da’wa* movement cannot be analyzed as the reinvention of the Islamic tradition in a modern guise; instead, for Hirschkind, the practices, discourses, and communities that make up the movement constitute what he calls a “counterpublic,” which he contrasts to Michael Warner’s discussion of the “public” of the nation-state, many features of which Hirschkind locates within contemporary Egypt. I take up this question of counterpublics in order to demonstrate that the changes in the sociopolitical landscape of Egypt are not reducible to the effects of an increase in fundamental religious doctrine in the public arena or of a restriction on

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17 "The form of public I explore in this chapter contrasts with this model in some of its basic features. For this reason, I will refer to it as a “counterpublic”" (Hirschkind 2006, 106). The basic features by which the *da’wa* counterpublic and the nation-state public differ are in the areas of affect, hierarchies of senses and modes of transmission, temporalities, and self-other relations."
Western practices and goods, but more significantly involve the transformation of the relationships between and conduct amongst members of a community. In exploring the notion of a public in the modern nation-state, Michael Warner highlights several aspects that, while appearing to enable autonomy and agency through rational-critical discourse, actually fail to account for the varieties of publics that can be formed through the gradations of affective, emotional, temporal, and embodied elements of the performance of discourse. For Warner, a public, as conceived by the contemporary social imaginary, is “a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself.” In this way, by being self-organizing, the public can remain independent of the state and other external authoritative frameworks, such as religious authorities. Through this independence, the public can have a claim to being sovereign, i.e. free from institutional power, allowing people to feel as if they can operate as autonomous individuals in public, i.e. exercise reason without interference. This model of the public critiqued by Warner therefore carries with it the underlying assumption that social agency necessitates autonomy in deliberation and action. However, as Hirschkind’s work on the da’wa movement illustrates, public argumentation and debate that lead to social, as well as political, change are present in the da’wa community, even though the notions of morality and responsibility are not grounded in ideals of freedom and autonomy. Furthermore, this example illustrates that any public, even the public of the secular state, cannot be properly understood without attention being paid to the formation of the modern secular subjects which participate in the public sphere. In other words, any public is going to be dependent upon the processes of subject formation that construct the

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embodied capacities that enable the forms of reasoning, discourse, and interaction authorized within that public.

The privileging of autonomy in the modern model of the public also entails a particular ethical relationship between members of the community, which I am disputing here to make the point that there are other forms of public relationality that do not foreclose possibilities for discourse and deliberation. According to Warner, the model of a public in secular states is seen as a “stranger-relationality in a pure form, because other ways of organizing strangers – nations, religions, races, guilds – have manifest positive content.”¹⁹ What Warner means here is that while the set of citizens composing a nation can be identified at a particular moment in time, a public is not an aggregate of a certain set of people. In this sense, a public is a “virtual entity,”²⁰ indicating that rather than being an empirical reality should be seen instead as a “distinctively modern mode of power.”²¹ Publics then are able to “make stranger relationality normative, reshaping the most intimate dimensions of subjectivity around co-membership with indefinite persons in a context of routine action. The development of forms that mediate the intimate theater of stranger relationality must surely be one of the most significant dimensions of modern history.”²² Therefore, the kind of ethical work done by the practice of cassette-sermon listening functions to restructure this interpersonal relationality, giving rise to alternative forms of social interaction and experience that make possible the modes of moral reasoning present within the community. Thinking about how social relationships are constituted along ethical, as opposed to intellectual, lines allows us to consider social

¹⁹ Warner 2002, 75.
²² Warner 2002, 76.
interactions in terms of how interactions are conducted, enabling us to think of them in terms of acquired skills rather than accumulated knowledge. Social agency in this sense becomes a kind of practical reasoning, as opposed to a cognitive task of detecting and articulating individual intentions.

The stranger-relationality of the modern public, which severely limits ways of relating to others, also implies for Warner that one must be able to address one’s self as a stranger. For instance he writes, “Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others, and immediately so. But this is only true to the extent that the trace of strangerhood remains present in our understanding of ourselves as the addressee.”

Because a public is constituted through attention or participation, there is a sense in which public discourse is addressed to possible people rather than actual people. Thus, when listening to public speech, one must be able to see one’s self as that possible person, i.e. as a stranger. The idea of a stranger, however, ultimately reduces the subject, who experiences, perceives, and reasons differently, to a disembodied entity defined by its rational capacities. Such a view of the self reinforces the idea of the public individual as an autonomous agent, and is modeled on the hierarchy of senses associated with the private reader, as opposed to the ethical listener in the case of the da’wa movement.

This is relevant because the conception of the public individual as a private reader places too much emphasis on the “reading” of other individuals as the basis for social interaction in the public realm.

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24 Hirschkind writes on the difference between the private reader and the ethical listener, “As opposed to the private reader whose stillness and solitude became privileged icons of a distinct kind of critical reasoning within the imaginary of the bourgeois public, it is the figure of the ethical listener – with all of its dense sensory involvements – that founds and inhabits the counterpublic I describe here” (Hirschkind 2006, 107).
For Warner, the hierarchy of senses privileged by the social imaginary of the public has led to a particular conception of the human, “elevating what are understood to be the faculties of the private reader as the essential (rational-critical) faculties of man.”  

Here, Warner is arguing that the notion of a public as rational-critical discussion reinforces and is reinforced by a language that highlights the rational dimension of language at the expense of its performative and expressive dimensions. With the conception of language posited by the public as rational-critical discussion, Warner argues, “discourse is said to be propositionally summarizable; the poetic or textual qualities of an utterance are disregarded in favor of sense.”  

This conception of language that focuses on narrowly construed propositional meaning is a crucial feature of the contemporary social imaginary of the public insofar as it enables a vision of discourse as free from influences of power. In terms of the contemporary social imaginary, it is only when the free exercise of reason through deliberation is achieved that we can free ourselves from the authority of religious traditions for example. At the heart of this conception of public discourse is the autonomous agent-subject critiqued in the first chapter whose engagement in the public realm is disembodied, dehistoricized, and reducible to propositional content. In this line of thinking, any social change that results from public discourse can therefore be traced to a particular individual’s intent.

Charles Hirschkind illustrates how historical factors are often left out of analyses of forms of social engagement by highlighting that in a significant portion of scholarship, it is assumed that there is an inverse relationship between the deliberative capacities of a

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public on the one hand, and its disciplinary function on the other. Drawing on Warner, Hirschkind states that, “the idea of public privileged within the modern social imaginary tends to exclude any recognition of the institutional and disciplinary conditions that enable it.”

One of his main points is to demonstrate that the increase in public deliberation on topics generally relegated to the realm of individual choice, facilitated by a practice of cassette-sermon listening, creates a public that does not conform to the sensibilities of the contemporary liberal social imaginary. Building from Warner’s exploration, Hirschkind goes on to argue that the da’wa movement constitutes a “counterpublic” and not simply a public that has been inflected with Islamic values and references. Central to the distinction between a “public” and a “counterpublic” is not simply his privileging of listening over reading (or of any particular sense over another), but how he takes an embodied and extended approach to an engagement with the idea of the social agency of subjects present within the communities of da’wa practitioners. The intervention into these embodied capacities provided by the cassette sermons integrates both modern technologies and traditional techniques to provide an innovative mechanism of social reformation and discipline, and adds to our understanding of agency insofar as it not only calls attention to the creativity displayed by religious practitioners in adapting to their continued marginalization in modern states like Egypt.

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27 Hirschkind writes on the two forms of public assumed in scholarship, “In short, the public arena constituted by media practices of religious actors tends to be identified either as a deliberative space of argument and contestation between individuals or as a normative space for education in community-oriented virtue. The assumption is that the more truly deliberative a public, the weaker its disciplinary function, and vice versa” (Hirschkind 2006, 105-6). Therefore, the institutional and disciplinary processes that enable certain forms of reasoning to occur are left out in analyses of modern publics, and forms of reasoning and deliberation are left out of analyses of religious communities. The former produce changes free from the bounds of power, while the latter produce no change in thought due to the over-determining modes of social discipline. This inverse relationship between deliberation and discipline forecloses an analysis of how disciplinary, educational, social practices operate on bodies to make possible the forms of reasoning taken as constitutive of publics.

28 Hirschkind 2006, 106.
Hirschkind’s discussion of the da’wa movement as a counterpublic highlights that changes in affects, gestures, and other embodied faculties are the means by which changes in modes of thought, relationality, and interaction occur, and therefore when analyzing the agency of a movement such as the Islamic Revival, i.e. what changes in social and political landscapes it is able to produce, it is necessary to attend to these embodied changes before evaluating the political and social changes. Furthermore, this approach enables us to think about how we can go about effecting change in our own society, and thus to more effectively engage in the practice of criticism. The da’wa movement constitutes a counterpublic first and foremost by replacing the idea of a private reader with an ethical listener as the inhabitant of the public. Such a move calls forward a rethinking of the hierarchy of faculties, where “the faculties of the ethical listener – an appreciation for and attunement to the affective and expressive dimensions of divine speech – now come to define the proper attributes of a public subject.”

Thinking of the subject in this way enables us to see how discourse can have crucial aesthetic and ethical dimensions that are more present in the performance of language than in the reading of a text. In doing so, sound, as well as other senses such as smell, gain prominence in the role of regulating and enabling social interaction. As a result, alternative forms of interaction, i.e. social agency, become possible because the ways of relating to and understanding other people go beyond the visual identification and cognitive appraisal of intentional states.

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29 Hirschkind 2006, 121.
30 “Smell, in other words, is a salient perceptual feature of the moral landscape for those who practice da’wa” (Hirschkind 2006, 130).
31 The da’wa movement also constitutes a counterpublic through its temporality, which stands apart from what Warner refers to as “secular time.” Secular time here refers to the temporality of publics idealized as conversation and decision making, which relies on a more punctual notion of temporality, i.e. the unfolding of sequential events through homogenous time. For Warner, this kind of punctual time is characteristic of
In discussing *da’wa* as a counterpublic, Hirschkind is able to illustrate the variety of ways in practitioners’ conceptions of subjectivity and agency differ from the conceptions associated with the “public” critiqued by Warner, and how those latter models fail to adequately account for the forms of thought and action present in the *da’wa* movement. In particular, engaging in public discourse cannot be seen as a straightforward expression of one’s individual intentions since, as Hirschkind writes, “to speak publicly on ethical issues is one of the ways one both hones and enacts ethical knowledge.” The enactment of discourses demonstrates that the discussion of ethical or religious practices and the proper performance of those practices are both dimensions of the interdependent processes of cultivating ethical sensibilities and creating an environment that allows for the proper enactment of those sensibilities. Through both the practice and the discourse, one comes to be shaped not simply ideologically, but viscerally, i.e. at the very level of tissue. However, the conditions that enable the proper performance, i.e. moral agency, are not located solely in an individual’s beliefs or doctrinal knowledge; instead, those conditions include the embodied and deliberative capacities of individuals, and also extend into the environment through technologies like cassette sermons. The key point here is that the engagement in social discourse and

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modern politics and is important because “a public can only act in the temporality of the circulation that gives it existence” (Warner 2002). Therefore, in order to act politically, it is necessary for a public to operate within the highly punctual “temporality of the headline.” Hirschkind demonstrates how the *da’wa* counterpublic is constituted by a temporality that is distinct from any form of secular time and, I would assert, could be characterized as a “messianic time,” in the sense used by Walter Benjamin. For instance, Hirschkind writes, “The temporality of these tapes … does not index the nation, the daily unfolding of events, or “news,” through which the newspaper reader or television viewer participates as a national citizen” (Hirschkind 2006). In this way it contrasts with the political time, but it also differs in its relation to the past where past sermons are not seen as fixed, and instead can be used in the present moment to help reason about contemporary issues. Furthermore, this present moment is “structured by the notion of *sahwa*, or revival, the period of moral renewal that repeatedly succeeds eras of decline and corruption” (Hirschkind 2006). Therefore, the temporality of this counterpublic could be seen as messianic in terms of the redemptive feature of the moment and its relationship to the past and the future.

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32 Hirschkind 2006, 112.
reform made possible in the *da’wa* counterpublic, i.e. the construction of a moral community, is dependent on the ethical work accomplished through the disciplinary practices that restructure relationships with self and other by modulating and altering processes of perception, affect, memory, and gesture within and between subjects that can serve as the ground upon which forms of thought and reason can take place.\(^{33}\)

**Section II: Cassette-Sermon Listening as a Disciplinary Practice**

In this section I consider Hirschkind’s analysis of cassette-sermon listening in terms of the disciplining of subjects in order to highlight the ethical work done by the practice of listening, i.e. its capacity to transform relationships with one’s self and with others, that makes possible forms of social interaction and deliberation different from those posited in the terms posited by Whitehouse’s use of the theory of mind. The transformation of these relationships is accomplished through the disciplining of the bodily capacities and affective sensibilities characteristic of an ethical subject in the Islamic traditions of listening from which, i.e. an aural subject. Consequently, the formation of the aural subject illustrates how, i.e. through what specific means and with what effect, disciplinary practices operate on bodies to produce new ways of understanding and interacting with the world. In particular, I highlight Hirschkind’s discussion of the work done in the constitution of the aural subject on perceptual skills, affective dispositions, gestural patterns, and processes of memory because the

\(^{33}\) Indeed, one of the central arguments of this book is that the affects and sensibilities honed through popular media practices such as listening to cassette sermons are as infrastructural to politics and public reason as are markets, associations, formal institutions, and information networks. My analysis, in this sense, follows upon a growing recognition by scholars that the forms of thinking and reasoning that constitute our political discourses are profoundly indebted to evaluative dispositions outside the purview of consciousness, to what political theorist William Connolly refers to as “visceral modes of appraisal”\(^{\text{a}}\)” (Hirschkind 2006, 9). In this sense, processes of political and social deliberation and action cannot be logically separated from the
functioning of these embodied capabilities, while foundational to forms of social reasoning and interaction, has been inadequately accounted for in theories of religious practices, such as Whitehouse’s specifically, and cognitive models of social interaction, i.e. theory of mind, more generally.\textsuperscript{34}

Central to the disciplining of the aural subject articulated in the da’wa movement through Hirschkind’s analysis is the practice of cassette-sermon listening, which are recorded sermons played throughout social spaces in many neighborhoods in Cairo, not because of its capacity to disseminate religious knowledge below the radar of state institutions, but because of its ability to effect changes in individuals bodies that provide the means for acquiring and experiencing a number of embodied skills, emotional states, and moral relationships.\textsuperscript{35} In this sense, Marcel Mauss’s discussion of bodily techniques is a helpful way of conceptualizing the relationship between disciplinary practices and human behavior and experience in that, as Talal Asad explains, “the possibility is opened up of inquiring into the ways in which embodied practices (including language in use) form a precondition for varieties of religious experience. The inability to enter into communion with God becomes a function of untaught bodies. “Consciousness” becomes a dependent concept.”\textsuperscript{36} The point here is that in order to examine the forms of religious experience and knowledge that exist within religious traditions, it is necessary to attend to the techniques through which the body is used and trained by practitioners as the developable means for achieving these forms of experience and knowledge, as well as

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{34} In chapter three I discuss research in cognitive and neurosciences on the categories of affect, gesture, perception, and memory in order to highlight their significant, yet variable, role in forms of social cognition.
    \item \textsuperscript{35} For example, drawing on the work of Marcel Mauss, Talal Asad writes in his discuss of ritual that the body “was to be viewed as the developable means for achieving a range of human objectives, from styles of physical movement (walking), through modes of emotional being (composure), to kinds of spiritual experience (mystical states)” (Asad 1993, 76).
    \item \textsuperscript{36} Asad 1993, 76-7.
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how those techniques relate to authoritative discourses and standards about proper forms of behavior, emotional states, and bodily comportment. Considering cassette-sermon listening as a bodily technique thereby enables an analysis of the how the embodied conditions underlying the aural subject’s affective-volitional disposition, i.e. modes of thought, experience, and action, are constructed and authorized in the context of the Islamic aural traditions.

Within the aural tradition employed by the *da’wa* movement, one set of capacities constitutive of the pious Muslim subject are the emotional dispositions of fear, humility, regret, repentance, and tranquility that, much like the virtues of willing obedience addressed by Talal Asad, are not universal or generic desires or emotional states, but are instead specific desires that are articulated and embodied within the Islamic tradition and which serve as the foundation for the construction of moral subjects.\(^{37}\) As an example of how such emotional states are honed through the cultivation of an affective sensibility, as well as how those emotional states of being themselves constitute forms of action, I draw from Hirschkind’s discussion of the role of death in cassette sermons. For Hirschkind, as for practitioners, one of the primary mechanisms, i.e. bodily techniques, through which the evocation and sedimentation of fear is achieved by *khutaba* (preachers) is through their sermons on death, which function to construct a sensibility toward death that brings the inevitability of death to bear on the daily life of the community and its members.\(^{38}\) In these sermons, according to Hirschkind, “One of the primary tasks of the *khutaba* is to

\(^{37}\)“Sermons are understood to evoke in the sensitive listener a particular set of ethical responses, foremost among them, fear (*khawf*), humility (*khushu’*), regret (*nadam*), repentance (*tawba*), and tranquility (*timi’nan* or *sakina*)” (Hirschkind 2006, 74).

\(^{38}\)There are a number of techniques used by the *khutuba* that draw from Islamic traditions of recitation, listening, and music to evoke these experiences of death, one of which is the use of metaphors to map bodily experiences onto traditional discourses and practices, but what is common among them is that they draw on the bodily experiences of listening, reciting, and remembering. The skillful *khatib* (preacher) is thus one who is able to engage the audience not just on the mental level, but on the physical level as well.
afford listeners such a taste of death, to portray death in its manifold dimensions and ramifications with a vividness and moral depth so as to root it in their sensory experience, to constitute it as a habit of thought, heart, and body.” The idea of “tasting” death is articulated in the concept of dhawq, which refers to a kind of learning and experiencing that is not grasped by the rational faculties (al-aql) but which invests the body with a sensibility that allows the inevitability of death to permeate the subject’s daily life and social engagements. In other words, for Hirschkind, “What is required is not an intellectual knowledge of the Islamic doctrines of death and the hereafter but a refashioning of one’s sensory experience until one becomes capable of perceiving this reality. Such a knowledge must, in other words, be an active belief, a honed attitude of recognition, acceptance, and responsibility infused with the appropriate emotions of fear, sadness, and humility.” It is precisely this notion of an “active belief” that is constituted by multiple embodied capacities, i.e. the affective sensibilities that underlie emotions, which illustrates the need for rethinking in particular the structure and causal role of intentional states in forms of religious practice, and thus for rethinking models of agency employed in the analysis of religious subjects. In particular, what is captured in an analysis of religious traditions in terms of bodily techniques and disciplinary practices, as opposed to one in terms of rituals and doctrinal knowledge exemplified in Whitehouse’s work, is the process by which religious knowledge and experience are produced through the embodiment and enactment of religious practices and discourses.

