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## The Immanent Body: A Thematic Study of the Logic of Immanence in Christology, Philosophy and Aesthetics

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## Abstract

This dissertation is comprised of two sections: 1) “The Immanent Body in Late Antiquity”: an analysis of late ancient christology, Stoicism and philosophy; 2) “The Extended Body: Aesthetics”: depictions of monastic bodies in late medieval, Renaissance and contemporary art.

I. The thesis of this dissertation can be stated as follows: *the conditions under which immanence is thinkable in relation to bodies are found in conceptual personae.*

Contemporary philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s concept of conceptual personae, developed in conjunction with French theorist Felix Guattari, helps navigate the complex relationship between bodies and ontology developed by these three ancient thinkers. In order to understand the formation of the conceptual persona of Christ in late antiquity, it was necessary to return to the work of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Athanasius.

II. The second part of the project begins with the *Antony Series*, which is a cluster of Renaissance works of art designated by a common theme. They represent St. Antony, who, being the first deep desert monastic, was the subject of my previous chapters. Therefore, the link between late antique conceptions of the monastic body and Renaissance art becomes explicit. Early Renaissance artists turned to an aesthetics of the monastic body in order to revolutionize painting, for it was during the late thirteenth century that expressive bodies were being created, bodies that would move painting towards the Renaissance. This dissertation analyzes the precise point of this transition through a christological (i.e., monastic) understanding of the painted figure.

THE IMMANENT BODY:  
A THEMATIC STUDY OF THE LOGIC OF IMMANENCE IN  
CHRISTOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND AESTHETICS

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DISSERTATION

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religion  
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To Carl Raschke I owe my deepest thanks for introducing me not only to the spirit of contemporary philosophy, but what it takes to *think* in this discipline. As the person who first put French philosophy in front of me, I am very fortunate to have had Carl's friendship and support across the entirety of my graduate career. Patricia Cox Miller has been a profound influence on the ideas and trajectories of thought found here. Her work in antiquity introduced me to entire discourses, and just as important, she taught me how to theoretically and practically navigate writing about late antiquity, which comprises more than half of this dissertation. Without my exposure to her writings on the ascetic body, and without her having me read *Life of Antony* for a comprehensive exam I fear

this dissertation may have taken an entirely different course. Zachary Braiterman's work in contemporary thought and aesthetics provided a crucial link between my interest in art, the body and philosophy. Zak's insistence on the aesthetics of thought and the materiality of the image has undeniably played a crucial role in how bodies, especially the figure of Christ, have been conceived in this dissertation.

Lastly, to my wife Christy, whose patience and companionship have literally held me together at times, I owe more thanks than is possible to put in words. The same goes to my parents—they know how much their support has meant to me. And to Amelia, my daughter, who has put everything in perspective.

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## Preface

### I. Thesis

The thesis of this dissertation can be stated as follows: *the conditions under which immanence is thinkable in relation to bodies are found in conceptual personae*. The thesis is philosophical, but has historical consequences. This philosophical thesis has as its application late antique christology. As a concept developed by Deleuze and Guattari in their last collaborative work, a conceptual persona is the image philosophical thought presupposes before it begins to philosophize. Conceptual personae are neither historical nor psychosocial types, but the image thought presupposes.<sup>1</sup> Conceptual personae provide movement and style to philosophy, and ought to be conceived as virtual landscapes guiding the trajectories of concepts.

The historical consequence of this thesis is that the development of late antique orthodox thinking gave birth not only to strong theories of transcendence and episcopal hierarchy, as it is usually thought, *but also* to immanent bodies. The articulation of these politically charged bodies, and the analysis of their relation to the ontologies supporting them, remains relevant to contemporary continental thought as this genre of thinking continues to interrogate the relation between ontology and bodies, thinking and practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia Press, 1994), p. 67.

Aristotle's simple definition of immanent causality—*the quality of an action that begins and ends inside an agent*—as it has been adapted and applied by Deleuze in his interpretation of Spinoza, has been employed here to specify the meaning of immanence.<sup>2</sup> Deleuze defines “immanence” by differentiating it from “emanation,” where the One produces effects that remains outside itself (as in the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus), while immanent causality is defined by an ontology whose effects remain within (immanent) to the cause and do not fall outside it (as in the God of Spinoza).

In ancient and medieval thought, Aristotle's definition was used to justify transcendence, since the more immanent the life of a being (for example, Aristotle's self-thinking thought), the more perfect it is. That is why the thinkers addressed here—Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius—are not philosophers of immanence who reject transcendence.

In a manner that parallels Deleuze's use of Aristotle's definition in respect to Spinoza, I am using it in christology to justify God's immanence in the world. As the first immanent body within the Christian tradition, the immanent causality of the mystical body of Christ is used by these three thinkers to collapse the distinction between transcendence and immanence, a loss of distinction marked by the theology of the incarnation. For Athanasius's “christic metaphysics,” Christ is literally the “cosmos” and “all of existence.” The acts of Christ had cosmological significance, and it was only through this conception of Christ's immanent activity that an incarnate God was thinkable, a God that was active in the world. All of Christ's action begin and end in his mystical body, and God is the other name of this immanent action. The immanent causality of Christ—the conceptual persona—makes an immanent transcendence thinkable, and yet, historically speaking, the persona of Christ has consequences beyond the reach of

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter one, section titled “Two Problems.”

speculative theology.<sup>3</sup> Here the task is different in thinking the *conditions of immanence* as they relate to bodies.

This study therefore uses a philosophical theory to argue for the historical existence of what has been termed *immanent bodies*. The existence of these types of bodies within history confirm the philosophical theory that conceptual personae provide the conditions in which immanence is thinkable in relation to bodies.

A body is an immanent body when its actions are understood to have immediate effects within the “cosmos.” The body of Christ is immanent because its effects are contained within his body. Ascetic bodies are immanent within the body of Christ because everything they do remains within his body as its effects, modes or attributes. Though Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of conceptual personae form the analytical structure of this analysis, this text *does* make immanence an attribute of bodies. Immanence does not belong to these bodies in the sense of possession, as if immanence were a noun. Since Deleuze would also use the category of immanent causality in order to identify philosophies of immanence, this text has rather spoken of immanent causality and not ventured into further defining immanence itself.<sup>4</sup> Bodies are considered to be immanent bodies when their acts are said to have immanent causality within the cosmic body of Christ, and the acts and effects are immanent because their bodies are likewise considered to be the cosmos itself. The immanent body is a literal embodiment of the cosmic Christ body.

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<sup>3</sup> In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze conducted a similar analysis of thought’s presuppositions when he distilled the eight postulates of the image of philosophical thinking. See chapter three of *Difference and Repetition*, titled “The Image of Thought.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. “Immanence and the Historical Components of Expression,” in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone Books, 1990).

Firstly, there is the original immanent body, the body of Christ. This Christ is not to be equated with the earthly body of Jesus of Nazareth, but has biblical precedents in the Pauline letters, such as in Ephesians 1:22-23, “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”<sup>5</sup> In this study, the mystical body of Christ is interpreted as the name of an ontology, as a conceptual persona.

Secondly, there are bodies that are “repetitions” of the Christ body, whose acts are understood to have immanent effects in the world that belong to the body Christ. These are ascetic bodies, and their powers of “cosmological” adjustment will be analyzed especially in Athanasius’ *Life of Antony*. An ability to immanently effect changes in “space,” or in the cosmos, bridges the connection between the two types of immanent bodies. Moreover, it is this simple power of bodies to effect changes in space that translates into the analysis of the work of art in the second section of this dissertation.

While the first section of the dissertation concerns late antiquity and the conceptual persona of Christ, the thesis of the second section is a natural outgrowth of the logic developed in the previous section. The thesis of the second section is: the prevalence of the ascetic body in Renaissance painting contributed to the notion of the work of art as an “autonomous” body, i.e., the picture *space* as one of immanent causality where “immanence” now means the internal communication of elements within the painting which produce an autonomous work of art.

Building upon theoretical engagements with art theory and history, certain Renaissance works of art—what I have termed the *Antony series*—are considered an immanent body, and are, by this definition, “modern.” The work of art is a “formal cosmos,” to cite painter Paul Klee, defined by internal resonance and an immanent communication of its elements of color and form. Every

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<sup>5</sup> See also Cor 12:12-31; Col 1:18; 2:18-20; 3:19; 4:13.

effect of color and form remains within the frame or “cosmos” of the painting, and it is argued that the ascetic body and the ascetic tradition influenced this type of expression in painting.

These vibrations come from the abstract forms themselves, and especially from their interaction.

Wassily Kandinsky, writing in 1911, and one of the major theorists of early Modernist abstract art, wrote of the immanent causality of the canvas in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, though his language is that of resonance and vibrations. Kandinsky was attempting to justify, on formal grounds, the decline of representational strategies in art, claiming that due to the lack of representational depth in the Modern canvas, certain “spiritual” vibrations populated the abstract canvas. Kandinsky’s argument, and for those theorists following him, was that forms on the abstract canvas now communicated *with each other*, in an *immanent fashion*, and that it was this property that “held” together the “flat” abstract work of art. As will become clear, the analysis of Renaissance art assumes this thesis—immanent causality as a property of the abstract canvas—and will attempt to locate this immanent causality within depictions of the early representations of saintly bodies. With slight modifications, the definition of immanent causality employed in the first section is thereby applied to a philosophy of art. Theoretically speaking, what immanent causality accomplished for our late antique thinkers (the founding of an ontology such that a cosmos is unified by an internal relay of cause and effect wherein transcendence is an effect of immanence) it has also accomplished for a philosophy of art (the transcendent element of art, its meaning or “spirituality,” is a result of the immanent causality of forms within the painting, which also unifies the painting).

## II. Method

The method employed here has been termed “genealogical,” not in the strict Nietzschean or Foucauldian sense of the term, but in the sense that an “image of thought” is located and made explicit across a historical spectrum. An “image of thought” is a term of philosophy in Deleuze and Guattari’s work used to analyze how philosophy is constructed and how philosophies are differentiated from each other aside from mere difference in content. An image of thought is the “ground” upon which concepts move and have their character. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari termed this method of describing an image of thought “noology,” and this is the method employed here. Noology not only refers to the study of images of thought across time, but also to a “historicity” in which this image of thought constitutes subjects through its influence on historical bodies. The conceptual persona of Christ is in this instance the image of thought developed by Irenaeus, Tertullian and Athanasius.

Asceticism, as a genre of subject formation, is the historical result of the conceptual persona of Christ. The focus on asceticism is in part due to Foucault and Peter Brown’s groundbreaking work on how asceticism represents a type of subject formation never before seen in the ancient world. It was the body to which the ascetics turned to achieve divinity. Since ascetic bodies were spoken of in the same register as the mystical body of Christ—immanent causality—this study argues that they are products of an immanentist christology spearheaded by Paul, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Athanasius. The successive modification of the conceptual persona of Christ through said thinkers develops into a historical subject formation, asceticism.

This study does not aim, therefore, to simply represent the ideas of these thinkers, but to engage the conceptions of immanent causality in these thinkers that find expression in, first, the

speculative body of Christ in christology, second, the historical bodies of ascetics, and finally, works of Renaissance art utilizing immanent causality to produce autonomous works of art, forebears of their twentieth century, “modern” counterparts.



## Introduction

# Creation, Christ and the Body of Frankenstein

*“No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.”*

*“I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.”*

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*

### **A New Monster**

So writes the mad scientist character, Victor Frankenstein about his creation, perhaps the most famous monstrous body in American and English literature. In these passages, Victor writes of the thrill of renewing life in the body where corruption ought to be, of animating lifeless matter that will be a torrent of light into “our dark world,” and yet, after his creation is alive, his reaction is one of horror and disgust at the result. In these passages one discerns utopian desires

met with a dystopian product. The dream of giving life through the creation of a body is confronted with the actuality of the monster. Once the monstrous body was born, it had a life of its own, and Victor tracks his creation into the cold recesses of the arctic, which is where the epistolary tale begins. The lesson for scientists as well as artists is clear—once a body is let loose onto the world, there is no telling where it might go.

What is presented here is likewise the story of a body, and the “operating” room here is the work of thinkers who have dedicated their efforts to the creation of a different type of body. It is not a body pieced together from the tools of science, but a body constructed from the equally experimental tools of philosophy. Christ is the name of that body given life through these thinkers. The first part of this text is a strategic genealogy of the Christ body *gone virtual* through three late ancient thinkers. Irenaeus, Tertullian and Athanasius should therefore be understood as technological operators in the construction of the truly most famous body in Western history, and the point of this genealogy is, like Victor Frankenstein’s creation, an assemblage. But why these thinkers? Like the body of the monster, there was a specific point when it was given *life*. Assembled from fragments, the unnamed monster rose to life in an instant. In the case of Christ, however, it took centuries.

Two recent trends in continental thought initially motivated this interrogation of the Christ concept. First is the inadequacy in which the Christ figure is appropriated by various thinkers in continental thought and theory. Though chapter one will go into more detail on this specific issue, numerous thinkers—not all of them recent—have appealed to the Christ figure to support various types of ontologies, either in materialist, vitalist/process, transcendental or transcendent

variations.<sup>1</sup> As one might expect, appeals to Christ have been more frequent during our age of the “end of metaphysics.” More often than not, Christ is the harbinger of immanence, and his “arrival,” according to said thinkers, signaled a new relationship with a transcendent God. However, for those celebrating the so-called “end of metaphysics,” little attention has been paid to christology while most attention has followed Heidegger’s notion that ontotheology and metaphysics have been the primary discourses of philosophical and religious thought. Though it was Kant who first coined the term ontotheology, it was Heidegger’s powerful analyses that foreclosed a space in which to think christology as an equally relevant area of studies.<sup>2</sup> Strangely, while appeals to Christ have become more frequent, they occur in support of an anti-metaphysical discourse and fail to address the genre of thinking wherein the Christ was constructed, i.e., christology. One rarely hears the term onto-christology perhaps because christology, as a genre of thinking grounded on a body, complicates Heidegger’s narrative of Western philosophy as defined by onto-theology, i.e., the forgetting of the question of Being. Christology is neither metaphysics nor an ontotheology, nor a strict philosophy of immanence, but requires new categories of thought to address it properly. Yet if the figure of Christ did establish immanence in the Christian tradition as *thinkable* under speculative conditions, then transcendence will have to be conceived as an attribute of immanence. It is not enough to simply state that what has gone by the name of transcendence in the history of philosophy is merely an aspect or effect of immanence, as Agamben has claimed.<sup>3</sup> To the contrary, such a move needs to be proven through an engagement with the texts that, in many ways, have done more than any other other to establish the architecture of Christian immanence.

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter one, section titled “Two Problems.”

<sup>2</sup> Schrijvers, Joeri. *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> See the “Taking Place” essay in *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

In sum, with the exception of Radical Orthodoxy, christology has largely been ignored in contemporary continental thought and Death of God theologies.<sup>4</sup> As to what christology can add to the narrative of the end of metaphysics, to our understanding of Christ and immanence, as well as to the resurgence of body theory, remains a question this text attempts to answer.

What is initially problematic for contemporary appropriations of the Christ is that a subtle piety remains in the usage of Christ. It is a paradox that many secular or atheistic ontologies appeal to Christ *as if* to a powerful force that needs no explanation, *as if* Christ is a concept that can be best adopted by simple reference, *as if* his name is still powerful, *as if* Christ speaks for just one thing, i.e., immanence—*as if* Christ, and the God he deconstructed, existed. To the contrary, Christ's existence was very much in question in late antiquity. Though much nuance exists in contemporary usage *after* the appropriation of Christ has taken place, seldom if ever it is acknowledged that Christ, and the immanence he represents, is a construction like any other. Less seldom is the actual construction of Christ addressed. This text therefore argues not just against an uncritical appropriation of the Christ concept, but for a rethinking of a method of thinking about Christianity in the continental tradition. It is insisted here that the best manner in which to address Christ is to address how Christ was made in late antiquity. In addition, focus needs to be paid on how Christ in the tradition does more than just inaugurate immanence, but how this immanence is related not only to the Christ body, but to the most famous and revolutionary bodies in the Christian tradition: saints, ascetics, martyrs, artists, etc. It is in the creation of these bodies that one can find the secret trajectory of christology, to which this genealogy is devoted.

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<sup>4</sup> One can find references to an onto-Christology in the work of John Milbank in his *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 78.

The second factor motivating this interrogation is the manner in which immanence in contemporary continental philosophy has been conceptualized as a noun rather than a *quality of an action that begins and ends inside an agent*, to use Aristotle's, and, it will be argued, Deleuze's definition. If the Christ concept did, in some manner, aid in the development of doctrines of immanence, then what type of immanence was it? What or who is the *agent*? What is the *action*? What is the *quality*? Using this simple definition of immanence, the concept of Christ is as much a concept within the philosophical apparatus of christology as it is a repetition of a quality to be found on lived bodies. Christ the concept is therefore the product of a double genesis—from the phenomenality of lived bodies as well as from the lived experimentations of philosophy. This text is therefore a strategic genealogy in that in order to expose this double genesis, specific thinkers will be taken up, with each thinker serving to highlight this genesis.

### **A Reversal of Christology**

The genealogy here is strategic in a few senses. Numerous Christs existed in late antiquity, just as there were many different expressions of Christianity. It is not claimed that the Christ presented here is the best one, nor the real or most historically accurate version. Further, no argument is given as to the truth of Christianity in general. On the one hand, the purpose of this genealogy is to locate a logic of what has been termed the immanent body. The immanent body can be found in poetry, mysticism, art, philosophy, religion, and can be found in such a diverse range of thinkers as Levinas, Deleuze, Meister Eckhart, Athanasius, Weil, Blanchot, Novalis, Thoreau, Bataille, Whitman, among many, many others. Naturally, the immanent body is conceptualized in many registers and variations. Humanistic at its core, a version of the

immanent body was found in Pythagoras. Of Pythagoras, David Fideler observes, “Humanity, as the living image of the Logos, is the microcosm, the harmonic blueprint of the universe reflected in miniature.”<sup>5</sup> Pythagoras’ figural ontology is therefore one of the earliest articulations of the immanent body. Christianity, borrowing many of its ideas from antiquity, alters this blueprint to fit the landscape of Christian thought in three interrelated practices. First, Christ is conceptualized as a transcendentalized logos and blueprint of the universe (Christ as co-creating pattern for creation). God designs, forms and informs the world through Christ. Co-creation, eternal generation, immanent causality—these are just a number of notions expressing the blueprint function of Christ. Christ expresses and is an expression of God (the All). Second, the attributes of a universe enfolded into the Christ body is applied to lived bodies. A perceptual hermeneutic is constructed whereby one finds in lived bodies (saints, mystics, ascetics, martyrs, etc) the universe in miniature. Third, because the lived body is conceptualized to have the universe enfolded in it, it is therefore granted agential force to influence, or counter-actualize, the universe—to add to the creativity of life. Only by virtue of the first two practices can we arrive at the third. Life and body enfold one another, and it is difficult to entangle them. Of the experience of the immanent body, Rilke called it the “Open.” At times, Blanchot referred to it (life) as the “outside.” And Novalis asked, “We dream of voyaging across the universe. Isn't the universe, then, in us? We do not know the depths of our mind. Toward the interior goes the mysterious road. Eternity with its worlds, past and future, is in us.”<sup>6</sup>

This body is not limited to Christianity nor religious studies. The focus here is on ascetic bodies and the power they were perceived to have on the cosmos, since their power was not limited to

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<sup>5</sup> Fideler, David R. *Jesus Christ, Sun of God: Ancient Cosmology and Early Christian Symbolism* (Wheaton, IL: Qwest Books, 1961), p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Ann Smock in *The Space of Literature* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 136. I also thank Smock for directing me to Rilke’s quote as well.

their bodies, but extended to humanity in general. Power ought to be understood in terms of causality, and cosmos as the mytho-poetic arena wherein this power is exercised. But how is this transference of power possible? How is logos christology related to lived bodies? What is the role of christology in asceticism? Ascetic bodies were considered to be patterned after Christ, but what type of theoretical architecture is required so that Christ is able to be ontologically repeated? And what does repetition mean in this context? This text will address all these questions.

On the other hand, what happens when we ask the question in reverse? In what sense is the logos of christology the virtualized persona of a living body? The analysis of the immanent body of the ascetic in the fourth chapter takes up this very question, concluding that the concept of Christ, including his ontological properties, is equally based off of the body itself and its own material properties. Dance and art theory are employed to argue that the phenomenon of the moving body is involved in a practice of *implication and explication*, and it is no wonder then that we find these two concepts to be major elements of the scaffolding in understanding who Christ was, what he did and how it did it. To accomplish this task, attention is paid, first, to the preoccupation of bodily limbs and members in ascetic literature, and, secondly, to how a harmoniously moving body is a perfect replication of Christ, not in the physical sense, but in the manner of how Christ harmonized the cosmos. Christ and lived body repeat one another.

### **The Portrait**

In this strategic genealogy, a portrait of Christ is being constructed, and Irenaeus builds the frame and stretches the canvas. Irenaeus constructs the plane of thought capturing the concepts of our later thinkers. The first chapter uses Deleuze and Guattari's notion of conceptual personae,

developed in their last collaborative text, *What is Philosophy?*, to explore the ramifications of Irenaeus' highly sophisticated concept of recapitulation. Recapitulation is the act whereby Christ sums up humanity.

Far from a simple appropriation of their work, this text does to Deleuze what he believed himself to have done with Kant—to produce a bastard child through becoming more Kantian than Kant himself. Simply put, like Deleuze's "reversal of Platonism," which he never considered a reversal, the intention of his readings of philosophical figures was to find the secret inspiration in Kant, or Plato, and begin from there. This project is Deleuzian in this manner. Implicit in this reading of Irenaeus' notion of recapitulation is the desire to keep Christ *ontologically protected*. Depending on the context, I have used this phrase interchangeably with the virtualization of Christ, which produced the ontological body of Christ, or, again, the conceptual persona of Christ. Ontological protection refers therefore to the first operation in the construction of the virtualized Christ body. Ontological protection produces the property of inexhaustibility and repeatability for Christ. In his own language, Geoffrey Harpham writes: "Christ must resist the tendency to form; he must remain infinite and inchoate, free from all objectification of his being."<sup>7</sup> The conceptual persona of Christ keeps him inchoate, and/or embryonic; ontological protection is the act that constructs this persona. To use a phrase Manuel DeLanda employs to describe material systems which are by nature unstable, ontological protection establishes Christ's "hylomorphism."<sup>8</sup> Christology establishes a system wherein the Christ persona remains hylomorphic—one should think of "eternal generation" here—whose purpose is twofold:

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<sup>7</sup> Harpham, Geoffrey. *The Aesthetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> DeLanda, Manuel. 'Deleuze and the Genesis of Form': *Art Orbit*, No 1, Stockholm: Art Node, March 1998.  
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/delanda/pages/genesis.htm>



immanent and creative deployment of Christ in life, and second, the repetition of his body in lived bodies.

After an engagement with Irenaeus, Tertullian is taken up as the representative thinker of late ancient materialism. If Irenaeus built the frame onto which this portrait of Christ is painted, thereby setting the parameters and limits of christological thought, Tertullian begins to outline a figure on the canvas by providing color and texture to the surface. Flesh is the name of that color and texture.

Tertullian's christological materialism comes under the name of flesh, and Tertullian thinks flesh so as to raise the status of life and honor the incarnation of Christ. Eugene Thacker's penetrating analysis of the concept of life has distilled a simple function of the word life that is also applicable here. *Life is required to think the living*. Thacker's thesis alerts us to philosophical strategies of theorizing life, which in the end reveals that in every theorization of the concept of life, a new concept of the living organism is being constructed. Tertullian's exploration of flesh as the shared substrate between God and man, whose other name is Christ, materializes the trajectory in Irenaeus. When Tertullian writes that Christ is the "fabric of life," Irenaeus' assumption of Christ adopting the form of the All takes on a nuanced form. As we shall see, the bodies of the martyr's are forever on Tertullian's mind, and his raising up of life is also the affirmation of the deformed body of the martyr, the latter a repetition of the crucified body.

Primarily taken up in an Egyptian context through the work of Athanasius, asceticism will then be engaged on a number of levels. What Athanasius' work adds to this portrait is the movement of Christ through the idea of *imitatio Christi*. The portrait of Antony in his *Life of Antony* is

equally a portrait of the ideal Christian attempting to imitate the life of Christ.

Asceticism and their deformed bodies are repetitions of the martyr, since for Origen, asceticism was “daily martyrdom.” The ascetic body represents a body under control. The ascetic control and maintenance of their limbs marked excellence in practice, which explains the frequent mention not of the body, but its limbs. Ascetic discourse and literature rely *not* on a general category of the body (as our usage no doubt stems from its usage in Foucault and certain strains in anthropology), but on an image system of the body as composed of parts. Ambrosiaster’s *On the Sin of Adam and Eve* asks, “Either it operates as a whole or it comes to rest as a whole. Is a body useful, if some of its members thrive while others wither?” Though this surely does not define the ascetic task in its entirety, a major component to ascetic life was to unify the Parts (limbs) into a Whole (functioning unit). The same was said of the Greco-Roman athlete, and it is no surprise to learn that ascetics were considered “athletes of God.” But the discourse of ascetic limbs relies on a certain repetition, and it is here that one can discern the manner in which the Christ concept is conditioned by the phenomenality of the body. We witness the language of the Part/Whole in dance theory and athletics, since it is here, in these acts, that the body presents the greatest challenge to itself, which is to bring bodily discord into harmony. Remarkably, this logic is found in ascetic discourse. “Ontological slippage” is the language conceptualizing the ascetic body as a repetition of Christ, in such a way that the former’s disciplining of limbs is also an act of redemption, in virtue of Christ being a unifying agent of discord. Inscribed on the body of the monk is therefore a universal mythos of fragmentation, recapitulation and creation. The monk with his physical body repeats the cosmological act done by Christ’s body. “And all that the

Savior did through the Saints, he does in our own times through these monks,” says an anonymous source in the epilogue to the *Historia monachorum*.

