Prof. Dr. **Heiko Kleve**

SPACE, EMPATHY AND MEANING

A THEORY OF REPRESENTATIVE PERCEPTION

EFTA Research Cafe, 12 February 2026

WIFU
WITTENER INSTITUT FÜR FAMILIENUNTERNEHMEN
UNIVERSITÄT WITTEN/HERDECKE

AGENDA

1. THREE CASES

2. THEORY

3. CONCLUSION

THREE CASES

1.

THE EXPERIENCE OF *FIT* AND *COHERENCE* IN CONSTELLATIONS ARE REPEATEDLY ASTONISHING, BOTH FOR CLIENTS AND FACILITATORS.

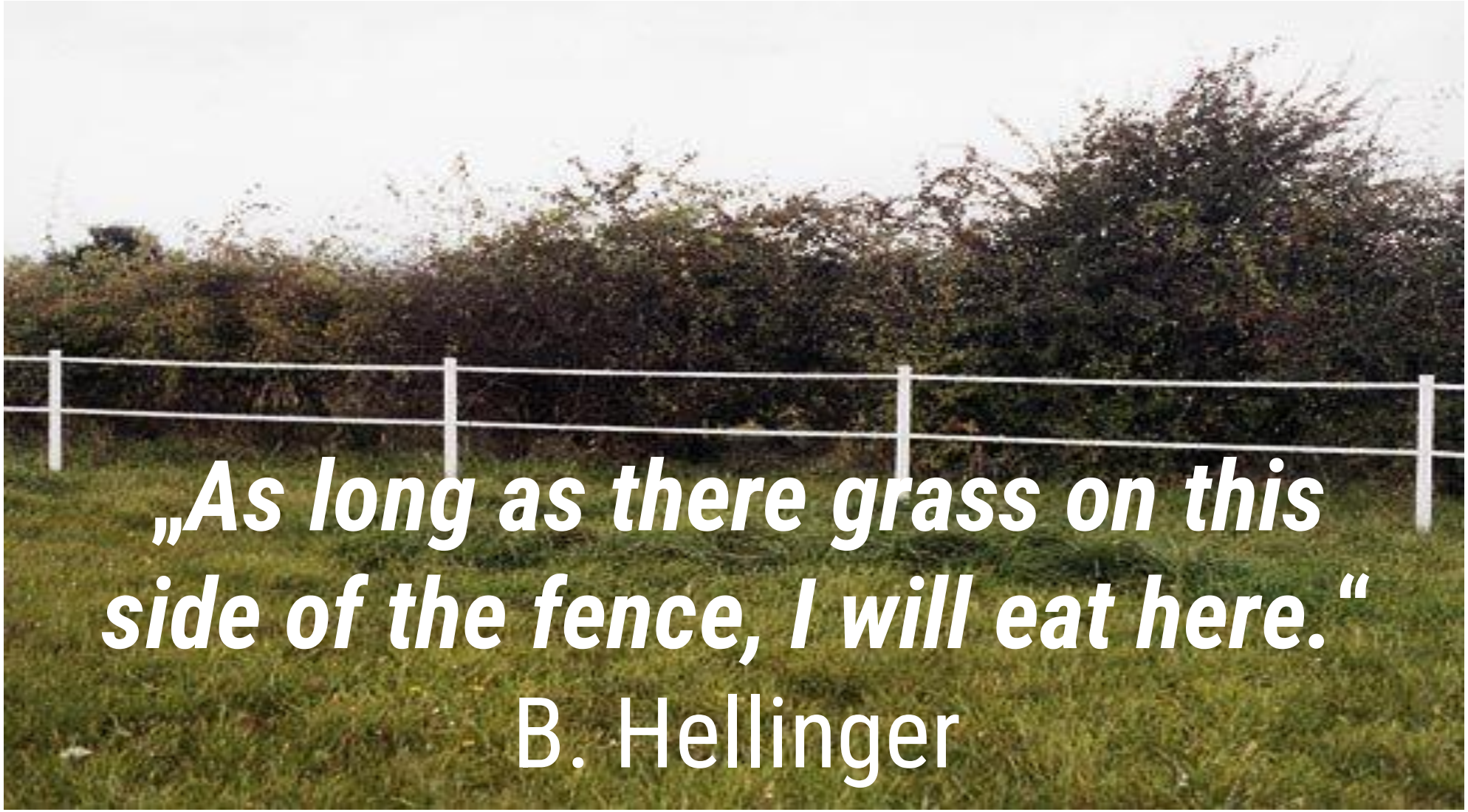
REPRESENTATIVE PERCEPTION – THREE EXAMPLES

Blind Tetralemma Constellation: *„The Kidney“*

Blind Solution-focused Constellation: *„The Cross“*

Belief Polarity Constellation: *„Alone vs. Trust“*

HOW CAN REPRESENTATIVE PERCEPTION BE EXPLAINED?