The affective experience of death associated with listening to these sermons serves as a constitutive element of moral subjects and moral agency within the da’wa

39 Hirschkind 2006, 176.
40 Hirschkind 2006, 175-6.
41 Hirschkind 2006, 180.
movement insofar as it provides the possibility for conducting social engagements with a pious fear. While many scholars have interpreted this emphasis on death as an “unhealthy obsession” that inhibits social reform and progress, Hirschkind argues that the discourse on death enables “a collective inquiry into how Muslims should live today in light of (or in the shadow of) the fact of human morality and its aftermath.” As such, the disciplinary program manifested in the practice of cassette-sermon listening operates to reconstruct both the structure of individuals’ desire, insofar as these desires are not given and universal, and also the role of desires in causing (or prohibiting) forms of social behavior, insofar as the enactment of these ethical emotions is simultaneously a structuring of intentional states and a form of behavior. Thus fear, for both Hirschkind and the practitioners, is not to be seen as a mechanism of social control insofar as it restricts the potentials for people’s actions; rather, acting (listening) with fear must be analyzed as a form of ethical conduct that is productive of new relationships and new sensibilities that enable one to experience and embody the Islamic tradition as a pious Muslim subject. The role of fear, for instance, as a form of behavior is elaborated by Hirschkind in that, “As an ethical emotion, such fear does not simply inhibit wrong behavior or limit human agency but allows one to achieve excellence in the performance of the moral acts one undertakes.” The intentional state of fear in this sense becomes a form of action, which calls into question the claim associated with theory of mind models of agency that assume all behaviors are necessarily preceded and caused by internal

42 Hirschkind writes, “That is to say, an experiential knowledge of death is a condition of moral agency. The qualities of fear and sadness that accompany such knowledge open up a distinct way of living as a human being” (Hirschkind 2006, 176).
43 Hirschkind 2006, 177.
44 “While the fear of the horrors of the grave and the fires of hell serves as a disincentive to immoral conduct, such fear is also a virtue of character, a condition not only for the avoidance of error but for the proper performance of good as practiced in all fields of human endeavor” (Hirschkind 2006, 176).
intentional states. Therefore, framing cassette-sermon listening as a disciplinary practice expands our conceptions of agency to account more adequately for the affective dimensions of repetitive religious practices, particularly as they pertain to the restructuring and incorporation of affective dispositions that provide the foundation for the forms of life present with the da’wa community.

The affective sensibility of death, or active belief, described by Hirschkind is constituted not only by an emotional-volitional disposition, but also by perceptual abilities. For example, in his description of the khatib Muhammad’s understanding of the fear associated with the truth of death evoked in sermons Hirschkind writes, “To see with “dead eyes,” as he expresses it, means to see with capacities of vision shaped by intense and continuous personal experience of this truth.”\textsuperscript{46} The practice of listening to sermons on death therefore functions to continually reconstruct and orient how one perceives the world, in addition to how one relates affectively to the world. Elaborating on the effect of listening on perceptual capacities, Hirschkind writes, “Listening invests the body with affective potentialities, depositing them in the preconscious folds of kinesthetic and synaesthetic experience and, in doing so, endows it with the receptive capacities of the sensitive heart, the primary organ of moral knowledge and action.”\textsuperscript{47} Therefore, these alternative perceptual and affective capacities honed in the practice of listening are not only the effects of, but also conditions for forms of intelligent social behavior, i.e. ethical conduct.

In describing the perceptual foundations of the moral agency of individual subjects within da’wa movement and the aural traditions from which it draws, Hirschkind

\textsuperscript{46} Hirschkind 2006, 180.
\textsuperscript{47} Hirschkind 2006, 76.
states, “all moral action is in some sense a listening, the reverberation of the words of God within human souls and actions. Sermons provide a powerful instrument for honing this reverberatory faculty and, thus, for attuning and orienting the senses to a divinely ordered world.” Listening, much like the emotional dispositions discussed previously, should not be understood as a passive state, but as an active relationship with the world that is conditioned by past experiences.

The sedimenting of affective sensibilities and perceptual aptitudes through previous experiences suggests a different function of memory in relation to religious practices than the model offered by Harvey Whitehouse in his modes of religiosity model. The significant difference is that while for Whitehouse the role of memory consists in the storage, consolidation, and re-representation of events and information in propositional form, the function of memory in Hirschkind’s analysis involves the conditioning and restructuring of connections between perceptual, affective, and movement mechanisms that allows one to live differently as a person, i.e. to “see with dead eyes” or “hear with the heart.” For Hirschkind, “Memory, in other words, is not built upon ideas, and much less upon visual images, but rather on the reactivation of gestures, understood as the sensory sediments of prior perceptions.” The role of memory in religious practices therefore needs to be understood as a process of learning certain skills, dispositions, and bodily characteristics that enable one to think, experience, and act as religious subjects. In other words, the function of memory in disciplinary

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48 Hirschkind 2006, 76.
49 This bodily memory is built on “the patterned interconnections of touch, vision, hearing, smell and taste that tend to remain outside of awareness in adult perception” and “… generally … remain outside of consciousness, present as sensory background, the body’s affective involvement that forms the constitutive outside of our consciously directed actions” (Hirschkind 2006, 78). Such a model of memory fits well with models of Hebbian learning explored in chapter 3.
50 Hirschkind 2006, 78.
practices is less the acquisition of knowledge and more a conditioning of the embodied capacities involved in certain actions, such as listening, which is important because, for the aural subject, the incorporation of specific bodily capacities is critical to proper forms of reasoning and social interaction.

Listening, as a form of moral action, is dependent upon not only affective sensibilities and perceptual training, but also the gestural habits of subjects. The role of gesture in cassette sermons is highlighted by Hirschkind through his observations of the khatib Muhammad, whose changes in posture and hand movements are not irrelevant movements that are somehow separate and distinct from an independent process of listening and reasoning; instead, there is an intimate relation between the two and the proper understanding, or the active belief that constitutes the act of listening, of the sermon itself involves these types of movement. In this sense, the understanding of the sermon by Muslim practitioners is not simply a cognitive activity that can only be expressed through speech or writing. It is also accomplished through these seemingly extraneous movements. Since these types of movements are below the realm of conscious and intentional behavior, insofar as they are not the output of conscious intentional states, it is possible to say that the listener's understanding and beliefs are embodied, insofar as it is the body itself that is resonating with the words without the mediation of any higher order cognitive functions. In other words, as Hirschkind writes, “To “hear with the heart,” as those I worked with described this activity, is not strictly something cognitive but involves the body in its entirety, as a complex synthesis of patterned moral reflexes.”

51 Hirschkind’s point here is that comprehension of sermons by practitioners is dependent upon more than the individual’s mental faculties, and my point

51 Hirschkind 2006, 79.
is that the necessary incorporation of embodied capacities, like gestures, into forms of action and reasoning does not make them any less intelligent or less interesting from a cognitive perspective.\textsuperscript{52}

The kind of knowledge, i.e. the active beliefs, present within this bodily understanding are not reducible to procedural knowledge about how to move or act nor to propositional knowledge about beliefs in supernatural agents or the hereafter; instead, such active beliefs are embodied in religious subjects, and that enact religious traditions, are more adequately dealt with as ways of feeling, perceiving, moving, and acting, or in other words, ways of living and being. Consequently, it is clear that there is far more to the practice of listening, and religious practices more generally, than the straightforward transmission or expression of religious knowledge and beliefs, which is the central focus of many cognitive theories of religion like Whitehouse’s. For example, while Whitehouse claims that religious rituals lack any technical function, the analysis of listening as both a bodily technique and disciplinary practice highlights many of the significant effects of religious practice on bodies and communities, and clearly casts doubt on Whitehouse’s claim that religious practices lack any purpose or meaning, and that therefore they lack agency. Furthermore, the analysis of cassette-sermon listening as a disciplinary practice illustrates that focusing solely on the propositional content of speech, i.e. its content or meaning, fails to account for the fact that listening, perceiving, feeling, and moving are all forms of action in themselves. Listening, in this sense, is a pedagogical process of cultivation and sedimentation in which individuals and

\textsuperscript{52}In fact, it is precisely these types of complex cases of social interaction that could provide potential challenges and research opportunities for studies on the causes and structures of social behavior not fully incorporated in theory of mind approaches to social agency.
communities are shaped simultaneously in order to make possible the forms of living and reasoning that enable one to become a pious Muslim subject. For Hirschkind, this virtuous subject is exemplified in the *da’wa* community by the aural subject whose capacity to “listen” to the world and others, and thus to live as an ethical subject in contemporary society, has been honed through the discipline of cassette-sermon listening. The fact that memory, gesture, perception, and affect are the primary embodied mechanisms effected in this context illustrates that the study of religious traditions must attend to these areas more specifically because they are the means through which traditions are enacted and transformed, and more fundamentally that forms of social interaction and deliberation are constituted by more than the neurological processes involved in the identification, expression, and discernment of natural or intuitive individual intentions.

**Section III: Listening and Agency in tarab and sam’**

In the final section of this chapter I discuss in more depth the act of ethical listening as a form of social interaction and how this practice draws from discourses within the Islamic tradition. In particular, through the concept of *tarab* theorized within this aural tradition and the rich theory of gesture articulated by the scholar of religion Sam Gill, I propose a way of theorizing the agency of listening by considering listening as a form of gesturing. Specifically, Hirschkind’s analysis demonstrates that within the contexts of the Islamic tradition, the practitioners’ conception of the act of listening is significantly different from many modern conceptions of listening, particularly insofar as the agency is attributed to the listener and not the speakers. Listening in this context is
simultaneously a form of social interaction and performance, a form of perception and embodied experience, a form of work performed on one’s self, a disciplinary practice authorized by religious authority and discourse, a form of social deliberation engaging social problems, and a construction of an “ethical soundscape” that permeates Egyptian neighborhoods. In other words, their primary mode of interaction is not one in which the identification of people’s conscious intentions is the principal concern, as is the case with models of social interaction based in the theory of mind, such as Whitehouse’s model. Perception and action then cannot be separated into two independent processes, since for the aural subject in this tradition a verbal or bodily response constitutes the act of perception and the performance themselves. Rethinking perception on these interactive and reciprocal grounds therefore reflects a deeper restructuring of social interaction in which the subjects, i.e. speaker and listener, are integrated and coupled with respect to a number of bodily and environmental variables.\textsuperscript{53} I also draw from Hirschkind’s work because the practice of listening and its value within the sensorium has been inadequately theorized, leading to a hierarchy of senses,\textsuperscript{54} in which vision is considered the primary way in which we come to learn about the world and others. Discussing listening as gesturing is therefore also a way to rethink our fundamental assertions about the connections between perception, experience, movement, and thought, specifically in the

\textsuperscript{53} I explore this line of argument and its application to potential case studies in social cognition involving \textit{dhikr} and Sufi dancing more fully in chapter four, but in this section I emphasize that the agency of the performance is most accurately understood with respect to the affective, gestural, and perceptual relationalities between performers and listeners.

\textsuperscript{54} On the topic of the devalued role of listening in the sensorium, particularly in relation to forms of knowledge, Hirschkind writes, “it is widely recognized that the politics, ethics, and epistemologies that defined the Enlightenment project were deeply entwined with a set of assumptions regarding the relative value of the senses” (Hirschkind 2006, 13). What Hirschkind is referencing here is the privileging of the eye over the ear in anthropological studies, and this hierarchy of senses has rendered truth increasingly abstract, leading to a privileging of text over speech, reading over listening, interpreting over embodying, and inner meaning over outward form. In drawing these distinctions, and by tying each of the former elements to modernity, progress, and reason, the latter elements become tied to religion, tradition, and irrationality, and are thereby stripped of any agency as forms of behavior.
sense that perceiving (and experiencing) is itself a kind of action and consequently, a kind of knowing or thinking.

The forms of reasoning and sociality cultivated by the da’wa movement in general, and the cassette sermons in particular, draw from the Islamic tradition of listening (sam’) in which sermon audition and listening are rooted. Hirschkind relates the tradition of sam’ practiced in contemporary Egypt to other Islamic traditions of ‘ilm al-balagha, which is the study of the aesthetic aspects of the Quran, and tarab, which is an affective dimension of primarily, though not exclusively, Sufi music. What cassette sermons take from these traditions are the affective and embodied dimensions of audition and a particular sense of the relationship between listening and agency not present in theories of perception in cognitive and anthropological literature.

In the tradition of tarab, for example, the relationship between agency and listening is one in which the performance is dependent upon the affective interaction of performers, or in the case of cassette sermons speakers (khutaba), and listeners. Tarab is not easily translated, but for the ethnomusicologist Michael Frishkopf, it can be narrowly defined as, “musical emotion and the traditional musical-poetic resources for producing it, especially expressive solo singing of evocative poetry, in an improvisatory style, employing the traditional system of maqam (melodic mode).” It is in this sense a relational property that allows for the exchange and unity of feeling, and is made possible by the mutual modulation of the performance by singer and audience, as well as singer and word. This kind of performance takes place in both formal and informal settings, but for Frishkopf the informal setting provides more potential for reach a state of tarab

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55 Sam’ also refers to a ritual dance performed by some Sufi sects, which I explore in chapter 4.
56 Zuhur 2003, 233.
because of its inherent flexibility and openness. As such, it has been an integral component of sermon recordings, in addition to Sufi dhikr and music. In describing the interaction between performer and listener, Frishkopf writes:

Moving himself and his listeners with the poetry he selects, and selecting poetry according to his hal (state) and feedback from listeners, he carefully tunes the performance, seeking that elusive frequency of emotional resonance among poet, munshid (performer), and listener, that melting point at which individual boundaries dissolve away, leaving the emotional unity which is tarab.57

One thing that is interesting about this practice is that many of the listeners can’t necessarily describe the propositional meaning of the texts being read because these poems are incredibly dense and metaphorical, and are written in classical Arabic in a way that makes it difficult for most people to understand. However, the focus in the performance on the affective, embodied, temporal, and environmental variables is essential for cultivating a feeling of social unity between performer and listener. For example, Frishkopf states, “through performative decisions regarding poetry, pacing, tempo, tonality, and many other variables, the munshid creates and molds emotion in hadra; he feels and expresses emotion, and his listeners empathetically feel with him.”58

Through this description, it is apparent that there is a kind of feedback loop between audience and performer that might constitute the dynamic coupling that is discussed within the enactive framework. Furthermore, it might be possible to explore how this rather intricate performance involving complex texts could be modeled with respect to some of the variables identified by Frishkopf.

Using the work of Michael Frischkopf, Hirschkind writes, “Tarab indicates a relation of harmony (insijam) between listener and performer, an intersubjective form

57 Zuhur 2003, 269.
58 Zuhur 2003, 263.
enabling an exchange of feeling (tabadul al-shu’ur) or an affective melding (dhawb) of one with the other.”

While the primary effect of Sufi music, and tarab especially, is to elicit a state of fana’, both sermon listening and Sufi music share the capacity to effect change in individuals’ affective-volitional dispositions such that the subjects are able to experience a state of closeness to God throughout their daily lives. Consequently, it is through these embodied, i.e. affective, experiences that the performance, or the act of listening, is able to acquire the sensibilities that permeate and guide not only the performances themselves, but also social interactions throughout the community.

Cassette sermons in particular draw from the musical tradition of tarab, but for Hirschkind the importance of affect is that it is the means through which the emotional dispositions discussed earlier are constructed. Affect, for Hirschkind, is differentiated from emotion insofar as affect operates at the level of bodily interaction, whereas emotions are individuated affects that are given specific form through culture, discourse, and practice. Hirschkind himself draws on the work of Brian Massumi to explore how emotion and affect can be distinguished and how such a distinction enables analysis of the interaction in terms bodily and environmental variables of interaction. He says, “Massumi reserves the term ‘affect’ to describe the myriad emotional movements within the body occurring below or outside of consciousness, the vast sea of emotionally charged perceptual responses that traverse the body without being assimilated into subjective content.”

He uses this approach to ethical listening in order to describe how it occurs at the affective level, rather than the emotional, conscious, or intentional level.

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59 Hirschkind 2006, 36.
60 According to Hirschkind, fana’ is “the dissolution of the self in the face of God described by mystics…” (Hirschkind 2006, 37).
61 Hirschkind 2006, 82.
In the tradition of *sam*, along with *tarab*, agency is conceived in terms of the involvement of the body of the listener as a whole, but what the tradition of *sam* adds to an understanding of the relationship between agency and listening is an emphasis on the listening as a particular form of action undertaken by a specific subject with certain embodied capacities and affective sensibilities. In short, for Hirschkind as well as practitioners, “*Sam*, in other words, is not a spontaneous and passive receptivity but a particular kind of action itself, a listening that is a doing.”

Furthermore, it is important to note that the tradition of *sam* is aimed at proper recitation and listening, rather than toward the effective presentation of arguments. The reason for the lack of focus on the persuasive power of sermons is that it is argued, “When humans fail to be convinced by this message, the fault lies not in the words but in the organ of reception, the human heart.”

Therefore, The main organ for this receptivity is talked about as the heart, which certainly contrasts with the Western organ of receptivity, the brain. However, such notions of receptivity need not be confined to any singular organ and this tuning, or this embodiment of ethical emotions, incorporates the subject as a whole.

Hirschkind offers one approach to rethinking the listening subject from the embodied perspective emphasized in the tradition of *sam*, where body and mind are synthesized into what he calls, “the human compound, as Jousse glosses the indivisible unity of body and mind, [that] is the product of a complex dance of rhythmic gestures, or gesticulations, the motor actions by which the body intussuscepts the world it inhabits, incorporating what is outside within it.”