Two criticisms beset this treatment of ascetics. Are not ascetics agents of empire? Are not ascetics destroying their bodies, *not* making their bodies more creative? To the first point, it is true that ascetics can be conceived as agents and mouthpieces of empire. Athanasius, author of the first hagiography, the *Life of Antony*, does have Antony come to Alexandria in support of Athanasius’ anti-Arian polemic. Historians, however, largely consider this to be a fabrication. This study focuses on asceticism’s earliest appearance in the Roman Empire, in Egypt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, when asceticism was still young, impressionable and exhibits more traits of the impulse to “get away” from civilization than it does to take part in that civilization. Ironically, it is from this very distancing that ascetic agency derives. In fact, the monks often despised humanity, believing pilgrims and general hangers-on irritating, a distraction to their contemplation and ruinous to the purity of the pristine desert landscape. Antony’s practice requires he gets away from his friends and admirers.

Secondly, ascetics can be conceived to be involved in a project of dismantling the body, or hating the flesh and torturing the body. Yet this does not mean that they ignored the body, but only found its effacement more important than its “health.” Though ascetics and their admirers no doubt believed they were getting healthier, proved by the story of when Antony emerges from the deserted fortress after nearly two decades of uninterrupted solitude and harsh desert life, his friends were amazed to see how his body maintained its “former condition.”<sup>9</sup> But the dark,

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<sup>9</sup> Athanasius. *The Life of Anthony, Classics of Western Spirituality* 16, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 42.

almost Gothic, currents of self-mortification remain in asceticism and cannot be ignored. The manner in which this problem has been dealt with here is redefining “health” as power.<sup>10</sup>

It is in ascetic discourse, hagiography and literature that the logic of the body is distilled (as enfolded into the cosmos), a body able to constructively engage the cosmos. The ascetic body is an immanent body because it was understood to effect the space around it in an immanent fashion, i.e., without mediation. The two case studies in Renaissance art constituting the second section of this dissertation are a creative adaptation of the logic of the immanent body, especially its ability to effect space around it. While the analyses of art are not essential to understanding the nature of this body in late antiquity, they do provide a fuller picture as to how this body works in concrete practice.

### **The Renaissance: Art and the Power of the Body**

Representations of ascetic bodies enjoyed an increase in popularity in the Renaissance for a number of reasons. Ascetic bodies are interesting; they are torn by demons and temptations, and they are expressive, singular, and God approved. Ascetic bodies represent a carnal spirituality wherein the state of beatitude is registered on the limbs of the ascetic. Ascetic bodies are always in movement, as attested by Martin Schongauer’s *Temptation of St. Antony* (Figure 1), which displays a body caught in the throes of temptation.

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the medieval notion of self-injury and modern attempts to psychologize it, see Jerome Kroll and Bernard S. Bachrach’s *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology Of Medieval Mystics And Ascetics* (London, Routledge, 2005).



Figure 1. Martin Schongauer. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1480-90. Engraving.

It is no wonder then, that ascetic bodies are popular as painted figures since according to Da Vinci in his treatise on painting only the body in motion is a body. A body is motion. *The ascetic*

*body, therefore, is more body than the rest. In it is revealed something profound about the body.*

A second reason for the popularity of these painted figures is socio-political. A cult of the living saint, originating with St. Francis, produced a new type of iconography—the living saint. St. Francis' stigmata, painted numerous times by the Franciscan painter Giotto, is one of the finest examples of this new gestural iconography. It is also at this time where we find the first narratives of a contemporary life set alongside the life of Christ. St. Francis as *alter christus* testifies to the birth of a new artistic subject.

But aside from theories of the body, the role of ascetic representation in Renaissance art plays a more profound, if subtle, role in the history of Western painting. From Giotto to Cezanne there is a trajectory, noted by many art historians, wherein Giotto's original invention leads to Cubism. What is this invention? The autonomy of the work of art. This highly utilized phrase does not in this context refer to the fact that a painting needs nothing outside of itself to explain itself, but rather refers to the painting's property of an immanent self-referential system of marks, colors and forms acting together inside its frame. Autonomy because of immanent signification. Immanent causality again—an act inside the painting in a way that the action begins and ends inside an agent. The painting is an agent defined by a particular quality of an action, and the quality of the perceptual experience defines the work of art against other visual experiences.

Prior to the Renaissance, art was embedded in ritualized environments and relied on outside adornment for its signification, i.e., it was part of a religiously affiliated and institutionally supported hermeneutic. But as the Renaissance developed the adornments were used less and less in fine art painting. The work of art was coming into its own, and the fine arts were beginning to be treated as ends in themselves, no longer mere crafts or items for religious and state

expression. In part, the representation of ascetics expresses this autonomy because of the fact that painters used this figure to express something of the humanism of the Renaissance and Neo-Platonic revival. The ascetic was a Renaissance man in some senses—they forged an individual path, were heroic against the demons and found nature to be the place to seek truth.

Giotto is known to have loosened the tongue of Medieval art. The second innovation of Giotto was his deployment of gesture in his painted figures. Prior to the thirteenth century, painted bodies were often stylized in a Byzantine fashion. What could not have been predicted before this time was how the ascetic body in visual art replicates ascetic literature's preoccupation with bodily limbs. In other words, the ascetic body is an extremely important figure for the Renaissance painters because, in an era where painters sought to paint limbs in movement and wild gestures, the ascetic tradition provided the content to explore this body in paint. Giotto's stigmata of St. Francis highlights this decidedly, and not long after Giotto's death, St. Antony became a popular figure in the visual arts (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Giotto. *Stigmatization of St. Francis*, Bardi Chapel, Florence, 1319-28.

Depictions of St. Antony were extremely frequent, found in every major European region where the Renaissance was underway. St. Antony is also a phenomenon outside the Renaissance period,



with such artists as Dali, Cezanne, Flaubert, Manet, Carrington, Albright, and Ernst lending their brushes to immortalize the saint once again. In 1946 a competition in Europe was held under the theme of the *Temptation of St. Antony* (Figure 3).

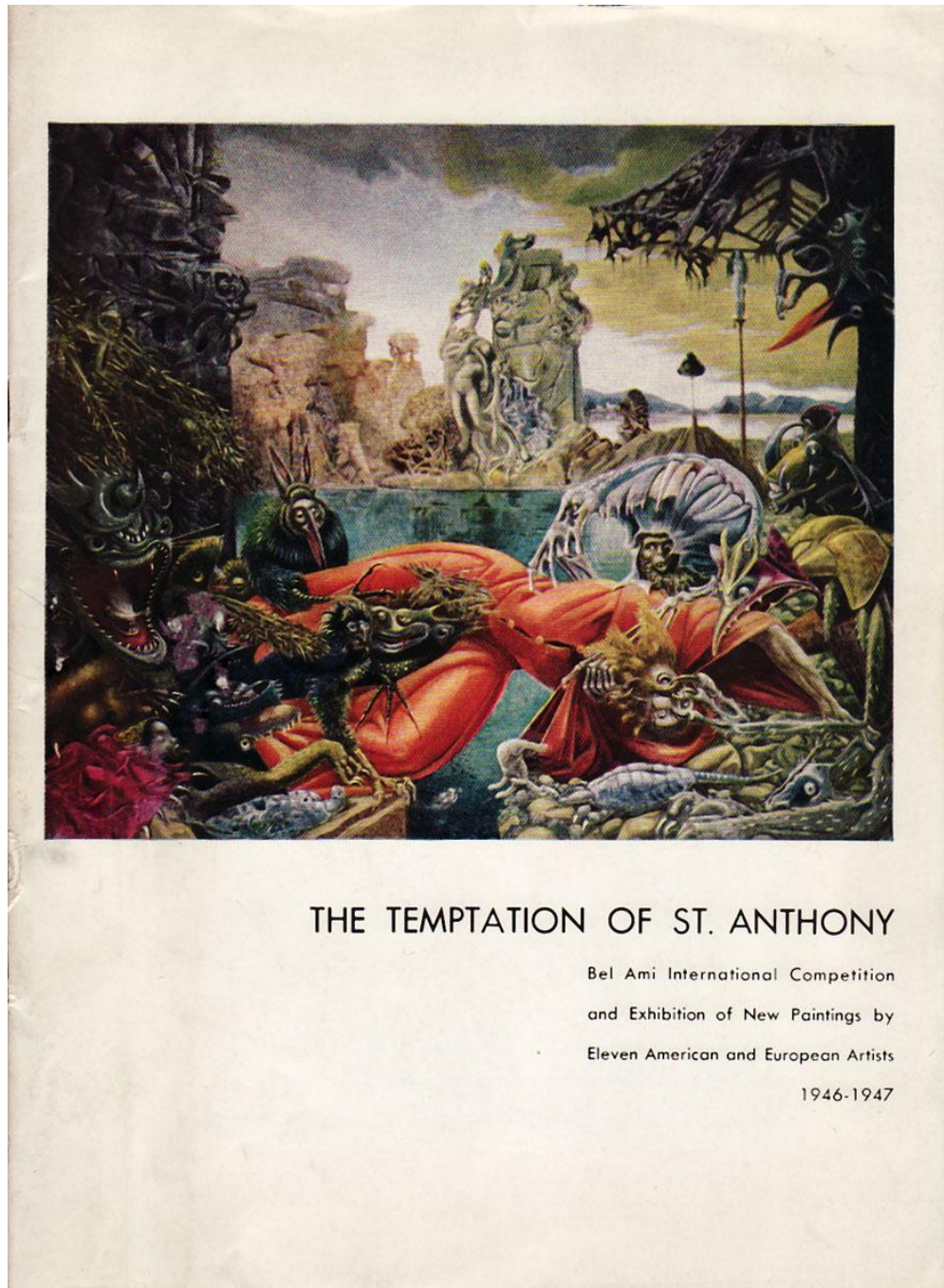


Figure 3. Catalogue cover for the Bel Ami International Competition.

Though Max Ernst's version took the prize, the competition produced Dali's version, now more famous than Ernst's, and his first work to employ religious symbolism. Renaissance painters, Dutch engravers, writers, Modern and contemporary artists and filmmakers all have lent their hand to depicting St. Antony, the deep desert Egyptian monastic considered to be the founder of asceticism.

Always frontal and surrounded by demons, the *Antony series*, which has been designated here to draw attention to a cluster of early and late Renaissance works, is a counter-movement in the birth of Renaissance painting. Contrary to the muscular nudes of Michelangelo or Da Vinci's feminine touch, the paintings in the *Antony series* display a different set of qualities, qualities which can be understood to exhibit the trait of autonomy that is said to begin with Giotto and find expression in Cubism.

*Istoria*, or narrative, is the second theme to be taken up in the discussion of Renaissance art. Forming the backbone of the Renaissance canvas, *istoria* is a property of the canvas based on gestural communication between painted figures, and between the gesturing limbs of a single body. Latin for story, it is through the *istoria* of the painted figures that a painting tells its own story. *Istoria* gives to the canvas an autonomy because through its internal system of signification (the painting signifies within a body, and between bodies), the viewer need not rely on any outside information in order to decode the painting. Moreover, *istoria* exclusively relies on a system of gestures, which, when analyzed alongside the earlier use of gestures (Giotto, Cimabue, and the *Antony series* in general), adds further support to the role the painted figure played in the creation of autonomy and immanent signification.

The chapters on art and aesthetics can be broken into two categories: the gesturology of Giotto in his stigmata of St. Francis and their relation to the *Antony series* (ch. 5), and secondly, the analysis of *istoria* and its relation to the concept of immanence in general (ch. 6). For a more detailed outline, see the introduction to the chapters on aesthetics. The purpose of these analyses is therefore to trace the historical power not only of the ascetic body, but what it represents in the tradition of the visual arts and how it is employed toward the perfecting of that art.

**Contribution: Immanence Under a New Name**

This text will directly contribute to the fields of contemporary religious thought, theology, studies in early Christianity and Continental philosophy. The intent of this study is to extract a consistent appeal to immanence from the aforementioned fields of thought, and in the process combine Christological thought, theories of the body, aesthetics and the desire for immanence. As a concept, immanence will be brought to bear upon various disciplines, elucidating classical problems and reframing contemporary concerns. Immanence is without question one of the most important terms in contemporary theory and philosophical theology, and can serve as a stand-in for post-metaphysical and post-structuralist thought.

As outlined in the first chapter, the concept of Christ has been appropriated by numerous philosophers and theologians in the continental tradition as a figure of immanence. Yet this study challenges the simple appropriation of Christ, and it challenges the simple opposition between transcendence and immanence that has plagued philosophical theology. Depending on one's perspective, contemporary readings frequently catalogue historical philosophies and theologies as weak systems of immanence if they contain even a "minimal transcendence," and as too strong systems of transcendence if they contain too little immanence. As the most infamous

thinker of immanence, Deleuze himself was guilty of this characterization.<sup>11</sup> Deleuze's litmus test was causality. If emanation was found to be operative in such a way that the cause remains unmoved by the effect itself, as with the neo-Platonists and Medieval philosophy, then the bastion of transcendence is being protected. Some philosophies even combined immanent causality with emanation (Bonaventure, Erigena). It is argued in the final chapter that christology is neither a philosophy of immanence nor of transcendence, but must come under a new heading—the *Christic cause*. What makes this cause unique is the way the conceptual persona of Christ alters christological thinking in the concepts of communication of events, consistency, deformation and/or gesturology. These three concepts are features of the metaphysics of Christian ontology as well as prisms in which to interpret famous bodies in Christian history. If so-called 'high christology' is said to be Hellenistic in nature, translating the social and ethical message of Christianity into a philosophical one divorced from the realm of life, this text will at least provide methodologies for proving how the 'high' has as its final flowering a 'low' anthropology, applicable very much to lived bodies and daily life.

The genealogical work has not been completed to merely highlight the way Christ has been constructed, but serves three functions: (i) to conduct a nuanced historical and philosophical investigation into the concept; but also steer this work into a desired direction; (ii) that direction is to distill a logic in the concept of Christ that crosses thresholds into other disciplines and in which the logic cannot be said to be the property of Christianity; (iii) through the deployment of this logic, to provide a new modality of thinking the relation of bodies to ontology as well as to provide a future philosophy for the creation of new bodies, new forms of life.

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<sup>11</sup> See Gilles Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (1968 EPS) trans. Martin Joughin (1990: Zone Books, New York), especially the chapter titled "Immanence and The Historical Components of Expression."

## Part I.

### **The Immanent Body in Late Antiquity**

## Chapter 1

## Conceptual Personae

## Chapter abstract:

What is the relation between religious figures and the construction of immanence? What is the Christian image of thought? Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of conceptual personae, developed in their last collaborative work, offers profound implications for thinking about how the concept of Christ organizes theology. Christ *is* Christianity's conceptual persona, and it is the first appearance of a body-ontology that we see in Western philosophical history. The concept of Christ, however, took centuries to construct, but we can find in Irenaeus' notion of recapitulation the first attempt to place Christ in the center of a philosophical system. Recapitulation is the first instance in theological history wherein *the* Christ "body" is laid out as an image of thought, to which all subsequent concepts must submit. As such, the persona of Christ can inhabit the world in an immanent fashion only when he does so philosophically. This chapter therefore draws the connection between the conceptual persona of Christ and the image of thought he introduced.

## Christology: A Modality of Thinking

Christology is first of all a modality of thinking. What christology accomplishes, before it allows the faithful to participate in the “life of Christ,” is the insertion of a body at the nexus of a series of problems: existence, diversity, ethics, death, and so on. Christology was and is, as all innovations in thinking are, a solution to a problem. The solution was not singular, but responded to a cluster of problems besetting late antiquity. Of course, John 1: 1-4 remains the predominate text for how Christ will be understood within the larger contexts of God, creation and redemption, for this text grants to the figure of Christ new powers of presence: presence at the time of worldly creation (co-creator), that through which all things were made (screen of creation), and finally, that Christ is life, and it is in this life that we all live (immanence; Christ as new figure of the One-All). Proponents of the synoptic gospels often claim that John’s cosmological Christ distorts the human-centered, social gospel of Jesus in favor of a Hellenized logos-Christ, the latter more a philosophical principle than a poor messiah who taught social justice, non-violence and, equality. This critique was, after all, spelled out decisively in volume three of Harnack’s *History of Dogma*.<sup>1</sup>

However, has the opposite claim ever seriously been considered, namely, that it was John *and* the christology built upon his opening lines that would have the greatest effect in humanizing Christ? This is precisely what will be argued here, and many new concepts will have to be introduced by the early authors, and/or emphasized from Paul’s letters, in order to accomplish this goal, concepts such as recapitulation, ascetic *imitatio christi* and immanent causality. Designating the *quality of an action that begins and ends inside an agent*, it is the immanence of

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<sup>1</sup> This critique was, after all, spelled out decisively in Harnack’s *History of Dogma*: see Harnack, Adolf von. *History of Dogma*, vol 3, (Russell and Russell, 1901), see the first chapter, pgs. 1-118.

God in the world that is often regarded as the unique contribution of Christianity to doctrines of immanence. However, God did not make the incarnation, nor did God incarnate Christ. Rather, a concept of Christ made new type of God thinkable. A God who was incarnate, a God who descended into the world, a God who could be identified with material life yet separated from it, an immanent God—this is what the concept of Christ made possible. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of conceptual personae will provide the framework for analyzing how Christ made this possible.

Injected into ancient systems of thought, Christ is a concept that was introduced and created by philosophical tools, in the manner of the monster of Frankenstein. As the harbinger of bodily and divine immanence, it was the power of his conceptual persona that formulated the specific Christian concept of immanence, creating what we can call *the* Christian image of thought. Deleuze and Guattari will help define how personae organize philosophy and theology, since Christianity is not unique in that it employs a figure to think with.

In this strategic genealogy, Irenaeus is the first thinker to be taken up. The following chapters will be devoted to Tertullian and Athanasius. Each thinker represents an operation in the construction of Christ, and each thinker builds, in the manner of a portrait, on the ideas developed before them. Tertullian's concept of flesh requires Irenaeus' notion of recapitulation, and Athanasius will put to work Tertullian's concept of flesh to describe his embodied ascetics.

In sum, Irenaeus constructs the frame and stretches the canvas upon which this portrait of Christ is being painted. Through an understanding of Christ as a recapitulated being, and by placing Christ at the three points of causality (near, immanent and end), Irenaeus establishes a manner of thinking about Christ that will find itself deployed by Athanasius centuries later. More



specifically, the point is not just to track how Christ was constructed over time, since many Christs existed in late antiquity, just as there was no single Christianity. What is at stake in the later chapters is how the high Christ of late ancient christology becomes crucial to the ascetic project of *imitatio Christi*. Only by analyzing how Christ works in christology is it possible to discern how ascetics function in ascetic literature. Since the ascetics were considered to be imitations of Christ, it is important to first ask the question *what is the philosophical performance of Christ?*

## Two Problems

Two problems beset current treatments of the Christ in continental philosophy and theology. First is the usage of immanence as a noun or entity of affirmation, and the related use of Christ as the entrepreneur of an immanent ontology, whether in its bodily, phenomenological-affective, transcendental, a/theological or bio-political variations. It is my claim that continental philosophers, especially those who address religion, have yet to take the concept of Christ seriously, and that, perhaps latent in the most avowed atheisms of our day, there lies a subtle piety towards this word, this Christ, seen most effectively in the fact that we are still using his body as a site upon which to make universal statements, create ontologies and test our epistemologies. It does not matter if difference or identity is preserved by Christ, or if Christ is the law of the same or another name for a materialistic vitalism—for thinkers still remain pious towards this body when the name of Christ is simply appropriated.

For instance, when Žižek recently argues that Christ's eschatology refers not to a time to come, but immanent time, he argues for a certain Christological reading of immanence.<sup>2</sup> When Žižek writes that "Christ is resurrected in us, the collective of believers, and his tortured dead body

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<sup>2</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. *Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 283.

remains forever as its material remainder,” he is understanding Christ in a rather predictable (post-structuralist and post-metaphysical) manner. Like Vattimo’s Christ and many other Christs, Žižek’s Christ was the figure who taught us transcendence does not exist, and that immanence, constructed via the *void in immanence*, is all there ever was.<sup>3</sup> Milbank, under the guise of the “infinite particular, concrete universal,” speaks of Christ as the perfect, ontologically inspired dialectical figure of justice, whose mere existence provides proof of “the infinitely abstract source of this infinite particularity.” For Milbank, the central figure in the current Radical Orthodoxy movement, the body of Christ is the *materiality* of materiality, i.e., Christ is a resource whose inexhaustible “body” testifies to an infinite economy of God’s will in which no thought, matter or soul can escape. Victor Taylor sums up their position nicely when he surmises that both Milbank and Žižek would surely agree that “There is nothing outside the body of Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Badiou, in his manifesto on St. Paul, will speak of the Christ-event that “sets up an immanentization of the spirit” that is not to be confused with transcendence.<sup>5</sup> Jean Luc Marion’s Christ is but a transparent icon through which givenness itself, as gift, becomes manifest.<sup>6</sup> Jean Luc Nancy’s meditations in *Corpus* act as an ode to the unfinished modulations of thinking, breathing, and philosophizing on the body, *the* body (of God), but, really, we should blame it on Christ. In a commentary on Nancy, Derrida recasts the Christ in terms of a dialectics of touch, of being touched and touching, of Christ an interior exteriority, a “fleshly locus” of (im)material splendor. Michael Hardt, when speaking of the incarnation, writes that “The figure of Christ has often been understood as a point of mediation of the external relationship between divine essence and worldly existence. But the incarnation, the self-emptying of Christ, denies any possible

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 287.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, Victor. “Absolute Christ of “WDCD?”: The Question of Christian Materiality in the *Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic*,” in *Journal for Cultural and Religions Theory* vol. 3 no. 2 (Spring 2011): p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Badiou, Alain. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> See Jean Luc Marion’s *The Crossing of the Visible* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), and for a secondary source see Paul Lakeland’s *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

exteriority and hence any need for mediation.”<sup>7</sup> For Hardt, the kenotic enterprise of God as he is incarnated in Christ erases all traces of transcendence. For Hardt, following in this tradition of appropriating the persona of Christ for an ontology of immanent materialism, the incarnation, therefore, becomes a theological proposition—“the plenitude of materiality.”<sup>8</sup>

Michel Henry’s *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity* repeats the usage of the Christ concept as an organizing tool to re-think immanence in the age of the end of metaphysics.<sup>9</sup> As the title insinuates, Christ is the Truth because he reveals something transcendental about the way the world reveals itself. Highly indebted to the christic phenomenology of Henry, Francois Laruelle’s *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy* is another text attempting to claim Christ as a rightful ancestor of continental immanence.<sup>10</sup>

Hegel, Nietzsche, (early) Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Kant—all appeal to the Christ in one way or another, either to support their project or defend it against the all-consuming Christ. What all these appropriations of Christ share in common is an image of Christ-as-extension, and of an immanent working of Christ in this extension. As we shall see, Irenaeus is the architect of recapitulation, which is the concept authorizing this extended Christ. If according to Deleuze, Spinoza was the “Christ of philosophers,” then Irenaeus is the finest philosopher of Christ. It is through an analysis of Irenaeus’ notion of recapitulation that we can better understand how it is Christ can be understood as an immanent force.

The second problem is much easier to resolve, and it follows directly from the first problem. Its essence is that Christ is assumed to be a ready-made concept. It is as if continental philosophers

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<sup>7</sup> Hardt, Michael. “Exposure: Pasolini in the Flesh,” in Massumi, Brian ed., *A Shock to Thought: Expression After Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Henry, Michel. *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Laruelle, Francois. *Future Christ* (New York and London: Continuum, 2010).

have picked Christ up off the ground of theological history, and made him into a ready-made object for theological appropriation, but if we can remember the great lesson of Duchamp's readymade, it was a statement about artistic process—how, and in what manner are art objects made. Our task here is analogous: how and in what manner is immanence made. We know what contemporary immanence is responding to (transcendence, hierarchy, totalization, systems, gender rigidity, power, law, injustice, and so on) but what was Irenaeus, the great ancient theorist of immanence, responding to when he set off to construct it with such radicality? The claim here is that Christ did not *bring* immanence, or a materialist a/theology, or teach the value of the immanent event during his crucifixion and resurrection. Christ did not deploy immanence as if it were an object or principle, and neither did St. Paul's Christ. Certain theologians who became "victorious" in the battle over orthodoxy beginning in the second century refined a concept of Christ in which Christ brought a *quality of action* to materiality, in which Christ was stretched across an onto-material fabric. The establishment of immanence occurred *philosophically*, with philosophical tools and procedures, and only when it was established there could it enter the literature (christology) and the Christian world as a mode of life, in which it would find expression in Christianity's great experiment on the body, asceticism.

For most of philosophical history (even with Deleuze) immanence is not an object but simply designates the quality of an action that begins and ends inside an agent (Aristotle's "immanent cause"; *Physics* 11.7), and if you know the history of philosophy, it is mainly the Catholics who hotly contested its relevance until it burst on the scene with Whitehead and process philosophy, upon which it became entangled with post-structuralist France, deconstruction, phenomenology, neo-materialisms, and so on.

Moreover, if today's thinkers are using the Christic body as a quasi-universal site upon which to say something "universal" or shared among all bodies, and if immanence is always a tool for resistance, then it would serve our politics and philosophies well to see how Christ was constructed *then* so as to aid us in our forays into how better to construct him *now*. In sum, to avoid these traps of understanding immanence as a noun, or of thinking that immanence was simply brought at one moment, we should turn to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of conceptual personae to see how immanence is constructed, and further, how the persona of Christ will set the precedent for finding a in our body (ch. 4). But they get us only so far, and we have to develop new modes of analysis in which to understand this operation. Only in returning to this basic definition—as a quality of action—can we understand 1) what the persona of Christ did for philosophy, 2) how and what this quality of action is, 3) and lastly, how Christ is a theological accomplishment rather than a *given*, perhaps the finest conceptual addition to the Western Christian philosophical landscape, thanks to Irenaeus. I will begin with a discussion of conceptual personae, then spend the remainder of the time on recapitulation and ontology.