Insa Sparrer (1997): Modifikationen der Grundprinzipien der systemischen Familienaufstellungen beim Übergang zu systemischen Strukturaufstellungen, in: Hypnose und Kognition (HyKog), 14 (1+2)/1997, S. 129.

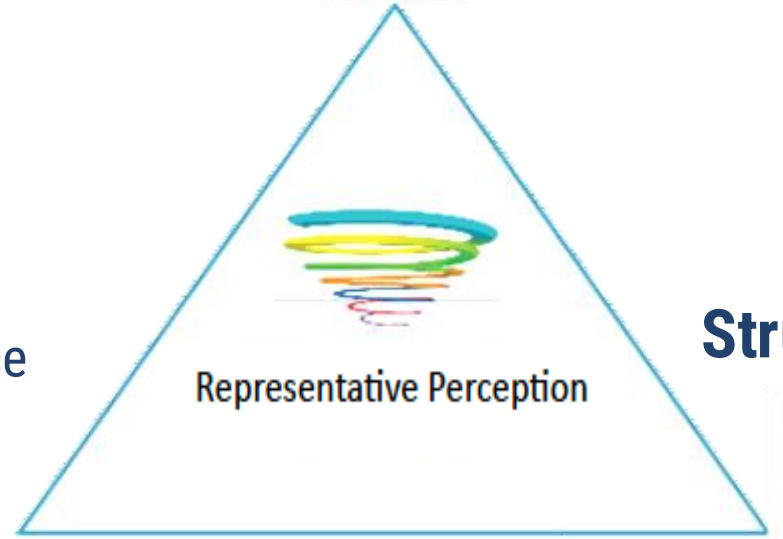
THEORY

2.

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL EXPLANATORY MODEL.

THEORY

Meaning Dimension
Cognitive constructions



Empathy Dimension
Bodily perception in space

Structure Dimension
Acting in space

STRUCTURE DIMENSION: EXPERIENCING SYSTEMIC STRUCTURES IN PHYSICALLY SPACE.

THEORY

→ Spatial language

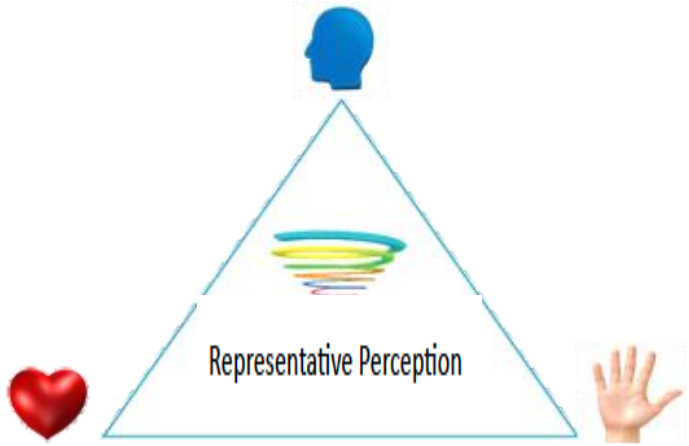
Spatial perception = differentiation of meanings (P. Schlötter)
Space as an *a priori* category (I. Kant)