This intussusception, or the taking within of something, is exemplified in the studies of perception insofar as there seems to be a very

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62 Hirschkind 2006, 34.
63 Hirschkind 2006, 34.
64 Hirschkind 2006, 77.
real way in which, in the act of perception we bring the world into ourselves. The opposite logical movement would be *gesticulations*, or gradations of bodily movements, experiences, and expressions, which function as an integral aspect of both perception and action. In other words, the interaction is not simply one in which the subject is formed by the environment or subjugated by authority; instead, it must be seen as a reversible relationship in which the subject also gives form to the environment and its tradition. For Hirschkind, "Viewed in this light, cassette sermons emerge as more than just a technology of ethical self-fashioning. Such tapes contribute to the creation of a sensory environment from which the subject draws its bearings, an environment that nourishes and intensifies the substrate of affective orientations that undergird right reasoning…” 65

This practice of listening associated with the cassette sermons does far more work than the construction of a subject which entails constructing a public space, or ethical soundscape, which in turn reinforces the cultivation of a particular type of subject, in this case the aural subject. Given this structure, i.e. the interactive and reciprocal process of intussusception and gesticulation, exemplified in the practice of listening in the formation of the aural subject, I argue that listening in this context can be productively analyzed as a form of gesturing.

The identification and incorporation of gestural patterns into the study of religious traditions has been a project taken up by Sam Gill who provides significant insight into the functioning of gesture in the construction of subjects and environments, particularly with respect to paradoxical structure of gesture. Gill describes this structure of gesture by writing, “Gesture imprints the values and distinctions of a society on the habitual bodily techniques of the individuals thus marking them as members of the society, but also

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65 Hirschkind 2006, 125.
actually making them of society. Yet the manipulation of techniques of moving bodies is the mechanisms by which societies transform."\textsuperscript{66} For Gill, the “rich theory of gesture” is composed of two arcs, which he terms the efferent and afferent arcs. He defines the efferent arc “as an arc that extends the body into the environment as well as into one’s very flesh.” In this sense gesture serves the function of conditioning the subject at the physical level and is seen by Gill as a mode of enculturation, while also revealing the importance of gesture in shaping communities and social relationships. This reciprocal structurality is also reflected in Hirschkind’s analysis of the function of cassette-sermon listening in the construction of ethical soundscapes and subjects. Consequently, gesture can be seen as exhibiting the cultivation or reorganization of the self by the subject, but it also exhibits the processes of self-cultivation that are constructed by its surrounding environment. Gill asserts that “gestures create space,” implying that both social and physical environments are enacted through the interaction of subjects and environments. However, for Gill gesture also possesses the afferent arc, which he defines as “a movement from the environment to the one gesturing. In gesture we discover ourselves and our environment; we explore possible meanings as we physically and mentally grope the world with our gestures.” Therefore in gesturing, as in listening in the context of the cassette sermons, the action is itself constituted by the interaction of the subject with the environment, interactions which are made possible by the embodied capacities, perceptual aptitudes, and environmental elements produced by the processes of subjectivation. Listening, in other words, is not an act undertaken by an autonomous individual with a particular goal in mind, but is a way of living enacted by a subject that is dependent, both necessarily and presently, upon embodied and extended factors.

\textsuperscript{66} Gill 2012, 69.
The point here, which I will elaborate further in chapter four, is that listening in the context of Islam can be understood as gesturing insofar as it functions in this kind of reciprocal fashion and incorporates the entirety of the moving and feeling body interplaying with its environment. In making this connection, it will be possible to more fully analyze the gestural practices of Sufi 

Sam’ and dhikr with respect to their function as bodily techniques and disciplinary practices within the Islamic traditions of listening. However, with respect to the questions of agency being discussed in this chapter, the issue of listening in terms of gesturing allows for a more complex engagement with agency, i.e. that change is effected along sociopolitical, psychological, and bodily dimensions, which all contribute to a specific construction of the subject. My argument, therefore, is not simply that models of agency, such as Whitehouse’s, based in a strict application of the theory of mind are insufficient because they leave out contextual factors, do not fully account for all of the intentional states involved in an action, and that somehow, by providing a more elaborate description of the context in which actions take place, it will be possible to locate the nexus of agency in a given situation. Instead, my assertion is that notions of agency will necessarily remain insufficient insofar as they fail to take into account how subjects have been formed, where subjects are not understood as individuated consciousnesses, but as changing potentials for thought, experience, and social action dependent upon the interaction of the sociological, psychological, and physiological conditions and processes that afford and foreclose possibilities for ways of living, thinking, and experiencing.
One of the central points of the previous chapters has been to demonstrate that the analysis of the forms of thought, experience, and action of individuals, whether religious or non-religious, need to be addressed with respect to the processes by which those individuals have been constituted as subjects. In short, the subject is to be understood as a set of possibilities for interaction with one’s self and with the world. These processes, as I have tried to illustrate, function along a number of dimensions that make possible, modulate, and foreclose certain possibilities for interaction, experience, and thought. The dimensions along which processes of subjectivation operate to form subjects capable of certain forms of interaction include, but are not limited to, affect, gesture, perception, and memory. I have highlighted these mechanisms for a number of reasons, the first of which is that all of these areas have been, for the most part, left out of theories of why people act and how they understand the actions of themselves and others. However, and this brings us around to my second point, when these dimensions are taken into account, for instance as Whitehouse does with memory and emotion, they are often assumed to function universally, i.e. independent of the historical constitution of the subject’s potentials for interaction. My approach, on the other hand, asks about the extent to which these particular processes can function variably within social interactions, and furthermore, the extent to which social practices are able to modulate and modify ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting. Therefore, in contrast to theories of agency, such as Whitehouse’s, that propose a natural subject, i.e. that make assumptions about how normal individuals act, think, and experience, I suggest an exploration of the “plastic”
subject,\textsuperscript{1} which assumes that a discussion of people’s thoughts, experiences, and actions requires attention to the processes by which that individual has been formed as a subject. The exploration in this chapter, however, is not an attempt to argue that the notion of plasticity accounts for the processes of subjectivation explored by scholars such as Foucault and Asad, but to begin an analysis of people’s social interactions that does not start from the assumption that there is a natural, predetermined, normal way of being human. I highlight plasticity because it is, in part, empirical evidence on the plasticity of brain mechanisms, i.e. memory and perception, that has motivated my investigation of the influence and variability of embodied and extended processes in forms of reasoning and action.\textsuperscript{2}

Neural plasticity has become a prominent field of investigation in neurosciences over the past thirty years that has generated important insights into the structure and development of neural processes. The central areas of investigation have been processes of learning and memory, particularly as they relate to the hippocampus and amygdala. The basic principle behind the concept of plasticity is that “neurons that fire together, wire together.” In short, this is the idea that as neurons are activated in conjunction with other neurons, these sets have a tendency to increase the effectiveness of their connections and, as a result, establish weighted probabilities and tendencies to activate together. Memory, in this model, appears more as a process of sedimentation in which patterns of coactivation are conditioned over time, rather than as a process of encoding and retrieving specific bits of information. Learning has also undergone a rethinking as a

\textsuperscript{1} Plasticity has two meanings here. First, it refers to neurological plasticity. Second, it refers to my reading of Catherine Malabou’s concept of plasticity. For me, plasticity refers to an underlying structurality of a subject’s modes of interaction.

\textsuperscript{2} Plasticity is also important because it reinforces the importance of repetitive activities, such as religious or disciplinary practices, in our daily ways of living and interacting.
result of plasticity, resulting in what is called the Hebbian learning model. Basically, this model, much like the memory model, suggests that learning is not primarily about the acquisition of information, but instead involves the reconfiguration of neural architecture and patterns of coactivation, which could have a substantial influence on how people perceive and interact with the world.

While much of the research has stemmed from investigations of learning and memory, there has also been more recent research programs focused on the plasticity of perceptual capabilities. For example, Norman Doidge writes, “it has long been assumed that we absorb culture through universally shared, standard-issue, human perceptual equipment, but perceptual learning shows that this assumption is not completely correct.” In short, Doidge’s work calls into question both the givenness of perceptual apparatuses, i.e. that we all perceive the world through the same structures of interaction, as well as the strict separation between perceptual modules, i.e. that vision necessarily encodes information differently from hearing. There is also some preliminary research being conducted on cortical plasticity, which refers to the capacity to restructure cortical maps, which could imply that “representations” themselves are plastic and are subject to transformation through various repeated practices. Plasticity, therefore, provides and important fundamental concept for understanding how history imprints itself on the brain and how those impressions impact forms of perception, thought, and experience.

In other words, the investigation of the plastic subject is the question of how, and to what extent, we take into account the historical constitution of the subject in our

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3 Doidge 2007, 300.
4 This work on perceptual plasticity is a key component to much of the enactivist literature. For example, John Stewart’s lab works on remapping visual input onto tactile sensations on the tongue.
analysis of cognitive activities.\(^5\) The jump to framing the practices discussed up to this point as cognitive activities might seem inappropriate in that activities such as listening, dancing, reciting, and social interaction are not often perceived as cognitive in the same sense as problem-solving, abstract reasoning, and knowledge acquisition. However, the connection of these phenomena under the umbrella of cognitive activities has become possible by more open-ended approaches in cognitive science that seek to explain intelligent behavior broadly speaking. In particular, these approaches, which are variously glossed as “extended,” “embodied,” and “enactive,” insofar as they can usefully highlight the varied roles of emotions, gestures, and external media in causing (or constituting) intelligent behavior. To be clear, my point here is not to provide an argument in favor or rejection of any particular definition of cognition or specifically cognitive properties, but simply to highlight that these approaches do allow us to explore in closer detail the multiple forms of interaction that may or may not cause (or constitute) cognition.

The extent to which embodied and extended mechanisms can be considered to affect cognitive processes depends on how one defines cognition. Cognition is to a certain extent a nebulous concept insofar as it is used across a number of disciplines to refer to a wide range of phenomena, such as memory, decision-making, problem solving, learning. While many of these disciplines are comfortable limiting the scope of their research to a specific set of mechanisms and processes, scholars within other fields, in particular philosophy of mind, have felt compelled to ask more fundamental questions.

\(^5\) Certainly some people may take my investigation to be a point about learning and the fact that people’s past experiences have an impact on their present. If one wants to frame it as a question of learning, then think of it as a question of learning to perceive, or learning to think, or learning to experience, or learning to interact with other people and to live in a community.
about what it is that constitutes cognition. In other words, when we look at all of the phenomena across all of the cognitive disciplines, what makes them “cognitive”? 

Scholars in the field of philosophy of mind have posed this as the question of the “mark of the cognitive,” but have taken an approach that has generally privileged intuitions and hypothetical situations over empirical evidence. Therefore, in leaving notions of cognition fairly open-ended, supporters of the “enactive,” “extended,” and “embodied” cognition theses are encouraging the investigation and consideration of a wide range of empirical sources, thereby contributing both theoretically and methodologically to the interdisciplinary field of cognitive science.

In its strongest sense, the mark of the cognitive is a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that can be used to identify cognitive phenomena as such. The focus of this inquiry is to establish the mechanisms that are constitutive of the cognitive system, as opposed to those mechanisms that are causally related. The distinction between constitutive and causal relationships takes on significance when we begin to ask about the extent to which embodied mechanisms, such as emotions, gestures, and perceptions, or environmental artifacts and technologies, can be analyzed as constitutive elements of a cognitive system. The issue of what exactly makes a system cognitive has become pivotal in many debates about the validity of claims made by the “enactive,” “embodied,” and “extended” cognition theses in which factors outside neurological mechanisms are claimed to be constituents of a cognitive system. In what follows I consider some of the theoretical discussion and empirical evidence emerging from these research programs, beginning with the “extended mind,” in order to highlight their attention to processes and

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6 This idea is taken from Rob Rupert’s proposal for a Psychology of Philosophy and his emphasis on empirical considerations in the philosophy of mind.
interactions that have generally been marginalized in cognitive, as well as social theories of behavior broadly speaking.

A common problem posed by social scientists with respect to the use of cognitive science in studying social processes has been that cognitive science is based on mechanisms which exist in the head (and body) and thus cannot be directly measured, particularly in an authentic field setting. Further, many of the efforts of “cognitive science of religion” have been centered on identifying the neural correlates of religions or religious experience. In general, my argument is that the enactive approach helps to alleviate this concern by focusing not on the individuals alone but on the relationships and patterns of behavior that emerge through interaction. Therefore, cognition does not occur in the brain, or in the brain-body; instead, it is something that emerges to mutually guide behavior within particular settings. While this claim about the “extended mind” is debatable, the point for now is that the use of cognitive science here is not an attempt to reduce social activities to something inside the head. Advocates of this paradigm are very clear that the individualistic, “brainbound,” framework is not adequate for exploring social behaviors, and that in order to understand coordinated behavior one needs to see the entire individual-environment system holistically.

Section I. Extended Cognitive Systems

In this section I examine discussions on the extended cognition thesis, not in order to present an argument in favor of or against the extended thesis, but to suggest that what is critical to the empirical investigation of the cognition is not only the study of the kinds of processes involved, but also the study of the structures of interactions between those
processes. In particular, I draw from the work of Andy Clark, Robert Rupert, and Michael Wheeler to frame the debate about what constitutes cognition in the extended model. In using these philosophers to frame the discussion, I am emphasizing the value of an empirically minded approach to theories of cognitive activity, as opposed to approaches driven by intuitions, natural assumptions, and hypothetical situations, in which the decisions about what constitutes (versus causes) cognition are made with respect to the investigation of specific processes of interaction.

In general, the Extended claim made by Clark is that at times, a cognitive system may be composed of heterogeneous functional components that span brain, body, and world. This claim is not simply that cognition ‘depends heavily’ on the body and the environment, but that in certain cases, the body or artifacts can be said to be an active part of the cognitive system insofar as they function in ways similar enough to any other mechanism that we would consider cognitive. Clark expresses this in his formulation of the Parity Principle: “If, as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which, were it to go on in the head, we would have no hesitation in accepting as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world is (for the time) part of the cognitive process.”\(^7\) This claim about similarity rests on a fairly broad, “common-sense” functionalism in which mental states are characterized primarily by their “flexible, informationally sensitive systemic behavior,” as opposed to relying on the particular way in which such information is stored or processed.\(^8\)

As an example, Clark uses the case of forgetful Otto who keeps a journal to help him remember things. The question is whether or not there is a difference between a

\(^7\) Clark 2008, 77.
\(^8\) Clark 2008, 88.
normal person (Inga) using her memory to go to a location (in this case the Museum of Modern Art in New York City), and Otto using his notebook to “remember” the location and then travel there. For Clark, even though there are significant and apparent differences between the storage in the notebook and neurological mechanisms of storage, there is “sufficient functional similarity” between the two that the notebook can be considered a functional part of the cognitive system that extends around Otto.

The key point therefore is that, for Clark, the constituents of cognitive systems are defined by their functional roles, rather than by their physical instantiation. In addition, Clark’s investigation focuses on establishing the “natural kinds” of functions, i.e. cognitive mechanisms that can be realized either internally or externally. Memory, in the case of Otto for example, serves as a “natural kind” in this sense, in the sense that it can be realized in either the notebook or in Inga’s head. However, since these “natural kinds” are intended by Clark to function as causal-explanatory kinds for cognitive science, i.e. they are supposed to explain how intelligent behavior occurs, it seems that there are important differences between the notebook’s role in Otto’s action and the neurological mechanisms in Inga’s action. For instance, quite simply, Otto’s action was dependent upon not only stored memory, but also his perceptual capacities. Inga, on the other hand, made no use of her perceptual capacities to retrieve the information necessary to act. One concern, therefore, is that subsuming these different mechanisms under the same functional category won’t provide the explanatory power necessary for a cognitive science.

Robert Rupert raises this dilemma explicitly in his analysis of Clark’s work, pointing out that the response to the problem of broad “natural kinds” which do little
causal-explanatory work, would be an approach that tries to classify, in more “fine-grained” detail, the functional properties that are instantiated in both internal and external mechanisms. However, as Rupert contends, current empirical evidence suggests that no such fine-grained functional properties are likely to exist. In my opinion, this is not an assumption by Rupert that cognitive processes are necessarily internal, but is instead an observation that if we consider the research being done in a number of the cognitive disciplines, there doesn’t seem to be much evidence to suggest that the fine-grained functional states that constitute cognition can be established such that they can be instantiated independent of their internal or external location. Consequently, for Rupert, even though external mechanisms can and do play a significant causal role in cognitive behaviors, they currently should not be considered as constitutive of cognitive systems. Rupert contrasts these two positions as the hypothesis of embedded cognition (HEMC) and the hypothesis of extended cognition (HEC), where the former addresses the causal role of the environment and the latter the constitutive role of the environment in intelligent behavior.⁹

The clear difference between these two positions is the question of causation versus constitution, which brings us back to the question of the “mark of the cognitive.” For both Clark and Rupert, this issue is ultimately an empirical one, where an analysis of the relationships among processes, both internal and external, is conducted with respect to how those processes interact. Importantly, the focus provided by this discussion allows us to see cognition as a form of interaction between distinct processes and cognitive science as the analysis of those structures of interaction to determine which processes in particular play constitutive roles. The point, with regard to my discussion in

⁹ Rupert 2009.
this chapter, is that this philosophical debate on extended cognition opens up cognitive science in general to the investigation of many different forms of interaction, including social interaction, from an original and empirically grounded perspective.