### **What are Conceptual Personae?**

No other concept in the Deleuzian corpus has been as ignored as conceptual personae.<sup>11</sup> If one looks at the entirety of Deleuze's texts, one finds philosophical monographs on the singularity of a thinker's thought (*Bergsonism, Foucault, Nietzsche and Philosophy, Proust and Signs, Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation, The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*). As a unit of analysis, conceptual personae are explicitly taken up in

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<sup>11</sup> Treatments of the concept do exist however, and a few studies do stand out. Notably, the predominance of studies exist in media studies, not philosophy. See David Norman Rodowick's *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) for its relation to film; Phillip Goodchild's *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (London: Sage, 1996); Tamsin E. Lorraine's *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); A nice chapter in *Deleuze and Ricoeur: Disavowed Affinities and the Narrative Self* (London: Continuum, 2009), by Declan Sheerin, is also helpful.

his last collaborative work with Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*, where, upon reading how central they are to his understanding of how philosophy is constructed, one is led to think that perhaps Deleuze was thinking through conceptual personae all along. In this final text, it is central to his vision of how immanence is constructed, as well as how philosophical concepts are managed. Conceptual personae “carry out the movements that describe the author’s plane of immanence, and they play a part in the very creation of the author’s concepts.”<sup>12</sup> It is conceptual personae that construct a plane of immanence, organizing philosophy in such a way that the personae’s virtual existence provides the ground upon which concepts live and breathe.<sup>13</sup>

Theorists working in the field of continental philosophy of religion and theology have primarily focused on adapting Deleuze’s metaphysics to various fields, and much has been done in the way of contextualizing and utilizing his work in the fields of process theology, mysticism, phenomenologies of religion, postmodern theology, death of God theology and more recently, the material philosophies of contemporary Speculative Realism, under Brassier or Meillasoux, or the Non Philosophy of Laruelle.<sup>14</sup> Despite this warm reception of Deleuze in these discourses, or his rejection in the case of the latter, as well as the battle over who properly owns immanence (the religionists or the philosophers, the Realists or the theologians), the connection between conceptual personae and immanence remains unexploited.<sup>15</sup>

As all concepts are a solution to a problem, conceptual personae answer the question of how philosophies are born, and how they have style. Composing the image of each philosophy—populating the stage, as it were—are actors with varying degrees of importance, talent, skill and

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<sup>12</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze thought through figures, which must be distinguished from a nominalism, and could not conceive of philosophy apart from style, character, and persona.

<sup>14</sup> I am thinking here of Francois Laruelle’s *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy* (NY: Continuum, 2010) or Ray Brassier’s *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Just as Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept, religion is broached, but it is only in the figure of the Slavic “idiot.”

capability. Taken together, these actors perform in certain ways, and it is their movement (style) that distinguishes one philosophy from another: “style in philosophy is the movement of concepts.”<sup>16</sup> Concepts in philosophy are inevitably divided up according to a division of labor—certain concepts bear the brunt of a thinker’s ontology, while others only appear in varying degrees of importance. Plato’s concept of participation subsumes nearly all the minor concepts into its fold, rendering his theory of *eros*, remembrance of the forms, creation, and justice dependent on the fact that immanence is understood only through participation. Deleuze himself, as Badiou adeptly highlights, conforms all his thought to a distinction (virtuality/actuality), which are but two sides to the same concept, immanence.<sup>17</sup> But what grounds Deleuze’s style, that is, what inheres in his numerous texts, are conceptual personae, for as the unseen dramaturgist,<sup>18</sup> they “carry out the movements that describe the author’s plane of immanence, and they play a part in the very creation of the author’s concepts.” Conceptual personae are what Deleuze sought, what his philosophy desired, and they form the basic unit of his analysis.

In their examples, Deleuze and Guattari begin with Plato. Socrates is indeed the principal conceptual persona of Platonism, but, they warn, “there is a danger of confusing the dialogue’s characters with conceptual personae.”<sup>19</sup>

The conceptual persona is not the philosopher’s representative but, rather, the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principal conceptual personae and of all the other personae who are the intercessors, the real subjects of his philosophy. Conceptual personae are the philosopher’s “heteronyms,” and the philosopher’s name is the simple pseudonym of his personae. I am no longer myself but thought’s aptitude for finding

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<sup>16</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Negotiations 1972-1990* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> See Badiou’s *Gilles Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), or more recently Peter Hallward’s *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Sheerin, *Deleuze and Ricoeur*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 63.

itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places. The philosopher is the idiosyncrasy of his conceptual personae.<sup>20</sup>

*The role of conceptual personae is to show thought's territories, its absolute deterritorializations and reterritorializations.* Conceptual personae are thinkers, solely thinkers, and their personalized features are closely linked to the diagrammatic features of thought and the intensive features of concepts. A particular conceptual personae, who perhaps did not exist before us, thinks in us.<sup>21</sup>

Conceptual personae simply are the virtual presence of a philosophical mode of life: Nietzsche's suffering in actual life has become the *modality of affirmation* (Zarathustra, Dionysius, Anti-Christ) in his philosophical life. A philosophical life cannot be thought apart from the virtual life that the philosopher instituted. It is this spectral presence which haunts the history of philosophy, not to mention haunting the placement of philosophy in history.<sup>22</sup>

But how is immanence a direct result of conceptual personae? First, immanence must be constructed. Philosophy is constructivism—philosophy is “the discipline that involves *creating* concepts”<sup>23</sup>—and structures are necessary for the consistency of thought. Consistency is not measured in categories of truth or falsity, but connections, growth and speed. Conceptual personae are the scaffolding upon which concepts lie, providing a ground upon which concepts can make connections with other concepts. Conceptual personae deploy immanence because they construct a system for thought, a plane, and concepts will have “attached” to them, as an immanent cause, the virtual life of the personae. Much in the way that the topography of a given landscape determines how and where water will collect and flow, the persona is found in the concepts by virtue of what they come into contact with. The persona is the landscape upon

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>22</sup> Is philosophy ahistorical? Philosophy had only begun to think “historically” with Hegel, to think of itself as moving through history, and yet at the same time as history incarnates itself in philosophy, it is only to prove that it moves through history toward a non-historical end. Always anxious due to a latent Aristotelianism, the best objects of any philosophy—those which it asks us to contemplate—ought to have no historical utility (pure *theoria*), for should the opposite be the case they only mire themselves as universals directing conduct, a fact that would render them materially engaged, and therefore, unsuitable for pure philosophical reflection.

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 5.



which concepts are defined, and upon which they receive their behavior. If thinking requires a prephilosophical plane of immanence, which provides the diagrammatic features for thought, then the personae work in conjunction with concepts as intensive features; that is, they bring a philosophy to life. Secondly, immanence is a direct result of conceptual personae because immanence is *a modality of life*, as the title of Deleuze's last essay attests. "Possibilities of life or modes of existence can be invented only on a plane of immanence that develops the power of conceptual personae."<sup>24</sup> Immanence inspires a mode of life through conceptual personae. It is in this manner that ethics is ontology for Deleuze.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, we should judge the success of a conceptual persona on what type of behavior it authorizes, and this mandate will come in handy when we think about the Christ figure.

One is tempted at this juncture to simply say that because they inspire modes of living, conceptual personae are simply affects attributable to thought (like art's aesthetic figures), not thought's foundation. Maybe they are what thought produces, not what it is grounded upon. Perhaps they are closer to a visceral seeing, or a haptic thinking, paralleling not a seeing that is a touching but a thinking that touches as well. Why allow conceptual personae to do so much work for the shape of philosophy? And then there is the obvious critique that we are blurring the distinction between art (affect) and philosophy (concept), which Deleuze and Guattari do themselves, it being the job of the former to move bodies and the latter to "merely" establish a thought-event from an all-pervading, differential virtuality. Deleuze and Guattari do warn of confusing aesthetic figures (art), which are the powers of affects and percepts, with conceptual

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>25</sup> See Daniel Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought," in Patton, Paul, and John Protevi, eds. *Between Deleuze and Derrida* (London: Continuum, 2003).

personae, which are the powers of concepts.<sup>26</sup> Despite this warning, however, they offer the following: “This does not mean that the two entities do not often pass into each other in a becoming that sweeps them both up in an intensity which co-determines them.”<sup>27</sup> Which is also to say: 1) not all philosophies establish modalities of life, and 2) often we see in the history of philosophy the concept-affect. Kierkegaard, Zarathustra, and Don Juan are cited as examples—each are aesthetic figures bound to philosophical modes of living. Their power lies not *only* in their philosophical persuasion, but in the power these conceptual bodies emit, and the lifestyles engendered by them. Given Deleuze’s penchant for equating power and affect ala Spinoza—as the combined capacity to affirm—it follows that the more powerful the conceptual persona the more we will see this figure passed on in life *and* philosophy. In other words, as Pierre Hadot has claimed, philosophy is and always has been a way of life.<sup>28</sup> The same goes for theology, and no better conceptual persona exists than that of the Christian Christ. Christ as concept is Christ as affect—any attempt to isolate the two results in dangerous distortions on either side of the equation. While the Christian mode of living, exemplified by asceticism, martyrdom and the rare instances of the stigmata are the modalities of life inspired by the conceptual persona of Christ, it is in christology where we find this conceptual persona.

### **From *What is Philosophy?* to *What is Christology?***

Christology organizes theology around a persona, and Christ is the persona of christology.<sup>29</sup>

When Deleuze and Guattari ask the question—*what is philosophy?*—they find an elegant

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<sup>26</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>28</sup> See Pierre Hadot’s *What is Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Formally, Christology differs from theology in that the former is a genre of thinking that has as its object Christ, while theology thinks of God. While one can do theology without thinking about Christ, in a Christian context it is not possible to separate thinking about God from thinking about Christ. As M.C. Steenberg recently argues, and which I will argue myself, the Christian concept of God is organized around Christ because Christian theology would distinguish itself from the various

solution. Philosophy is the art of inventing concepts with the help of conceptual personae. Now, when we ask a similar question—what is christology?—we get an inverse answer: Christology is the art of a conceptual persona through which a philosophy is born. But how is Christ positioned as a prephilosophical figure, as one in whom all subsequent concepts submit? How is Christ constructed, and who is the main architect?

Immanence in our present case is measured by the fact that when we look for Christ, we shall always find him. Christ inheres in materiality, in divine reality, in ethics, body, concept, life and death—as Athanasius says, and which basically sums up many centuries of thinking, “All things derive from the Word their light and movement and life.”<sup>30</sup> Christ is present in the whole as much as in the part because he simply is the whole *and* the parts simultaneously, and it falls to the property of the whole to be able to manifest itself in parts, just as the mind can manifest its power in a toe without delimiting itself in that toe.<sup>31</sup> In short, for Christians the Christ becomes the All—this pithy statement sums up what the incarnation accomplishes, and as we have seen, the understanding of Christ as an extended site/body in which ontology is tested, constructed and deployed remains operative in twentieth century philosophical theologies. The problem in question is: What is the tactic for laying out this Christ body as the Christian plane of immanence? Irenaeus’ concept of recapitulation presents itself as one of the first, and boldest, attempts by a thinker to lay out the persona of Christ as the image of thought. For Irenaeus, recapitulation simply is the incarnation—it is the generative principle behind the Christ adopting all flesh. But Irenaeus didn’t invent the concept, for Ephesians 1:9-10 reads, “God’s secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his

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mystical-eclectic theologies of the ancient world through its insistence on Christ’s centrality in theology. See M.C. Steenberg’s *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1989), p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 77.

good pleasure. And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.” Recapitulation is the name of this “bringing” together in the name of a body, a bringing together that is also an extension. As a theological concept, recapitulation is a second century phenomenon first outlined by Justin, and later by Tertullian, but between these two it is Irenaeus who will do more than any other to give the concept rigor.<sup>32</sup>

### **Irenaeus**

“Christ is the last syllable which, ‘being part of the whole metrical fabric, perfects the form and metrical beauty of the whole.’”  
Augustine, *On True Religion*, 22:42

Bishop of Lyons from 177-200, Irenaeus’ christology is “orthodox” and familiar on many fronts: human beings were made free in the beginning. God did not make man good, but gave him free will, which is good. What was good in man was the design (that obeying felt good). But mankind in general fell from grace because of the primal disobedience of a single man, and death, as a collective consequence, is a result of the Fall.<sup>33</sup> Part of the urgency of Irenaeus’ christology, which was always striving towards unity, was that he was fighting against “division” on many fronts. If Christ was a solution, then Irenaeus’ problems set the coordinates for his theory of recapitulation, for which he is famous. Irenaeus’ concerns were many—apostolic succession, the unification of the Old and Testaments in the figure of Christ (against Gnosticism), the promise of the second coming and the realization it may not be coming soon. Each problem threatened unification in its own way, but recapitulation, as the notion that Christ sums up in himself all of corrupt humanity, is a conceptual solution to said problems, and it remains one of the most

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<sup>32</sup> Osborn, Eric. *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 216.

creative visions to reconcile the relationship between divinity and man.<sup>34</sup> Writes Daniel Wilson: “Christ’s humanity had to contain all the characteristics and qualities of general humanity in order for him to deify humanity, and Irenaeus vividly pictures the humanity of Christ to emphasize that God did become flesh in order to identify with humanity.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it is because of recapitulation that theologians can claim, in a manner that all will understand in the coming centuries, that all things owe their existence to Christ.

Mainly writing against Marcion and the Valentinians, Irenaeus titled his main work *A Detection and Refutation of the Falsely Named “Knowledge,”* though history has shortened it to *Against Heresies*. Originally in Greek, it first appeared after 180 C.E. In his refutation, Irenaeus lumps together Marcion and others by calling them Gnostics.<sup>36</sup> Irenaeus’ war against the Gnostics was fought on two fronts: against those trying to expand scriptural application, and against those who were trying to limit it.<sup>37</sup> Irenaeus found heresy on either front, and Tertullian would fight the same battle, a battle for scriptural authority at a time when what counted as “authoritative” scripture had yet to be defined.<sup>38</sup> A student of the famed martyr Polycarp, Irenaeus would do more to ontologize the crucified body than any other early theologian.

Admittingly, Irenaeus is problematic for any theorist of immanence, especially when one is attempting to read him as one of the great liberators of thought. As a foremost opponent of heresy, publically known for attacking his critics and those who didn’t support his theory of scriptural integrity, Irenaeus is hardly known in theo-philosophical history as a philosopher of

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<sup>34</sup> See Thomas Holsinger-Friesen’s *Irenaeus and Genesis: A Study of Competition in Early Christian Hermeneutics* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, Daniel E. *Deification and the Rule of Faith: The Communication of the Gospel in Hellenistic Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Crossbooks, 2010), p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> Norris, Richard Alfred (ed.). *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> O’Collins, Gerald. *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 164.

<sup>38</sup> Kelly, John N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, 1960), p. 36.

immanence. The opposite could be argued, and easily, for it is historically and theologically accurate to place his thought at the beginning stages of systematization, episcopal hierarchy and dogmatic consistency.<sup>39</sup> Irenaeus established orthodoxy, put order into Christian thought, and organized a tight ontological schema wherein Christ is the transcendent head of the Church, the ultimate ruler of all humanity, the one who, like a king, brings all together under his divine status. Irenaeus insists on correct thinking, and the bulk of his largest work, *Against Heresies*, is devoted to criticizing rogue theological thought: the Gnostics, Marcionites, etc. Irenaeus might seem hardly worthy of a twenty-first century, Deleuzian inspired re-reading. However, recent work done in the areas of recapitulation theory uncovers a different story. M.C. Steenberg explicitly refers to Irenaeus as a “theologian of creation,” arguing that it is this theme more than any other which should be foregrounded when discussing his work.<sup>40</sup> Further, it is now common parlance to call his theology a “cosmic anthropology” or an “optimistic anthropology,” though little has been done in discussing *what is anthropos* in his anthropology. But how does recapitulation affect lived bodies? Does it do so at all? Will it be used in the future? In essence, the question is, *what does recapitulation give birth to?* Mark Graves recently argues that Irenaeus’ anthropology is unique in that humanity is born imperfect, but can grow toward the divine in successive stages.<sup>41</sup> Contrasted with Augustine’s anthropology where “people were born perfect and then fell from grace,” or Aquinas, where the willing part of the soul is oriented toward God, Irenaeus proposes a view of humanity as wholly maturing toward God, a humanity only able to receive what it is, at a particular time, able to receive. Though Christ is the nourishment we receive over time, it will be shown that “maturity over stages” applies to

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<sup>39</sup> See Harnack’s exposition of the logos doctrine in *History of Dogma*, vol 3, where he considers monasticism as an outgrowth of high, logos christology.

<sup>40</sup> Steenberg, Matthew Craig. *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Graves, Mark. *Mind, Brain, and the Elusive Soul: Human Systems of Cognitive Science and Religion* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishers, 2008), p. 145.

humanity *and* Christ, for Christ had to mature through history in his appearances as prophets in order to reach his final and perfect form (as Christ), and we need to align ourselves to his being as we perfect ourselves. The exchange is co-dependent, each enabling the other—humanity is able to mature because Christ himself, as the bedrock of our subjectivity, matured as well. One could call Irenaeus’ theological anthropology, or the human condition, an apprenticeship in Christ. It is in this specific innovation that his work is so important for the monastic experiment and subsequent ideas of *imitatio Christi*. It is also for this reason that Eric Osborn terms Irenaeus’ thought a “theocentric optimism,” referencing the possibility of humanity to attain God-like status.<sup>42</sup>

For Irenaeus, God is transcendent, and Christ is the organs of our body, organizing humanity to an ultimate, hierarchized end. Due to the incarnation, all glory that can be attributed to our flesh must be referred *to that which gives glory*, i.e., Christ. Again, a very un-Deleuzian sentiment. But it is in this absolute exchange, of the absolute becoming-Christ of our bodies and the becoming-body of Christ (the logic of the incarnation) where one can discern the seeds of a theory of an immanent body, that is—God is a name for a certain organization of the body. While it is the contention in later chapters that the power to present divine attributes on the body is not a function of God, but of the (monastic and artistic) body, here it is argued that Irenaeus opens the door for this (political/aesthetic) power to be given to the human body, as per Virginia Burrus’ account of the political force of the shameful martyr or desert monastic, and/or Patricia Cox Miller’s angelic bodies of late antiquity.<sup>43</sup> Irenaeus is not a death of God theologian by any

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<sup>42</sup> Osborn, Eric. *Irenaeus of Lyons*, p. 231.

<sup>43</sup> See Virginia Burrus’ *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), and Patricia Cox Miller’s *The Corporeal Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), and “Desert Asceticism and ‘The Body From Nowhere,’” *J ECS* 2 (1994):137-53.

means, but it is my conviction that Irenaeus is ultimately a thinker of immanence on the level of bodies.

What this exegesis of recapitulation will balance is a double-sided approach. On the one hand, Irenaeus' does fall victim to a transcendentalizing of Christ and God, of ordering beings according to their participation in Christ. It is only by virtue of Christ that the flesh is given power, but, if we refuse to "believe" in transcendence, to accept it as an actual category of being, and if we treat it as a conceptual innovation intending to do work for a thinker, only then can we understand how Christ (as a quasi-transcendent) could actually be employed to recharge immanence. On the other hand, Christ's position as head of humanity is but one aspect to recapitulation, and does little justice to its complexity. Recapitulation includes Christ's humbling himself to take human form, Christ's death as servant, his resurrection and his suffering. Recapitulation includes God taking a human form but equally the human taking a divine form—so it is with this tension that we must proceed. What is ultimately at stake in this re-reading of Irenaeus' concept of recapitulation is 1) what can be found in the concept that is later used for a robust practice of *anthropos*, 2) how human bodies can mature into virtual bodies of Christ, and 3) how these previous effects in turn give birth to a certain autonomous and abstract quality to the painted body. To this end we shall extract the components of the concept appearing in successive thinkers, and as we will see in chapters 2-4, the concept will have to make its way through a variety of late antique thinkers before being able to be logically deployed in support of monastic practice.

## **Recapitulation**



As expected, Irenaeus cites the bible for the deep source of his preoccupation. Romans 5: 12-21, a crucial text in his arsenal, reads:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come...Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

At its core, the concept of recapitulation traces the results of a single act—the crucifixion—and how this act carries ontological weight: how a new law replaces the old, how the Adamic body is retrieved by humanity, how death is overcome by life, how disobedience is replaced with obedience, imperfection with perfection, fragmentation with wholeness. Numerous other Biblical texts wherein the concept of recapitulation is incipient include, John 12:32, “And when I am lifted up on the cross, I will draw everyone to myself”; John 11:52, “It was a prediction that Jesus’ death would be not for Israel only, but for the gathering together of all the children of God scattered around the world”; Ephesians 1:9-10, another important passage, reads, “God’s secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.” As one might expect, when we do find the notion in Irenaeus’ writings, it is, as Eric Osborn argues, wrapped up in at least eleven different concepts, some of them being redemption, perfection, unification, and so on.<sup>44</sup>

However, unification, in its philosophical and political components, is the major problem to

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<sup>44</sup> Osborn, Eric. *Irenaeus of Lyons*, p. 97. See also Eric Osborn’s *Justin Martyr*, chapter titled “History and Recapitulation: Law, Word, Christ.”

which recapitulation responds. Irenaeus writes: “We could not receive imperishability and immortality unless we had been united to imperishability and immortality. And how could we have been united with imperishability and immortality unless imperishability and immortality had first been made what we are, so that what was perishable might be absorbed by imperishability and what was mortal by immortality.”<sup>45</sup> Calling it a metaphysics of transcendence is both sloppy and imprecise, a reflection more a post-Heideggerian philosophy of religion that has trouble seeing shades of ontology other than immanence and transcendence. Rather, recapitulation is a body-ontology, and there exists no parallel in the Western philosophical tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Recapitulation obeys a unique logic: one tree cancels out another—the “tree” of the crucifixion overrules the tree of sin, and makes a life without sin possible again.<sup>47</sup> Through the crucifixion, Christ brings the Adamic body to perfection. Through Christ’s obedience, Adam’s disobedience is rendered null. Irenaeus writes: “For He would not have been one truly possessing flesh and blood, by which He redeemed us, unless He had summed up in Himself the ancient formation of Adam.”<sup>48</sup> As the universal body, the Christ body is the pattern of ours, and any alteration in his registers immanently an alteration in ours.<sup>49</sup> Irenaeus thus establishes an unmediated transmission between all corrupt bodies and Christ’s perfect body by understanding the

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<sup>45</sup> *Against Heresies* 3.19.3. All references to Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* are taken from its annotated text, found in *Irenaeus of Lyons*, by Robert M. Grant (Routledge: NY, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> There are of course many figures in religious history that have as their final moment their sacrifice.

<sup>47</sup> Osborn writes: “God became what we are so that we might become what he is.”

<sup>48</sup> *Against Heresies* 5.1.2.

<sup>49</sup> Or, as Balthasar writes: “The second Adam repeats the whole natural development of man at the higher level of divine reality.” Balthasar, Hans Urs von and Saint Irenaeus. *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 1990), p. 53.

crucifixion as a completion.<sup>50</sup> Christ is not a mediator for Irenaeus, but rather, he becomes the central figure for his theology's conception of matter, body and redemption.

Irenaeus needs a strong concept of Christ because without it he cannot solve the great puzzle—what it is Christ brought? We know what happened after Christ—corrupt materiality was fixed—but we do not know exactly how he is authorized to do so on a philosophical level, for Irenaeus is not content with proclamations that mere faith is all one needs. Christ is not an object of faith or worship, but quite the contrary. Christ is not a simple mediator, not a mediatorial Logos.<sup>51</sup> Mediation is problematic because it still keeps divine activity removed from the world. Christ is a solution to Irenaeus' main preoccupation, which is where Deleuze and Irenaeus coincide: protecting an ontological force. To protect this force, Irenaeus deploys the logic of immanence, and Irenaeus knows the logic well: “As through a conquered man our race went down to death, so through a conqueror we ascend to life”; “As through a tree we were made debtors to God, so through a tree we receive the cancellation of our debt.”<sup>52</sup> What makes this a logic is the manner in which an act, regardless of its temporal position, is *necessarily* transmitted immanently across the material spectrum. What authorizes Irenaeus to make such fantastic claims is that Christ is for Irenaeus a modality of thinking, a site organizing his speculative theology. It is in the name of this Christ persona that he can claim this immanent transmission, and so, now, we must turn our attention to precisely how Christ is constructed.

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<sup>50</sup> Recapitulation is a theory equally theological and anthropological. Catherine Keller notes the anthropomorphic qualities of Irenaeus' concept of recapitulation when she writes: “Summing up all things in its liberating body, the divine would assume the language of our bodies. Its Logos would touch every defect. Its Sophia would convey a love spread—excessively—across the material universe,” from Catherine Keller's *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (NY: Routledge, 2003), p. 56. Keller's language of excessive spreading is crucial to how Christ gets deployed at an ontological level, for indeed it is not so much a kenotic emptying (of God or Christ) but rather the laying out of an persona so as to establish an immanent relationship with the divine.

<sup>51</sup> Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> *Against Heresies* 8.1 and 8.3. We also hear traces of exchange, ransom, etc. The assumption is Pauline, and Irenaeus cites Romans 10:4 regarding Christ's role in redemption: Christ is the end of the law so that righteousness may be shared by all.

The decisive point for establishing Christ as a conceptual persona comes when Irenaeus follows up Paul by asking, “How could Christ be the end of the Law unless he were also its beginning?” Or, as Irenaeus asks more practically in a response to the Ebionites, “How can they [believers] be saved unless he was God who wrought their salvation on the earth?”<sup>53</sup> In order to deliver his promise of salvation, Christ will have to be an organizing principle before creation, an immanent principle within it, and its final telos.<sup>54</sup>

### **Christ’s Temporal Structure**

Christ’s most important characteristic is his temporal structure, and it is this structure that acts as a pseudo-fabric upon which Irenaeus layers his entire philosophy. This structure is composed of a near point, immanent point and far point, each representing a stitch in which the Christ fabric is woven. Below I offer a brief sketch of this complex temporality. Taken together, they constitute the initial act of the Christ persona’s construction.

a) First, Christ’s near point is his co-presence with God the Father (John 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 8:6; Hebrews 1-3). As Word, the Son co-exists with the father, and in proximity to the original points of creation. Christ is near the father in that he is his agent for creation, “For he has been with the Father from the beginning.” Equal parts ontological and aesthetic, founded and founding, Christ designs creation with an eye to installing internal principles inside humanity—our will tending towards the Good, creation towards perfection, and each thing reflecting God’s beauty. In book V of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus explains that as maker of the world the Word “invisibly contains everything that was made and was imprinted in the shape of a Chi in everything, as Word of God

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<sup>53</sup> *Against Heresies* 3.21.1.