→ Structural similarities

Translatability of psychological, social, and bodily structures – Relational structuring of elements into spatial configurations

→ Elementary system principles

Belonging (inside / outside), Reciprocity, Expansion, Replication, Resilience, Diversity



ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES IN SYSTEMIC STRUCTURES

THEORY

1. Inside / outside boundaries

inclusion and separation

2. Reciprocity

Giving and Taking

3. Temporal oder

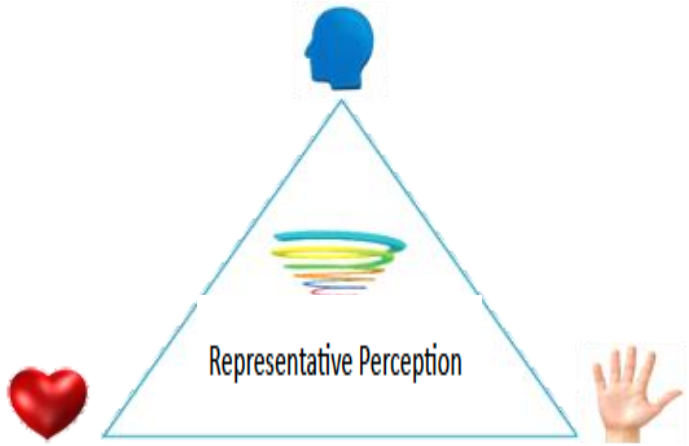
… System growth: earlier before later
… System reproduction: later before earlier

4. System immune strength (Resilience)

Priority of performance / contribution

5. System individuation (Diversity)

Acceptance of difference

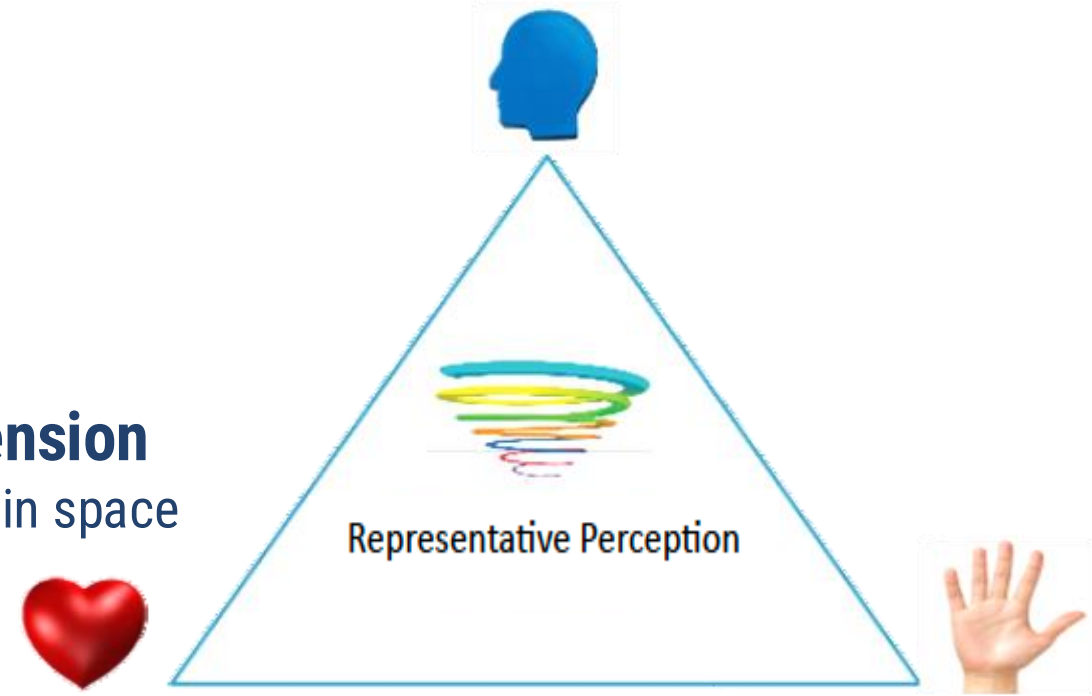


A THREE-DIMENSIONAL EXPLANATORY MODEL.