However, despite this general agreement, Rupert differs significantly from Clark in his approach to the analysis of the structures of interaction. Whereas Clark relies on a notion of “continuous reciprocal causation” (CRC) to define the criteria for two processes that constitute a single system, Rupert offers an approach grounded in probabilistic causation. In this method, the analysis of whether or not processes are constitutive elements of a cognitive system entails an examination of the probability and extent to which a process causally contributes not only to another mechanism, but also to all the mechanisms that contribute to the system in question. The modeling of the behavior of a cognitive system would therefore entail a mapping of all the conditional probabilities for mechanisms (internal and external) to causally interact with some (or all) of the other mechanisms. The determination of constitutive versus causal could therefore be established empirically, in terms of its causal “weight” in a system. In a way, for me, this model of the cognitive system is reminiscent of the notion of the subject as a set of potentials and dispositions for interaction. Furthermore, it seems quite feasible that these probability functions can be modified and trained, i.e. conditioned, through repetition, suggesting within this shifting network of conditional probabilities a potential for “learning” to incorporate different processes into the cognitive system. In other words, through repeated practice, i.e. spending too much time on an i-phone (or by listening to cassette sermons regularly), people may be able to alter what exactly constitutes their cognitive system in a given context. This possibility, however, is left open to empirical
investigation in cognitive science through Rupert’s model, which in my opinion opens
the possibility for cognitive science to explore a wide variety of phenomena, including
social and technological interactions.

Clark, as opposed to Rupert, bases his analysis of the structures of cognitive
interaction in, what he terms “continuous reciprocal causation” (CRC). Thus, for Clark,
cognition is defined in terms of a type of coupling between processes, one in which both
processes simultaneously contribute to the behavior of the system. In such cases of CRC,
the processes can be considered aspects of the same system. The philosopher Michael
Wheeler elaborates on this idea of coupling by positinge that “situated special-purpose
adaptive couplings,” which are achieved through simultaneous dynamic interaction and
mutual feedback loops, are the kinds of interactions that would indicate the integration of
two processes into a single cognitive system. I emphasize this idea of dynamic coupling
in relation to extended cognition because this structurality is also central to the embodied
and enactive approach. For a clearer explanation of this “causal-structural basis” for
cognition, Wheeler draws from Clark’s notion of CRC, which Wheeler defines as an
interaction in which, “(a) the causal contribution of each systemic component partially
determines, and is partially determined by, the causal contributions of large numbers of
other systemic components, and, moreover, (b) those contributions may change radically
over time.”\footnote{Wheeler 2008, 341.} The key point for Wheeler, as for Rupert and Clark, is that it is in the
details of the interaction of various processes that we can begin to make claims about
what causes versus what constitutes certain cognitive phenomena, and that consequently,
philosophers interested in establishing a “mark of the cognitive” need to turn to empirical
evidence, rather than intuitions, to provide adequate theories of cognition. In addition, this empirical evidence takes as its phenomena of interest the various forms of neurological, physiological, psychological, ecological, technological, and sociological interaction that contribute to intelligent behavior. However, even if this investigation only yields more “fine-grained” models of the role of embodied or extended processes in forms of reasoning, i.e. only adds more detail to Rupert’s HEMC, it still seems to me that this provides an important step in explaining how people think and interact, particularly in social contexts where the causal roles of emotional or perceptual processes may be more substantial than in cases of abstract problem solving. As such, while scholars in the enactive and embodied camps, to which I turn in the next section, make radical claims about the nature of cognition, their novel investigations on perceptual and embodied interactions do suggest that further analysis these mechanisms in relation to intelligent behavior is warranted. In this sense, I consider the enactive and embodied research programs as significant programs within the broader debate framed here about the mechanisms that causally contribute or constitute cognitive systems.

Section II. Enaction and Embodiment

In this section, I consider the “enactive” and “embodied” cognition theses as more specific instantiations of the extended cognition thesis. In other words, all three are aimed at the analysis of the structural principles of interactions using primarily different types of couplings. Enaction, for instance, focuses mainly on the structures of perceptual interactions, whereas embodiment, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of emotions or bodily movements in intelligent behavior. My goal here is not to say that the evidence
presented here necessarily substantiates the claims about cognition made by the extended, enactive, or embodied approaches, but to demonstrate that the openness to the study of the myriad forms and levels of interactions increases and enhances the depth of phenomena variously glossed as intelligent behavior. To begin with, I discuss some work being conducted in the enactive framework, and then I move on to discuss work on embodied cognition.

While the term “enaction” is accredited to Varela, Thompson, and Rosch’s use of the term in describing perception, it has since been elaborated upon by a number of authors in the compilation *Enaction: Toward a new paradigm for cognitive science*. In its opening article, John Stewart reveals some of the crucial features that have driven some cognitive scientists to adopt a new framework in which cognition, action, and perception are aspects of the individual that emerge in different forms to help sustain and maintain life. For Stewart, “cognition and life are fundamentally the same phenomena.”

Cognition in the enactive framework, then, is something that emerges through interaction with the world and functions to guide behavior, implying that cognition must be understood as a process constituted by factors inside and outside the individual. This view, which expands the traditional notion of cognition, builds from a framework that sees the individual as a dynamic, dissipative, autopoietic, and ontogenetic process that, despite the complexity of the processes that constitute it and the diverse ways it can interact with the world, nonetheless proves to be a fairly stable and regular entity. However, this stability emerges from the way in which the individual system is able to adapt in order to more effectively guide behavior in an environment. What I want to emphasize throughout this discussion of enaction is that cognition is understood as a kind

11 Stewart et al 2010, 3.
of dynamic, reciprocal interaction that is directly affected by both bodily and environmental factors.

To begin with I clarify a few of the terms in the enaction discussion in order to get a better sense of the primacy of interaction in this model. For instance, the individual is conceived not as a stable entity, but as a dissipative structure, which is a dynamical system that operates far from any sort of equilibrium and is constantly exchanging matter and energy with its environment. However, despite a potentially chaotic system, a dissipative structure is able to maintain a form of regularity despite existing far from equilibrium. Additionally Stewart states, “The emergence of a dissipative structure brings about the differentiations between two inseparable entities.”12

The point here is that what is “internal” and “external” to the subject is not determined a priori, but instead comes into being through dynamic conditions. The self, in the enactive framework, is therefore not taken as a given, singular entity, but is instead a constantly negotiating, adapting, and working being. In other words, if cognition is defined as an adaptive mode of interaction (coupling), then the framing of the self as a dissipative structure means that simply living falls under the umbrella of a cognitive activity. My point here, using Stewart, is to say that there is a focus in the enactive framework on some of the most basic, non-conscious forms of interaction giving a unique perspective on how, and even why, people behave in certain ways.

Elaborating on the notion of the dynamic individual, Stewart uses the term autopoietic; or, “a system defined as a unity as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components that produces components that … culturally regenerate and realize the network … and … institute it as a concrete unity in

12 Stewart 2010, 2.
the space in which they exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network.”\textsuperscript{13} The term autopoietic connotes the idea of self-creation, but the primary point as I take it is that an autopoietic system is one that is able to create the components that enable the maintenance of the system as a whole. Therefore, in maintaining one’s being in the world one has to continually reproduce the biological processes that produce that being. Altering these biological processes then has an impact on the dynamics of the system as a whole and consequently alters the individual as a whole, at least with respect to how it will interact with the world.

Stewart also characterizes the formation of the individual as a process of ontogenesis, which is term a used frequently in the literature and refers most generally to the “process leading from a fertilized egg cell which continues through maturation to an adult, and then through senescence to death at the term of a life span…”\textsuperscript{14} However, as Stewart points out, this incredibly complex process displays an enormous amount of regularity. Ontogenesis is important because it shows how different forms of material life are able to emerge through dynamical processes and how the emergence of new forms of materiality does not need to be explained by anything outside the dynamic interplay of other material processes. Using this principle, the enactive paradigm suggests a metaphysical realism that doesn’t attempt to reduce all forms of existence to a single realm of physical processes, and allows for the study of multiple forms of materiality that operate with many of the same structural principles. In short, the life of the individual human organism, for the enactive paradigm, is in itself a cognitive activity insofar as its life is an adaptive engagement with others and the world. Thus, the

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 2.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 7.
phenomena available for study are virtually endless, but would all share the focus of investigating the reciprocal relationships and interactions involved in those phenomena.

However, the enactive paradigm doesn’t consist solely in a redefinition of cognition as dynamic interaction. In particular, in the article “Horizons for the Enactive Mind,” Ezequiel Di Paolo, Marieke Rohde, and Hanne De Jaegher attempt to demonstrate how enaction differentiates itself from other cognitive science research programs not simply by emphasizing that cognition is active, physical, changing and interacting with the world via information transfer. Rather, the authors propose a theoretical framework for the enactive paradigm composed of five particular mechanisms: sense-making, autonomy, emergence, experience, and embodiment. In particular, Di Paolo et al claim that enaction differs through “the grounding of notions such as values and meaning.”15 Furthermore, for the authors, “meaning is inseparable from the whole of context-dependent, life-motivated, embodied activity, without being at all a hazy concept beyond the reach of scientific understanding.”16 Meaning and value, for the Di Paolo et al, are not something distinct from situations, but rather emerge from within the dynamic of individuals and environments in order to guide behavior. In doing so, Di Paolo et al highlight the possibility for meaning emerging from the organism’s interaction with the world. In short, this approach suggests that the world is inherently meaningful, but that it is through our engagement that it acquires meaning and value.

Di Paolo et al address the enaction of meaning and value through the mechanism of “sense-making,” which, as the authors write, “exchanges with the world are thus inherently significant for the agent, and this is the definitional property of a cognitive

15 Ibid, 35.
16 Ibid, 36.
system: the creation and appreciation of meaning.” 17 This sense, or meaning, need not be propositional, explicit, recognizable or conscious. The body can act in meaningful ways outside the realm of these categories and furthermore, for the enactivists, this sort of embodied meaning is both developmentally and presently necessary for the kinds of abstract meanings associated with language and higher-level cognitive systems.

However, independent of this line of argument, it is clear that the enactive framework opens up possibilities for multiple forms of meaning and value. Di Paolo et al go on to say of these cognitive systems that, “they participate in the generation of meaning through their bodies and action often engaging in transformational and not merely informational interactions; they enact a world.” 18 Any form of interaction in this sense, produces some form of transformation both of the individual and the environment. This is really one of the central insights of the enactive framework, which is basically that living, in itself, is always a process of reciprocal adaptation and therefore also a cognitive activity. Furthermore, the structure of this interaction is akin to the kind of “continuous reciprocal causation” discussed by Andy Clark, suggesting that the mode of interaction instantiated in the process of sense-making could be a candidate for a cognitive mechanism constituted by both internal and external factors.

To supplement this discussion of the sense-making mechanism, I consider Giovanna Colombetti’s article “Enaction, Sense-making, and Emotion.” In this article, Colombetti is attempting to add an emotional dimension to the process of giving meaning to concepts. In doing so, she argues that it becomes possible to understand the role of the body in generating meaning. She says, “in particular, I will interpret [this] notion of

17 Ibid, 39.
18 Ibid, 39.
sense-making as a bodily cognitive-emotional form of understanding, indicating the need to look at the role of emotion and the body more fully in understanding and adaptive action.”\textsuperscript{19} For Colombetti, adaptivity is “the capacity of the organism to regulate and monitor itself with respect to its viability conditions [and] allows for the emergence of various degrees of concern.”\textsuperscript{20} These degrees of concern allow for gradations of meaning, an idea that is not captured beyond either positive or negative in traditional models.\textsuperscript{21}

Alternatively, Colombetti calls for a “multidimensional valence” and states, “a story of how to move from the theory of organismic sense-making to human judgments and social values might prove useful to provide a theoretical framework within which it is possible to … characterize the idea of a multidimensional valence.”\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, by attempting to account for the multiple ways in which practices, such as dancing or chanting, operate to express and cultivate ethical sensibilities, I think it could be possible to provide this type of story. It is important to note, however, that when studying this in relation to something like religion, these practices can exist not only in formal settings, but also in informal, spontaneous, and even nonconscious contexts. Studying culture in this way causes us to look at the ways that everyday practices, from conversation to posture, construct individuals and simultaneously transform cultures. The forms of social interaction then need to be studied in terms of their biological or physiological function, their emotional function, and, if present, their cognitive-rational function, all of which operate simultaneously and dynamically in the interaction. Or, as Colombetti states, “it is

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 147.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 149.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 159. Refers to the notion of valence.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 160.
thus time to develop a view of agency in which emotion - including its bodily, experiential and behavior aspects – is not a secondary and circumscribed phenomenon.”

The point for Colombetti here is that emotion plays a number of roles in affecting the behavior of cognitive systems, and that these different roles reflect a deep need in cognitive science for a richer model of emotion. In other words, the modeling of affective responses needs to go beyond simply positive and negative valence, and possibly that the function of certain emotions in guiding or regulating behaviors could depend on the presence of external factors.

This mechanism of “sense-making,” in my opinion, is substantiated to a certain extent by research being conducted on the role of mirror neurons in behavior and emotion. In this particular study, the researchers investigate relationships between behavior mimicry and mirror neurons on the one hand, and empathy and mimicry on the other hand, with the assessment that mirror neurons could potentially provide an explanatory neural mechanism for prereflective imitation of other people’s behaviors. Furthermore, this imitation has been shown, in research in social psychology, to facilitate feelings of empathy and interpersonal connection. Thus, in watching someone perform an action, the individual is immediately giving an affective dimension that is experienced in her body. In a very real way, according to this research, the individual experiences, or enacts, the other in the self, thereby illustrating that a process of social understanding does not unfold simply along the dimensions of discerning and expressing intentions. Before her analysis of the intentions of the other actor, the individual is able to “understand,” “experience,” or empathize with the other.

23 Ibid, 160.
24 Iacoboni 2008.
This area, i.e. the relation between behavioral mimicry and emotion, has also been addressed by researchers in cognitive psychology, particularly in the realm of nonconscious behavior mimicry.\textsuperscript{25} The process of nonconscious behavioral mimicry explored in this study is linked not only with the entrainment of movement, but how that kind of coordination can operate at an affective level. Along with all of these research programs, there is a working assumption that there is a link between performing a behavior and perceiving that behavior. This research builds from results that “suggest that behavioral mimicry may be part of a person’s repertoire of behaviors, used nonconsciously, when there is a desire to create rapport,” in order to see if people nonconsciously employ mimicry to their advantage in social interactions. Their research suggests, “Behavioral mimicry is a nonconscious strategy that one uses to accomplish this goal. Thus, there are two automatic aspects of this process – the nonconscious activation and pursuit of an affiliation goal, and the nonconscious use of mimicry as a strategy to attain that goal.”\textsuperscript{26} This suggests that the process of desiring to create rapport and the cultivation of that rapport can all be done through nonconscious coordination and mimicry. Therefore, putting people in repetitive situations where they have a tendency to mimic each other could be a powerful way of cultivating a sense of community.

The approach to meaning and value theorized and practiced in the enactive framework becomes especially important when attempting to deal with social meaning, indicated by Di Paolo et al’s statement, “in order to fully understand how meaning comes about in social understanding, we need not only to focus on the embodiment of

\textsuperscript{25} Lakin 2003.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 337.
interactions, but also on the interaction process that takes place between them.”\textsuperscript{27} The point with this is to say that we can’t stop at a description of interaction that looks at the transfer of information between two independent systems of neurobiologically coupled processes. Rather, the whole process needs to be studied in itself as an entire system, as a form of material reality that displays and is composed of processes with the same structurality. There are features in this system that can be identified, manipulated, and used to predict and model the unfolding of the interaction over time without relying on a model where there are two independent systems. Instead, “interaction is here understood as the coupling between an agent and a specific aspect of its world: another agent.”\textsuperscript{28} This coupling functions to produce the emergent phenomenon of interaction, one that can take on a number of forms. This suggests that in studying people’s lives in cultures and societies, we need to have adequate models of the “mechanism of social interaction as such” that do not begin by positing an insurmountable gap between the individuals or systems involved.

The second major aspect of the enactive paradigm addressed by Di Paolo et al is the concept of “autonomy,” which indicates that cognitive systems “do not only respond to external perturbations in the traditional sense of producing the appropriate action for a given situation, they do in fact actively and asymmetrically regulate the conditions of their exchange with the environment, and in do so, enact a world or cognitive domain.”\textsuperscript{29} Autonomy is conceived here in a weaker sense where the cognitive system is not necessarily defined by its independence from the external world. Rather than receiving an input and producing an output in a sequential manner, the autonomous system is one

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{27} Stewart et al 2010, 61.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 61.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 38.
\end{footnotesize}
that works to impact the conditions that make possible or foreclose potential activities. In this way, the autonomous cognitive system does not have the capacity to act solely on itself or on behalf of itself, but must constantly engage in interactive processes of adaptation with what is external. Therefore, any strong or strict sense of the autonomy of agents from both embodied and environmental conditions, a sense employed by modern liberal political and social thinkers, is not able to fully appreciate the depth of how people live and interact in the world.

Furthermore, for Di Paolo et al, “autonomous agency goes even further than the recognition of ongoing sensorimotor couplings as dynamical and emphasizes the role of the agent in constructing, organizing, maintaining and regulating those closed sensorimotor loops. In doing so, the cognitive agent plays a role in determining the norms that it will follow.” However, its determination of those norms is in fact dependent upon the history of the subject, in the sense that norms that the subject can enact and experience require specific bodily and environmental capacities. In other words, by regulating embodied conditions of possibility, the agent takes part in constructing normative conditions that operate to constrain and limit possibilities for behavior that function to transform individuals and spaces. By limiting behavior, norms have the function of cutting off other possibilities of movement that give rise to new world of relationships and new ways of living and experiencing. My point here is that one does not need the strict, disembodied notion of autonomy in order to account for the types of interaction present in the social world.

Two additional theoretical points, which I discuss briefly before turning to embodiment, are experience and emergence. Di Paolo et al, for instance, claim that

experience “is itself a skillful aspect of embodied activity.” In making this point they use the example of a wine connoisseur, whose experience of wine is transformed through repetitive practice. In this way, the changing of bodily structures that perceive wine also brings about a transformation in the experience of that wine. Similarly, through repetitive ritual behavior, it seems possible to see how bodily transformation could occur that would make possible certain kinds of religious experience. Repetitive ritual in this way could serve as an important factor in investigating religious experience and discourse, an aspect of religion that is rarely seen as important in traditional approaches to the study of religion. And, rather than seeking to identify the possibility for neural correlates of religious experience, it looks at the way in which religious and cultural practices affect how the individual enacts its world. Furthermore, this notion of experience as a skillful aspect of living suggests that, to a certain extent, experience can be learned. As such, the forms of religious experience and thought that are the focus of religious studies must attend to the bodily techniques and capabilities that allow for that experience and thought to arise.