<sup>54</sup> A distinctive difference between Irenaeus’ conception of the role of the logos and, for example, Athanasius’, is that for Irenaeus the Word reveals God in creation (through a visibility of sorts), while for Athanasius the Word gives aesthetic resonance to creation; in Athanasius the Word can be found as an immanent organizing principle in matter, while for Irenaeus the Word is the principle in which we know God in creation.

governing and disposing everything.”<sup>55</sup> As an outcome of co-presence, Christ therefore contains creation by virtue of being immanent to all his creations.

Irenaeus’ unique christological contribution is in what consequences co-creation implies. But we can infer why he stresses this concept—co-creation answers the question of *how* Christ can complete humanity. Co-creation implies that there is an immanent design latent in humanity, and for this reason, co-creation naturally implies co-presence, and pre-existence. Christ can complete humanity because he is already implicated in it (“and he recapitulated in himself the work already fashioned”<sup>56</sup>). Christ is not a descended fragment of God redeeming humanity due to his divine power, but does so internally, from a code already formed by him. Christ is not a figure of exteriority, but of extreme interiority. This is one aspect in which the integrity of the incarnation itself is involved in each of these points, since if the incarnation is to be a robust and complete incarnation, then he must have been incarnated all along, at all times. God does not create through Christ; rather, Christ is a name for a type of creationist epistemology in which for the Christian God is revealed in all parts of creation. God did not incarnate Christ, but quite the opposite. Christ is a concept making the thought of an incarnate God possible.

Christ as near point establishes *an ability* for the Christ figure, such that because of his near point status, he is able to instill in humanity a bit of the Word in all of creation, and he is enabled from this position to enter historical and material life at will.

b) Aside from mere co-creation, Irenaeus understands this co-presence to authorize immanent appearances from Christ in history, a fact that may render his time in Jerusalem at the turn of the millennium important for only one reason—his death via crucifixion. It is Justin Martyr who

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<sup>55</sup> *Against Heresies* 18.3.

<sup>56</sup> *Against Heresies* 3.21.9.

offers the first account of what is often called a “saving history,” a history which, as Osborne argues, does the same work for Justin as it does for Irenaeus, i.e., establishing continuity between the previous prophets and the final prophet of Jesus, and unifying the Old and New Testament into a single, divine plan. Osborne writes: “The new thing which has happened in Christ is the fulfillment of former things.”<sup>57</sup> If God spoke to humanity in a somewhat fragmentary manner through the Old Testament prophets, he did not do so in the case of Jesus. Osborne surmises that Christians during this time were somewhat pressed as to why their “message” had come so late, their response being the very conception of history as the unfolding of a design immanent to it.

The specific points about this history is not history itself, but in what manner manifestation occurs. Irenaeus writes: “From the beginning he was accustomed, as the Word of God, to descend and ascend for the salvation of those who were in distress.”<sup>58</sup> Christ sustains the universe, as in Hebrews 1:3, but he does so in a more concrete way than that of abstract logos. Christ descends at (God’s) will in any form for the benefit of mankind, serving as an active design principle, or corrective, to the decadent extravagances in human material life (sin).

Irenaeus’ genius is his understanding that Christ only intervenes bodily to the extent that the world was formed from his body (the near point). Irenaeus writes, “Thus from the beginning the Son is the Revealer of the Father, since from the beginning he was with the father.”<sup>59</sup> Christ is the author of the existential novel of human life, and yet his universal persona also lends himself to be its resolution.<sup>60</sup> Irenaeus’ conception of Jesus’ life is that of a virtual topology of mimicry:

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<sup>57</sup> Osborne, *Justin Martyr*, p. 154.

<sup>58</sup> *Against Heresies* 4.13.4.

<sup>59</sup> *Against Heresies* 4.20.7.

<sup>60</sup> Moreover, given that his miracles, healings and speech often rely on the spectacular nature of the classical prophetic figure, our early theologians have given special attention to his bodily manifestations. Taken into its monastic context, the spectacular body of Christ appearing in and out of historical materiality, drawing ire here and reverence there, healing this woman from mere sight of him—all such compounds a mythology of literariness. This literariness will appear in the monastic texts and their *avant garde* bodies, a fact that will contribute to Christ being understood as a *pedagogy of the senses*—a metonym for that which corrects other lives through a morphological body (see chapters 3 and 4).

Christ is a figure who can copy any bodily landscape so as to correct whatever part of humanity is incorrect—“still others saw the Father’s glories adapted in various times to men who saw and then heard, and to those who would hear subsequently.”<sup>61</sup>

While Athanasius will later speak of Jesus’ necessary time in the body in order to educate our senses (to teach us to live as the monastic does), Irenaeus delves deeper into the uncanny temporality of Christ through life’s stages. While Irenaeus speaks earlier of the necessary immaturity of infant life, a life unable to obey God’s commandment, here the situation is more complex: how and in what manner will Christ design himself in each stage of life? Why did he have to live so long in a human body?, Irenaeus seems to be asking, a question Athanasius will also ask. Irenaeus is precise in his answer—he took the form of all bodies in all their stages out of a fear of not being comprehensive. Irenaeus writes: “He was made an infant for infants, sanctifying childhood; a child among children, sanctifying childhood,” and so on in such a way that each stage in life has a corresponding body, and each body a singular mode of atonement in which atonement is activated. Irenaeus again, “He did not appear to be other than what he really was, as they say who hold that his appearance was illusory. No; he appeared as he really was.”<sup>62</sup> What was of consequence is the integrity of the incarnation, for Irenaeus is actively engaging the space-suit christology of the Gnostics, who understood Christ’s descent into bodily form as but the donning of a material mask. If Christ was to be universal, then this universalism must show all bodies the way to correction and redemption. Again, it is the logic of immanence at play—transcendence gains in immanence the more the transcendent caters itself to the form of the immanent. God becomes closer to the world to the degree that Christ, the name of God’s immanent agent, is understood to contain all immanent forms.

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<sup>61</sup> *Against Heresies* 4.20.6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 2.22.4.

More was involved than just descent, for if the world is a song written by God, then Christ is an embodied note that descends into life at just the right moment to give life that beautiful sound.

“Where there is composition there is melody; where there is melody it is at the right time; where there is the right time, there is benefit.”<sup>63</sup> Christ’s descent into flesh in the form of a body in history required precision timing and a catering to the forms of local bodies. Benefit could only be achieved with this precision pairing.

c) Third, the far point of Christ’s temporality is the cosmological completion implicated in his death by crucifixion. In Book III, Irenaeus explains the logic: “And he recapitulated in himself the work originally fashioned, because, just as through the disobedience of one man sin came in, and through sin death prevailed, so also through the obedience of one man justice was brought in and produced the fruit of life for the men formerly dead.”<sup>64</sup> The logic is of a redemptive repetition, which is the repeating of an original act that restores the faults of the previous act. Irenaeus sees this logic operative in Eve and Mary as well, for in their case since it was through Eve’s disobedience that mankind fell, it was through Mary’s obedience that mankind is redeemed: “So too the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by Mary’s obedience, for what the virgin Eve had bound by her unfaith, the virgin Mary loosed by her faith.”<sup>65</sup> What is remarkable about Christ’s final recapitulation is the logical necessity, indeed, immanent causality, by which it operates. Irenaeus does know why recapitulation works as a theory, but he does not know exactly how. All he knows is that it does work—new life is possible, death overcome, and the defeated race is defeated no more. Exactly how it works can be found in the logic of immanence itself.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 4.20.7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 3.20.2.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 3.22.4.



While we have already spoken of Christ's difference and repetition within history, Eric Osborn notes that the repetition also takes on an onto-historical bent in the case of Irenaeus. Osborn writes of Christ's repetition: "His action is repetitive in that it returns to the point of error and replaces the wrong deed with the right deed, thereby rectifying the ancient fault."<sup>66</sup> The classical (Pauline) interpretation is that through Christ we can overcome death, and there is no shortage of passages to make this case. But Irenaeus imports the concept of perfection into recapitulation, and in this sense he is garnering inspiration from John and the Synoptics as opposed to the Pauline insistence that Christ's recapitulation means overcoming death.<sup>67</sup> Irenaeus would be more akin to say that it is the perfecting of life rather than an overcoming of life.

Though the previous two points of Christ's temporality serve an equal function in his theory of recapitulation, as it is classically understood recapitulation is the name of this third point—anthro-cosmological completion. As we saw in his immanent point in human affairs, Christ had to be at once identified with history and yet "virtually" separated from it; this does not mean that he wasn't fully identified with materiality, for the distinction was in how Christ could be expressed. Christ was distinguished from God by his mutability and from materiality by his morphological capabilities. As logos, the near point placed him at the point of creation in such a way that "through him all things were made," while the immanent point fulfilled the requirement of "he was always present with the human race." Though the third point comes last, it is really first in Irenaeus' system.

Christ fulfills the divine purpose, assumes humanity as a whole and restores the imperfect, but he does so on the condition that he is able to, and he is only able to do so first, because he is already

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<sup>66</sup> Osborn, *Irenaeus*, p. 100.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 104.

implicated deep into the fabric of created life (near point), and second, because the principle of creation is no longer that of divine deity or God but of a human body placed at the point of creation. Only by virtue of his near point can he be given the agency of an immanent point, serving as a portal into the innermost recesses of human materiality, and only by virtue of his far point can his entry into immanent life be understood as life's improvement, or as correction. Irenaeus is fond of Paul's language of a universal body, citing how we are all joined by the "joints and ligaments" of God. We are all the limbs of God, and Christ, when he moves, being the head, we naturally follow. The golden thread, as it were, that registers an immediate effect in life itself is authorized at the imagistic level of an ontologically generated, corporeal body, for it is not at one point that Christ's authority is established but the holistic fabric that is his conceptual persona. Immanence is the logic of multiplicities—of connections across this conceptual persona.

Christ is the name of an ontological body, a most unique philosophical invention. Christ is the name of one event only, and one should hear inflections of Deleuze's claim that there is only a formal distinction between events, for all events are really events of the One.<sup>68</sup> Irenaeus, like Deleuze, speaks of one metaphysical event, the Christ event, and like Deleuze's three syntheses (or cuts) of temporality, Christ will also inhabit the pre-philosophical layer of immanence, for the world is now subservient to him, residing in him, completed in him.<sup>69</sup> Christ as a far point in this rendering is nothing but a recapitulation of creation in us; his purpose as comprehensive design is adopt the form of corruptibility so as to render the corruptible incorruptible. Only through this *difference and repetition* of the Christ form in its three modalities can the stain of the Garden be erased.

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<sup>68</sup> Badiou, *The Clamor of Being*, p. 73.

<sup>69</sup> See Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* on the three synthesis of time.

## Avoiding Exhaustion

An important question arises: Is it not the point of establishing immanence to never stop, never complete, never finalize? Will not Deleuze, and his collaborative works with Guattari, make the point that immanence can never quite be established, for it is always-already, or that the very philosophies that establish immanence have as their intent to never contain the power of immanence, to never have the last word on what or where it will go? Immanence *resists*, right? To these questions, we reply that recapitulation accomplishes for Irenaeus the power of a Christ body never able to be exhausted. In order for Christ to inhabit and correct all our bodies, he must have an ontological power of inexhaustibility and morphological capability.<sup>70</sup> Christ must be tireless and deformed, i.e., rhizomatic. Christ must be a plastic force.<sup>71</sup> (It is worth noting that this fear of inexhaustibility highlights an old image of the Christ appropriated from Hellenistic cosmology, that image being Christ as solar God, an inexhaustible source of energy, constantly and forever the source of energy without being depleted).

The great practices and performers inspired by this Christ—martyr, stigmata, ascetic—all attest to bodily deformation in favor of a “higher” formation. In other words, the crucified body has entered theology as a transcendental plane of immanence (recapitulation itself) that would organize all subsequent Christian thinking. Moreover, the responsibility will fall to later centuries, specifically in the theologies of Tertullian and Athanasius, to perfect the physical redemption doctrine of recapitulation, doctrines which requires the precise logic deployed by Irenaeus.

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<sup>70</sup> In a rare positive nod to religion, Deleuze himself would note the freedom the incarnation gave to deformed bodies. In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), Deleuze writes: “Insofar as God was incarnated, crucified, descended, ascended to heaven, and so on, the form or the Figure was no longer rigorously linked to essence, but to what, in principle, is its opposite: the event, or even the changeable, the accident” (100).

<sup>71</sup> For more on the concept of “plasticity,” see Catherine Malabou’s *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2010).

Of all the problems to which philosophy can and has addressed itself, Deleuze fears the exhaustion, or containment, of virtuality, a fear which will continue throughout the entirety of his work. If philosophy is the art of creating concepts, then his own concepts are thought-events constructed to counter-actualize the ontological reserves of the virtual. Deleuze's fears do not give rise to a conservatism, but, as Agamben will note<sup>72</sup>, a critical attempt at ceaseless "ungrounding," an attempt that could be said to be the ultimate task of *Difference and Repetition*—the locating of a generative principle of ungrounding.<sup>73</sup> Deleuze notes: "Beyond the grounded and grounding repetitions, a repetition of *ungrounding* on which depend both that which enchains and that which liberates, that which dies and that which lives within repetition."<sup>74</sup> According to Deleuze, virtuality needs to be protected in philosophy, from religion, from power, from Popes and kings. The problem is Bergsonian, constituting the greatest threat to immanence, a threat which constitutes Deleuze's anxiety about religion, which is that religion captures immanent energy fields, hierarchizes them, and makes them attributes or properties of the plane of transcendence.<sup>75</sup> Deleuze and Guattari are clear in their position on religion: "Transcendence enters as soon as movement of the infinite is stopped," and it is religion understood to be the agent of stoppage.<sup>76</sup> But what if the opposite is the case?

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<sup>72</sup> See Agamben's "Absolute Immanence," section titled "Unattributable Life," in *Potentiality: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 233.

<sup>73</sup> Carl Raschke's 2011 article on Žižek and monstrosity of Christ is instructive here, for he locates the principle of "ungrounding" first in Schelling. See Raschke's "The Monstrosity of Žižek's Christianity," in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 11 no. 2 (Spring 2011): 13-20.

<sup>74</sup> See Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p. 275. The ethic of counter-actualization is nothing but a concept of redemption aimed at keeping the virtual breathing, albeit idling just below the surface of judgment and analysis, much as Rogue Riderhood's admirers need to keep him just below the threshold of perceptual life so that they do not confuse the 'spark' life within with the wretched mound of flesh before them.

<sup>75</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*, especially the chapter titled, "The Plane of Immanence."

<sup>76</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 47.

For Deleuze, the transcendent does not threaten immanence by being transcendent, but by virtue of capturing the vital energies of an immanent field.<sup>77</sup> Deleuze's main strategy for protecting immanence is to claim that immanence is all there is, albeit a construction, with the exception of THE PLANE, and that moments in the organization of transcendence are violent towards the vitalist energies.

It cannot be denied that for Irenaeus God is transcendent, first creator, perfect, without parts ("what contains is greater than what is contained"<sup>78</sup>), uncircumscribable, and so on, but if Christ is the form through which we know the world, if Christ is the agent of visibility of God, if Christ is the body in which we participate, if Christ is the agent through which the world was made, if Christ is the beginning and end of all things, if there was never a moment when Christ was not, and there will never be a moment when he is not, then what use is God? God accomplishes very little for Irenaeus, nor does he care much for his definition<sup>79</sup>, but his role as designer and decision cannot be underestimated. God is act itself, as Irenaeus, like Philo before him, is constantly battling notions that God is pure, eternal inactivity, isolated from the earthly sphere.<sup>80</sup> God as articulated by Irenaeus is a code producing the Word, internal to himself, and through this production creating an unruly, deformed body of potential—the eternal generation of the son.<sup>81</sup> The unruly, deformed body is Christ. God can produce the code at any time in history

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<sup>77</sup> Immanence in-itself is compromised when it becomes immanent *to* another field, however it is configured, and even when it is in the name of "immanence" that attempts are made to electrify the transcendental field; "immanence" must be in quotes because what is here getting passed off as "immanence" may indeed be exactly what Deleuze is referring to, yet it's only value is its attributive function, i.e., the fact that it is involved in a dynamic of participation.

<sup>78</sup> *Against Heresies* 2.1.2 See also 4.11.2

<sup>79</sup> See 2.28.2 and 2.13.4.

<sup>80</sup> See Philo's "A Treatise on the Account of the Creation of the World, as Given by Moses," *The Works of Philo Judaeus: The Contemporary of Josephus* (London, 1854).

<sup>81</sup> See the discussion of Irenaeus in *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, by Catherine Mowry Lacugna, especially pages 27-29.

because he used this code to produce the world (Christ's near point). In order to *think an incarnate God*, Christ has to be conceptualized as a co-creator.<sup>82</sup>

God is a code because not only is the world his design, but there inheres internal to life a *telos* directing humanity to be like him. This *telos* should be understood not as a direction but as a design. The *telos* is a code that needs to be awakened, not completed—once it is awakened there is no end, for the “end” is actually the immantizing of God and/or the divinizing of humanity. One could counter that the concept of resurrection is yet another form of bodily transcendence, but it is not that simple. For Irenaeus, since Christ took a bodily form, then the resurrection is bodily as well. Moreover, it is not a radical break but an improvement, and about as concrete as Paul's “heavenly bodies.” Irenaeus writes that “since men are real, their transformation must also be real, since they will not go into non-being but on the contrary will progress in being.”<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

Why is immanence constructed? Why is it appealed to? Why make the body of Christ so important? A few ways of answering these difficult questions present themselves. According to Deleuze, the purpose of conceptual personae is to establish modalities of life, and the logic employed by Irenaeus will make him famous for this precise reason, for it is his theory of recapitulation that will authorize the great disciplinary practices within Christianity. The conceptual persona that is Christ succeeds for Irenaeus because it remains latent in the disciplined practices of monasticism, for it is here that the living monks will be understood through the categories of crucifixion and martyrdom, replete with all the complex temporalities

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<sup>82</sup> Wilson, *Deification and the Rule of Faith*, p. 39.

<sup>83</sup> *Against Heresies* 5.36.1.

that we saw on Christ's virtual body. Irenaeus' refinement of the concept of recapitulation will have a lasting influence on late ancient christology. As we shall see, Tertullian's valorization of the flesh, which was itself a quasi-transcendentalism of the Christ body, will rely heavily on Irenaeus' innovations.

Irenaeus was the first thinker in this genealogy, and the rationale in selecting his thought from among the many others in late antiquity is that he begins a trajectory of thinking eventually finding expression in the body. In part thanks to Athanasius, the practices of the ascetics will be conceptualized as recapitulated beings, as beings that have the powers to unify the cosmos and harmonize their surroundings. This genealogy is strategic in that sense, i.e., it seeks to define a concept of Christ later to structure the manner in which ascetics are interpreted. Recapitulation is the one of the first major conceptual innovations in that trajectory.

## Chapter 2

# Flesh, Body, Earth—Tertullian

### Chapter abstract:

As was argued in the previous chapter, recapitulation secured the ontological protection of Christ. Irenaeus placed Christ in all the important philosophical points (near, immanent and end point), so as to guarantee for Christ the highest possible cosmological and terrestrial importance. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of conceptual personae helped theorize the relationship between philosophical personae and the instituting of immanence. However, the implications for the Christ in material life remained unexploited. In this chapter it will be argued that the concept of flesh, as it is conceived by Tertullian, relies on the notion of recapitulation. Recapitulation can be credited with Tertullian's insistence that Christ, who is flesh, is the "fabric of life." Expansive, incarnated, composed of blood and spirit, flesh occupies the central position of Tertullian's christology. Moreover, this study is meant to enrich and engage the recent popularity of contemporary materialist ontologies, negative theologies or death of God/immanentist philosophical theologies.



## **Introduction**

As the second thinker to be addressed, what does Tertullian add to this portrait of Christ? It was said that through his concept of recapitulation Irenaeus constructed the frame and stretched the canvas upon which this portrait of Christ is painted. Tertullian distinguishes himself from many ancient thinkers through his concept of flesh, and it is this aspect that adds texture and body, so to speak, to this portrait. Embracing the paradoxes of embodiment, defilement and divinity, Tertullian outlines a transcendental materialism under the name of flesh, a word which defines his christology more than any other.

The first step was taken by Irenaeus, and he made it possible to think of Christ as a substitute for the All, since Christ was understood to embody all that came before it. The act of recapitulation erased the ancient “stain” and made possible a life in God once again. But Irenaeus didn’t quite address the question of materiality. For him, Christ assumed the form of all bodies, not necessarily all life. Tertullian, in this second operation, establishes this claim—Christ is a substitute for the “fabric of life.” Tertullian will not sidestep gross materiality, claiming that Christ was even “abject” in nature, a fact proving the very reality of his incarnation. Another unforeseen consequence of Tertullian’s christology is that because flesh is the common substrate between God and man, a possibility is created for a relay between life and body, and between body and life. In other words, it makes possible an ontological slippage (to be addressed in the following chapter) between a part and a whole in such a way that an alteration of the whole can take place through a part. By creating a middle term between divinity and materiality, flesh, which is a metonym for Christ, authorizes a mutual becoming between the ground of a being and

the being itself. The cosmos can be moved from a body through immanent causality—this is where this analysis of late antiquity is ultimately headed.

### **The Performance of Flesh**

*This is an age of circulating flesh.*  
Stelarc, performance artist.

In 1989, a little known artist from Brooklyn by the name of Andres Serrano took a photograph of a small crucifix submerged in a glass jar (Figure 4). At first glance, the picture is beautiful—Christ, clearly embattled with his head hung low, is bathed in golden light. The outlines of Christ's body are nearly lost in the luminescent glow. The nail holes in Christ's right hand are clearly visible, and are the most focused part of the image, while the left side of his body drifts towards nondifferentiation. Only a cloth covers his emaciated torso. If you didn't know better, you'd say the work is from a pious Catholic.



Figure 4. Andres Serrano. *Piss Christ*. 1987.

Nothing at first glance would lead you to think it is one of the most controversial, and famous, works of contemporary art, but if you read the title—*Piss Christ*—you’d suddenly realize that the golden hue is that of the artist’s own bodily fluids. Serrano submerged the crucifix in a jar of his own urine, and *Piss Christ* was born. In 1989, when it was included in a Washington D.C. gallery, outrage ensued, mostly because the work was part of a traveling show receiving a portion of its funding from the National Endowment of Arts. The political right followed with law suits, criticism and congressional pressure to cut funding to the N.E.A. for supporting such obscene and anti-religious art. After numerous legal battles and oversight committees, funding stipulations were made, and the N.E.A. survived intact. An ambivalent Catholic, Serrano’s interests in the symbolism and ideas of religion spread like wildfire throughout the art world, but though his case was one of the earliest, it was only the beginning.

As New York art critic Eleanor Heartney points out, aside from the “culture wars” of the eighties and nineties, which was Serrano’s milieu, something very “catholic” was going on in the art world, and Serrano is but one player, merely representing deeper trends within the recent phenomenon of bodily materiality in art.<sup>1</sup> Heartney cites an interview with popular B.B.C. art critic and nun, Sister Wendy, to make a point. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Sister Wendy refuses to understand Serrano’s work as blasphemous. Rather, in regards to the prevalence of violence, sex, lust and nudity in Western art, Wendy is asked about her reaction to the little known Brooklyn artist’s crucifix submerged in urine. Sister Wendy replies that, “It would never have occurred to me to be shocked.” “I’m a Catholic,” she offers. She continues, “God looked at his creation and saw that it was good”; “There is nothing amiss in any part of the human body.” Heartney uses Sister Wendy to illustrate a point about the growing tide of 60’s and 70’s

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<sup>1</sup> Heartney, Eleanor. *Postmodern Heretics: Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* (NY: Midmarch Arts Press, 2004), pgs. 4-6.

performance artists mutilating, biting, scarring, burning and cutting their bodies so as to embody social criticism, activities continuing to this day. Which is not to say that all Catholics approve of *Piss Christ*, destroyed as it was in the spring of 2011 by conservative, axe-wielding Catholics when on display in the French town of Avignon.

Heartney's point is this: many of the original, international performance artists whom spawned the movement were Catholics or from Catholic countries. Gunter Brus, Hermann Nitsch (Figures 5 and 6), Carolee Schneeman, Chris Burden, Piero Manzoni, Arnulf Rainer, Vito Acconci and Linda Montano, among others, were all beholden to what Heartney terms the "Catholic imagination," which she defines as an "incarnational consciousness" towards the paradoxes of embodiment.



Figure 5. Video still from one Hermann Nitsch's 1960's blood rituals, which were part of the Orgien Mysterien Theater.



Figure 6. Photo of Hermann Nitsch by Sven Eisermann.<sup>2</sup>

Those paradoxes include the very concept of the incarnation, sexual desire merging with desire for God, the ability to inscribe “immaterial” social realities on a material body, as well as the often blurred boundaries between the grotesque and the beautiful. Heartney is not saying that postmodern performance art has its beginnings in Catholicism, for one should look predominantly to the crisis of the easel picture after Modernism, the bloodbath of Vietnam, sexual liberation and gender equality for its ideological roots. However, according to Heartney, there is something peculiar about the way Catholics, or those from Catholic countries, are using

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<sup>2</sup> These two images of Hermann Nitsch were taken from Cvlt Nation, article titled “Sabbath, Bloody Sabbath: The Sacrificial Rites of Hermann Nitsch.” Website accessed on April 24, 2012.

their bodies in ways that others are not.<sup>3</sup> The Catholics are more violent, bloody, masochistic and sexually oriented, observes Heartney. The manner in which they employ their bodies, and its flesh and fluids, can be explained by appeal to the Catholic theological and philosophical tradition, which Heartney does effectively. Yet her text cannot help but make the point that there *is something Catholic* embedded within performance art. Or, as I will argue, there is something very performative in early Catholicism more generally. What *is Catholic* about performance art is the relation of the enfleshed body to the social body.

