PART IV

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGE OF LIVED RELIGION
THE ACT OF LOOKING IS THE ACT OF CREATING:
PHENOMENOLOGY OF HOMILY

Michael Thiele

Said Jesus: “See what is in your sight, and that which is hidden to you shall be disclosed. There is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed.” (GThom 5)

The Art of Formation

Profane and religious speech crave “form-ation”—in play, in aesthetic performance, and body-mind presence (Heimbrock 2001, 235). Aesthetic learning is thus the process of “perception and practice of adequate forms” to celebrate our life and lament its chasms (Kriegstein 2001, 202). What would we be, what would our speech be without this aisthesis and mimesis “that wrestles the form from the formless?” (Heckmann 1987, 39).

To perceive the formless, to entice it into form and bring it into speech has always been the business of rhetoric and homiletics. Its job is to find ‘the form of doctrine’ (étupon didachês) in its right configuration, according to Paul’s Letter to the Romans (Rom 6:17). The artist Fiona Tan puts it like this: “The act of looking is the act of creating” (Spindler 2005, 233). And the artist Richard Serra: “Seeing is believing” (1997, 39; cf. Heimbrock 2003a).

In the last century, E. Lerle introduced the concept of gestalt, or form, as part of his empirical theology for preaching in 1963. With the exception of Meyer zu Uptrup’s scant and weak Gestalthomiletik (1986) he did not, however, find an extensive echo. This century, H.-G. Heimbrock has put the topos in the public eye. He achieved this in the framework of a life concept that emphasizes the fragmentariness of our existence—existence understood as an incomplete form that longs for redeemed completion (2001, 220–221). The fragmentation of our life and “the fragmentation of the personality” (Perls 1972, 10) strive for wholeness. This corresponds, in art history terms, with the method of fragmentation, which no longer represents the whole, opting instead for parts and seeking to ensure that the whole does not appear (Pfeiffer 2004,