The idea of thought or experience arising out of bodily processes relates to Di Paolo et al’s discussion of “emergence,” which is perhaps one of the most underdeveloped and important features of the paradigm, especially with regard to scaling up to both higher-level cognition and larger social contexts. Many people across humanities and cognitive science use the language of emergence, systems and dynamics to describe the nature of phenomena from consciousness to religion. Di Paolo et al use emergence here to describe how “meaning is not to be found in elements belonging to the environment or in the internal dynamics of the agent, but belongs to the relational domain

31 Ibid, 44.
established between these two.” To say that meaning emerges then is to look at the ways in which the conditions of the entire system create relations that allow meaning to take a particular form. The primary point for Di Paolo et al is that meaning is not an objective property that is discovered by cognitive systems, but something that comes into existence as a result of the interactions and historical trajectories of a number of different processes. Further, if we see cognition as meaning making, then cognition is not something that always exists in a certain form, but can take multiple forms when the agent enters into different relationships with the environment. These different relationships demand adaptation from the agent, and it is cognition that emerges in order to guide this adaptive behavior. Cognition in this sense is a problem-solving geared primarily to navigating different types of interactions, rather than toward a recreation of the external world. This then brings us back to the idea that cognition is not different from life itself, but is one mode of operating in the world that enables and agent to maintain its continuation.

However appealing this notion of emergence may appear, one criticism of this theory of emergence that needs to be addressed is the question of downward causation. By downward causation, I mean the question of how an emergent pattern could affect the processes that bring about its emergence, particularly when those composite processes are causally closed on their own. In order to understand how this is possible, it is necessary to rethink traditional perspectives on causation, particularly with respect to “causes” of behavior because these causes are often identified as residing solely in the acting individual. However, as the researchers in this paradigm show, perhaps the best way to understand behavior is not through sequential causal stories, but through relational

32 Ibid, 40.
conditions and histories that allow for people to coordinate and interact in different ways. By this I mean that, in the enactive view, there is simultaneity between the processes that allow for the emergence and the processes that emerge. Furthermore, the process that emerges must continually be emerging in the sense that the underlying processes must continue to be at work. So, rather than having a situation where two things stand in a relationship of action and response, they stand in a relationship where an action of one is a response of the other and they cannot be separated temporally.

The point here, for me, is that the problem of top-down causation stems from the need to posit both a logical and metaphysical gap between constitutive components and emergent phenomena. Such a gap prevents us from seeing the variety and gradations of material existence the world can take and how each of these forms demonstrate the structural principles present in this enactive paradigm. This structurality is one of plasticity, which enables openness to transformation in the very processes that constitute it while also retaining a resistance, or a tendency to resist deformations. Plasticity, like enaction, can be situated between extremes of infinite flexibility and insurmountable rigidity or autonomy, two ideologies that have been crucial in the development of modern society and subjectivity. Emergence, therefore, resembles the structural properties of “continuous reciprocal causation” discussed by Andy Clark, but is consequently also subject to the kinds of criticisms offered by Rob Rupert, among others. In short, the criticism is that while such systems are causally coupled in potentially interesting and profound ways, they are, nonetheless, still two coupled systems, and not one single system. However, as mentioned earlier, this judgment needs to be made in light of empirical evidence on the specific details of these dynamic couplings, which cannot be
determined beforehand. Therefore, the enactive paradigm ought to be invested in research as many different forms and levels of interaction as possible, opening the door in my opinion to the incorporation of anthropological (broadly speaking) studies on social behavior and interaction across diverse populations. In doing so, the research program will not only provide important details about a greater number of phenomena, but also be able to test the universality and primacy of certain forms of interaction, such as the theory of mind.

A significant amount of this research into varieties of interaction has been framed by the term “embodiment,” which is geared toward the study of the role of bodily experiences in forms of abstract thought, like metaphors or language, as well as toward the specific forms of bodily interaction that can take place outside of the realm of consciousness. In describing this theoretical position, Di Paolo et al write, “embodiment means that mind is inherent in the precarious, active, normative, and worldful process of animation, that the body is not a puppet controlled by the brain but a whole animate system with many autonomous layers of self-constitution, self-coordination, and self-organization and varying degrees of openness to the world that create its sense making activity.” For the enactivist, the body is constitutive of meaning and sense, not merely something off of which meaning can be read or on which meaning can be inscribed. Di Paolo et al, building on Lakoff and Sheets-Johnstone, “there is much evidence that higher-level cognitive skills, such as reasoning and problem solving, mental image manipulation, and language use depend crucially on bodily structure.” Furthermore, the authors claim that the plasticity of these bodily structures, in conjunction with our

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33 Ibid, 42.
34 Ibid, 43.
immersion within an already social and symbolic world, enables “our bodies to fit a
scheme of control and observation of behavioral and cultural norms thus giving rise to
sociolinguistic and narrative selves.” Here, the authors are attempting to show how the
combination of social world and plastic bodily structures enables the emergence of a
sense of self that fits with notions of a Cartesian disembodied self. However, the point is
that rather than this being a natural feature of our body, is actually of form of subjectivity
that has emerged out of the social conditions in which we live. Therefore, our sense of
self is crucially dependent on the relationship between our bodily structures and social
aspects of the environment, indicating, for the supporters of these claims about
embodiment, a mutuality that should not be seen as causal but as constitutive.

Di Paolo et al explore some of the different forms these interactions can take, as
well as the critical processes and relationships that enable their emergence. One form of
interaction is coordination, which itself can take different forms with varying levels of
participation. Di Paolo et al define coordination as “the nonaccidental correlation of
behaviors of two or more social agents.” Here, the authors use two studies to
demonstrate this kind of coordination activity and what the bodily factors are that in
enable, constrain, and modulate this activity. They claim that, “the models demonstrate
the importance of timing in interaction and suggest how it can affect sensorimotor
processes at the individual level to the point that reorganizing an interaction partner is
possible thanks to the interplay and mutual modulation between the interaction and
individual cognitive properties.” The temporality or “interaction rhythm” plays a
significant role in the dynamics of the interaction, and as I will present later, the timing

36 Ibid, 69.
even in language can be linked to neurobiological mechanisms that oscillate in
temporalities that enable action and perception to take place in corresponding
temporalities. Therefore, it seems that coordination in interaction is facilitated in some
way by the embodied temporalities which themselves are structured through the
coordination itself. In this way, “social skill depends on a “rhythmic capacity.””

One particular example of this type of interaction can be seen in the case of the
“dancing robots.” This research dealt with the coordination of two mobile robots that had
the task of trying to locate and stay near one another, using acoustic signals and sensors.
According to the research, “successful agent pairs acquire a coordinated pattern of
signaling in which individuals take turns in emitting sound so that they may hear each
other. They solve the self/nonself distinction problem by making use of the self-
shadowing property.” What this refers to is the fact that if the robots rotate, then they
perceive the other’s signal in rhythmic patterns while their own signal remains constant.
Such a rotation also causes them to produce sound rhythmically and “through a process
of mutual modulation the production of sound is coordinated in an anti-phase entrainment
of signals.” The rotation of robots facilitates a movement pattern that might be
characterized as a dancing pattern insofar as the robots are moving about one another
while traversing the room. The key point here is that this movement pattern does not
emerge from the presence of a recorded signal, but from a mutual coordination that is
made possible by movement and temporal, or rhythmic, relationships.

Extending the dynamic interaction between robots to the social realm, Di Paolo et
al claim that, “social interaction is the regulated coupling between at least two

37 Ibid, 70.
38 Ibid, 64.
39 Ibid, 64.
autonomous agents, where the regulation concerns aspects of the coupling itself and constitutes an emergent autonomous organization in the domain of relational dynamics, without destroying in the process the autonomy of the agents involved.”

This statement is critical for enactive theorists because autonomy is fully embodied and situated, not solely in the sense that that the autonomous entity is embedded in a body and environment, but that the autonomous entity itself emerges and is maintained through the dynamic coupling. There is not a thing that is autonomous, but a process that contributes to its continuation by coupling with the world through cognition, action and perception. If the process does not engage in this, then it loses its autonomy insofar as it ceases to exist. Consequently, it becomes clear that these forms of interaction are critical to maintaining and establishing our “self,” and that these interactions can be studied without recourse to a pre-formed isolated individual. In this the agents gain the capacity to actively participate, rather than just observe or receive.

Elaborating on the social aspects of enaction, Di Paolo et al write that social cognition is, “the ability to coordinate through the interaction with another person. Through such plastic coordination, the rhythm of an interaction can be adapted.”

Cognition, as it is applied to social interaction in this sense, is therefore a process of interaction and coordination that requires a number of embodied and environmental mechanisms far more fundamental than the discernment of people’s intentions. As such, for the enactivist, social interaction is not guided primarily by the theory of mind, in the strong sense employed by Harvey Whitehouse discussed in the first chapter. Di Paolo et al adds to this perspective in their claim that social perception, “is not about finding

40 Ibid, 70.
41 Ibid, 70.
hidden intentions in the other but is based on the mastery of self-other contingencies … negotiated during the encounter itself,” and, “social meaning generation relies on the coordination of individual sense-making. It relies on coordination as a process, not an outcome.”

What this theoretical approach illustrates is that, for the enactivist, social meaning, perception, and cognition are participatory and ongoing processes of interaction that help to facilitate coordination that is necessary for activities ranging from daily activities to dancing, writing, and conversation. This is not to say that coordination is a prerequisite for these other forms of interaction, but that social interactions can themselves be understood as processes of coordination. To be clear Di Paolo et al state, “the point of our proposal is not that social understanding only happens in situation where the participants are physically present to each other. It is rather that social understanding has its developmental and logical origins in social interaction.”

Basically, part of how we understand one another is a feature of how we interact, and those forms of interaction are dependent upon an array of constitutive variables. Therefore, in this enactive paradigm, social understanding and communication are constituted by the bodily capacities that enable coordination to occur.

The grounding of notions of understanding in embodied processes of interaction has faced the criticism that it is unable to account for how we are able to think about things in the absence of their presence, and how this could then cause us to behave in certain ways. More generally this is seen as the problem of scaling-up to higher-level cognitive activities. With regard to causation, the problem seems to be how it is possible for me to think abstractly about something that is not present, when cognition is

42 Ibid, 71.
43 Ibid, 72.
something that emerges out of interaction with the environment. More to the point, we
seem to have something like a representation in ourselves that enables us to not only
think about something that is not present, but also act based on the representation.
Therefore, there appears to be a way in which my thinking about and acting in the world
can be accomplished independent of an organism-environment coupling.

For me, stability in the conditions of the environment is crucial for this to take
place, i.e. by using technology to stabilize the environment around us; we gain the
capacity to think about things as stable entities. In a way, I think it is possible to say that
a nonlinear coupling can be made linear through the actions of individuals, thereby
enabling stabilization in patterns of coactivation that enables the construction of what
could be called “representations.” However, the construction of these representations is
mutually constitutive in that solely the individual does not construct them, nor do they
correspond directly to objective properties in the environment. Rather, “representations”
point both to the individual and the environment, or rather they emerge out of the
mutuality of the individual with its environment. Consequently, the mechanisms of
interaction will affect the perceived relation to the environment and thus impact the
“representation” itself. As a mechanisms of interaction become codified, so too do
representations. This allows us to see the role of disciplinary techniques in facilitating
the construction and deployment of “representations.”

Clearly, this implies that there do exist stabilized patterns that could be used as
representations in a traditional sense. However, I see this stability as arising out of the
stability of environmental conditions that is enabled by human activity. Because we can help construct stability in the environment, we can construct stable “representations” as
well. This isn’t meant to imply that there is no stability in the world itself, but that by stabilizing things like food sources and social practices, people are able to become detached from their environment such that they can think abstractly about it. In particular, some argue that this detachment is what enables play, which proves to be a critical component in the development of abstract thinking. Thus, higher-level cognition is a product of organism-environment interaction and not an independent process that is entirely different from activities explored by enaction.

The enactivist approaches this question through the notion of play, or what might be seen as meaning manipulation. A goal for the enactivist is to explore how we can detach meaning from a particular situation and utilize it in an alternative context. This process is most apparent in autotelic activities where meaning can be fluid and not singular, i.e. dance, play, music. The authors here draw on play as a prerequisite for other forms of abstract thinking, which “occurs only in the absence of more urgent motivations related to survival.” Consequently, play is possible for an organism that is able to stabilize its environment so that it can detach itself from the ever-changing conditions of the world. Through play, a child learns to detach meaning from the situation and actually, through things like gesture, impose a new meaning that functions to constrain behavior in the same way the original meaning does. Thus, through embodied activity, one can make the world that which it is not in an indefinite number of ways. Furthermore, as in dance, one can actually make one’s self into that which it is not through gestural patterns in order to explore the wide range of possibilities of what one can be and how one can experience the world. Play in this sense is a “self-structuring

44 Ibid, 75.
process governed by the dialectics of expansion and exhaustion of possibilities.”

Therefore, play as a thoroughly embodied activity serves as foundation not for the possibility of meaning itself, but for the possibility of generating and transposing meaning in the absence of an interaction that would be necessary for the emergence of meaning.

George Lakoff has addressed this question of abstract thinking and its embodiment through the notion of basic-level categories. For instance, Lakoff argues that categories, which scholars assume are based around objective properties in the world, are actually derived from how we relate physically to an object. Lakoff states, “The relevant notion of a property is not something objectively in the world independent of any being; it is rather what we will refer to as an *interactional property* – the result of our interactions as part of our physical and cultural environments given our bodies and cognitive apparatus.”

Central for Lakoff therefore is that how we think about the world is logically, not simply developmentally, dependent up how we can interact with the world. In relation to this, Adam Sheya and Linda B. Smith discuss the transformative and developmental role of sensor-motor coordination in infants. One key point from this research is that through their own exploration (groping), these infants discover possibilities for what they can do, i.e. create tasks for themselves through their own movement. They say for instance, “the very absence of predefined tasks and the individualistic and opportunistic nature of the tasks that cause change in the system may be the ultimate source of the adaptability and flexibility of human intelligence.”

The point here is that, for the enactive theorists, forms of bodily movement play both a

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45 *Ibid*, 78.
46 Lakoff 1990, 51.
47 Stewart et al 2010, 131.
developmental and a constitutive role in the abstract categories and forms of thought often classified as cognitive.

One form of abstract thought in which embodied dynamics also play an important role is in the experienced constitution of space, which is something explored by Olivier Gapenne. He begins by stating, “the constitution of perceived objects [and learning] is both constrained and made possible by the repertoire of actions available to the subject.”48 These repertoires of actions for Gapenne are related to the structural features of the coupling between agent and environment. Furthermore, the primary coupling which enables both our movements, and consequently our notions of self and other, is proprioception. The coupling provided by proprioception might be responsible for producing “reliable invariants related to the body, by mobilizing the body itself.”49 An important point the author makes is that it is not only action itself, but also kinesthetic knowledge of that movement, or self-movement, that is necessary for rethinking the dimensions along which knowledge about the world is constructed. For example, he says, “The tangibility of the object, must be elf-engendered with reference to the kinesthesia that is dynamically mobilized in the movements and their control.”50 Perception here is grounded in the dynamics of self-movement, which is itself dynamically coupled with the environment. Therefore, different forms of perception can be seen as different forms of coupling, and it is the structural principles of this coupling that enable different forms of bodily experience. And as these embodied experiences are fundamental for how we come to know the world, we ought to look at how these are related to the technologies of the self and bodily techniques. Further, these invariants

48 Ibid, 183.
49 Ibid, 186.
50 Ibid, 203.
could themselves be oscillatory, meaning that an invariant could be something like a temporality or a rhythm, which suggests that one of the fundamental ways people come to know themselves and others is through different kinds of movement. Furthermore, the self-motion involved here could, for embodied theorists, be scaled up to language, since they claim that the possibilities for movement also help to create new ways of understanding and interacting with the world. Therefore, we ought to look at the myriad forms of movement and interaction, including language as an interaction, that make possible alternative forms of experience, emotion, and knowledge, i.e. alternative couplings.

Connecting some of these ideas about movement and interaction to the issue of language, Didier Bottineau states that “linguistic cognition involves cortical, muscular, and environmental dynamic events shared by individual beings in a continuous experiential shell forming a social body.”\(^{51}\) What he is suggesting here is the way the performance and perception of language involves the coordination of processes that occur at a variety of levels. He adds that, “the synaptic coordination of mental dynamics by linguistic verbal processes causes both individual and collective consciousness to emerge and gives cognitive-biological substance to the notion of a social body, whose spatial boundaries and temporal extension and continuity will vary with the profile of the communicative pattern.”\(^{52}\) This suggests that qualitatively different forms of cognition can emerge through the coupling of people through action and perception, including discursive interactions.

\(^{51}\) Ibid, 272.
\(^{52}\) Ibid, 273.
John Stewart adds to this discussion of language as an embodied form of interaction by arguing that language is a product of more fundamental embodied elements. For example, Stewart writes, “gestures [nod, wink, posture] are not usually counted as linguistic, but if this theory is right, such metalinguistic signals are actually at the core of what is characteristically linguistic… It is thus, theoretically, a second-order communication about the states of first-level intercomprehensions.”

This suggests a view of language that looks at the embodied conditions that allow for linguistic communication to occur in the first place. As I will show later, these embodied conditions may be present in the “metrical cognitive structures” that are involved in both speech production and perception. A focus on language as text, in my opinion, has led to the oversight of these features of language, features that can help us to see the myriad ways in which discourse operates within different cultures. Furthermore, since language is seen here as a second-order phenomenon, it seems important to identify and explore those nondiscursive forms of interaction, such as dance, that are not only alternative to discourse, but actually serve to create the conditions for the possibility of discourse itself.