What follows here should be understood as a detailed study that can be easily put into conversation with Heartney's arguments. Are not monastics performance artists? Do they not also blur the boundaries between pain and pleasure, beauty and the grotesque? Are not their bodies sites of social and cosmological dramas? Did they not have audiences as well? If *contemporary* performance artists use the body, and its flesh, to inscribe social realities in a very particular manner, and if this method can be found in Christianity, then this study traces the *ancient* manner in which the flesh of a body is understood to be an equivalent, or substitute, of the "social body." Foucault and Mary Douglas made the point decades ago: because the body is inscribed in political relations, then any alteration to the body can be read as reflection of that power relation.<sup>4</sup> Naturally, this alteration can be made in the direction of the solidification of power, but it can also be a critique of that power. Late antiquity did not hold a notion of a secular social body as we do today, but an equivalent notion encompassing the network of bodily and social relations was present, and we shall find it in Tertullian's theological concept of flesh.

Tertullian did not have a theory of the body, though he does use the term for many categories as

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<sup>3</sup> See especially Heartney's chapter titled, "Body and Soul: The Workings of the Incarnational Consciousness" in *Postmodern Heretics*.

<sup>4</sup> For more on Mary Douglas, see her *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Conceptions of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966). Gail Weiss and Graham Ward, each in their own way, speak of the relation between the human body and the social body in specific cases. See Weiss' *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

do the Stoics, since for the Stoics only bodies exist.<sup>5</sup> Yet, since the purpose of this study is to track how Tertullian's notion of flesh becomes enfolded within the imagery and christology of ascetic literature, especially the ascetic body, a theory of the body inserts itself as a consequence of his divinely embodied materialism. In other words, Tertullian's robust theory of the body will ultimately find itself expressed in Athanasius.

More than a mere relation, however, for Tertullian there is something consubstantial between our bodies and the enfleshed social. Tertullian's statement that Christ, as flesh, is the "fabric of life" will be the first point to be taken up, as it is here that a very physical body (Christ) is constructed in such a way as to be determined by, and determining of, ontological and social realities.

### **A Special Form of Earth**

"What is flesh but earth in a special form?"  
Tertullian

Rather than offering a general summary of Tertullian's writings, our focus will be specific: what role and function did recapitulation have in the construction of a univocal Christ, such that Christ can be said of all names and things? What is flesh? Together, Irenaeus and Tertullian would do more than any other to entrench logos christology in theological speculation, and it is recapitulation that allows the full consequences of the logos-Christ to come to fruition. In its simplest rendering, Irenaeus finds that Christ sums up, completes and perfects the corrupt Adamic body. But recapitulation's role in constructing a more general robust theory of the incarnation is best summed up by theologian John Macquarrie:

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<sup>5</sup> Sellars, John. *Stoicism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006). For more on Stoic physics, see Long, A. A., *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 2nd edition (London: Duckworth, 1986); Sambursky, S., *The Physics of the Stoics* (London: Routledge, 1959).



It is not that, at a given moment, God adds the activities of reconciliation to his previous activities, or that we can set a time when his reconciling activity began. Rather, it is the case that at *a given time there was a new and decisive interpretation of an activity* that had always been going on, an activity that is equiprimordial with creation itself. [my emphasis]<sup>6</sup>

The temporality of reconciliation as “already going on,” especially when it becomes an attribute of lived bodies, is the interpretative moment in christology when God’s act of creation becomes immanent to the world. It is through the recapitulated Christ that this activity can be understood to be implicated, in all times, with creation.

Why Tertullian? Born in Carthage around the year 160 C.E., what makes Tertullian so interesting as a late ancient thinker is that he, to quote Virginia Burrus, “enthusiastically embraces the challenge presented by Christianity’s most controversial teaching regarding the divine incarnation and fleshly resurrection,” accomplishing this feat, no doubt, by way of “boldly placing flesh at the center of his theological construction.”<sup>7</sup> In our reading of Tertullian, our interest in flesh will be confined to two areas: recapitulation and body-ontology. But why flesh, and why today?

### **Flesh Today**

According to Richard Kearney, “The theme of flesh was largely ignored by Western metaphysics since Plato.”<sup>8</sup> The same can’t be said for the past twenty years. If we can situate the popularity of flesh in post-metaphysical philosophy and theology, flesh is more often than not a trope for the ground on which we are constituted, akin to a material transcendental—in short, flesh is the

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<sup>6</sup> Macquarrie, John. *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Burrus, *Saving Shame*, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Kearney, Richard. “Sacramental Eschatology and Anticipation,” in *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now*, eds. Neal DeRoo, John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Ashgate, 2009), p. 56.

condition of embodiment, establishing the politics of touch, the phenomenological excess, the gift-gifting element, that which makes us akin to animal life, the source of affect, performance, the field upon which our self dissolves and co-becomes with its surroundings, or, finally, flesh is the final truth of Christianity—divine life incarnate in all its vulgarity and sublimity, violence and passivity, in all its dirtiness, muck, vulgar eroticism and erotic ontology. For Tertullian, as for today, flesh is the dominant category where the contestation for Christian truth finds itself played out. However, to understand the provenance of flesh’s popularity in contemporary thought, we must first go through phenomenology, as it is here that Husserl’s *epoche*, or reduction of all transcendencies will be used to find in flesh a transcendental and formal property. According to Ricouer on Husserl, “To say that the flesh is absolutely here, and so heterogeneous with respect to any set of geometric coordinates, is equivalent to saying that it is nowhere in terms of objective spatiality.”<sup>9</sup> As we shall see, Tertullian would no doubt agree. Flesh in Husserl’s account is an irreducible formal power, and it is this “nowhere” that will eventually give flesh its normative, constructive role in materialist ontologies. Like Kant’s manifold, Husserl’s flesh is inextricably bound to material forms all the while remaining beneath the radar of conscious perception.<sup>10</sup> However, though Husserl brings flesh out of the confines of a narrow, and ancient, theological discourse with his *Cartesian Meditations*, Richard Kearney observes that Husserl only pointed in the direction of a philosophy of the flesh.

In his *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty responds to Husserl’s use of the flesh: “The seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It is this Visibility, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have called flesh, and one

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<sup>9</sup> Ricouer, Paul. Quote cited by Don Ihde in *Expanding Hermeneutics: Visualism in Science* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Hopkins, Burt C. eds. *Husserl in Contemporary Context: Prospects and Projects for Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Press, 1996), p. 86.

knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it.” Merleau-Ponty continues, “...flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance.”<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty believes that we need an “old term” if we want to designate the rich materiality that is flesh. He decides on the term “element,” understood as an “incarnate principle,” an element of being.<sup>12</sup> This determination of flesh as an omnipowerful, transcendental category of metaphysics will go largely dormant, as Existentialism gave way to French post-structuralism, and the embodied, genetic semiotic will be found in linguistic constitution and no longer the material constitution of bodies.

For the phenomenological structure of flesh to make its way into theories of immanence and embodiment, it would first require a mediating theology that finds as its task the construction of new theological categories beginning from the dynamism of signs, not the stasis of the signified. Hence, the marriage of French post-structuralism and American pragmatism in the form of Death of God theology. Thomas Altizer, Gabriel Vahanian, Paul Van Buren, among others within the movement would concern themselves with what one could call a Radical Tillichianism—religion being immanent in culture. What we cannot forget about the Death of God theologians is their emphasis on the constructive power of the immanent as sole provider of theological material. While the theological task had historically been to display the transcendence of the incarnational paradox, now we begin from immanence and stay there; thereafter, if one discerns flickers of the transcendent, it is always as an effect of the field of immanence. Immanence in terms of signs is no longer understood as an achievement, but a property of the given.

With strong backgrounds in phenomenology, and indebted to the task of process theology (and its emphasis on God’s activity as opposed to his being), continental theorists such as Catherine

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<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 139-140.

<sup>12</sup> Found in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* (New York, Routledge, 2004), p. 256.

Keller, Michael Hardt, Karmen Mackendrick, Richard Kearney and John D. Caputo, among others, have each in their own unique way used the phenomenological structure of flesh—the *sense* of flesh—to arrive at an affirmation of immanence. Not to be equated with the body, the flesh, writes Caputo in Deleuzian and Derridean keys, is the virtual plane of events, while for Hardt the flesh is “the vital materiality of existence...Flesh subtends existence; it is its very potentiality.”<sup>13</sup> Terming his theology a carnal theology, Caputo writes: “The flesh is simultaneously a site of vulnerability and of pleasure, of bodies that so pulsate with sensation that their acting in the world is suspended and the flesh itself becomes all the world there is. These are bodies that are saturated with themselves, scenes of “auto-affection,” as Michel Henry puts it.”<sup>14</sup> Caputo’s usage of flesh serves more than a few functions. First, flesh as the site of events constructs a shared substrate from which to create a material continuum between flesh and the shared weakness of (the name of) God and humanity, a continuum defined by the impersonal, singular event. Second, his appeal to flesh, when contrasted with the risen body of Christ (a body *sans* flesh), creates the opportunity to equate the latter with conceptions of the post-human, techno-infused bodies of the twenty-first century and beyond, i.e., angelic, ghostly immaterial bodies of our future digital technology. Risen bodies, or bodies without flesh, may be idealized repetitions of events already occurring, at the transcendental level, in actual bodies.

Caputo writes:

On my accounting, the risen body, held suspect as a literal fact, is an attempt to release the event that stirs within the body, to release the sense, or at least a sense, of the body. The risen body is an idealization of the empirical body which is trying to express the truth

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<sup>13</sup> Hardt, “Pasolini,” p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> Caputo, John D. “Bodies Still Unseen; Events Still Unsaid,” in *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (April 2007): 73-86.

of the body, the event that takes in the body – as an event of mobility, velocity, light, power, and incorruptibility.<sup>15</sup>

Also having his theoretical provenance in phenomenology, and situating flesh as a categorical transcendental, Kearney describes his project as a “micro-eschatology” or “the passing from protest to prophecy and from prophecy to the retrieval of the sacred in the everyday,” all the while strategically utilizing the phenomenological reduction. Kearney calls Merleau-Ponty’s work on the flesh a “eucharistics of profane perception,” and counter-signs flesh’s sacramental value. Catherine Keller, in the tradition of process theology, writes:

What if we begin to read the World from the vantage point of its own fecund multiplicity, its flux into flesh, its overflow?...A chaomic Christ would represent the flow of a word that was always already materialized, more and less and endlessly, a flow that unblocks the hope of an incarnation....It takes place within the shared, spatiotemporal body of all creatures.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to Keller, Caputo and Kearney, there is a field of contemporary Catholic phenomenologists appealing to flesh so as to advance the pervasive transcendental conditions of flesh, and, by a philosophical sleight of hand, find the “God” of materiality in flesh itself. According to Caputo, these thinkers—notably Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry—constitute an important segment of the return to religion in contemporary continental philosophy.<sup>17</sup> Appearing first in *In Excess* (2004), to be picked up subsequently in *The Erotic Phenomenon* (2007), flesh is for Marion is an example of a saturated phenomenon that gives itself without relation, and, *vis-à-vis* a critique of Descartes, flesh is the shared horizon of ego and other. Flesh is not a simple concept for Marion, and cannot be summarized easily; however, what can be said of flesh is that it operates at a crucial intersection of problems for Marion, including the

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<sup>15</sup> Caputo, Jack, “Bodies Still Unseen,” p. 80

<sup>16</sup> Keller, *Face of the Deep*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> See John Caputo’s review of Jean-Luc Marion’s *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol. 74 no. 4 (2006): 986.

conditions of phenomenality, the *nonidentity* of God and “truth” of the incarnation—all facets indebted to the Husserlian tradition of phenomenology.

With all the options for flesh, what does Tertullian, a North African thinker born in the middle of the second century C.E., add to the resurgence of flesh as a linguistic intervention into twentieth and twenty-first century theo-philosophical discourse? What Tertullian has to add to the conversation is, perhaps, *the very existence of the conversation*. It was Tertullian who made flesh the central paradox of the Christian incarnation, and his thinking on the subject is reflected, in structure and content, in the orthodox creedal debates occurring long after his time. What does flesh do today? Flesh allows us to commune, but how? Flesh is the *a priori* of sensation, but is sensation a given or a capacity that requires our crucifixion? Today, flesh is a metonym for resonance, capability, performance, embodiment and communication in all its varieties. However, this *is the case* because christology originally laid out this image of thought, authorizing a plane of immanence under the name of flesh itself, and Christ as a conceptual persona is but another name for flesh, as we shall see with Tertullian.

In order to grasp the constructed nature of flesh, we must turn to classical sources, as it is here where the specific logic is laid out before us. Here we can better understand how christology initially authorizes flesh, and conversely, what flesh authorizes—the ascetic body. I turn to these sources to bring to light another discourse of flesh that has recently made its way into theory—it is the spectacularly deformed, enfleshed bodies of ascetics, imagined by Patricia Cox Miller, Virginia Burrus, among others. Within this second discourse of the flesh, we find an “athleticism” of the flesh, a concept of the flesh not as a common site of embodiment, as we saw with contemporary immanentist theologies, but flesh as a difficult and laborious end-result of a

specific bodily technology. We find a concept of constructed flesh, a body of flesh that performs a sublime incarnation only at the limit of what a body can do, not flesh as phenomenologically *a priori* or the condition of possibility of embodiment.

## **Flesh Again**

From St. Paul to Tertullian to Athanasius, who doesn't speak of flesh in early Christianity?

Translating the Greek noun *sarx*, flesh is a multivalent concept in the New Testament, used at least 135 times in its noun form and 10 times in its adjectival form.<sup>18</sup> Found predominantly in the writings of Paul, its usage can be found in twenty one of the twenty seven New Testament books. The origin of the word *sarx* can be traced to Homeric times, and can be found in all the literature between then and the years of the New Testament's composition. Writes Burton of its usage,

‘*Sarx*,’ properly meaning flesh, the soft portion of the body of an animal, living or once living, retains this meaning throughout all the periods we have been studying. In them all it is also used by metonymy for the whole body...Neither in non-Jewish nor in Jewish writers does the term seem to have acquired any ethical significance.<sup>19</sup>

Though Plato, unlike Seneca, held a notion that *soma* was a hindrance to the intellectual life of the soul, Plato does not use *sarx* in his vocabulary, nor does he consider the body, and its matter, to be inherently evil. For purposes of simplification, since the relation between these terms deserves more attention than given here, often when *sarx* is used in Hellenistic literature it is as a part of *soma*, i.e., as the soft outer layer of a body, and does not figure in ethical ontologies.

Though Tertullian was writing in Latin, he would have been familiar with Greek usage of *sarx*, and Tertullian, like Paul, continues to use flesh in its general historical linguistic context, but not

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<sup>18</sup> Dayton, Wilbert T. “The New Testament Conception of Flesh.” Found on April 22, 2012 at [http://www.revdoc.net/conception\\_of\\_flesh%20Dayton.htm](http://www.revdoc.net/conception_of_flesh%20Dayton.htm), by the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.

<sup>19</sup> I am highly indebted to David Wilbert for his analysis, and for discovery this informative study by Burton, where it is cited. See Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Spirit, Soul and Flesh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918), chapters 1-6.

without a major innovation. Flesh is for the New Testament writers a metonym for the whole of man, “by human generation and heredity.”<sup>20</sup>

If flesh stands for anything, it is a trope for the passions, desires and imperfections; flesh can mean anything from humanity in general to our post-lapsarian condition or the corrupt telos in our behavior. Flesh can be family lineage, the object of desire or desire itself. But according to Dayton, “There is no uniformly evil reference in the New Testament use of *sarx*.”<sup>21</sup> Caputo sums it up nicely when he writes that flesh in the New Testament is “everything that is both vulnerable and or able to be wounded.”<sup>22</sup> In short, flesh is *not* what hinders the construction of the heavenly body of 2 Corinthians 5, where we will “not be spirits without bodies, but we will put on new heavenly bodies.” Flesh needs to be forged in relation with the construction of our “new heavenly bodies,” not forgotten.

Given flesh’s profound ability to mark the (down) Fall of man, it is clear that Christ assuming flesh will pose the most daunting question to the early thinkers: Though it was good for humanity, how was Christ’s flesh not hazardous to a strong conception of God? Tertullian asks the question outright in *De Carne Christi*: “Let us examine our Lord's bodily substance, for about His spiritual nature all are agreed. It is His flesh that is in question. Its verity and quality are the points in dispute. Did it ever exist? Whence was it derived? And of what kind was it?”<sup>23</sup> Flesh, it appears, has a long and storied history in philosophy and theology, and its strategic appropriation stems from its ability to support those seeking transcendence or immanence: flesh accommodates. In her reading of texts after Tertullian’s *De Carne Christi*, such as Augustine’s

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<sup>20</sup> Dayton, Wilbert T. “The New Testament Conception of Flesh,” section titled “III. New Testament Context.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. section titled “III. New Testament Context.”

<sup>22</sup> Caputo, Jack. *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 1.



*City of God*, the *Genesis Rabbah*, and Palladius' *Lausiac History*, Burrus finds in the late antique conception of flesh a transcendent excess.<sup>24</sup> Citing Plato's *khora*, a term exercised most notably by Derrida in *Khora*, Burrus finds that materiality is already associated with excess, and that the Christian imaginary furthered this term to describe ascetic bodies, Christ's body, as well as various other tropes. It is the case, then, that we can thank Tertullian's exceedingly complex treatment of flesh for its resilience, morphological capability, and overall ability to work in/from/for all types of immanentist or transcendent theologies?

Flesh is activated for Tertullian only in relation to a broad spectrum of other concepts: the resurrection conquered flesh and yet, paradoxically, the incarnation brought flesh; flesh is sin, yet it was Jesus' flesh that made possible the removal of ours; flesh marks Jesus' strength but our weakness; flesh is the hindrance to the Christian project but the avenue, according to Peter Brown, through which the Christian project of desire defines itself against a Greco-Roman sensibility.<sup>25</sup> The task before us is how to think flesh as ontologically generative, as a transcendental, and inhabit the problem to which flesh is the solution. What is flesh a solution to? Though christology has received the brunt of much post-metaphysical critique, accused as it is of translating the humanity of Jesus into the high christology of the episcopate, eventually finding itself equated with authoritarian Vatican politics and abuses of power, here we are reading christology as a necessary ingredient in bringing our attention back to the project of (i) bodily construction and (ii) forms of resistance built on a structural relation between the body and the social.

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<sup>24</sup> Burrus, Virginia. "Carnal Excess: Flesh at the Limit of Earthy Imagination," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (Volume 17, Number 2, Summer 2009), pgs. 247-248.

<sup>25</sup> Writes Peter Brown in *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), "By concentrating in a single-minded manner on sexual restraint and on sexual heroism, the Christians of the age of Justin had found their way to presenting themselves as the bearers of a truly universal religion" (60).

## The Fabric of Life: Flesh and Life in Tertullian

Famous for saying that Jesus' burial and resurrection are certain because of their very absurdity, for claiming that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the liquids in the womb, Tertullian's texts represent a mid-second-century struggle to make sense of the claim that God donned human flesh. We can assume from the highly polemical nature of this former jurist's writings, this assumption was not shared by all Christian groups. As was the milieu in which Irenaeus was writing, the battle for orthodoxy is raging, and Tertullian, as was the bishop from Lyons, was instrumental in establishing exactly what "orthodoxy" is. However, I do not wish to support orthodox theologians in their rhetorical battles, but merely to track a problem inherent to the orthodox position, i.e., the Christ as a body-ontology and its relation to flesh.

Tertullian was born in Carthage, North Africa, held a position as a jurist in Rome and spent many decades defending orthodoxy, but moved away from the church late in his life, around 207, due to his beliefs in Montanism. Despite his moving away from the Catholic position, the central tenets of his ideas remained "Catholic" after his Montanist period.<sup>26</sup> God is the supreme being, unborn, eternal, without beginning nor end; the Fall occurred because Adam ceased to mind the things of God; the Father is the whole substance while the Son is a part; the Father and the Son are not identical but distinct in degree and person; the Word is logos, being co-present at the time of creation. Tertullian, in *Against Praxeas*, writes "Thenceforth God willed to create, and created, through the Word, with Christ as his assistant and minister."<sup>27</sup> Like Irenaeus, Tertullian had enemies—pagan polytheists, Marcion, Valentinus, and Monarchians.<sup>28</sup> As proof of his

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<sup>26</sup> Farrar, Frederic William. *Lives of the Fathers: Sketches of Church History in Biography*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1889), p. 139.

<sup>27</sup> *Against Praxeas* 8. Cited from Betteson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> Bowden, John and Aloys Grillmeier. *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* (London, 1965), p. 118.

“victory” in the battle over orthodoxy, much of Tertullian’s theology is reflected in the creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon (451).<sup>29</sup>

Tertullian advances Christian theology through his use of ornate rhetoric combined with an uncompromising logic, which he generously employs to defeat the various heretical positions, whom he frequently refers to as “devils.” Preferring to use the term Son as opposed to logos, he would nonetheless advance the cosmic scope of Christian reflection on Christ through his creative deployment of recapitulation.<sup>30</sup> Exceedingly complex, as we saw with Irenaeus, recapitulation gives rise to certain theological operations, and it is these operations guiding the discussion below.

Nowhere is Tertullian’s thought more complex than in his discussion of recapitulation. Though assumed and implicit, Tertullian speaks directly of recapitulation in but a few occasions, notably in his “On the Epistle to the Laodiceans” and *De carne Christi*. Tertullian does not, like Irenaeus, spend pages upon pages theorizing how Christ summed up humanity. But there is a good reason for this—Tertullian merely assumes this is the case, a fact allowing him even more freedom to explore the “absurdity” and impossibility of the incarnation without having to justify it from new principles. For Tertullian, as for Irenaeus, recapitulation “both fulfills and corrects,” and while the logic is that of Christ explicating humanity and implicating it towards a more perfect future, we must be wary of terming this logic a dialectic of any sort.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, a feedback loop does exist between two sets of operations: (i) Christ and God, wherein Christ assumes the form of flesh so that God can become whole again (so that diversity once again rests in divine unity, a diversity caused by the fall), and (ii) humanity and Christ, where Christ assumes flesh so that our bodies,

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<sup>29</sup> Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Volume 2, p. 314.

<sup>30</sup> Walker, Williston. *A History of the Christian Church* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919), p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> Osborn, Eric. *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 20.

the fabric of flesh, can become whole again. Yet if there is a dizzying amount of reconciliations at work, and they are numerous, they exist not between humanity and Christ nor between God and Christ. Rather, the multiple reconciliations are justified by a single gravity-orienting thought—the entire ontological drama occurs on Christ’s body, for thanks to Irenaeus the Christic body is now the paradigmatic ontological image to which Tertullian will return to again and again in his writings. In a manner prefiguring the scholastic debate over univocity, Christ as arche-being is here said of all diverse beings, names, and events—for this is the purpose of a strong concept of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Christ is a form of extreme diversity in unity for Tertullian, and allows a form of *life itself* to emerge.

*De carne Christi* is a text written around 207 to address the Gnostic “heretics” Marcion, Valentinus and Apelles, who according to Tertullian deny the human nature of Christ by denying that he donned actual flesh. It is in this treatise, potentially written under Montanist leanings (Tertullian having become a Montanist around the year 199), where Tertullian expounds on the idea that, first, Christ had human flesh, and second, the notion of the incarnation requires he did so. A crucial argument he puts forward concerns the vastness of Christ’s body, and how Christ, aside from simply “summing” up humanity, is the fabric of life itself.<sup>33</sup> As one might expect, the concept of recapitulation plays a major role in the understanding of this fabric.

In *De carne Christi* 17, Tertullian reiterates recapitulation but with a biological emphasis: “And in this man God was born, taking the flesh of an ancient race, without the help, however, of the ancient seed, in order that He might reform it with a new seed, that is, in a spiritual manner, and

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<sup>32</sup> See Eugene Thacker’s *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) on univocity, and or for primary sources see Gilles Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense (1969 LS)* trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (1990: Columbia University Press, New York).

<sup>33</sup> Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, Volume 1, pgs. 139-144.

cleanse it by the removal of all its ancient stains.”<sup>34</sup> Strangely, Christ *does* take the flesh but *does not* take part in the ancient seed of Adam, a fact that seems to belie his insistence that Christ was fully enfleshed, for is it not the case that being born of “seed” is a most human property? Tertullian’s insistence seems odd, given that for him flesh is synonymous with the body (“I will at once state that I understand by the human body nothing else than that fabric of the flesh...”<sup>35</sup>), which should lead Tertullian to conclude that seed is crucial for a body to be a body. But this is not the case, and two reasons account for this fact.

First, the rationale is in part biblical conformity—Christ was born of a virgin, and so was conceived aside from the usual biological workings of male and female partnership. Christ took the flesh of the ancient race, but not the seed (of Adam), which makes flesh prior temporally and ontologically. A reasoned opposing argument might well claim that Adam’s initial seed was pure before its defilement in the Fall, given that Irenaeus makes no such distinction between Adam’s flesh and his seed. Yet what differentiates Tertullian’s conception of the Adam-Christ connection from that of Irenaeus is that Tertullian wants to take us one step further back—namely, before the seed—insisting on the potentiality of the medium as opposed to the product (Adam) created from that medium. Bringing together Genesis accounts of creation, Johannine pre-existence and Jesus’ virgin birth, Tertullian continues in the passage:

But the whole of this new birth was prefigured, as was the case in all other instances, in ancient type, the Lord being born as man by a dispensation in which a virgin was the medium. The earth was still in a virgin state, reduced as yet by no human labour, with no

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<sup>34</sup> *De carne Christi* 17. For more on the biological metaphors of “seed” as it relates to early conceptions of the body, see Carolyn Walker Bynum’s *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1995). Bynum’s work will be treated in greater detail in a following section.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

seed as yet cast into its furrows, when, as we are told, God made man out of it into a living soul.<sup>36</sup>

An analogy is set up—earth : soul :: virgin : Christ. In the first term of each set, we witness a sense of place (earth/virgin) as virtual-potential to the actualizations that result from its materiality (soul/Christ). Tertullian is indeed taking us to a place, but it is a place without a place. We are in the Garden of Eden before humans are created, and it is in a “virgin state”; the potentiality of sin, man and woman, are not yet created, and so there is no division between God and his creation, no separation. This is as close to “pure life” as we are going to get, a world of pure potentiality without the threat of lapsarian difference. Tertullian is here imagining a phenomenology of fertile, divine space. This is not God’s place, but divine space itself. Jean Luc Nancy’s meditations on the “giving place to the world” of the divine square nicely with this paradox, given that by equating Christ with flesh, and reinscribing Christ at the initial act of creation, Tertullian is here creating a new image of what creation is for the world, since the world is now flesh,<sup>37</sup> and further, since that fabric is, it turns out, what Tertullian will in the next sentence call flesh itself. Flesh is virgin, unmarked by “labor,” but the materiality of this virgin place does have tendencies, trajectories and behaviors; namely, it is geared towards the creation of forms. Akin to Deleuze’s distinction between the molar and the molecular, or smooth and striated space, Tertullian is able to protect Christ from the stultifying, world of formed bodies. Christ must remain a transcendental condition of bodies, as it is this placement as flesh, without the trajectory of a seed, protecting his generativity.