THEORY

Empathy Dimension

Bodily perception in space



EMPATHY DIMENSION: BODILY PERCEPTION IN SPACE

THEORY

→ **Empathy as a continuous process**

Visual, **A**uditory, **K**inesthetic, **O**lfactory, **G**ustatory
+ X (additional channels)

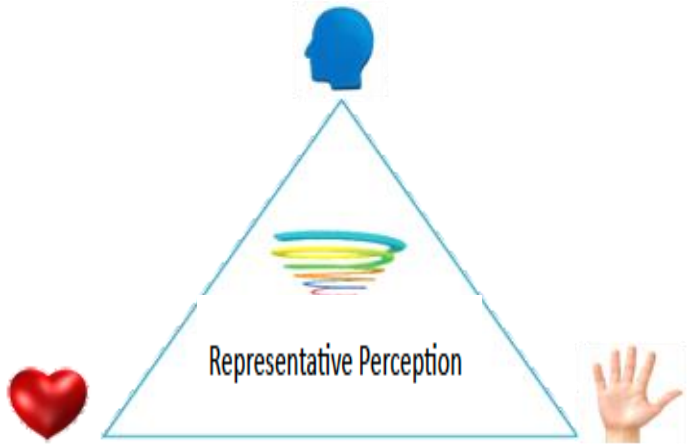
→ **Everday Empathy**

Highly selective – Limited consciousness

→ **Constellation Empathy**

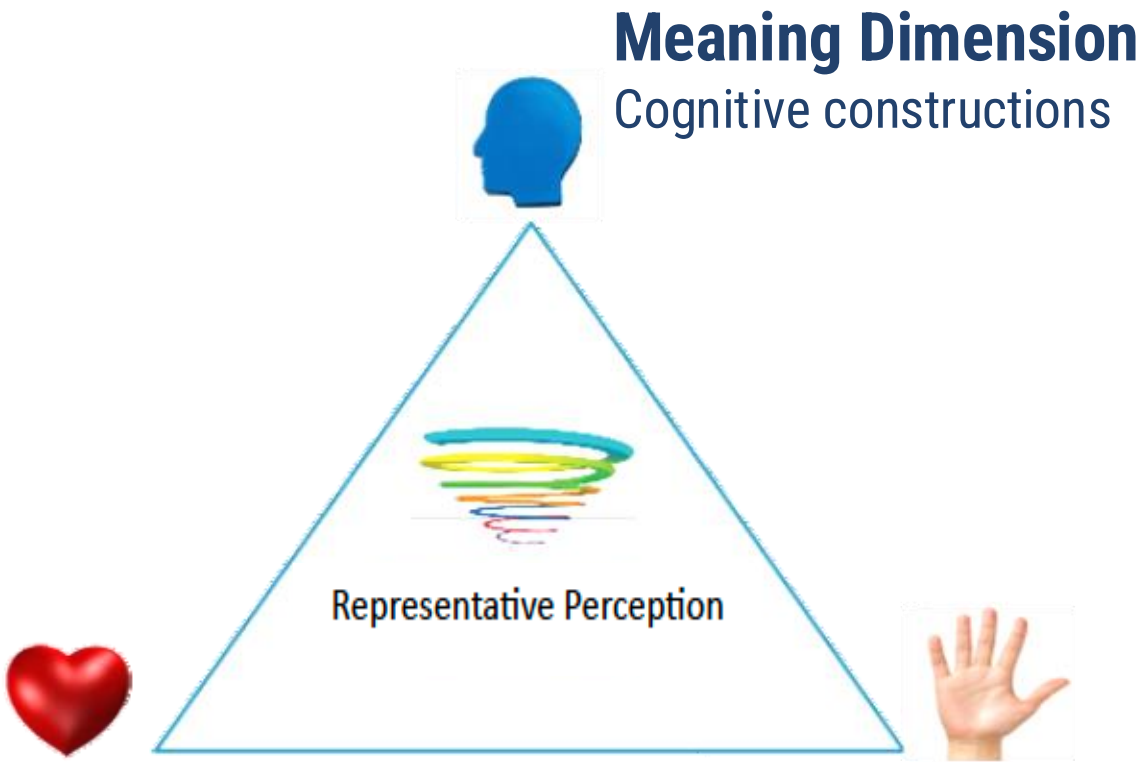
Expanded Perception / Consciousness

- Perceiving and registering bodily differences
- Articulating these perceptions
- Hearing these articulations