One of the primary theoretical reconsiderations here is to think about language itself as an embodied interaction that involves not just the content of the words, but also the affective, temporal, and perceptual couplings described so far. In other words, it is an approach to looking at the process of communication in all of its dimensions, rather than in its propositional format. In particular, a study on speech production extends the tools of neurological oscillators to model the embodied aspects involved in speaking. According to Port, “it is hypothesized that there are neural oscillations producing a pulse on every cycle, and that these pulses act as attractors for the beats at the onsets of

53 Ibid, 16.
He goes on to claim that these neural oscillators “attract perceptual attention” and affect the motor system by “biasing motor timing so that perceptually salient events line up in time close to the neurocognitive impulses.” To me, this implies that we produce speech in a way that would be easily perceivable for us, which also happens to be close to that of those who speak my language, providing a plastic mechanism of speech production that is implemented neurologically. This is demonstrated through what he calls the harmonic timing effect, which can occur for example, when people repeat a short phrase or text many times. In this practice, the speaker has a tendency to locate stressed syllables at “simple harmonic fractions of the repetition cycle.” Therefore, in repeating a text, there comes to be a particular rhythm or meter through the speaking of that text that might not come to exist when reading it. Further, if one is in the habit of reciting texts frequently, it seems plausible to imagine how the temporality of that text could have an impact on the formation of those neural oscillators that enable and constrain possibilities for coordinated behavior. In this way, language can operate in a thoroughly embodied manner that not only transfers semantic content, but also functions simultaneously at the physiological and affective levels.

This view is, I would argue supplemented by the author’s statements that “these oscillations can be described as neurocognitive because they may be time-locked to events across many different modalities … in order to solve a wide range of problems in complex motor coordination and in the prediction of environmental events.”

Additionally, he suggests, “The metrical structure of music, poetry, and chant is proposed

54 Port 2003, 599.
55 Ibid, 599.
56 Ibid, 600.
57 Ibid, 589.
to reflect essentially the same oscillatory system."  Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that there might be a relationship between the features of a language and the metrical cognitive structures that allow for the production and perception of patterns of speech.

Further research on the acquisition and perception of speech has also demonstrated the benefits of addressing embodied capacities in modeling these phenomena. In particular, this research explores further the possibility of the metrical cognitive structures that are grounded in the coordinated dynamics of the body, behavior and cognition. In particular, the research seeks to look at the role of the “basal ganglia in the timing of speech, and more generally, in the dynamics of human movement.” As emphasized in the previous study, there is an intimate connection between the perception and production of speech, a connection that is established neurobiologically. Furthermore, it indicates a possibility for the emergence of patterns in speech from the embodied coordination of speakers. Discursive practices, then, can’t be separated as production or perception. Instead, both the production and perception of speech involve the same bodily mechanisms that, due to their plasticity, can be shaped through practices of listening and speaking. It also indicates that there is a possibility that reading as a model of communication has had the effect of privileging a mode of interaction that ignores these important temporal features of language that can help to facilitate coordination, which in turn helps to generate feelings of affiliation.

Furthermore, Bottineau elaborates that as a result of these fundamental forms of interaction that give rise to language, “language emerges as an autopoietic dynamic system in the process of detecting and ruling its own collectively constructed

58 Ibid, 609.
59 Kello 2003.
60 Ibid, 624.
experience.” A language then, just as a discursive public for Warner, is a self-organizing process that is continually transforming through the performance of that language. Norms determined by institutional powers serve to restrict this transformative power by standardizing language itself, and by limiting the forms of discourse acceptable in society. This is particularly easy in a society that privileges text. However, Bottineau argues that, “to model a writing system is both to decipher the nature of the vocal and nonvocal experiences that the writing gesture is connected with and to understand how the very format of the gesture is reciprocally intertwined with its meaning.” The point here is that even when studying texts, we need to look at how the process of writing itself affects the meaning of the text, and how the reading of the text also affects its reception. It’s not just that discourse can act on bodies, but that discourse itself cannot be separated from how it is embodied. Enaction then allows us to begin thinking about how agency can operate at multiple levels simultaneously and how accounting for these helps us to understand how social landscapes come to be formed and transformed. This work also suggest a need to rethink our model of perception and sense using something like touch, as opposed to vision, being the foundation. Furthermore, as indicated by Hirschkind’s work, it makes possible a link between culturally cultivated hierarchies of sense and the practices of those cultures.

With regard to perception as a form of interaction, Anthony Chemero explores the idea of “dynamic touch” as a model for perception more fitting to the enactive model, insofar as it highlights structural characteristics of all perception that are often masked in other modalities. In particular, it reveals the dynamic interplay between perception and

61 Ibid, 270.
62 Ibid, 274.
action, and how this interplay allows for the guidance of behavior. This leads to the idea that we perceive must be in the world and must itself be sufficient to guide behavior, or Gibsonian “affordances.” The theoretical framework has been used by Chemero here to provide a theory of perception consistent with the research program he entitles “radical embodied cognitive science,” which has shown success in applying dynamic mathematics to different forms of coordination in ways that support many of the theoretical claims made by the enactive paradigm.

The paradigmatic case for this approach, according to the article “Perceiving and acting with others,” was put forward by Asch in 1952, and concerned two boys moving an obstacle:

They boys are fitting their actions to each other and to the object and are involved in a give-and-take required considerable sensitiveness. The two do not apply force in succession, or in opposite directions; they bring a common force to bear simultaneously. If one moves somewhat faster or swerves slightly, the other adapts his movement correspondingly. There is an immediate, direct communication between them through the object. The amount of movement, timing, pace, and direction are regulated continuously checked by the corresponding action of the partner. Here is a unity of action that embraces the participants and the common object. The performance is a new product, strictly unlike the sum of their separate exertions … neither boy would act in just the same way in the absence of the other; what each contributes is a function of his relation to the other in the task.

Several important points are revealed here, one of them being the emergence of a new social unit out of such coordinated activity. Also, you see this coordination being a unique way in which each of the boys can learn about the other. Lastly, it demonstrates the kind of situation that can be studied with this approach, which is one in which the participants are dynamically coupled in some way, through movement, speech, and vision for example. Marsh et al have done research to extend this kind of coupling from any sort of mechanical coupling to solely visual or auditory coupling. For instance, they look

63 Chemero 2009.
at the dynamics of two agents rocking in chairs independent of any mechanical coupling. They found that these rockers had a tendency to synchronize their movements over time, and that this rocking obeyed many of the same principles as other coupled oscillator dynamics.\textsuperscript{65}

Marsh et al call this a “social synergy” approach and emphasize the importance not just of a dynamic, approach, but also a dynamic approach that treats forms of social interaction in ways that are not reducible to summation of the individual parts that can be identified. As they say this story is “beyond linear causal influence, rather it is about the manner by which things come into being. The “how,” as it turns out, matters substantially to our account: the dynamics matter.”\textsuperscript{66} By entering into different relationships with other people, we create possibilities for alternative social spaces that can afford different possibilities for action. Studying culture in this way causes us to look closely at these mechanisms of interaction because they will enable us to understand how meaning is enacted by means other than cognitive simulation and constructive processes.\textsuperscript{67}

According to Chemero, much of the success in this program has stemmed from research done in finger wagging and the development of the HKB model.\textsuperscript{68} Chemero states that the insight of this research suggested, “Limbs in coordinated actions could be understood as nonlinearly coupled oscillators whose coupling requires energy to maintain and, so, tends to dissipate after a time.”\textsuperscript{69} The results revealed a rather simple model for

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{65} Marsh, et al., 2009.
\bibitem{66} Marsh, et al., 2009.
\bibitem{67} Ibid, 1219.
\bibitem{68} Hacken et al 1985.
\bibitem{69} Chemero 2009, 86.
\end{thebibliography}
this dynamic process, which has subsequently been adapted in a variety of ways to incorporate not only intrapersonal couplings but also social and interactive ones.

One thing to note here is that what is being addressed is behavior, so what makes it possible to model cognition in this way? First, by redefining cognition, much of what people would call cognitive behavior could fall under the heading of coordination. But there is still what can be called “representation hungry tasks,” such as abstract thinking or imagination. However, according to Chemero, there is research, which indicates that while there are elements in their dynamical systems that could be called representations, this is not the preferred interpretation. He suggests that coupled oscillators could be good candidates for these representational vehicles. In this sense, the stability or regularity of what we call representations could be dependent upon various neurological couplings that allow for regularity. If these “regulating” oscillators fail to operate, one could imagine significant irregularity in thought or experience. It is also important to note that these couplings exist throughout the body at the proprioceptive level, implying again that cognition cannot be restricted to the brain.

Chemero’s work, in addition to framing methodological and theoretical features of the radical approach to cognitive science, opens up an approach in the social sciences that identifies relational features in the environment, whether from other people, tools, or spaces, that are capable of guiding coordinated behavior even at nonconscious, wholly embodied levels. This approach allows us to explore religious practices not just as ways of transmitting ideas or indoctrinating subjects, but also as meaningful processes that have tremendous transformative power. How these practices transform spaces, discourses, and subjectivities to constrain and enable possibilities is best approached

70 Ibid, 42.
through this enactive model that does not decide from the start which phenomena (and which aspects of those phenomena) are worthy of scientific investigation. As such, the enactive paradigm could constitute a unique approach to the study of religious (and social) phenomena and in return, the study of these social phenomena could provide original areas of research that illuminate the various roles of emotion, perception, and movement in people’s behaviors, thoughts, and experiences.
Chapter 4: Listening, Gesturing, and Dancing

In the previous chapter I considered recent work in the cognitive sciences that falls under the headings of extended, embodied, and enactive cognitive science in order to demonstrate that, for these paradigms, theories of cognition must attend to the specific structures of interactions in determining whether or not a particular form of intelligent behavior is “cognitive.” Within these research programs, the factors and mechanisms that contribute to these structures of intelligent behavior span brain, body, and environment such that the cognitive system is composed of a set of heterogeneous, and potentially changing, processes. The approach offered by these research programs therefore opens up the set of phenomena available for study in cognitive science to include forms of social interaction, as well as what are generally considered minimally cognitive activities, which can illuminate the diverse roles of emotion, perception, and other subjects in people’s behaviors. Furthermore, applying these methods and theoretical considerations to religious phenomena, for example, gives us a way for studying specifically how the details of the interaction in itself make possible the forms of religious thought and experience that are the focus of religious studies. One “minimally cognitive” type of interaction that fits this category is dancing, which can clearly be described as a form of coordination, but which is not readily explained in terms of the expression or discernment of individual intention. In other words, the theory of mind as strictly employed by Harvey Whitehouse is ultimately incapable of explaining the phenomenon of dancing because it does not account for the bodily dynamics that give rise to the interaction we call dancing.
The role of dance within religious traditions has received little to no attention from Western scholars, but Sam Gill’s work on dancing provides significant insight into the way in which the experiences of bodily movement and interaction found in dancing function to make possible and reflect more abstract concepts, values, and experiences.\(^1\) In particular, I consider his work in light of Hirschkind’s discussion of sam’ to investigate the dancing form of dhikr as a form of listening that requires (and is also a means to) the embodied (perceptual, affective, and gestural) capacities of a trained body that make possible the varieties of experience (and thought) discussed by practitioners. Furthermore, Gill’s theory of dancing provides a way of theorizing or scaling up an embodied, enactive conception of cognition. For Gill, dancing involves a mutual coordination with other agents and environments; it modulates and gives form to affective and temporal experiences, it recruits the senses, action and cognition in an interdependent and mutually constitutive fashion, it sustains a fluidity of meaning and representation that cannot be captured through an analysis based on internal mental representations, and provides a grounding of more abstract concepts or metaphors in embodied experiences of movement and coordination. Within Gill’s analysis of dancing, just as within Hirschkind’s analysis of listening, the roles and boundaries of perception, cognition, and interaction are blurred in ways that cannot be fully accounted for in the theoretical framework afforded by the cognitive science of religion in particular.

In studying dance, it is a common tendency to focus on topics such as meaning and expression, i.e. claims about dance as a universal language or dance as self-expression. As Sam Gill has argued, such a model of dancing severely restricts our capacity as scholars to discuss the work done by dancing at physiological, psychological

\(^1\) Gill 2012.
and social levels that give dancing far more influence than simply the transfer of psycho-semantic content. Rather, practices such as dancing also function to generate the bodily and affective experiences and dispositions, as well as forms of perception and temporal relationships, that help to open up or make possible alternative, embodied forms of social and personal understanding. In this sense, the relationship between practice and knowledge is not solely a question of transmission of propositional content, nor do practices simply represent particular virtues, emotional states, or values; it is instead a matter of understanding the ways in which practices cultivate and sediment sensibilities, dispositions, experiences, gestural patterns, and often values that are critical to the heterogeneity, transformation, as well as maintenance – in short plasticity - of social landscapes and relationships of power. Learning how to navigate, coordinate, and understand in these landscapes becomes an ongoing process of historical sedimentation and enaction, both of which are thoroughly embodied processes of creating identities, subjectivation, and social transformation.

Dancing enters here for me in two capacities. First, with respect to Islam in particular, I want to look at the relationship between different practices of listening that take shape within different social and political contexts. These practices include formal practices such as the *Sema*\(^2\) of the Mevlevi order or certain forms of *dhikr*, as well as more informal ones in Egyptian music and cassette sermons. Taking into account the role of movement and gesture into these understandings of listening allows us to gain insight into the differences and similarities of how these practices are experienced and authorized. Dancing as a form of Islamic audition (*sam*') more generally “denotes acts of

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\(^2\) *Sam*’ and *Sema*’ are the same word in Arabic, but I differentiate the transliteration here in order to make clear when I am referring to the traditional act of listening as discussed by Hirschkind, and the traditional dance of the Mevlevi order.
listening and bodily practices associated with the achievement of ecstatic states.”

Situating dancing within this tradition of audition will help to reveal important gradations and forms of meaning that are often left out of models of dance as ritual.

Second, dancing in general provides a way of theorizing or scaling up an embodied conception of cognition insofar as it is a form of coordinated and adaptive social behavior that can ground provide the experiences that ground knowledge of other people and more abstract knowledge, such as religious doctrines. In framing it in this way, dancing could serve as a helpful model for rethinking some of the normative assumptions about how people interact in a social world. Dancing is not simply about the expression or transmission of particular representations or symbols alone, and stopping at this level of study restricts our understanding of the varieties of ways in which dancing functions, just as limiting our conception of cognition and language to semantic representation manipulation fails to account properly for the affective, embodied, and temporal qualities that are crucial to their functioning.

In this chapter I begin by considering the Sufi dance tradition of sema’ in light of Sam Gill’s work on dancing, particularly with respect to his framing of dancing as gesturing. Through this consideration I develop some of the groundwork for a notion of listening as gesturing in order to emphasize the embodied and active elements of listening as a form of interaction. While this theoretical perspective will not be developed in full in this chapter, my suggestion is that rethinking listening as gesturing entails a significant shift in the structures of the relationships between perception, cognition, and action. In the second section I deal more generally with dhikr as an embodied form of listening and remembering with a focus on some academic approaches to the practice. Lastly, I

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3 Shannon 2004, 381.
address literature on singers and performers (*munshids*) in the Islamic tradition in order to get a sense of the various factors that for the *munshids* constitute a performance or a *dhikr*. The overall aim of this chapter is to identify some specific forms of interaction present within the Islamic tradition that not only serve to ground religious knowledge and experience in the Islamic tradition, but also to illustrate their potential as forms of interaction available for investigation with the enactive cognition approach. In doing so, I hope to provide a foundation for exploring social phenomena as forms of intelligent behavior that can be used to test and develop research in the cognitive sciences.

**Section I: Sufi *Sema’***

The Mevlevi Order was officially founded by Sultan Weled (1226 – 1312), the son of Jallaluddun Rumi, but the formation of the *sema’* as a mystical practice can be traced back to Rumi himself. As the story goes, Rumi was walking in the city of Konya after the death of his master and happened to take notice of the sounds being made by the goldsmiths’ hammers and began dancing by opening up his arms and turning.\(^4\) Describing this instance of *sema’*, Rumi’s son wrote, “Separation made the sheikh lose his wits; he became drunk, not with wine, but with light, and in this state he began to dance.”\(^5\) According to Fremantle, Rumi was trained in a practice of turning that was likely heavily influenced by Messalianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The practice itself has had a varied political and social role throughout its history, at times being influential and at times being suppressed, but discourse still exists today about its authenticity and

\(^4\) Fremantle 1976.
\(^5\) Fremantle 1976, 334.
permissibility. Just as with cassette sermons in Egypt, discourse and socio-political conditions have shaped the function and form of this practice within Turkey.

The *sema’* can be seen as a form of *dhikr* particular to the Mevlevi Order, which has taken shape primarily in present day Turkey, although it is certainly not restricted or defined by national boundaries. The *dhikr* is a practice, often performed in a group, of “remembrance” of God and his names. According to Jonathan Shannon, an anthropologist studying *dhikr* in pre-revolution Syria, “by performing dhikr, a participants seeks to fulfill the Qur’anic injunction “Be ever mindful of God,” that is, to make every act itself a form of dhikr or invocation.”

Michael Frishkopf adds that, “In this ceremony, *muridin* draw closer to God through collective rhythmic chanting of His names, often while performing *tafqir* (rhythmic body movements).” I explore some of the varied features of this practice later, but what I want to emphasize is this notion of drawing closer to God through collective movement and embodied forms of perception and experience. For instance, Frishkopf writes, “spiritual perception (*basira* or *shafafiya*) is situated in the *qalb* (“heart”). The *‘aqil*, is clever but veiled (*mahjub*), being limited to the visible and logical; the *qalb* transcends these limits to perceive higher truths constituted by feeling (*ihsas*).” In this way vision as we commonly think of it is linked with the intellect (*al-‘aqil*), which does not provide the “insight” that feeling or listening with the heart provides. Therefore, when we describe how a practice like this functions, or what it *means*, we need to rethink what it means “to perceive” in order to reveal those features of dancing that are felt, heard, and experienced but not necessarily seen.