By refusing to grant Christ a human seed, naturally liable to decay and beholden to the normal telos from life to death, Tertullian is in conversation with Stoic and Middle Platonic reflection on

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>37</sup> See Jean Luc Nancy’s *Dis-enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2008), chapter “A Faith that is Nothing at All.”

the *spermatikoi logoi*, or the plurality of generative logos. Tertullian is speaking to a crowd well versed in the categories of Hellenistic reflection, and so, if Christ is to be equated with the logos, then he will be essentially unable to take a final form. Christ's task as logos is rather to remain materially generative, but materially inchoate, for the *spermatikoi logoi* are the divine ether organizing the world rather than being the world itself.<sup>38</sup> This was no doubt Irenaeus' concern as well, a concern which led him to recapitulation—a fear lest Christ form into a final body, to be ontologically protected.<sup>39</sup> But Tertullian adds to Irenaeus an auto-generating property wherein he is not dependent on the seed of another for his birth, a property that unbinds him from human modes of production, and hence, manifestation. Rather, Christ is the place, the earth itself, from which man is conceived, just as the virgin body of Mary was not dependent on male seed.

Tertullian continues:

As, then, the first Adam is thus introduced to us, it is a just inference that the second Adam likewise, as the apostle has told us, was formed by God into a quickening spirit out of the ground—in other words, out of a flesh which was unstained as yet by any human generation. But that I may lose no opportunity of supporting my argument from the name of Adam, why is Christ called Adam by the apostle, unless it be that, as man, He was of that earthly origin? And even reason here maintains the same conclusion, because it was by just the contrary operation that God recovered His own image and likeness, of which He had been robbed by the devil. For it was while Eve was yet a virgin, that the ensnaring word had crept into her ear which was to build the edifice of death. Into a virgin's soul, in like manner, must be introduced that Word of God which was to raise the fabric of life.<sup>40</sup>

Thus it is established: Christ is a second Adam *not* by a sharing of Adam's seed, but by the (i) substance through which Adam was formed (earth-flesh); (ii) act of conception (not *ex nihilo*);

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<sup>38</sup> David Dawson writes: "According to the Stoics, the divine logos had fragmented itself into the *logoi* that constituted human minds; the human mind was literally part of the divine ether that pervaded the cosmos. Like that cosmic fire, the *logos* of human reason was productive: it was able to generate "seeds," which were the principles and concepts of human thought," from *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 191.

<sup>39</sup> For more on Irenaeus and Adam's "seed" Denis Minns' *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010) pgs. 100-110.

<sup>40</sup> *De carne Christi* 17.

and (iii) place of conception (virgin-life). Taken together, we can begin to see the body of Christ being spread out ontologically. What is profound about Tertullian's thought at this juncture is the sheer exchangeability of Edenic place with the body of Christ, of flesh and life, of earth and virgin, of one body with another. In Tertullian's theorizations there is an interpretation of materiality as always-already infused with spirit, but which had had the "edifice of death."<sup>41</sup> The *contrary operation* that Tertullian refers to in the third sentence reveals the ontological slippage, or exchangeability of operations, within the incarnation. The slippage revolves around two operations. The first is familiar: God creates Adam from the earth, but death enters the earth through the virgin Eve. Now the Whole is ruined by a Part. Referred to as the *contrary operation*, God puts into a virgin Christ which is to "raise" the earth. Now the Whole is redeemed by a Part. Crucial to this operation is the exchangeability of mediums. The earth from which Adam was made must be in some way equivalent to the virginity of Mary.

What is at stake for Tertullian's materialism, if we can tentatively call it that, is precisely what is at stake for twentieth century materialist ontologies. As an organism, the human body inhabits this flesh-earth, and any attempt to "raise" up the status of life must be understood as an attempt to call attention to an element in brute material life that cannot be accounted for. In this raising up, the organism is reconfigured, reconciled and transfigured. Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze, and more recently, the materialisms of Jane Bennett, Freya Mathews, David Abrams, to name but a few, consistently appeal to the material/matter substratum to explain something about the human body. It is as much a post-humanism as it is a pre-humanism. Tertullian's spiritualizing of earth and the appeal to matter for contemporary theorists, for whom the appeal to matter is less spiritual than it is ecological, translates into a common materialist maxim—*the health of the*

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<sup>41</sup> *De carne Christi* 17.



*ground is the health of the organism.* Though in a passage previously cited Tertullian does equate flesh with body, he does not mean that the body, as we understand it today, is simply flesh as he understood it then.<sup>42</sup> Flesh was previously the defining attribute of the human, even preexisting the infusion of soul. Flesh was for Tertullian the thing that Christ assumed. Yet when Christ donned flesh, he united spirit and flesh. Christ is “one person in whom are conjoined two substances.”<sup>43</sup> While it is true, according to Geoffrey Dunn, that “What it means to be conjoined in one person was not something that was investigated here any further,”<sup>44</sup> it is not the case that the outcome of Tertullian’s christology fails to affect how bodies are conceived. Since Christ assumed flesh, and since it is established that the path to redemption is through Christ’s flesh, flesh on the human body becomes equally an instrument of divinization. We put on the flesh of Christ towards our divinity just as Christ put on the flesh of man towards his humanization. What this material-spiritual relation between human flesh and Christ’s flesh establishes is the method for thinking about the “true” site of Christian life. The true “site” is *all of Life*, since Christ is, effectively, the “fabric of Life.” In essence, just as Irenaeus established through recapitulation a transcendentalism of Christ, here we have the same idea though under the name of flesh. Christ remains a conceptual persona in both instances, despite the slight modification. And since any appeal to a transcendental in philosophical practice is likewise an appeal to the forms of life conditioned by the transcendental, Tertullian’s christology by default establishes a new way of conceiving divinely inspired bodies, a conception that will find expression in asceticism.

Below is a remarkable passage from *De Carne Christi* employing this logic:

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<sup>42</sup> The passage previously cited was, “I will at once state that I understand by the human body nothing else than that fabric of the flesh...”

<sup>43</sup> Dunn, Geoffrey. *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

We have thus far gone on the principle, that nothing which is derived from some other thing, however different it may be from that from which it is derived, is so different as not to suggest the source from which it comes. No material substance is without the witness of its own original, however great a change into new properties it may have undergone. There is this very body of ours, the formation of which out of the dust of the ground is a truth which has found its way into Gentile fables; it certainly testifies its own origin from the two elements of earth and water—from the former by its flesh, from the latter by its blood. Now, although there is a difference in the appearance of qualities (in other words, that which proceeds from something else is in development different), yet, after all, what is blood but red fluid? What is flesh but earth in a special form?<sup>45</sup>

The power of the “element” in matter acts as the transcendental ground, or an empirical field with properties, such that any alteration to it effects the forms it is generative of. The basic constituent of material life neither corresponds to concrete materiality itself nor a purely spiritual substance. The either/or or both/and properties of this flesh expresses the main thrust of the incarnation. Irenaeus’ positioning of the body-ontology of Christ was an ingenious step in personalizing the transcendental field of philosophy, such that appeals to it could be made with more precision than would have been otherwise with an abstract field. The main difference between late antiquity and contemporary thought lies between the personified materialisms of Irenaeus and Tertullian and the abstract, or bodiless, materialisms of the twentieth century.

### **Flesh and Spirit**

In *Adversus Marcionem* and *Adversus Praxeas* Tertullian speaks of the two substances of Christ: flesh and spirit.<sup>46</sup> These are inseparable: flesh is his human characteristic, while spirit is his divine characteristic. Flesh is the “Son of man” (Irenaeus’ specific invention) and spirit is God. God, however, is different in “person” (a term introduced by Tertullian), but one in substance.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *De Carne Christi*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> This multivalent dualism has been well documented in other studies. See especially Bynum’s *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity* and Eric Osborn’s *Tertullian: The First Theologian of the West*, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Bowden, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pgs. 125-126. See also Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pgs 89-90.

Personhood is the manner in which distinction is made in the economy of the trinity. Distinction in personhood allows Tertullian to avoid splitting the univocal substance of God. The problem is in part Biblical, squaring John 3: 6, “that which is born in the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit,” with Luke 1: 35, “Therefore that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” To be kept apart, flesh and spirit are nonetheless co-existent in God’s nature, but not Christ’s. In *Against Praxeas*, Tertullian writes, “Neither the flesh becomes Spirit, nor the Spirit flesh. In one *Person* they no doubt are well able to be co-existent.”<sup>48</sup>

Tertullian is wrestling with an old philosophical problem, Heraclitian in origin, a problem to which our twentieth century materialities are still responding to—is change a valid attribute of being? Does change ultimately destroy the purity of the original? In our present case, the problem is recast in terms of substance—does God’s substance change when he takes human form as Christ? If it does, he is no longer God. Irenaeus insisted that only things contingent could change, due to their corruptibility, and that contingency marked the entrance of beings into time. Contingency marked finitude just as finitude entails corruptibility. Tertullian, however, in a section in *Against Praxeas* titled “The Word Clothed in Flesh,” draws somewhat different conclusions. The specific instance that this philosophical problem assumes is trying to think exactly *how* Christ donned human flesh, and it is related to the entrance of beings into time because, properly speaking, Christ was an exception to the rule that objects which enter time become corruptible.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Christ entered time and God, his divine part, remained unchanged.<sup>50</sup> As Bynum notes, it is a concern and a rejection of Aristotle’s definition of a thing

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<sup>48</sup> *Against Praxeas* 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Against Praxeas* 27.

<sup>50</sup> Tertullian, as an aside, cites how angels can change their form without altering their substance.

or objecthood, which observes that “A thing that has changed ceases to be what it is and becomes something else.”<sup>51</sup> *But God’s nature cannot be changed when he takes the form of Christ and enters time, right?*, Tertullian is asking himself. Marcion, a Gnostic to whom Tertullian is devoting much energy, believes that Jesus cannot be fully divine for the very reason that should God don human flesh, then God ceases to be God.

The problem of God’s nature remaining unchanged after he donned flesh was, after all, the crux of the issue behind the exceedingly complex notion of “eternal generation.” Origen, writing after Tertullian, is credited with introducing the concept of how something “begotten” could be truly divine. Origen saw no conflict between God’s immutability and God’s incarnation: “But I consider that there is no evening in God, nor any morning, but time coextensive, so to speak, with his unbegotten and eternal life, in which the son was begotten.”<sup>52</sup> As I have shown, Irenaeus’ body ontology already placed Christ at the site of numerous temporalities (near, immanent and end point). Origen finds it shocking and impious to imagine a time when the Son was not. Recalling Tertullian’s attempts to remove Christ’s birth from the normal trajectory of a seed to organism, Origen scoffs at any notion that the Son’s generation follows the lot of normal animal acts: “It is impious and shocking to regard God the Father in the begetting of his only-begotten Son and in the Son’s subsistence as being similar to any human being or other animal in the act of begetting; but there must needs be some exceptional process...”<sup>53</sup> Eternal generation is that exceptional process. In other words, Christ is a concept used to rename something of the divine activity in materiality. Christ allows it to be said that God has always already been acting in the world. Creation was not a one-time act, but an immanent and ongoing affair. Ultimately,

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<sup>51</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection*, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Quotation cited by Paul R. Hinlicky in *Divine Complexity: The Rise of Creedal Christianity* (Fortress Press, 2010), p. 179.

<sup>53</sup> Cited by Hinlicky in *Divine Complexity*, p. 180.

eternal generation dulls the teeth of a teleology in human life, namely in the sense that life is infused with minor corrections in one's life as opposed to a final judgment.

In the debates of the logos' role in the trinity's internal economy, we are also dealing with two problems: (i) the question of the one vs. the many, or how unity can encompass diversity; also the problem of univocity; and (ii) an ontological power struggle between God and Christ. Paul Hinlicky correctly notes that for Origen, and for the problem in general, there is no eternal Father without a necessary implication of an eternal Son.<sup>54</sup> Though Origen was clear there was "ontological subordination" in the divine life, nonetheless the difference in *kind*, not degree, (which was the distinction between God, Spirit and Christ), created a problem of preserving the power of a single divinity when it is identified with multiplicity.

To the first problem, addressing an audience skeptical of how this is not polytheism, or how real difference is not introduced into the Godhead by distinctions in person, Tertullian in *Against Praxeas* provides a creative solution: the division in the trinity actually supports unity.<sup>55</sup>

Difference is the highest expression of a single name for being. The trinity is actually unified in the internal division because it is only Christ who can deliver the kingdom back to God, therefore unifying God who ought to contain the All. God does not contain the All because of the Fall—a break in the intimacy of divine unity, at least—as now enemies are free to roam.<sup>56</sup>

Tertullian relies heavily on the logic of recapitulation to prove Christ's role in completing unity: "The Son actually has to restore it entirely to the Father"<sup>57</sup> so that God may "be all in all." Inside trinitarian dynamics there is a clear division of philosophical labor: the father and son are two

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 180-181.

<sup>55</sup> Tertullian writes: "The numerical order and distribution of the Trinity they assume to be a division of the Unity; whereas the Unity which derives the Trinity out of its own self is so far from being destroyed, that it is actually supported by it," *Adversus Praxean* 3.

<sup>56</sup> See (1 Cor. 15: 24-25 and 1 Cor 16: 27-28).

<sup>57</sup> *Against Praxeas* 4.

separate “persons” because one subjected all things while it is to another to whom it is delivered. At work in the notions of delivery, however, there is more than a distinction of labor identity. It is a division of the process of redemption. If we recall a logic common to process theology, namely that of an emphasis not on the substance but the accidents, occurrences and events happening in the name of God, Tertullian’s Christ acts as an agent of the internal difference within God. Christ gives movement to God, which allows him to encompass diversity. Christ’s flesh is his materiality, and his spirit is an attribute of his flesh, which is his unity.

Christ can unify difference because he is, first and foremost, *logos*. The concept of *logos* as world reason, stitching the cosmos together as a natural law, was frequently used in the Hellenistic world, especially since for the Stoics the *logos* orders the world by setting matter in motion and giving it form. For Plato, *logos* was a guide to true being, and was not pantheistic, whereas the early Christian apologists actually combine elements of Stoicism and Platonic philosophy.<sup>58</sup> The Apostles creed has no mention of the *logos* doctrine, and John’s gospel leaves unresolved the tension in the statements that the son is equal and the fact that the son is lesser than God.<sup>59</sup> Even as far as the middle of the second century, around 150, two views of Christ existed: adoptionist (Arian; Gnostic) and pneumatic (Jesus was a heavenly spirit who assumed a heavenly body).<sup>60</sup> The use of the *logos* would thereafter, after the mid second century, be the primary means through which Jesus was defined. For Tatian and Justin, writing decades before Tertullian, God created the world out of his will with his *logos*, thereby keeping divine unity through the generation of difference. For Tatian, the *logos* was a solution to an old Platonic

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<sup>58</sup> Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Jesus God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 161

<sup>59</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man*, p. 160.

<sup>60</sup> Harnack, vol. 3, *History of Dogma*, p. 5.

problem, that of “overcoming the antithesis between unity and plurality.”<sup>61</sup> In essence, the logos doctrine allowed the early Christians to solve, in their own manner, the main philosophical problem bequeathed to them by antiquity. Though Harnack, and later, Bultman, was one of the harshest critics of the logos doctrine, once having said that it allowed the early theologians never to have to mention the Jesus of history, he nonetheless admits that its conceptual flexibility dampened the “speculative anxiety” that the early Christians had. In other words, it allowed them to philosophize on an equal level with their Hellenistic peers.<sup>62</sup> Logos could be creatively appealed to in numerous situations, but most importantly, Christ-as-logos allows us to think of God and life together.

To use the medieval notions of *implicare* and *explicare*, which will become crucial lenses in a later chapter to understand the Christ concept, it can be said at this juncture that what the Son does is explicate sinful humanity *and at the same time* implicate all of humanity toward a future state: i.e., the son delivers, completing unity’s essential nature, but does so at the cost of altering that unity so it can achieve a future state that was always-already. Therefore, the difference inside the One is made possible by a creation of the One as it acts to gather the primordial unity. As always with middle terms, Christ acts on two levels—ontologically and bodily. The logic is repeated on the site of human materiality in such a way that the fragmentation and ensuing unity of the Christ is a drama that occurs in our lives. As the Christ enters our most internal parts, as he is with God, our naturally sinful selves become complete, our “parts” reassembled the moment we reside in Christ. In *De Anima*, Tertullian writes: “every soul takes its status in Adam until it

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<sup>61</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man*, p. 163.

<sup>62</sup> Harnack, vol. 3, *History of Dogma*, pgs. 2-7.

receives a new status ‘in Christ’; until then it is unclean; and sinful, because unclean, receiving shame from association with the flesh.”<sup>63</sup>

The logic of fragmentation-completion, solved by implication-explication, is eagerly applied to the gruesome deaths of the early martyrs so as to make sense of why these performances were so important for the early Christian communities. Not only were the deaths of the martyrs performative repetitions of the crucifixion act, it bespoke of a deep rite of passage for the ideal Christian—to be lost and found again. According to Burrus, martyrdom is for Tertullian “the quintessential transformative rite of Christians.”<sup>64</sup> With their flesh scarred and burned, as was Christ’s, human flesh became a site of social inscription, just as Christ’s crucifixion was equal parts cosmological and social. Burrus continues, “In all this unspeakable suffering—in all this carnal passion—the worthiness of the much-maligned flesh surfaces like a flush on skin brushed by God’s loving touch.”<sup>65</sup> Flesh can be sinful, messy, tears, spills, bleeds and is liable to corruption, but because it is the very thing that God needed to assume for us to assume our divinity, then flesh marks the transformation and site upon which glorious bodies are seen. In fact, to speak of a sin of the flesh is to blame the tool for the master’s sin. Flesh becomes *the* battle ground for eschatological peace. Departing from Paul, it is not the substance of flesh that can sin for Tertullian, but its actions.<sup>66</sup> Flesh is teachable, instructable—Christ would not have descended otherwise. Tertullian writes in *De Anima*:

For although the flesh is sinful, and we are forbidden to walk according to the ‘flesh,’ and its ‘words’ are condemned as ‘lusting against the spirit,’ and on account of the flesh men are censured as ‘carnal,’ which is a disgrace, yet there is nothing disgraceful about

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<sup>63</sup> *De Anima* 39-40.

<sup>64</sup> Burrus, *Saving Shame*, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Burrus, *Saving Shame*, p.56.

<sup>66</sup> *De carne Christi* 10.



the flesh, as such. For by itself the flesh has neither sense nor feeling so as to urge or command to sin. How could it? It is merely instrumental...<sup>67</sup>

Yet, in case one thinks flesh is merely given this spark of life by God, such is not the case. Rather, the glory of flesh inheres in flesh itself. According to Burrus, flesh's glory is "less a power exercised over or against nature" than it is allowing to surface the divine qualities of lived bodies.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, for Burrus, flesh is the shamelessly shameful site of the Christian paradox regarding human embodiment and what the incarnation *really* means. What it *really* means is that the human body, and what is done to it, is given a performative agency unparalleled in the ancient world. This body is inscribed by the social and political realities of injustice, religious belief, the foundation of the state's authority, and religious/ideological tolerance. While *the body* remains an abstract entity, what is necessarily implied in performance is bodily movement. Stillness, we must remember, is also a form of movement. I will now turn to one manner in which the movement of the body is linked to the movement of the soul, since the paradigmatic conceptualization of the body is that from the movement of the body we can sense the condition of the soul—this perceptual hermeneutic is active in Athanasius and can even be found in Da Vinci's theorization of the painted figure, over a millennium later. In his accounting of the birth of the body, Tertullian borrows from the earliest Stoics a belief that the body comes to be when the *pneuma* enters the body's limbs, giving it movement, shape and soul. It is this alliance with limbs and souls that will eventually find expression in ascetic literature.

### **Compression and Recapitulation**

In *De Anima*, Tertullian argues outright for the corporeality of the soul: "Yet we will not hesitate to assert that the more usual marks of corporeality, which are completely inseparable from that

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<sup>67</sup> *De Anima*, 39-40.

<sup>68</sup> Burrus, *Saving Shame*, p. 57.

condition, are found also in the soul: such attributes as shape and definition, and the three dimensions of length, breadth, and height, by which scientists measure bodies...<sup>69</sup> And in *De carne Christi* he writes, “The soul, in my opinion, is sensual. Nothing, therefore, pertaining to the soul is unconnected with sense, nothing pertaining to sense is unconnected with the soul. And if I may use the expression for the sake of emphasis, I would say, ‘*Animæ anima sensus est*’— ‘Sense is the soul’s very soul’” (xii). Musing on the Genesis account of God breathing life into Adam (Gen. 2:7), and clearly borrowing from Stoic conceptions of birth, Tertullian draws an interesting distinction between the activity of soul and body, which can further help us understand their intimate relationship:

Surely all the breath passed straightway through the face into the inner parts, and was diffused through all the spaces of the body; and at the same time it was compressed by the divine breathing and was moulded by every feature within and hardened, as it were, in a shape. Hence therefore the corporeality of the soul was solidified by compression, and its appearance formed by a moulding process.<sup>70</sup>

On this account, the body’s landscape provides a captive device and resonating feature that takes its hardened shape from the soul’s infusion. Likewise, Philo and the Stoics, the latter some five centuries previous to Tertullian, equated the soul with *pneuma* (‘breath’), conceiving this breath to infuse the body to its most extreme regions.<sup>71</sup> The soul capitalizes on the internal plumbing of the body (“surely all the breath passed straightway through the face into the inner parts”), adapting itself to the body’s idiosyncrasies, given that the body appears to pre-exist its shape. But even more remarkable are the affinities with the Stoic notion of *tonos* (tension).

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<sup>69</sup> *De Anima* 9.

<sup>70</sup> *De Anima* 9.

<sup>71</sup> A. A., Long, *Stoic Studies* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 264. For more on Philo and Stoicism, see John R. Levison’s *Filled with the Spirit* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), p. 146. See also David Hamh’s *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977).

According to the pupil of Zeno, considered the founder of Stoicism, Cleanthes held a notion of *tonos*—defined as “a blow of fire”—which is akin to the harmonization of the cosmos by Christ.<sup>72</sup> For the Stoics, this blow of fire exists in the human soul, and in the soul it is the physical cause of the virtues. But *tonos* also plays a cosmological role. The origin of the cosmos is due to the *tonos* in the matter of the universe.<sup>73</sup> Cleanthes’ use of *tonos* comes to us in fragments and we cannot construct it reliably given the texts. However, the basic import of *tonos* is the “stretching of a cord,” because only a stretched cord makes a noise when plucked. Tension is the property of a body that produces a harmonious sound. The beauty of this sound indicates a harmonious state of being, whether in the body or cosmos. Irenaeus’ insistence that Christ not only descended but descended at an opportune time, recalls the concerns of cosmic harmony so important to Stoics and Christians. Irenaeus writes, “Where there is composition there is melody; where there is melody it is at the right time; where there is the right time, there is benefit.”<sup>74</sup> Christ’s benefit was that he finished the composition of humanity, striking earth at just the right time, retroactively rendering it, and all that came before him, melodious.

*Tonos* is a quality of *pneuma*. For Chrysippus, *pneuma* is a substance that permeates the cosmos, giving it life, just as it makes a living man whole.<sup>75</sup> Cosmologically, *pneuma* provides unity and quality; for nature, nutrition and growth; for soul, sensation and movement; for mind, logos or rationality. *Pneuma* has a motion with two phases: into itself and out of itself. “The state of the *pneuma* in this activity is sometimes called tension (*tonos*).” The actual movement of in and out can be termed tonic or tensional movement (*tonos*); the inward movement produced cohesion,

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<sup>72</sup> Hamh, *Stoic Cosmology*, p. 153.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>74</sup> *Against Heresies* 4,20.7.

<sup>75</sup> Hamh, David. *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, p. 163.

unity and being, while the outward movement causes dimensions or qualities.<sup>76</sup> In Tertullian's passage, the movement that forms the body utilizes both directions. Divine breath enters through the face, expanding and contracting the outer skin of a pre-existing flesh, and then, once it took shape, the soul was formed when it hardened. The soul's corporeality did not mould the body, but the reverse. The breath was molded by the body's features, i.e., its limbs and members. The soul has a distinctive shape, and this shape is allied to the body.

Not just a body, but the body's members are saturated with soul. Just as we are all members of the larger body of Christ, so too are our body's members expressing the soul in our bodies. Further complicating the sense of a soul entering a body, Tertullian layers on the concept of discipline to the soul, thereby bringing the ascetic logic of performance closer into view. In *De Anima*, the soul has a power of choice, which is a property of our nature. That property is defined by its freedom, which is the ability for our will to change our nature through its own "self-determination."<sup>77</sup> So, we can conclude that if the soul is necessarily implicated in the members of the body, then we can perhaps reverse the logic and conclude that the body's members can indeed affect the soul. Which is exactly what Tertullian means when he says that the "natural properties of the soul...advance and develop with it [the body] from the moment when it acquires its being."<sup>78</sup> Though the soul is of a single substance, it is liable to vicissitudes over periods of time, for as with God's personhood, alteration of mode does not equal change of substance, and so therefore the question of the ethics of these modalities, a question close to Spinoza in his *Ethics*, will be inevitable.<sup>79</sup> Movements of the body, therefore, are indicative of higher or lower states of the soul. When centuries later in *The Life of Antony*, Athanasius speaks

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid. 166.