- Responding to these articulations



A THREE-DIMENSIONAL EXPLANATORY MODEL.

THEORY



MEANING DIMENSION: CONSTELLATIONS ENABLE NEW MEANING CONSTRUCTIONS.

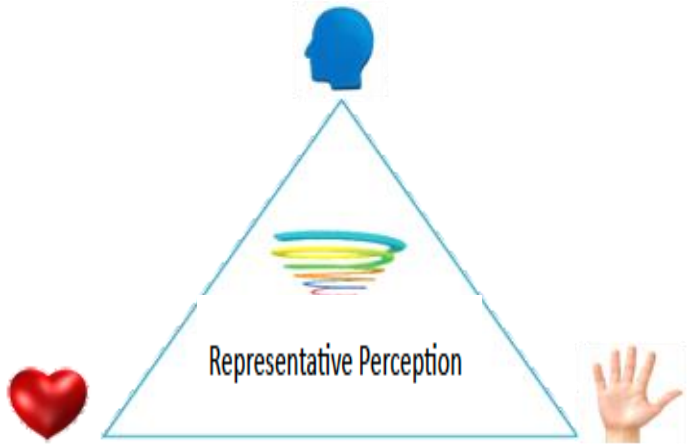
THEORY

→ **Constellations as meaning construction**
„The horoscope effect“

→ Meaning is constructed during the constellation

→ Meaning is constructed through observing the constellation

The Person who constellates their own issue holds the **authority of final interpretation**.

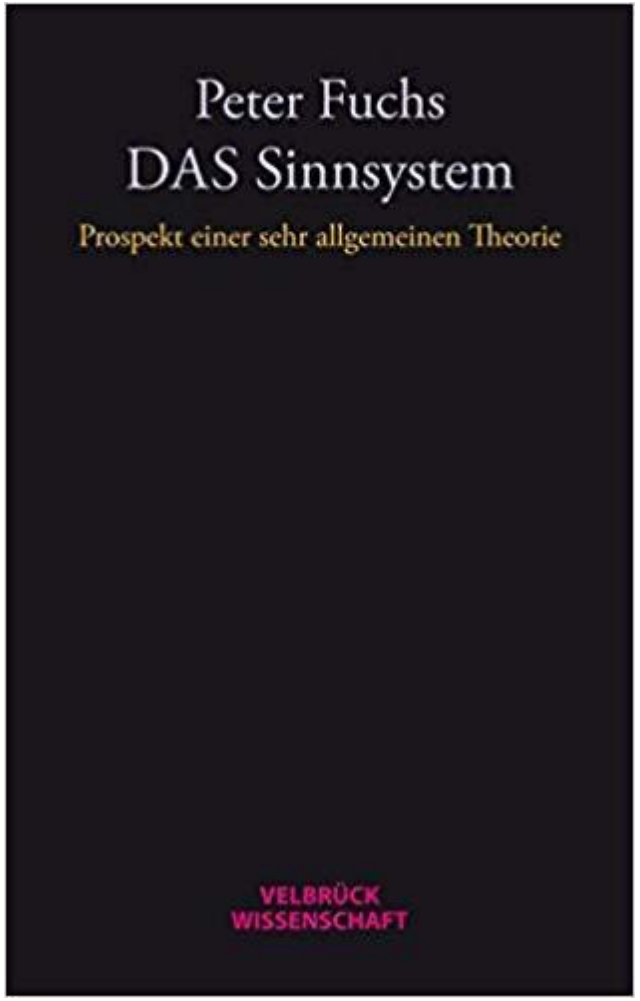


CONCLUSION

3.