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7 Zuhur 2003, 281.
8 Zuhur 2003, 237.
The kind of transcendent experience encourage in Sufism has led to poetry being a primary means of sharing, describing, and evoking closeness to God. Such poetry relies heavily on metaphorical language, affective and temporal qualities of the language, and proper performance by a munshid. Many of the common metaphors or themes of the poetry are love (of God, Mohammed, or saints), separation from and desire for a lover, overabundance and filling up, drunkenness (intoxication) and wine as related to love, and notions of a journey or path or spatial relationship with God. For me, the use of these kinds of metaphors draws heavily from the experiences associated with the gestural and movement patterns in a way that ground the semantic content of these metaphors in experiences of the body. Drawing from the of people in embodied cognitive science, we can look at how corporeal concepts or image schemas such as these are constructed by and grounded in forms of movement and interaction, and then look at how those concepts are used in society and discourse.⁹

While the notions of corporeal concepts and image schemas are useful for grasping in part how movement and embodiment could contribute to semantic content, they rely on meaning and representations, and do not address the role of affective sensibilities and dispositions in relation to movement, as well as the importance of movement in giving form to, enacting, a world that feeds back to continually constitute conditions for possibilities, experiences, and knowledge. For example, Frishkopf writes in relation to the poetry that reveals the religious knowledge associated with Sufism: “This poetry is often extremely difficult, densely symbolic mystical language in classical Arabic, and while everyone understands fragments, few are able to grasp it completely. Still, they appear to feel it, and respond with gesture, movement, and vocal cries,

⁹ See Sheets-Johnstone and Lakoff.
particularly at the close of each musical-poetic phrase (*qafla*).\(^{10}\) Furthermore, “The Sufi poet’s status as wali and privilege position within the spiritual genealogies bestows authority upon his words while his mystical experience saturates them with meaning.”\(^{11}\) This capacity to feel, or this affective disposition and sensibility, is shared across the Sufi community, as well as more orthodox communities in some cases, and is not simply a presentation of religious beliefs that are transmitted through practice. Instead, as discussed in relation to Charles Hirschkind’s work on cassette sermons, these sensibilities are in a sense “active beliefs,” or ways of being, orienting, and living in a constantly changing world. This is not to say that the cassette sermons are necessarily aimed at the cultivation of the same “active beliefs” as the Sufi *dhikr*, but that in both cases, the practices are processes that create possibilities for being and living in the world. One must continually attempt to work to enact, or bring forth, those affects and different forms of movements, gestures, and practices help to make that possible by acting simultaneously at physiological, psychological, and social levels. The point here is that in looking at the Mevlevi *sema’* it seems that, given its name, we ought to consider it within the diverse practice of ethical listening described in part by scholars like Frishkopf and Hirschkind. From this framework we can understand *sema’* in terms of what it does, rather than only what it represents – a realm which allows us to speak of dancing as a discipline instead of dance as a symbolic ritual. *Sema’,* therefore, can be analyzed in this way as a method of ethical fashioning that cultivates sensibilities conducive to an ethical relationship defined by a particular relationship to God.

\(^{10}\) Zuhur 2003, 250.
\(^{11}\) Zuhur 2003, 258.
In order to better understand what this relationship is and how it is cultivated, I turn to a discussion of the practice of *sema’* that highlights many of the gestural characteristics of the dance. While I discuss the symbolic aspects of these gestures, my emphasis is not on what those gestures represent, but on how they help to evoke and construct experiences that are foundational to how the practitioners conceive of and interact with the world. According to Celaleddin Bakır Chalabi, the “Sema is a vassal’s, going towards the truth, elevation of the mind with love-wisdom, leaving his soul and disappearing in God spiritually and returning to vassalage as a man of maturity and a holy person.”12 The *sema’* refers to the phases of turning while the term *muquabala* refers to the performance in its entirety including music, singing, and prayer.13 It takes place in a *semahane*, which contains a round dance space representing the universe as a whole, as well as a place of Rumi’s abode where the sheikh sits on a red sheepskin. The red here symbolizes “unity with God” and “departing life on Earth” in reference to Rumi’s uniting with God at sunset. The participants wear three primary pieces of clothing: *sikke* (hat), *tennure* (overcoat), and a waistcoat. The *sikke* is shaped like a tombstone to represent the death of the ego, the *tennure* the shroud of the ego whose removal reflects a preparation of the *sema’* or “stepping into purification”, and the waistcoat symbolizes the ego.14

The event begins with the *Nat-i Sherif*, which is music in praise of Mohammed that was composed by Mustafa Itri Efendi (d. 1712).15 Musical instruments vary, but include tambourines, cymbals, bells, rebabs, violas, violins, drums (*kudum*), and flutes.

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12 “International” 2010.
14 “International” 2010.
(ney).\textsuperscript{16} The last two carry important significance and appear to be the most common among different groups. For instance, the drum, or ‘kudum,’ manifests God’s command “Be!” in the act of creation; and, the flute, or ‘ney,’ corresponds to the divine breath that maintains the world.\textsuperscript{17} There is usually a prayer read at the beginning, often a praise of the dead, followed by the singing of Qur’anic verses, which then leads to a period of musical improvisation called saba, referring to a dawn wind that blows in Anatolia.\textsuperscript{18} The music is composed in the key of D flat and the words are taken from Sultan Veled’s poem Rabapname:

\begin{verbatim}
‘Thou art the unseen and the seen
Had no clue.
Thou art hiding in bodies and souls
Had no clue.
I was looking for a sign of Thine in this world.
At last I have figured that the world itself is a sign of Thine;
Now I have a clue.’\textsuperscript{19}
\end{verbatim}

This is followed by a roll of drums reflecting God’s “roll-call” at the beginning of creation where it was replied, “Here am I,” and at the end in his judgment.

Following this introduction, the participants proceed in a counterclockwise direction around the area, bowing to the sheepskin and to the person behind them as they pass the sheepskin. This is repeated three times, symbolizing mineral, vegetable, and animal beings. On the fourth, the participants remove their tennure, representing their preparation for the journey, and as they pass the sheikh they are given permission to

\textsuperscript{16} “International” 2010.
\textsuperscript{17} “International” 2010.
\textsuperscript{18} “International” 2010.
\textsuperscript{19} “International” 2010.
proceed and kiss the sheikh on his hand. She states also that this direction of turning represents a turn from the west of non-existence to the east of God’s existence.20

As they begin, the participants’ arms are folded, symbolizing God’s uniqueness. They turn in a counterclockwise direction and begin to open up their arms as they open themselves to embracing the universe. The right palm is upwards, receiving God’s blessing which travels through the heart, to the left hand points down to allow God’s blessing to be shared or overflow. An analogy often used to describe this is that of a cup half filled with honey. If you touch it, you simply touch glass; but if you fill that cup until it overflows, when you touch it you will touch honey. In the same way, one tries to fill one’s heart with God’s blessing or presence, ultimately by developing one’s capacity to listen with the heart.

The term “God’s blessing” here refers to the notion of baraka as theorized in the Sufi tradition. This exists in and flows through God as well as spaces and people that are blessed by God’s presence. Part of what it means to be a pious Muslim here is working to come close to God to receive his blessing, and a path to that is listening (sam’). For Sufis, this blessing is understood as an unveiling and as self-annihilation, both of which suggest not simply a transmission of knowledge, but a transformation of the self such that it is capable of experience divine reality. The annihilation of the self is a common theme among interpretations of sema’ and dhikr broadly speaking, which basically refers to the elimination of the self such that the individual becomes one with God. I explore this concept in more detail in the section on dhikr, but for now I offer an alternate interpretation using Sam Gill’s notion of self-othering as an underlying structurality of dancing. For Gill, “dancing offers the experiential grounding that makes it possible to

20 “International” 2010.
know the other, to be aware of the other, to represent the other, to name the other, to comment on the other.”

In framing the mystical notion of self-annihilation as a form of self-othering, my point is to highlight that even though the self is “annihilated,” it does not cease to exist in the practice. The experience of the self as something else (or even as nothing) is not a loss of the self. Instead, it is a transformation of the self that leaves a lasting imprint on the individual, particularly when that practice is repeated regularly.

The key point here is that, while it may appear justified to ignore the individual experiences involved since it is being eliminated, even in a highly mystical and transcendental notion of self-annihilation the omission of the individual’s experience in the process of dancing (or practicing in general) severely restricts an understanding of the dancing itself and what effects the repeated practice has on people’s conceptions about their tradition.

One example of the difference between relying on the metaphors as explanations instead of the experiences themselves can be seen in the analysis of the gesture often conceived as “turning.” The performance, *muquabala*, goes through four phases involving turning, *sema*. The first phase generally lasts about fifteen minutes, ends with an abrupt stop in music, followed by a few minute rest. The participants stand in small groups during the rest period. This first phase is said to symbolize the “going-forth of creation from unity.”

The second phase is shorter and follows the same pattern of turning and resting, and represents “man’s acceleration to God by means of mystical exercise.” The third phase is the most intense or passionate and the music picks up in tempo. This phase represents “annihilation in God,” “supreme certainty,” and is thought

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22 Freemantle 1976.
to embody the notion: “In dying you have freed yourself from death.” Lastly, in the fourth phase the sheikh himself begins to turn, moving toward the center. This reflects the return of eternal order, “where God himself turns too.”

While many people, including Sufi scholars, interpret the dance as a turning, my discussions with a few performers and musicians involved in these practices indicate that the experience associated with the dance is not one of turning, but one of oscillating. In other words, for these performers, the dance entails a feeling of oscillating back and forth, rather than turning around a single point. For these participants, this experience of oscillation is foundational to their understanding of the doctrine of the unity of God. According to them, the metaphor that best captures the unity of God is that of a single point oscillating and then reflected. In this way, a single entity is able to give rise to the multitudes of beings and phenomena in the universe that, while appearing separate, are actually manifestations of the unity of God. The point I want to emphasize here is not whether such an interpretation is valid or authorized within Islam, but that, for these participants, the experience of oscillating in the sema’ serves as a bodily experience that enables individuals to connect and understand a complex, metaphorical doctrine within Islam. Therefore, through this experience, the participants are able to develop an understanding of themselves, others, and the world that is not guided by propositional doctrines, but by embodied and social experiences of interaction. This alternative reading indicates that it is not necessarily adequate to simply read people’s gestures as an expression of their doctrinal knowledge. Instead, the analysis needs to look at how gestural patterns evoke experiences that subsequently ground and make possible the metaphors and knowledge that is often the emphasis of the analysis of religious practice.

Reversing the direction of analysis in this way focuses our attention on the processes of interaction in themselves, rather than focusing our attention on what the practices mean or represent in terms of something other than the interaction itself.

As the *sema*’ finishes, there is feeling among dervishes and audience of closeness to God, strengthened love, and a purified soul. This kind of shared and interdependent experience relies on many of the affective qualities of tarab, but operates through music and movement primarily. Dancing here has the capacity not only to express these symbolic meaning through gesture; it also functions to enact a form of social interaction that cultivates affective sensibilities that support social and ethical practice and discourse. Here, both participants and audience are active – a feature which is often lost when we think of dance as a static object. As such, this practice is a means for experiencing that is constituted by and serves to constitute performers and audience alike. For Sufis, these affective sensibilities cultivated as a result of these performances include love, tolerance, peace, and personal relationship with God.

These themes are sometimes characterized as essential to Islam by authors and scholars, and while Sufi discourse talks about the ‘hidden meaning’ that is illuminated through the Sufi paths, an important difference is that mysticism in Islam focuses primarily on an individual’s relationship to God. Whereas in the practices explored by Hirschkind there was an ethical and epistemological link between *umma*, God, and individuals, in Sufism notions of truth and ethics are primarily individualistic, i.e. truth is found within the self. Perhaps this is part of the reason why Sufism has been more easily accepted in the West – it emphasizes individual faith – making it compatible with a definition of religion imposed by secular views of history and political projects. It also
makes Sufism a great candidate for interfaith discussion of tolerance or hybridity – a discussion that makes particular assumptions about religion and secularism that function to reinforce normative conceptions of ethics, knowledge, and ways of being human. My point here is simply to say that practices like these can operate on different levels and are affected by forms of political discourse, and that essentializing religious practices constrains our understanding of how these practices function. Further, it is these productive capacities of practice that enable it to operate in the transformation and maintenance of power structures, subjectivities, and social landscapes.

Above, I have attempted to elaborate aspects of the Mevlevi *sema* in the terms discussed by the practitioners and within the context of dancing. However, this practice must be situated within the broader context of Islamic audition in dhikr and popular culture, providing us more ways to understand the varieties of ways in which practice can function. In particular, I hope to reveal the importance and usefulness of developing embodied models of practice that do not reinforce the separation of bodily experience and religious meaning, conceive of ritual as thoughtless action in itself, and utilize psychological frameworks that privilege representational and unconscious explanations of behavior. As we will see, these models are not only insufficient, but often carry with them a bias that from the beginning precludes the possibility, value, and legitimacy of embodied forms of knowledge.

Section II: *Dhikr*

The mutually constitutive relationship between performer and audience demonstrated in the Mevlevi *sema* is also crucial to other forms of *dhikr*, which have a more explicit form of audience participation. In reality, the distinction between
performer and audience itself is blurred, a clear example of a case in which cognition (language and coordination), perception (listening, feeling), and action (movement, language) are all implicated. In a way, listening becomes a performance and performance becomes a listening, and it is this relationship (form of interaction) that enables a kind of social understanding and experience. In this way, an enactive and embodied approach I believe could be usefully applied to a study of the practice of *dhikr*, insofar as it gives a more robust model for understanding how *sema* functions in relation to the doctrine of self-annihilation.

To see how this is possible, I will be looking at three works on *dhikr* by Antoon Geels (1996), Michale Levenson and Abdul Hayy Khilwati (1999), and Jonathan Shannon (2004). Anton Geels explores elements of *dhikr* in the Havleti-Jerrahi Order and attempts to use a model of ego psychology to theorize the mystical concept of ‘self-annihilation’ (*fana*) in *dhikr*. While his description of the practice itself reveals important aspects, the psychological model and its application to *dhikr* seems to be inadequate. In describing the practice, Geels makes reference to three phases that contain particular group arrangements, movement patterns, and phrases. Phase one involves sitting in a circle, sometimes moving heads rhythmically from left to right, phase two involves standing in a circle and holding hands and moving in a counterclockwise direction while chanting and rocking, and the third phase involves standing in opposite rows. These phases also correspond with the stages of *dhikr* of the tongue (*jali*), *dhikr* of the heart, and *dhikr* of the inmost being (*sirr*).\(^{24}\) Furthermore, for Geels, it is “at this last stage we can again touch upon the total annihilation of the self-experience, the personality of the

\(^{24}\) Geels 1996.
Sufi.” For Geels, this self-annihilation will be understood as the inhibition of “the representation of the I as an active agent.” I argue that this assessment is misguided on two fronts – first, it misunderstands this process of self-annihilation and its relationship to mystical experience and knowledge; and second, it bases itself in a psychological model that is representational, disembodied, normative, and modular. After laying out his model, Geels analyzes the dhikr as follows:

The repetition of divine names with corresponding movements of the body are examples of verbal and motoric monotony. This monotony can lead to an alteration of ordinary perceptual and cognitive processes, in other words, a partial inhibition of the ego’s adaptive functions. The relation to the environment is partially inhibited. This simultaneously means a weakening of the defensive functions that explains why certain dervishes give free way to their emotions. Such expressions can also be observed during Friday prayer. Recitation of the Koran in the mosque can be extremely emotional, leading to Muslims getting in touch with suppressed anger or other feelings. Such happenings are rather common during dhikr exercises, and they are generally accepted by the group … The dervishes in question move arhythmically and exclaim their agony in shouting the name of Allah and phrasing their feelings in different ways.

Apart from the theoretical points which I will explore shortly, I think it is important to note the language used here. “Monotony.” “Inhibition.” “Weakening.” “Anger.” Later, he adds that the object is “to lose self-consciousness” and “this means submission of personal will, of the self to the group. The dhikr should be done so as not to be aware of your own voice.” In this way, the dhikr for Geels comes across more as a pathology or disruption of the normal functioning of psychological and cognitive mechanisms.

Furthermore, as Levenson and Khilwati state in response to Geels’ claim: “Annihilation in Allah is not the equivalent of the disinhibiting effects of mob psychology.” This response rejects the psychological explanation offered by Geels and the authors argue that psychology is not a sufficient language for describing the goal or outcome of dhikr.

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27 Geels 1996, 248
29 Levinson 1999, 250.
One reason for this according to Levenson and Khilwati is that “mystical practice can be seen as the method for transcending the local mind (the intellect and emotions) in favor of absorption in the nonlocal mind.”\textsuperscript{30} Part of this transcendence is the emptying-out of the mind and its forms of “pattern thinking” which impact how we perceive ourselves in relation to the world. As I mentioned in the preceding section, the notion of self-othering discussed in dancing could be useful for incorporating this kind of transcendence into a model of the relationship between practice and knowledge. This could also be tied to notions of corporeal concepts and image schemas as discussed by Sheets-Johnstone and Johnson. The point for now, however, in relation to Levenson and Khilwati’s response is that, for them, this psychological model of transcendence was insufficient because it did not attend to important theoretical considerations in the practice of mystical self-annihilation.

Returning to Geels’ work directly, he proposes a psycho-social-physiological approach that makes use of a psychological model entailing a representational mechanism and four functional mechanisms: adaptive, defensive, mediating, and synthetic.\textsuperscript{31} The representational system here seems to refer broadly to computational cognitive models. For instance, he writes, “Inner representations are closely related to memory, with the help of which we code, process, and store information that can be retrieved in useful forms in specific situations.”\textsuperscript{32} This sees the role of perception as the formation of representations about the world and cognition as the manipulation of those symbols, a key point contested by enactivists. Further, practice is limited as to the kinds of meaning that can be “usefully” retrieved and stored. Meaning here will necessarily be

\textsuperscript{30} Levinson 1999, 256.
\textsuperscript{31} Geels 1996, 246-7.
\textsuperscript{32} Geels 1996, 248.
representational and semantic, precluding possibilities for the kinds of embodied meaning present in the Sufi tradition – as well as the Islamic tradition more generally.

The adaptive function in Geels’ model “has at its disposal a number of abilities or dispositions that are inherited, for example, perception, memory, intelligence, language. Those functions are autonomous and they help human beings adapt to their environments.”33 This psychological mechanism then functions within his interpretation of dhikr to make certain assumptions about the innateness of certain capacities, the autonomy of those, and the relationship between adaptation, autonomy, and progress within particular predefined criteria, i.e. “language” and “intelligence” help humans adapt, but affective and embodied forms of adaptation or left out. The point is that we engage adaptively at not only psychological but also embodied levels, and the explorations of adaptive autonomy in the enactive literature could be useful for rethinking a model of dhikr.