<sup>77</sup> Tertullian, *De Anima* 22.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 22.

of viewing the soul through the members of the body, he is channeling Tertullian's corporeal movement.

### **Earth, Ground, Life, Flesh**

I began with a story of Brooklyn artist Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* and Eleanor Heartney's claim that something very Catholic resides in 60's and 70's performance art. According to Heartney, the catholic imagination, expressed in an incarnational consciousness, sees not only body and soul as one, but has fetishized bodily disfiguration, dismemberment, masochism, and self inflicted torture of all stripes.<sup>80</sup> Heartney is not alone in her thinking, and the point hardly needs to be made that there is a strand of morbidity and violence, self-inflicted or not, in Christianity's history.<sup>81</sup> Tertullian's christology, however, is an early resource for thinking about the social and political power ascribed in and around the human body. Though ascetic hagiography and literature, not to mention Christian history as whole, is replete with glorifications of bodily dismemberment, blood and leper's pus, Tertullian does not take his language into glorifying the transcendently abject nature of the body. Or does he? In fact, for Tertullian what is "wonderful" about the "abject" flesh of Christ is that it is precisely not supernatural, not heavenly, not shimmering with divinity.<sup>82</sup> What is remarkable is that Christ's flesh is "infirm," "not honorable," "disordered," "ruined," "sinful" and "condemned."<sup>83</sup> It is a miracle for Tertullian that Christ's body *was* abject, which, for Tertullian, proves the very materiality of the incarnation. *De carne Christi* reads:

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<sup>80</sup> Heartney, *Postmodern Heretics*, p. 64.

<sup>81</sup> Many texts argue for the frequent morbidity in Catholicism, but in this study I have primarily made use of the work of Virginia Burrus, Patricia Cox Miller and Caroline Walker Bynum, whose texts offer a complicated reading of the mortifying tendencies in asceticism. See also chapter 4 of this text.

<sup>82</sup> This is in fact the title of chapter IX of *On the Flesh of Christ*, Chapter 9. "Christ's Flesh Perfectly Natural, Like Our Own. None of the Supernatural Features Which the Heretics Ascribed to It Discoverable, on a Careful View."

<sup>83</sup> I would like to thank Burrus for reminding me of this excellent passage; cited in Burrus's *Saving Shame*, 56-57.

But if there had been in Him any new kind of flesh miraculously obtained (from the stars), it would have been certainly well known. As the case stood, however, it was actually the ordinary condition of His terrene flesh which made all things else about Him wonderful, as when they said, Whence has this man this wisdom and these mighty works?... His body did not reach even to human beauty, to say nothing of heavenly glory...The sufferings attested His human flesh, the contumely proved its abject condition.<sup>84</sup>

Tertullian is unique because his thought at one and the same time speaks of the renewed vitality of material life (earth/flesh), but also of its abject nature. The multivalence of flesh will be characteristic of Athanasius' thought as well, thanks in part to Tertullian.

Tertullian conceives flesh as the instrumental center of parallel and equivalent processes: personal and cosmic redemption. As flesh, our materiality shares in the life of Christ. As flesh, Christ embodied the form of the accursed so that the curse would be no longer. Building upon Irenaeus' concept of recapitulation wherein Christ is said to have assumed all of humanity, "summing" it up in his body, Tertullian established Christ as a fabric of life through which all is bound: the concept of Christ reorganized the manner in which to view God and humanity, allowing them to be thought together. Using the term "flesh" to designate this fabric of life, Tertullian indicates that the ubiquity of flesh is symptomatic of what the incarnation means. To be able to find flesh everywhere, to be in it and to think through it in theological terms—this is the ubiquity of the flesh. Flesh's all encompassing embrace of life is but one result of the ontological body of Christ.

By calling attention to the transfigurative power of flesh, Tertullian begins a discussion of process materiality that continues to this day. Tertullian's appeal to the processes embedded

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<sup>84</sup> *De carne Christi* 9.

within flesh calls forth a logic of implication and explication in which *the health of the ground is the health of the organism*. The appeal of Deleuze to the virtual provided the same solution to the same problem—the incarnation was a concept that increased the virility of that ground, and Christ was the agent of reformation. Tertullian endorses the logic of implication/explication, “No material substance is without the witness of its own original, however great a change into new properties it may have undergone.”<sup>85</sup> By equating Christ with earth, Tertullian is calling attention to our own partaking of that materiality, since “What is flesh but earth in a special form?” asks Tertullian.<sup>86</sup> Because they are formed of the earth, the appeal to the earth is actually an appeal to bodies, and the equation of an earth with a body is made possible through the body ontology of the conceptual persona of Christ, set up by Irenaeus. In becoming the fabric of the All, and in encompassing diversity through his body, Christ is a *univocal* body, which is but another expression of recapitulation and the power of the conceptual persona established by Irenaeus—all things are said of Christ and in Christ. As we shall see with the ascetic literature in chapter four, the ascetic body was likewise a univocal body, able to embody a universal power in the Christian imagination.

Earth and ground have been used interchangeably in this analysis, but more precision is needed. Tertullian is not, strictly speaking, fixing the ground, but trying to envision—trying to spread the *good news*, as it were—a new image of the body’s relation to its external surroundings, i.e., to life. It is the relation between the living and life. Eugene Thacker says it eloquently when he defines *life* as “that concept which is necessary in order to think the living,” and in the case of Tertullian Christ-as-life is that concept to which he turns in order to rethink the living. Christ is

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 9.

not just an ontological ground, but an amalgam of ontological ground and virtual body. This amalgam will prove decisive for asceticism.

Tertullian's conception of flesh is the second philosophical operation in the construction of the Christ persona. Tertullian is a transitional figure between Irenaeus and Athanasius for a number of reasons. First, Tertullian materializes and transcendentalizes the recapitulated body of Christ. Christ is not just the body at the end of time, but the enchanted materiality that always-already was, is and will be. Flesh becomes a medium and a concept in which to reinvent and re-think the human. Second, by focusing on the medium of exchange between God and man, Tertullian sketches an outline for a christology of becoming; Christ becoming body, body becoming Christ, and all on the common substrate of flesh. This is not to say that transcendence and the eternal stasis of God are not products of christology as well. That is undoubtedly true. Rather, there may inhere in christology a seldom recognized trajectory towards becoming. It will be argued in the following two chapters that this trajectory finds expression in the ascetic body, not to mention the martyr, saint and mystic within the Christian tradition. This is not a "reversal of christology," but the attempt to find within christology trajectories and resources that have created some of the most powerful bodies in Western Christianity.



## Chapter 3

## The Whole and the Part: Athanasius’ Ontological Movement in *On the Incarnation*

## Abstract

In this treatment of Athanasius’ *On the Incarnation*, our focus will be on the metaphors and imagery of “ontological movement,” as it is borrowed both from Stoic ontology, medical literature and from ancient philosophy. It will be argued that the effective and sometimes cosmological power given to the ascetic body in *Life of Antony*, which is a later text, is a direct result of the logic of the whole/part that Athanasius utilizes in the earlier *On the Incarnation*. This chapter is therefore a close reading of a specific logic in *On the Incarnation*, while the following chapter concerns how this logic is applied to ascetic texts and discourse. The overall logic of the whole/part argument as it relates to ontological movement can be summed up as follows: creation is moved in the advent of Christ. God moves creation, including his own nature, when a pre-existing part splinters (or is *begotten*) from the whole in the hopes of bringing the parts back together again.

## Introduction

“What must be the nature of parts which can in some way  
contain or express the whole within itself?”  
Gottfried Leibnitz

“Events are the foam of things, but what I am  
interested in is the sea.”  
Paul Valery

In the two epigraphs, Gottfried Leibnitz and Paul Valery are interested in the same relation, but ask the question from different aspects of the problem. Leibnitz asks how a part can express the whole, and he is subtly critiquing Spinoza’s emphasis on unity to the detriment of the particular, or difference. Rather than ask about how the whole can become a part, to which Spinoza posited his theory of the modulation of substance, Leibnitz asks how the part can express the whole. It is important to note in this terminology that while the whole *becomes* a part, the part *expresses* a whole. This difference in language indicates a subtle metaphysical relation, which, it will be argued here, has an analogous relation in the body itself and the way the body moves. In short, because the body’s limbs express the body’s will, and because for much of the ancient world the universe was a giant body, the language one finds in metaphysics is conditioned by the body itself—this is at least the conclusion of the following chapter. This chapter, however, does more than just point out this fact—that philosophy is based upon an image of the body—but articulates precisely how this relation works in the christology of Athanasius, one of the chief architects of the “orthodox” understanding of the incarnation.

The idea of a part expressing the whole is a different question than that of the whole becoming a part. The former is more profound when one realizes how seldom the question is articulated in

the history of philosophy and theology. Paul Valéry's language of the "sea" entertains an interest in the whole, and Valéry in a few lines succinctly summarizes Deleuze's metaphysics with the appropriate language of waves, foam and the univocity of the sea. Waves are actualizations of the water, and the water, which is the virtual, cannot help but produce waves. Water and waves co-define each other in tides of energy transformation. The whole becomes parts in a seamless fashion, as if that is precisely the function of the whole (to divide itself in an *eternal return*), and the parts are nothing but transient formations of the whole, as if it is in their nature to dissolve and become the sea once again. One could rewrite the history of philosophy according to the contours of the whole/part relation, up to and including the post-structuralist concern for difference and a materially infused metaphysics. Remarkably, through the prism of the whole/part problem one can interpret diversity, multiplicity, being, God, nature, unity, social ontology, ethics and many other foundational concepts in the history of philosophy.

But what about the whole/part problem in relation to Christ? And christology? What will be the contribution here is how the whole/part problem finds itself worked out in the logic of the incarnation, where a part (Christ), through its incarnation, fixes the whole (unifies God) *and* the parts (creates harmony). To call up once again a simple definition of immanence—as the quality of an action beginning and ending inside an agent—Christ as a philosophical concept makes it possible to think this type of immanence. Christ brings a quality of an action (immanent causality) and, *at the same time*, makes it possible to think of God as an agent in which Christ "works." The part effects the whole, makes it possible to think the whole, and/or renders it possible to conceive of God as a totality. In other words, Christ makes the incarnate God thinkable. Immanent causality makes it possible to think (divine) immanence. God doesn't incarnate Christ, but Christ renders God thinkable. Moreover, while the language of God as

eternal being and transcendent entity is predominant in late ancient christology, if one reverses the perspective with the idea that Christ makes God possible, then God, it turns out, becomes a quality of action *within* immanence. In order to argue this point, a logic first needs to be distilled.

The purpose of distilling the logic will be heuristic, a device for determining how Athanasius will understand the ascetic body, and the phrase *ontological movement* will name how the ascetic body becomes embedded within the discourse of cosmological harmony. Firstly, the word “ontological” is here employed because of its affinities with the study of the nature of being. Secondly, ontological movement refers to the effectuation of a new configuration of the “cosmos.” Thirdly, ontological movement refers to the ability of the Christ body to invent and reinvent a new ground of being.

The properties of ontological movement, once attributes of Christ, will be then applied to the ascetic body. This being said, this and the following chapter are divided by a division of labor. This chapter is a close reading of Athanasius’ relatively early text, *On the Incarnation*, while the following chapter will focus on his *Life of Antony*. It will be argued that *On the Incarnation* provides the fundamental insight for how to interpret the supernatural and heroic qualities of the ascetic body in the *Life of Antony*, as well as in other ascetic texts.

This is the third late ancient thinker to be taken up. The thought of Irenaeus and Tertullian have already been addressed, and specific attention was paid to a concept of Christ that will find its expression in Athanasius. What is relevant to Athanasius’ Christ, since there are many different articulations of the Christ concept in the ancient world, is how this concept of Christ would be applied to ascetic bodies. This is the strategy in this genealogy. Since we began with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of conceptual personae, and since it is the trait of conceptual personae to create

modalities of life, here and especially in the following chapter we discover the modality of life (asceticism) created by the Christ personae. It is well known that Athanasius is one of the early architects of ascetic theory, having penned the first hagiography, and his characterization of monastics as “imitations” from the “pattern” of Christ has been well documented.<sup>1</sup> The specific contribution here is not only the relevance of his christology to his anthropology, but 1) the specific vision he brings to the human body that has its origin in his christology, i.e., his description of Christ in *On the Incarnation*, and 2) the manner in which this concept related to Stoic ontology and the second century medical literature of Galen. More specifically, the manner in which Athanasius links co-creation and recapitulation is responsible for one of his lasting contributions to late ancient theology: Christic causality.

### **Universe as a Body**

The idea that the universe is a body not uncommon in the ancient world, and one is able to find the thought in Pythagoras, the Eleatics and the Stoics, among others. It is equally common to encounter the idea that the human body is a microcosm of the universe as a whole, and Genesis’ language of man being made in the “image” of God testifies to its historical authenticity. Less common is the belief that since the universe is a body, and since the human is a microcosm, then the microcosm ought to be able to influence, or effect, the universe. This is what will be termed *ontological movement*. As it turns out, this is precisely how Athanasius conceptualized the Christ figure—as being able to effect the cosmos, both in the sense of creating anew, altering and

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance David Brakke’s work: Brakke, David. *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998); *Demons and the Making of a Monk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978). Goehring, James E. *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999). Harpham, Geoffrey. *The Aesthetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

influencing. Of course, when Christ moved his arm Athanasius did not mean that the distant stars physically moved, as might the *Butterfly effect* of contemporary quantum mechanics assert. Rather, what is insinuated is that Christ was a system, and that any alteration in one part registered an effect elsewhere. Athanasius' insistence on Christ's central role in creation and redemption allowed him to create what will be termed here Christic causality. Christ is an agent working within the universe, and in his actions Christ is making a specific articulation of the universe possible for the first time.

### **Athanasius**

Born in C.E. 298 in Alexandria, Athanasius is one of the most important architects of Trinitarian thought in the history of Christian theology, and the history and theology of the fourth century will be forever dominated by the figure of Athanasius.<sup>2</sup> What makes Athanasius such a dominant figure in fourth century theology is not necessarily the originality of his ideas, since others before him had understood salvation in a similar manner, but, according to David Gwynn, "the clarity of his vision and the power of his language."<sup>3</sup> More than for any other thinker, the incarnate Christ is the center of Athanasius' thought, as was flesh for Tertullian, and his christology will provoke the foundational dispute between his chief opponents, the Arians, a political dispute enveloping the years between Nicaea and Chalcedon, and a philosophical dispute over the nature of the Logos; in other words, it is a debate on the identity of Christ.<sup>4</sup> For Peter Leithart, Athanasius writes *through* the Christ persona and the cross: "It is all about Christ. It is a Christic

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<sup>2</sup> Young, Frances. *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1983), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Gwynn, David M. *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> "The Central Theme of Deification and the Divine Oikonomia: The Incarnation," in *Deification and the Rule of Faith: The Communication of the Gospel in Hellenistic Culture*, Daniel E Wilson, p. 39.

metaphysics. Even when Athanasius is exploring the nature of created reality, the cross and the Christ of the cross remain in the forefront of his mind.”<sup>5</sup>

Athanasius will understand Christ’s role in creation and salvation in the same manner as Irenaeus. Like Irenaeus, Christ’s status as recapitulated being (salvation) works in strict conjunction with his status as pre-existent logos (creation). Early in his *On the Incarnation*, penned when Athanasius was just thirty-seven years of age, he writes: “There is thus no inconsistency between creation and salvation; for the One Father has employed the same Agent for both works, effecting the salvation of the world through the same Word Who made it in the beginning.”<sup>6</sup> Before time at the creation of the world and in time during our tenure in the world, Christ works simultaneously, as the *same agent* in both instances. The whole/part relation is easily inscribed on this schema, and Athanasius will do it himself. Christ as a quasi-figure of the whole finds himself embedded in the parts during creation, and yet, during the incarnation, Christ who is now a part expresses a fundamental truth about the whole, correcting it in his power.

Athanasius’ *On the Incarnation* contains the fundamental insight elucidated in his later writings, and so this text may in fact not be “a boyish performance of an unripe theologian,” but an early and courageous attempt to *think*, a grasping in the dark for a concept to bring the Christ concept a rigor previously unseen.<sup>7</sup> But what is the main problem for Athanasius? What is at stake? What is at stake was the human fact of corruption, and how Christ made incorruptibility of the body possible. Between corruptibility and the potential of incorruptibility Athanasius will have to

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<sup>5</sup> Liethart, Peter J. *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), p. 92.

<sup>6</sup> *On the Incarnation*, 1.2.

<sup>7</sup> On the “boyish performance,” Virginia Burrus cites R.P.C. Hanson’s *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh, 1988), 246, 417-18.

create a concept rendering this infusion of incorruptibility possible. Christ is that concept—Christ is not the whole nor the part, but allows for a new articulation of their relation possible. God does not send Christ so God can become incarnate, as that is a statement of faith. Rather, Christ makes the concept of the incarnate God possible. Without question, *On the Incarnation* belongs in the genre of apologetic writing, a genre according to Timothy Barnes already outmoded when Athanasius is a boy.<sup>8</sup> However, if the purpose of apologetics is to show that “belief in Christ is not unreasonable,” then much of theology is apologetic. More to the point, Athanasius’ apologetic is a work of speculative christology. Since, according to Pelikan Jaroslav, who is citing Gregory of Nyssa but which equally applies here, “It was the task of speculative thought to render the sublime ordering of the universe as cosmos generally intelligible,” then Athanasius is clearly engaging in a cosmologically oriented speculation.<sup>9</sup> Writes Pelikan, “For it was axiomatic that order was preferable to disorder and anarchy.”<sup>10</sup> What is unique about Athanasius’ speculation, and which marks christology as a uniquely figural discourse, is the fact that Athanasius is making the “cosmos generally intelligible” through Christ: the conceptual persona of Christ is allowing for an intelligible cosmos. Christ gives it rationality, structures its being and guides its *telos*.<sup>11</sup> The universe is intelligible through Christ because of the simple fact that for Athanasius the universe was literally made through Christ (co-creation).

### **The Fall from Contemplation**

Like the thinkers before him, the Fall for Athanasius was an act of the will that brought death and corruption to the body. Brakke sums it up nicely: “According to Athanasius, the original

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<sup>8</sup> Barnes, Timothy D., *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Pelikan, Jaroslav, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 91.



human beings fell when they allowed their souls to be destabilized by the impulses of the body, including fear, and Christ enabled subsequent human beings to resist the passions when he extinguished them in the flesh that he assumed.”<sup>12</sup> Akin to Tertullian’s biological fears of bodily disintegration, for Athanasius death is constantly spoken of in combination with bodily corruption. While intimately related, death and corruption do not correspond. “But if they [Adam and Eve] went astray and became vile, throwing away their birthright of beauty, then they would come under the natural law of death and live no longer in paradise, but, dying outside of it, continue in death and in corruption.”<sup>13</sup> Because we fell out of contemplation of God, we lost our beauty and became corrupted, carrying death like the plague (Athanasius refers to this death-state as “non-existence”). One is corrupted while living under the law of death. Corruptibility is a state of the body while death is an existential fact.

Christ is an agent of God incarnated so as to allow humans to enter new life, freed from the “law of death.” According to Athanasius, destabilized by the impulses of the body, the soul became corrupted and because Christ himself opened up an ontological opportunity (Christ was more than just a teacher), others could follow suit in their own resistance to the passions. The ramifications of the impulses of the body for his *Life of Antony*, and how the ascetic life is an attempt to tame the impulses, already makes clear that it is through the body that the soul’s purity is won. Though we fell from Eden through a lack of contemplation, it is *not* through more contemplation that we enter again. One must purify the will by first purifying the body.

Therefore, returning to this Edenic state entails a disciplining of the will through the body, and Christ’s performance on earth was for Athanasius the exhibition of the required discipline. Yet

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<sup>12</sup> Brakke, David. *Demons and the Making of a Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass: 2006), p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> *On the Incarnation* 1.3.

Christ's life was much more than just a model of ideal activity, since for Athanasius "God became man so that man might become God."<sup>14</sup>

The Arian Christ could not lead humankind "behind the veil and into the divine fellowship because he is not part of it, since, in the end, there is no divine fellowship to be part of."<sup>15</sup> Part of the strategy for articulating the "divine fellowship" was through a concept of Christ as co-creator and con-substantial with God. Eager to differentiate himself from the Arian position of the created son and sanctification by human virtue, Athanasius makes it clear the son is eternal, con-substantial with the Father, and that humans benefited immanently from his incarnation. Moreover, another reason for insisting on co-creation was the claim, which would have distinguished Christianity from classical theories of the origin of the cosmos, that God did not need an instrument in the creative act.<sup>16</sup> Christ was not an instrument if he was co-present and eternally begotten. Christ made our participation in the divine life immanent. But how exactly was this possible? What philosophical tools made this notion of immanence believable?

### **Recapitulation, Flesh and Substitution**

It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for his human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the Word of God was above all, when He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all, He fulfilled in death all that was required.<sup>17</sup>

According to this passage, in his sacrifice Christ was both an "equivalent" and substitute of the "life of all." A substitution by equivalence—this is the essence of recapitulation. Furthermore, this equivalence is more than just an abstract formulation of one body completing other bodies,

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<sup>14</sup> *On the Incarnation* 54.3.

<sup>15</sup> Leithart, *Athanasius*, p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> *On the Incarnation* 2.9.

as it was with Irenaeus. Athanasius relies on a more subtle use of flesh when he speaks of the “bodily instrument.” Tertullian equated flesh with the fabric of life, and Athanasius is using the general thrust of Tertullian’s materialist notion when he speaks of substitution. According to Burrus, Athanasius requires that we “imagine the Logos and flesh of Christ, life-sustaining Word and otherwise-moribund body, as intimately interwoven, almost as two aspects of the same entity—‘a life wound closely to a body’ and a ‘body wound closely to life.’”<sup>18</sup> Through this mutual equation of life and body, of body implicated in life and life in body, we can through the Christ figure account for the totality of existence. To think Christ as equated with existence is therefore to conceptualize Christ as a figure of univocity. The Christ is said *of* difference (the all) without being identified with difference (substitute). Athanasius observes, “He is still Source of life to all the universe, present in every part of it, yet outside the whole.”<sup>19</sup> Christ does not simply transcend the material world, which he does do, but is “present in every part of it.” Christ is *in* the parts of creation as rationality, frame, essence, pattern, image, archetype and impress.

When Athanasius links the end with the beginning (co-creating logos with recapitulation), as Irenaeus does, Christ is not a dramatic historical introduction, but rather the constant presence of an agent accompanying history. And it is worth noting that Gregory of Nyssa will link beginning and end as well in his own version of a Christic metaphysics.<sup>20</sup> What Athanasius is doing is re-conceptualizing the incarnation. No longer is the incarnation a single act of God, but the state of the world that has always been, that was always-already: “For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who while ever abiding

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<sup>18</sup> Burrus, “Begotten, Not Made,” p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> *On the Incarnation* 3.17.

<sup>20</sup> Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 319.

in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are.”<sup>21</sup> For Burrus, this Christ is a “proper inhabitant of a realm of inexhaustible space, located but everywhere and nowhere.”<sup>22</sup> Christ is not just immanent before the Fall or after the Fall, before the crucifixion or after the crucifixion—Christ simply is the transcendental ground upon which the drama of the whole and the parts unfold.<sup>23</sup>

### **Ontological Movement and the Logic of the Transfer**

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”  
Col. 1:17

Stephen Davis asks the perennial question central to Athanasius’ christological system: “How are the effects of the Word’s deification of his own human body actually conveyed to humanity as a whole?...What facilitates this salvific transaction for Athanasius?”<sup>24</sup> Davis is correct to note Athanasius simply assumes the “transaction” works, and for the answer one must look rather to his cosmology, though it is possible that Athanasius may have gotten his “exchange formula” from Clement.<sup>25</sup> As we shall see, Athanasius will utilize a shared transcendentalism of the flesh initially spearheaded by Tertullian. Athanasius will call it a “kinship” of the flesh. Virginia Burrus, in more a contemporary bio-religious idiom, calls this immanent transaction a “sacred blood transfusion” and a “sublime metabolic process.”<sup>26</sup> The logic of the transfer—*how humans benefit from Christ’s death?*—is extremely complex. And according to Brakke, the ultimate rationale for the transfer of the Word’s incorruptibility to other human bodies’ potential remains

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<sup>21</sup> *On the Incarnation* 2.7.

<sup>22</sup> Burrus, Virginia ‘*Begotten, Not Made*’: *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Burrus also makes this observation, writing that Athanasius takes “the transcendentalization of the human subject to the limit” (47).

<sup>24</sup> Davis, Stephen J. *Coptic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 19.

<sup>26</sup> Burrus, ‘*Begotten, Not Made*,’ pgs. 41-42.

“unclear.”<sup>27</sup> However, as we have seen, it does seem to be the case that the “kinship of the flesh,” which is the matrix of our relation with Christ, relies heavily on the thought of Irenaeus and Tertullian.

To begin, Athanasius recalls a logic that Irenaeus relied on repeatedly—because it was through a tree that we became corrupt, it is through a tree that we can become incorrupt. The second tree cancels out the first. Athanasius also utilizes classical metaphors of debt repayment, fulfillment and exchange for understanding how this transfer of potentiality happens. Irenaeus and Athanasius are clear that there is no penal substitution, i.e., the formulation that God punished Jesus with death in order to pay the penalty for sin. Athanasius does speak of “debt” but it is not sin but death itself which receives the payment from Christ so that we may conquer death.