MEANING EMERGES THROUGH BODILY-SPATIAL EXPERIENCES OF DIFFERENCE.

CONCLUSION



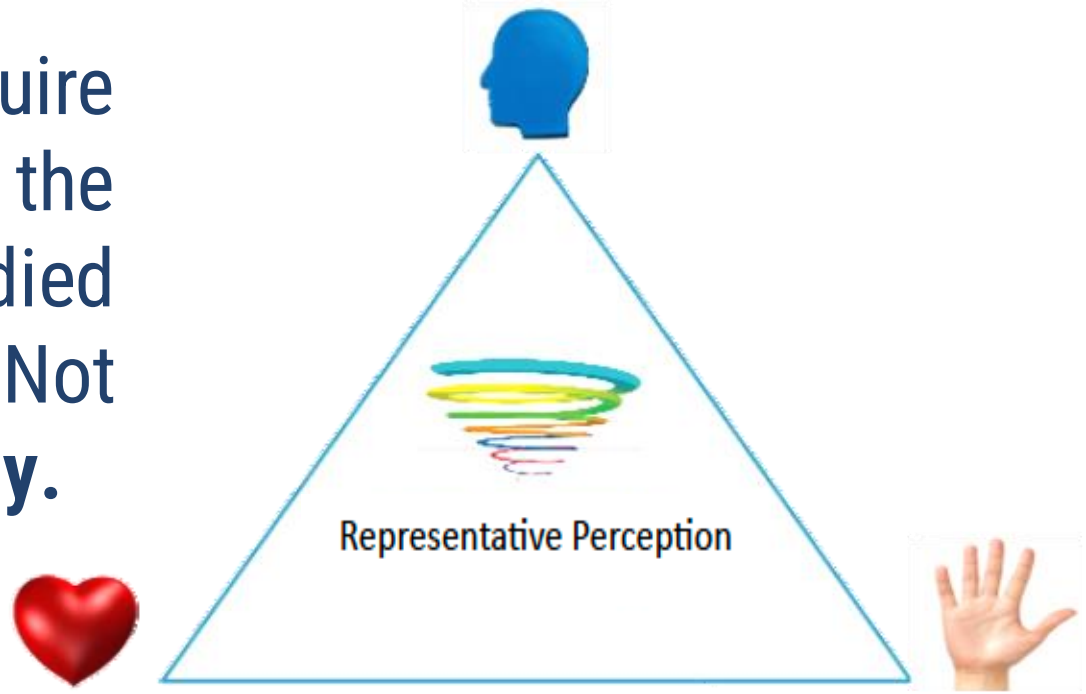
Weilerswist 2015

It is our living, sensing body that creates the space for perception – or more precisely: it provides all sense impressions with distances and differences. Without these distances, we could not distinguish, classify, or experience meaning. Our body brings together a complex interplay of perceptions: external (such as seeing and hearing), internal (such as feelings or muscle tension), and tactile and movement-based sensations.
In this way, we create our experienced world – and our body is simultaneously part of this world and the agent that creates it.

MEANING EMERGES THROUGH BODILY-SPATIAL EXPERIENCES OF DIFFERENCE.

CONCLUSION

Representative perception does not require mysticism. It can be understood as the interaction of structure, embodied empathy, and meaning construction. Not mysticism — but **embodied epistemology.**



VIELEN DANK FÜR IHRE AUFMERKSAMKEIT.

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