The second psychological mechanism is the defensive function and is “acquired under the influence of the sociocultural milieu. Freud presented a systematic survey of human defense mechanisms, which are activated to cope with threatening impulses from the unconscious id.”34 For me, there are two important theoretical points to identify here. First, the notion of a ‘threat of the unconscious’ reflects, to a certain extent, the need to repress and control the kinds of bodily, i.e. non-mental, animalistic, irrational, arousal that lead to the uncontrolled outbursts in dhikr. Here we see not only a separation of bodily experience from religious meaning, but also an almost ethical relationship between the body (unconscious) and the mind. Second, I question the recourse to a Freudian

33 Geels 1996, 246.
34 Geels 1996, 247.
model whose mechanisms of psychological repression were the product of the historical sedimentations explored by Foucault in *Madness & Civilization*. Consequently, this Freudian model prevents us from seeing how affect, emotion, and embodied experience actually function to guide adaptive, i.e. cognitive, behavior.

A similar problem I believe can be posed to the third psychological mechanism – the mediating function.\(^{35}\) The idea here is that there is a central mechanism that operates to regulate and control bodily impulses, i.e. a central processing unit. As I have argued previously, such cognitive models are not effective in understanding how the body is incorporated in cognition and perception in a way that gives us a robust understanding of practice in relation to knowledge and discourse.

Geels also identifies the synthetic function that serves as “an organ of equilibrium,” and allows for “assimilation, simplification, generalization, and unification.”\(^{36}\) Therefore, the “normal” operation of our psychology is defined in these explicit terms, which themselves reflect and reinforce a particular form of knowledge. In this view, proper understanding requires representational and unified knowledge, and appeals to other truths get construed as the malfunctioning of cognitive mechanisms, rather than as transformations or alternative possibilities of functioning. Furthermore, we often operate far from equilibrium and come to understand things through paradox, metaphor, and allegory, for example, that do not fit into this ‘synthetic function.’ Again, in assuming that it is the natural function of our psychology to think in this way, the model fails to make room for other ways of knowing that are central to mystical experiences.

\(^{35}\) Geels 1996, 247.

To his credit, Geels does address the role of the body and how the practice of dhikr functions at a physiological level. However, rather than looking at affective or kinesthetic features, Geels focuses on hyperventilation as an embodied phenomenon that might help explain why people describe mystical experience as they do. While trying to identify physiological elements of practice is an important step, his presentation of hyperventilation again seems to discredit or devalue the forms of mystical experience as deviations from or interruptions of ‘normal’ operations. For me, this type of approach, whether it is hyperventilation, heart rates, or neural correlates of consciousness, attempts to establish a causal story for mystical experience, thereby giving it justification within a Western epistemological framework. Instead, I look to the specifics of the interaction to understand how conditions, practices, and dispositions are cultivated and transformed in ways that facilitate the emergence and perception of mystical experiences.

If we look at a variety of dhikr performances in addition to the sema’, there are some substantial differences. As we see, the participants can be seated or standing, generally forming a circle. There are often times drums, but clapping is quite common as well. This is accompanied by chanting and rhythmic body movements, i.e. swaying or rocking. The chanting is often a relatively simple phrase such as: “La ilaha ila allah” (There is no God but God), “Istaghfurallah,” (seeking forgiveness from God), “Hu” (He), and “Hay allah.” The repetition of these phrases often transforms the pronunciation in a way that opens up new levels of meaning. For example, some participants suggest that in its ordinary pronunciation “Allah” is ninety-percent tongue, causing it to have a deficiency in meaning. However, as the repetition turns into “uh-uh,” the word begins to be pronounced from the heart and in doing so adds a level of sincerity and affect that is
crucial to the *dhikr*. Another interesting take on this is presented by Geels, where the oscillation within these phrases can be seen as an “illustration of the movement going forth and return… The emanation of created things, things other than God, is shown by the words *la ilaha*, whereas their return to Him is indicated by *illa allah*. This is the consummation of *tawhid*, the reintegration of all things in the one from whom they sprang.”

The embodiment of audition is here reflective of the affective qualities of speaking and listening that can be tapped into by music, political discourse, and everyday social ‘soundscapes.’

Jonathan Shannon also explores the *dhikr*; however, his research centers on Aleppo, Syria, where the practice is often understood as an orthodox Sunni practice. Nonetheless, the *dhikr* can be understood through “the sensory techniques of Muslim worship that condition and enable spiritual states.” Similar to the idea of sama as a form of ethical self-fashioning presented by Hirschkind, Shannon writes, “from an aesthetic standpoint, *dhikr* can be understood as a practice that conditions or fashions more discipline in participants.” Such disciplining is necessary for the sedimentation of affective dispositions and “kinesthetic competencies” which ground “an epistemology that carries over from the confines of the mosque or *Sufi* lodge into domains of everyday life.” Thus, mystical experiences require the proper cultivation of sensibilities, which itself is sought after through practices aimed at the enactment of those mystical experiences. Experience and sensibility, knowledge and practice, and cognition and perception, here are revealed in their mutually constitutive relationships. *Dhikr* then

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37 Biegman 2009.
38 Geels 1996, 238.
39 Shannon 2004, 381.
40 Shannon 2004, 381.
41 Shannon 2004, 383.
functions as an important practice continually transforms and modulates processes of subjectivation and identification, and also transforms the temporal experience of participants in a way that makes possible different understanding of history and memory. And, considering a central feature of dhikr is ‘remembrance,’ it seems important to understand how temporality functions in the practice.

In relation to this, Shannon writes “the experience of transformation in the course of performing dhikr is not a transcendence related to objects outside the body … This transcendence comes about from the perception of temporal transformations in the course of dhikr, specifically for the combined effects of melodic modulation and rhythmic acceleration.” These musical elements function to facilitate mystical states of “heightened emotional energy.” He goes on to say that, “In such states, finite and linear temporality of the dhikr and its constituent sections coexists with numerous nonfinite and nonlinear temporalities; the eternity of Creation (al-khalq) and the Qur’an, for example, as well as the potentials and flexibility of temporal cycles of dhikr, which suggest a continuing processes of invocation and remembrance.” Therefore, in addition to the incorporation of affect and gesture in theorizing the embodiment of practice, we must also look at the embodiment of temporality, which as I have explored elsewhere, has important implications for forms of coordination including language. In this sense, Shannon is able to provide a robust interpretation of the practice of dhikr as it relates to subjectivity, temporality, and experience. I do want to add the musical elements on their own do not directly cause or bring about the mystical states – instead they are an important part of the environment that help make possible the varieties of religious and

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42 Shannon 2004, 388.  
44 Shannon 2004, 388.
mystical experience present in the *dhikr*. In this way the music and the participants function together in a thoroughly interdependent manner, again cutting across that distinction between performance and audience, speaking and listening.

Additionally, Shannon writes that for many of the participants “dhikr is a means of resistance against the secular politics and corruption of the Syrian state, especially since zawiya is a site par excellence of cultural authenticity because of its associations with popular religiosity and tradition.”\(^45\) While he does indicate that the practice serves other purposes, I think it would be important to elaborate on how *dhikr* is understood and discussed within the social and political landscape of Syria and what role it has in shaping that landscape. Furthermore, positing an understanding of *dhikr* as resistance, in my view, tries to explain it in terms of a normative framework that has been argued against by scholars such as Saba Mahmood. In explaining *dhikr* as a form a resistance, it gives it to a certain extent “rational” political ends, and in so doing takes away from an understanding of the differences between the sensibilities of secular politics in Syria and the sensibilities of *dhikr* practitioners. This line of inquiry is explored by Frishkopf and Hirschkind in the Egyptian context and illustrates how many of these sensibilities are crucial to not only mystical experience, but also social interaction and ethical reasoning in everyday life. One of the primary ways this occurs in Egypt is through music, performance, and sermons that draw on the theoretical model of tarab.

**Section III: Inshad**

The *inshad* is a popular practice found primarily in Upper Egypt that is similar to the *dhikr* insofar as it is a combination of recitation, listening, and gestural movement,

\(^{45}\) Shannon 2004, 388.
but which is generally performed in a more informal, social setting. The relationship important to the inshad studied by Frishkopf spans munshid, listener, and poet in a way that opens up varieties of affective and temporal experiences characteristic of other forms of listening such as cassette-sermons, dhikr, and sema’. According to Frishkopf, “the munshid, mystic and singer, mediates language and listener via sonic expression, giving the poet’s mystical experience an affectively compelling voice so as to create tarab in the performance.”

Tarab connotes a number of meanings, but for Frishkopf it can be narrowly defined as, “musical emotion and the traditional musical-poetic resources for producing it, especially expressive solo singing of evocative poetry, in an improvisatory style, employing the traditional system of maqam.” In this sense tarab is more of a continually transforming (plastic) affective relationship that emerges from the mutual modulation of the performance by singer and audience. The participation of the audience relies on the kinds of sensibilities, gestural patterns, and experiences that are shared by members of the Egyptian Islamic community, but the munshid must possess specific genealogical, spiritual, and musical qualification on top of those embodied sensibilities.

According to Frishkopf, the munshid must possess the spiritual talents of ihsas (spiritual feeling), basira, and shafafiya (spiritual insight). These qualities are necessary because they allow the munshid to “live with the poetry” thereby “internalizing it until he can feel its meaning as expressing his own experience.” This is not an internalizing of semantic content alone; it is rather that the munshid must work on himself in order to make possible the experience of the poetry that gives it its deeper, inner, or

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46 Zuhur 2003, 258.
47 Zuhur 2003, 253.
48 Zuhur 2003, 259.
49 Zuhur 2003, 259.
hidden meaning. In fact, Frishkopf writes, “The munshid need not be capable of providing lucid explanations of the qasida’s meanings. Rather, he understands it affectively, resonating with his experience.” These texts are meaningful, but acquire meanings through their enactment in embodied practices, including discourse.

Here, language can be seen as nearly infinitely productive, yet in a way not explored by people who discuss language in cognitive science. The alternative approach to language offered by this practice enables us to see how language must be understood with respect to the affective and temporal qualities of both the speaker and the listener. Furthermore, it is productive in the sense that it has the capacity to work on bodies and transform and maintain social and political landscapes. Discourses themselves function as techniques of the body and function to construct different ethical and political sensibilities in the same way that these practices of listening cultivate affective dispositions that ground ethical, social, and political sensibilities. Thus, in looking at how language is enacted, tarab provides the kind of dynamic coupling between agents and environments characteristic of the enactive model, while adding significantly to an understanding of how both affect and temporality function in forms of linguistic coordination.

The munshid must also possess certain musical talents, and for Frishkopf: “Most importantly, he must have the ability to express feeling vocally by manipulating musical resources, such as timbre, dynamics, timing, rhythm, tempo, pitch, melody, and tonality.” Using these variables and his experiences and insight, the munshid gives for to an “aesthetic expression of an authentic mystical condition,” that in turn functions to

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50 Zuhur 2003, 259.
51 Zuhur 2003, 260.
facilitate that mystical experience through affective modulation and also cultivate the sensibilities that allow for this affective modulation to occur.\textsuperscript{52}

This mutual feedback between performer and audience is described by Frishkopf as follows: “Moving himself and his listeners with the poetry he selects, and selecting poetry according to his \textit{hal} (state) and feedback from listeners, he carefully tunes the performance, seeking that elusive frequency of emotional resonance among poet, \textit{munshid} (performer), and listener, that melting point at which individual boundaries dissolve away, leaving the emotional unity which is \textit{tarab}.”\textsuperscript{53} What we see here is a performance that is a complex, dynamic, and emergent system where listeners and performers both play constitutive roles, and in which the language operates through its embodied dimensions, rather than through its strictly intellectual dimensions.

One thing that is interesting about this practice is that many of the listeners can’t necessarily describe the propositional meaning of the texts being read. These poems are incredibly dense and metaphorical, and are written in classical Arabic in a way that makes it difficult for most people to understand. However, the focus in the performance on the affective, embodied, temporal, and environmental variables as important for cultivating a feeling of social unity. For example, Frishkopf states, “through performative decisions regarding poetry, pacing, tempo, tonality, and many other variables, the munshid creates and molds emotion in hadra; he feels and expresses emotion, and his listeners empathetically feel with him.” It seems to me that through his descriptions, this kind of feedback loop between audience and performer might constitute the kind of social synergy or dynamic coupling that is discussed within the enactive

\textsuperscript{52} Zuhur 2003, 260.
\textsuperscript{53} Zuhur 2003, 263.
framework. For instance, he writes, “…the emotional feedback from listeners to munshid not only provides the latter with a means of making performance decisions, but also is the exchange of feeling required for the production of tarab.”54 Furthermore, it might be possible to explore how this rather complex performance involving complex texts could be modeled with respect to some of the variables identified by Frishkopf.

These processes operate to not only construct spaces of shared experience temporarily; they also function in contemporary Egypt to help create “ethical soundscapes” that serve to orient people emotionally and bodily to the dispositions of a pious Muslim. This has been looked at in terms of the call to prayer, but is extended by Hirschkind to include the circulation of cassette-sermons throughout parts of Egypt that draw from these principles of tarab. Such a move extends some aspects of enaction into ethical and political realms insofar as it opens up an understanding for how different forms of life, experience, and thought are produced and created. Furthermore, when studying Islam in post-colonial contexts like Egypt, we need to look many different forms of interaction within society, and how those embodied forms of interaction, that often go overlooked or simply seen as symbolic or representational, are crucial to the dynamics and histories of social landscapes and the cultivation of pious affective-volitional dispositions. In other words, by looking at forms of interaction in themselves, which range from highly ritualized practices such as sema’ to more informal practices like inshad and down to the quotidian daily activity of having a conversation, we gain, as scholars, a deeper understanding of how religious subjects are formed and consequently, how they live their lives in contemporary, heterogeneous societies.

54 Zuhur 2003, 263.
Conclusion

The chapters brought together in this thesis have attempted to illustrate both the need and the potential for reconsidering certain assumptions about how human beings “naturally” engage with themselves, others, and the world around them. The reevaluation of the givenness of certain ways of thinking, experiencing, and acting is, as I have demonstrated, an epistemological and ethical project. In terms of the epistemological aspect, I have argued that the causal explanations provided by conscious intentions, i.e. the kind of intentional states employed in Harvey Whitehouse’s model of the theory of mind (which I take to be reflective of most of the work in the cognitive science of religion) discussed in chapter one, are insufficient insofar as they fail to account for the myriad embodied and environmental factors that contribute to behaviors, and for the fact that forms of intelligent behavior often occur without any recourse to individuals’ intentions. In other words, the causal story provided by the intentional states discussed in Whitehouse’s theory of mind does not offer an explanation of how, i.e. through what processes, behaviors actually occur; instead, it is a description of an event that seems to make sense to people after the event has already happened. In this sense, the intentions are back-filled, meaning that they are used as post-hoc explanations even though those intentions themselves may not necessarily drive people’s behaviors. The point, therefore, is that the “coarse-grained” intentional states present in Harvey Whitehouse’s theory of mind do not carry sufficient causal-explanatory power to ground a scientific study of religious (or any other) behaviors and thoughts.

Furthermore, when Whitehouse employs this model in the description of religious practices for example, it takes on an ethical dimension in which the researcher ultimately
decides which intentional states actually caused the person’s behavior. Therefore, the account of why people behave as they do becomes a story told by the researcher based on her natural intuitions. Moreover, when the natural intuitions or assumptions of the researcher don’t align with the explanations provided by the practitioners themselves, the tendency of the researcher is to claim that there is something wrong, abnormal, or pathological about the person they are researching. In this way, as I discussed in the first chapter, if a religious subject is unable to provide an intentional explanation of a particular religious practice, the conclusion on the part of researchers like Whitehouse is that the practice is essentially a thoughtless, and therefore meaningless, activity. Conversely, if religious subjects do provide intentional explanations for their practices, the researchers tend to reduce those explanations to fundamental religious doctrine, such as their belief in a supernatural being. In both of these cases, the study of religion entails a significant reduction of people’s experiences, thoughts, and actions that is not only empirically deficient, but also normativizing in that religious explanations and practices are taken to be necessarily false, misguided, and counterproductive for societies.

In contrast to this approach, my claim is that when we are confronted with a set of phenomena that do not seem to be explained by our current scientific theories, our response should be to look back at our own theories, not to degrade and discredit the phenomena that challenge our theories. In doing so, we will not only be able to develop more robust theoretical and scientific models that account for more phenomena in greater nuance, but also gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the function of religious practices and experiences in people’s lives. Considering the deficiencies of Whitehouse’s approach highlighted by the discussion of Charles Hirschkind’s work on cassette sermons
discussed in chapter two, I turned to other theoretical models within cognitive science that have attempted to elaborate more substantially on the contributions of affect, perception, memory, and gestures (bodily movements) to people’s behaviors and thoughts. In doing so, I am arguing that scholars working the field of the cognitive science of religion, or who are generally trying to provide scientific explanations for religious phenomena, must pay closer attention to the work being conducted in the cognitive sciences, particularly the empirical work, because it also calls into question the models and assumptions that have grounded the “scientific” study of religions, and to anthropological work like Hirschkind’s that challenges the assumptions about the study of “religion” which have grounded these kinds of approaches.

My overall claim is that the recent anthropological (Asad, Hirschkind, Gill) and cognitive (enactive, extended, embodied) scholarship doesn’t simply demonstrate the inadequacies of scientific study of religions, but more importantly provides the impetus for an approach to the scientific investigation of religious traditions that emphasizes the processes and interactions that contribute to the formation of religious subjects with particular modes of experience, thought, and action. Furthermore, it is clear that some of the processes in need of greater elaboration in relation to behaviors in both fields are affect, perception, gesture, and memory, so analyzing phenomena in which these processes play a prominent yet varied role will provide data that can help construct and test claims made within cognitive science about the constituents and causes of intelligent behavior. Therefore, by highlighting the confluence of these disciplines with regard to subtleties, complexities, and gradations of forms of interaction, my goal has been to lay the foundations for an interdisciplinary approach that enriches research being conducted
in a number of disciplines without attempting to reduce or collapse them into one another.
Bibliography