Because of Adam’s transgression, we are all liable to death, and so Christ pays this primal debt.<sup>28</sup>

As expected, the notion of immanent causality plays a crucial role for Athanasius in the payment of this primal debt, but what is remarkable is how *it is thought*. For Athanasius, immanent causality is necessarily linked to co-creation—“He both fashioned essential being and restored to health the thing that he had formed.”<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, restoring and fashioning is the language of immanent redemption caused by the agent of Christ. On the other hand, Christ can do so because he is immanently present in each being by virtue of co-creation (“the thing that he had formed”). Co-creation authorized Christ’s immanent acts. Christ was the same agent working in both operations. This linking of co-creation and immanent causality is one of the major conceptual innovations of Athanasius, and his ability to slide effortlessly between the two

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<sup>27</sup> Brakke, David. *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998), p. 150.

<sup>28</sup> Belousek, Darrin. *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), p. 362.

<sup>29</sup> *On the Incarnation* 8.49.

highlights the power of his vision for which he became famous.<sup>30</sup> Proverbs 8:22, a crucial text for co-creationist/pre-existence theologians, reads, “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before he made anything from the beginning.” What is “revolutionary” about Athanasius’ understanding of Proverbs 8:22, according to R.P.C Hanson, is that Athanasius “insists that its terms apply to the incarnate, not the pre-existent Christ.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, Athanasius’ interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 saw no difference between the pre-existent Christ and the incarnate Christ. Though Hanson calls Athanasius’ interpretation “ridiculously far-fetched,” it does reveal the main concern of Athanasius, which is to locate Christ’s “activity” in his incarnate body and not in his pre-existence.<sup>32</sup> Of course, Christ’s activity is very much part of

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<sup>30</sup> In the history of christology and philosophical theology, co-creation has often been associated with variations of “ideas in the mind of God,” and the latter has exerted a strong influence in the history of ideas, especially aesthetics. Borrowing the general schema of the role of Platonic ideals in creationist accounts, especially the *Timaeus*, wherein the Demiurge looks to the Forms to imprint matter, the Gospel of John took Christ into the highest philosophical registers known to the ancient world when he wrote that Christ was with God in the beginning, and that, as Logos, God made the world through him. Christ was God’s idea, a pattern for creating the forms of the world. Just as rational thought needs ideas to construct a rational structure, the world, as a rational structure, had to be made of pre-existing ideas. The relation to creation is analogous—the artist must have an idea, or look to an idea, in which to conceive and render their work of art. Plotinus and the Middle Platonists, the latter writing before Tertullian and the former just before Athanasius’ time, did understand the ideas as guiding the visual artist. This transcendental aesthetic would influence how art works were conceived until the advent of Modernism, in which the artist acted as a divine medium through which divine forms were transparent to his or her vision. For theology, Augustine would claim outright that the Platonic Ideals were the ideas in the mind of god, and Bonaventure combines Plato and Aristotle when he states that the form, or idea, must be transcendent *and* immanent, able to be perceived in the material world as well as the rational one (Christopher’s Cullen’s *Bonaventure* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 73). In what is known as *exemplarism*, this tactic for grounding being, and its forms, in an ultimate ground is the central concern of metaphysics for Bonaventure, with Meister Eckhart following suit. Aquinas, however, ran into a common difficulty that the ideas in the mind of God brought forth: the question of diversity and difference. Did the ideas constitute the essence of God, or the attributes? Does god have to know the world through ideas, like humans? It could not be the former, as that would make God multiple. In question 15 in the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas addresses the question directly. Aquinas’ answer is instructive in that it serves as an exemplary model for the reception history of this idea. For instance, Aquinas began by stating an idea is a principle of action and knowledge. Ideas do exist in the mind of god, inasmuch as the Greek word for *idea* can be translated into the Latin *forma*. Existing apart from the things themselves, ideas exist apart for two reasons: either it is a generic type or it is the principle of knowledge of that thing. Aquinas relies on a Kantian distinction between speculative and practical knowledge to further define the ideas double nature: “So far as the idea is the principle of the making of things, it may be called an “exemplar,” and belongs to practical knowledge. But so far as it is a principle of knowledge, it is properly called a “type,” and may belong to speculative knowledge also. As an exemplar, therefore, it has respect to everything made by God in any period of time; whereas as a principle of knowledge it has respect to all things known by God, even though they never come to be in time” (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 15). In each case, the idea is a *principle*, which means that it contains a governing feature. For Aquinas the question was intimately wrapped up in Platonic creationist accounts (practical knowledge; “exemplar” in the principle of making things) and rationality (speculative knowledge; “type” in respect to all things known by God). As an exemplar, the form inhabits “everything made by God in any period of time,” and as type it is the conduit through which was God known in the made thing. Without getting mired in the complexity of the Thomistic account on form, idea and God, it remains the case here and in many others that co-creation is often understood in the register of “ideas in the mind of God,” and that the latter are themselves understood in the register of epistemology and the acquisition of the knowledge of God. As logos or ideal principle co-creation put Christ into an intimate place of divine knowledge, acting as the manner in which the exercise of rationality took part in God’s divine nature.

<sup>31</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 424.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 424.

his pre-existence, and the pre-existent Christ is crucial for Athanasius, yet it is mainly what pre-existence authorizes that is of main importance to Athanasius. Co-creation and pre-existence are concepts deployed to justify Christ's immanent and redemptive causality *in the world*.

What Athanasius desires is a Christ that is fully identified with material life yet virtually separated from it. Daniel Wilson observes, "In order to redeem humanity, Christ must be transcendent and ontologically separate from the creation, being the "Creator" God who has the ability to re-create the image and likeness in humanity."<sup>33</sup> Yet, as we have seen, Christ is both fully identified with life and virtually separated from it. Athanasius wants an incarnate Christ able to descend at will, a Christ present in the parts and in the whole, and able to enter the parts. Co-creation is the specific solution to the problem of the latter, and it solves the ability to enter the parts at will. *Moreover, in a remarkable twist, co-creation is a type of causality that has as its main application immanent causality.* In other words, though there is a quasi-transcendentalism of Christ's status of co-creation, reminiscent of the demiurge and or the mythos of the *Timaeus*, here Christ does retain that transcendental status yet its main application, or what it accomplishes, is immanent causality. This is why co-creation is a transcendentalism and not a transcendence, if by the transcendental we invoke Kant's classical usage, namely as the condition of possibility of existence. For instance, existence requires as its condition of possibility a co-creating Christ, and so therefore within the forms of life a Christic element remains.

Christ was God incarnate—this is what Athanasius assumes. Yet this is to believe in the existence of a Christian God, which this text does not. God did not make Christ, nor create the

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<sup>33</sup> Wilson, *Deification and the Rule of Faith*, p. 39.

incarnation. Christ, as a philosophical concept, made the thought of an incarnate God possible. Christ made Christian immanence possible.

Rehabilitated from Greek philosophy, co-creation is a concept designed not only to allow Christ into the world (the incarnation), but to give him power to adjust the fabric of that world. Because co-creation accounts for how Christ can embody material forms, co-creation implies an aesthetic principle. Christ is somehow embedded within the diversity of forms found in nature and human experience. If Irenaeus sought to place Christ at the center of an ontological system, and if Tertullian sought to en flesh the world with the flesh of Christ, then Athanasius' investment in the incarnation is about creating a consistent principle between creation and salvation—it is the same operation when Christ created the world as when he effects salvation in our own bodies.

Tertullian provided a transcendentalism of the flesh analogous, or at the very least implicit, to Athanasius' understanding of the flesh. Christ as both identified with the whole of creation *and* its condition of possibility is theoretically analogous to Tertullian's conceptualization of flesh. We can say of Christ for Athanasius what Michael Hardt says of the general contours of flesh in the Christian tradition: "Flesh is the condition of possibility of the qualities of the world, but it is never contained within or defined by those qualities."<sup>34</sup>

Because Christ envelops humanity and the cosmos, cosmological creation and redemptive creation must be univocal—that is, it must be spoken of in the same name. In other words, in our world there is an immanent, cosmological cause which acts in the same manner as it did in the creation of the world. The body ontology of Irenaeus supplied the qualifications for this first positioning of Christ as transcendental figure containing all while not being identified with the all (recapitulation). Recapitulation provided the language of universal inclusion, correction, and

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<sup>34</sup> Hardt, "Pasolini," p. 83.



perfection. Wilson again, “Christ must also immanently identify with humanity in order to join it, redeem it, and as the perfect substitute pay its debt of sin and death, which humanity incurred at the Fall.”<sup>35</sup> In this instance, substitution is but a variant of the language of recapitulation.

Athanasius repeatedly returns to Christ’s extreme intimacy and extreme exteriority to illustrate his vision. What Athanasius will gain from this placement of Christ as source of whole (exteriority) and presence in part is not a dual understanding of Christ as human and divine; that it does achieve this is hardly worth noting. More profound is the morphological flexibility, to borrow a phrase from Manuel Delanda, attributed to Christ in virtue of this unique ontological position: (i) he can assume any part without fear of being equated with it because he is generative source; (ii) he is source of all and thereby can’t be accused of being distant from creation. This morphological flexibility is also his *immanent power*—the ability to at once activate a singular part, be present in that part, all the while remaining the “source” of that part. One could use another term originating with Aristotle—hylomorphic—though this term is frequently found in the literature on medieval angelology to denote their specific ability to act in form alone without the use of a body.<sup>36</sup> Christ is hylomorphic not in the sense of not having a body, but of being able to act in form by virtue of assuming all forms. Perhaps an apt way to describe this christology is *transfigurative*—across all figures in the sense of containment—and for obvious reasons recapitulation remains a crucial component in the notion.

Christ is not a body outside the parts, but is, strictly speaking, the image and activity of the parts fitting together. One should recall here the Stoic notion of *tonos*, or tension, which holds the

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<sup>35</sup> Wilson, *Deification and the Rule of Faith*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> For more on angels and hylomorphism, see David Keck’s *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

cosmos together in the movements of expansion and contraction.<sup>37</sup> Harmony of parts is the goal of Athanasius' Christ, just as Irenaeus understood the salvation of all the world in musical terms. Leithart observes, "As Logos, the Son is the framer and arranger of the creation, and the fact that there is harmony in the creation is testimony that it was framed "logically," that is, by the Logos."<sup>38</sup> By harmony one should hear inflections of immanence, since harmony was for the Stoics a state of affairs in which all parts of the cosmos were working together, unified as it were, towards a central task. The parts cannot work together if they are not in immanent communication with a central information-feeding source. Athanasius' insistence that Christ remains in all the parts, while also differentiated from it, reflects the concern for complete immanence and the conductorship of that harmony. In his insistence that Christ is not just a part (not just a human being) and not just the whole (not just God), Athanasius is also silently engaging varieties of "unorthodoxy" claiming Christ is God itself and unmixed with humanity (docetism), or that Christ is solely a human (Arianism). Paradoxically, for Leithart, "because God is truly transcendent, he is immediate to the world."<sup>39</sup> The identity of Christ becomes the central pivot for dealing with Athanasius' main theological rivals, but Christ also becomes, in the process, the central pivot for thinking about God and man. But as to the ultimate influence on Athanasius—was it the Stoic doctrine of Logos immanent in the world? *or* the Middle Platonist notion of Logos controlling the world through its emanation?—Hanson somewhat humorously notes that "We do not know, and perhaps neither did Athanasius."<sup>40</sup> But what is clear is that Athanasius utilizes from both traditions, and, in his usage creates a distinctive form of immanence centered on an ontological body.

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<sup>37</sup> See chapter two for the discussion of Stoic *tonos*.

<sup>38</sup> Leithart, *Athanasius*, p. 99.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

<sup>40</sup> Hanson, *Doctrine of God*, p. 861.

Athanasius will refine the Christ of history that came in stages (Irenaeus), as well as the apprenticeship in humanity (Tertullian), and state that Christ took a body because he wanted to move “as Man among men, meeting their senses, so to speak, half way. He became Himself an object for the senses so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might apprehend the Father through the works which He, the Word of God, did in the body.”<sup>41</sup> *Immanent power* is relevant here in a practical phenomenological sense. Though in this passage Christ becomes an object, the logic of the whole/part is consistent with the logic of the incarnation. The rationale for insisting on Christ’s immanent power renders his life and actions all that more effective, which is the germ of Athanasius’ argument. In other words, Athanasius understands all of the whole coming together in the part, or the body of Christ, so as to immanently effect the whole and/or re-create the whole so that it is no longer under the “law of death.” For Athanasius, sensate life, as the ability to perceive and be affected, is the method whereby Christ’s body gained agency on the earth. Christ was more than just a teacher, which would have been closer to the Arian tradition, but embedded in his acts were larger cosmological consequences.<sup>42</sup>

### **Immanent Causality**

In order for Athanasius to conceive of Christ’s immanent power in the world, Athanasius found it imperative to think co-creation and immanent causality together, as two aspects of the same agent. Co-creation for Athanasius did not give Christ a passive role regarding his inherence in

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<sup>41</sup> *On the Incarnation* 3.15 and 3.16.

<sup>42</sup> Sensation, therefore, is the shared substrate upon which Christ lived his life—it is the rationale for staying in a body so long. Christ could emit sense to humanity, and this sense, enfolded by the power of the whole, had immediate effects on the ontological level. Moreover, Athanasius takes into account the problematic nature of accounting for the Whole, admitting that for the majority of humanity the whole is too hard to comprehend (vii, 43). Christ’s assumption of a part, therefore, takes into account the human inability to perceive and be affected by the Whole. Athanasius does not believe *one can think the whole*, a fact again utilizing the Stoic conception of logos as not only enabler of rational thought. Christ makes the thought of god possible.

the forms of creation, but an active role in that because he was co-present, he could be present again in flesh. In other words, it allowed him to link his cosmology with his anthropology.<sup>43</sup>

Immanent causality is the principle by which Christ operates in this world, and Christ's movement in a body has cosmological, not moral, consequences for Athanasius' high christology. Athanasius reflects on the transfer of effect in Christ's immanent life, his life as an "object" of the senses. Irenaeus and Tertullian focused their energies primarily on the way in which Christ's death carried an immanent consequence in life—this is the question not of *how*, but *if* the whole effects the parts, or conversely, if a part can reasonably effect the whole.

Athanasius is asking another question, the question of immanent causality: *how* can a part effect the totality of parts (the whole, or God). Athanasius takes it for granted that Christ as part does effect the whole. Christ is the principle of immanent power, and God is but another name for the sum of parts, but God can't be understood without the parts—Tertullian admitted as much when he stated that God was basically incomplete before Christ, but that after Christ gathered diversity together, only then could God be thought to be complete. This is the question of immanent causality.<sup>44</sup>

For a cause to be considered immanent, it must begin and end inside an agent, a definition which harkens back to Aristotle's usage. Immanence is not a noun, but a state of affairs that has as one of its properties a resonance and immediate communication among its parts. In this instance, immanence is not what Christ brings, as if it were an object of reflection or contemplation.

Immanence is not an object of affirmation, not the Real, nor ground of Being, nor any other

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<sup>43</sup> See Daniel Wilson's *Deification and the Rule of Faith*, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> Borrowing from Spinoza, Deleuze understood the concept of the immanent cause as that which is cause of itself. Deleuze asks: "What do we mean by immanent cause? It is a cause which is realized, integrated and distinguished in its effect. Or rather the immanent cause is realized, integrated and distinguished by its effect," from *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (1988: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis), p. 32.

variant of ultimate ground. Christ is an immanent cause allowing the parts to come together, but, more importantly, allowing the parts to communicate with each other through a medium, which is himself, or the conceptual persona. The immanent cause describes the range and origin of an action, but traditionally does not hint how these connections are established. Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, with its striated materiality and shifting, rhizomic virtualities, was his solution as to the genesis and strategies of how an agent (the virtual) finds itself immanently implicated in the world of matter. Immanence is not a substratum of life, as Deleuze will himself sometimes infer, but the quality of an action beginning and ending inside an agent. *Ontological movement* defines a specific trait of immanent causality, which is that of a part effecting the whole; the word "effect," while having resonances with "affect," is primarily employed here to the ability of an agent to both influence and reconfigure. While affect would suffice, its primary meaning referring to the act of "to influence," the term has been avoided because its denotation is not strong enough to capture the act of not only influencing, but bringing about a new configuration and re-creation. Meaning to bring about, and to influence, "effect" better captures the relation of a part to a whole under consideration here.

An important passage reveals how Athanasius describes the ontological movement of Christ by conflating co-creation and immanent causality:

When He moved His body He did not cease also to direct the universe by His Mind and might. No. The marvelous truth is, that being the Word, so far from being Himself contained by anything, He actually contained all things Himself. In creation He is present everywhere, yet is distinct in being from it, ordering, directing, giving life to all, containing all, yet is He Himself the Uncontained, existing solely in His Father<sup>45</sup> (3.17).

Co-creation necessarily implies immanent power for Athanasius—the power to effect the whole as a part. Numerous trajectories come together in this passage: 1) the anxiety of Athanasius to

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<sup>45</sup> *On the Incarnation* 3.17.

keep Christ distinct from creation, which highlights his docetic tendencies, yet present in every part, highlighting his robust incarnationism; 2) immanent causality—Christ is everywhere directing, ordering, moving, etc. within all aspects of existence; 3) recapitulation, in that Christ contained all things himself; 4) Christ’s bodily movements/acts/gestures have immediate, cosmological consequences on earth.

One should not be fooled as to the real-time Christ of Athanasius, adopting a body and educating humanity. For Athanasius, Christ is cosmological, and Athanasius’ focus is on how his body, when moving on earth, had cosmological *and* soteriological significance. Another translation of first sentence of the above quote, which reads rather awkwardly in the Lawson translation above, reads: “nor, while he moved the body, was the universe left void of his working and providence.”<sup>46</sup> Recalling the highly popularized *butterfly effect* of modern physics, *by moving his body he moved the universe*, Athanasius continues the passage, “His body was for him not a limitation, but an instrument, so that he was both in it and in all things, and outside all things, resting in the Father alone. At one and the same time—this is the wonder—as Man He was living a human life, and as Word He was sustaining the life of the universe, and as Son he was in constant union with the Father.”<sup>47</sup> This language of moving the universe should does not mean the earth or objects in the universe physically moved, but is part of the construction of the medium and quality of action in that medium. The “universe” is the space of mythos and poetry, defined by immediate and immanent relays of acts, while the acts within this space applies to all aspects of this space. The acts and the medium come about at the same time, and co-define each other—this is Athanasius’ genius. While the references to the “Father” are never lacking, they

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<sup>46</sup> This was taken from the Archibald Robertson translation, titled *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation* (London, 1885). Passage found on page 41.

<sup>47</sup> *On the Incarnation* 3.17.

play little to no role in Athanasius' anthropological christology except to note that Christ rests in the Father, or that he is in constant union with the Father. God is not ordering the universe, it is Christ with divine power that is doing it from the "inside," as it were, immanently. If according to Thomas Weinandy, Athanasius' conception of the incarnation is not intended to imply that "the Word ceased quickening or governing the universe," then the opposite is the case.<sup>48</sup> The incarnation for Athanasius is intended to imply that the Word takes an ever important role in governing the universe.

### **Why the Cross?**

Athanasius considers Christ's cosmological acts/movements in terms of ridding the evil spirits, the crucifixion, resurrection, miracles and healings. As one might expect, the crucifixion is the most important act of Christ for Athanasius.<sup>49</sup> But what is unexpected in the manner in which the crucifixion becomes the image of recapitulation. For Tertullian and Irenaeus, the crucifixion merely represented the death of Christ, and recapitulation was concept in which to understand the rationale behind the horrible death. For Irenaeus, the world was indeed wrapped up—recapitulated—in the body of Christ, but it wasn't necessarily the crucified body. For Athanasius, however, it is a literal aesthetic of the crucifixion that remains essential for any thought of recapitulation. Regarding the gestures of the crucifixion, and linking them with the notion of recapitulation, Athanasius writes: "Here, again, we see the fitness of His death and of those outstretched arms: it was that He might draw His ancient people with the one and the Gentiles

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<sup>48</sup> Weinandy, Thomas G. *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2008), p. 36.

<sup>49</sup> See Liethart, *Athanasius*, p. 92.

with the other, and join both together in himself.”<sup>50</sup> The “ignominy of the cross” was fitting as a cosmological gesture.

Why the cross, Athanasius ponders? First, Christ chose it because like any athlete, he confronts the battle that is given to him.<sup>51</sup> Second, because it was his duty to bear the curse, he had to wear the form of the accursed. Referencing John 12: 32, the bodily comportment of outstretched arms, a unique trait of crucifixion, has the effect of drawing all people to him (recapitulation). Fourth, and most importantly, a crucifixion takes place in the air, which is where demons block the passage of the faithful from earth to heaven. Citing Ephesians 2:2 in combination with Hebrews 10:20, Athanasius not only believes the air is the sphere of the devil, but claims the air is purified by a death on the cross.<sup>52</sup> Christ’s crucified flesh purifies the air in its suffering, thereby clearing a path for the righteous. This imagery, more than mere metaphor, would again find repetition in the *Life of Antony*, where it is Antony raised up in the air, extended and outstretched, savagely attacked by demons so as to purify the air for others. Moreover, thanks to Tertullian, the way to redemption for all mankind is no longer just through air now-purified, it is through Christ’s body itself, through the veil that is Christ’s flesh. Christ’s body is understood by Athanasius as a literal “door” and at the end of the passage Athanasius understands Christ’s body as the “path” to heaven. The placement of Christ in the air, as an agent of cleansing and redemption is the aesthetic equivalent of Irenaeus’ more formal definition of recapitulation, and gives bodily shape to Tertullian’s otherwise bodiless, enfleshed materiality. While it is but one example, the manner

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<sup>50</sup> *On the Incarnation* 4.25.

<sup>51</sup> *On the Incarnation* 4.24.

<sup>52</sup> This belief, as we shall see, forms the basis on his ascetic Christology, which will have a profound impact in Renaissance aesthetics.



in which Athanasius interprets Christ's gestures of outstretched arms is indicative of his figural imagination.<sup>53</sup>

### **Moving Creation with a Body**

In all his concepts, Athanasius returns again and again to the whole/part distinction, also the problem of the one vs. the many, and, as we shall see below, he borrows much inspiration from Stoic cosmology. For instance, as regards the Word's appearance on earth, Athanasius writes "For, as I said before, if it were unfitting for him thus to indwell the part, it would be equally so for Him to exist within the whole."<sup>54</sup> While the language of immanent causality is not Athanasius' language, the language of the whole/part is, and remains the dominant register through which he understands the logic of the incarnation.

Tertullian argued on similar grounds, though with a different emphasis. It was the problem of the many in the Godhead that led Tertullian to assert that the Word actually increased the stability of the one, for since the world was in a state of the many, it was the Word that gathered the many into the one. Tertullian's main issue was with the devolution, or corruption of God, when the Word took human form, and Tertullian was battling "heretics" who claimed that a God who took a human form could no longer be a God. For Tertullian, the problem was no so much *what justified* the one assuming a part, as much as it was of protecting the solidity of the one when emphasis was paid to a part. Tertullian did not ask *how* Christ assumed human form, nor under what logical operation it was justified. Athanasius, however, is working with a different set of problems. To his Stoic critics, Athanasius must justify the logical possibility of the whole

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<sup>53</sup> See Patricia Cox Miller's discussion (p. 115 and elsewhere) on figural imagination *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> *On the Incarnation* 7.42.

assuming a part. Citing the Stoic cosmological belief that the world is a body, in *On the Incarnation* Athanasius asks what is wrong with believing the whole entered a part? If we grant that the world is a body, Athanasius concedes to the “Greek philosophers,” then “what is there surprising or unfitting in our saying that He has entered also into human nature?”<sup>55</sup>

It appears that the sticking point of Stoic cosmology according to Athanasius is that human nature is not a “part,” while for the Christians human nature is as much a part of the universe as anything else. But there is more to the argument than just whether or not human nature is part of the universe, an idea most Stoics would find sufficient. Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations* submits a view to this very idea: “What is rational in different beings is related, like the individual limbs of a single being, and meant to function as a unity. This will be clearer to you if you remind yourself: I am a single limb (*melos*) of a larger body—a rational one.”<sup>56</sup> Though we could find differing accounts as to what human nature is for the Stoics and Athanasius, the real issue is the cosmological significance of a special part harmonizing the whole. It is to the efficacy of just a single part that the Stoics would most likely find abhorrent, given the Stoic emphasis on sociality and individuals necessarily working together.

Therefore, before us we have competing accounts of what it means to incarnate the logos. On the one hand, for the Stoics, the rational human must embody the larger rationality of the ethereal logos, and by doing so, allow the whole to function more efficiently, which in turn effects the productivity of the social sphere. Stoicism and the larger thread of Greek ethics took place in a public milieu. “What injures the hive injures the bee,” writes Aurelius. The web of logos is interwoven, future oriented, harmoniously composed, one world made up of parts. Humans are

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<sup>55</sup> (vii, 41). See *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, by Thomas Gerard Weinandy, p. 41 and Khaled Anatolios’ *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London, Routledge, 1998), p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> Aurelius, Marcus. *Meditations* (NY: The Modern Library, 2003), 7.13.

limbs of a universal body that must help it move beautifully and harmoniously—the point is to attune oneself by acting in accordance with the nature of the logos, and therefore to purify one’s will of anything that does not accord with the logos. Though of course the whole absolutely needs the parts to function correctly, in essence, the part must efface itself in favor of the power of the whole, and the whole can only be a harmonious whole when all the parts are actively working in unison.

On the other hand, Athanasius’ cosmology shares the Stoic concerns of harmony, and the imagery of a world as a body and humans as limbs he too shares, but he differs as to the ultimate power of a part. What creates the sticking point is the Christian understanding of the advent of the incarnation, i.e., the fact that the whole is incarnated in one of the parts, and it is up to a specific part to fix the whole: “He both fashioned essential being and restored to health the thing that he had formed.”<sup>57</sup> This act of restoration is not so much a publicly performed ethical or ritualized performance, as it was for the Greek, as much as it was a private affair.<sup>58</sup> More than a few arguments are put forth by Athanasius to justify the power given to a part, arguments no doubt distinguishing Christian ontology from Stoic ontologies. First, creation was made through Christ in the beginning, and so therefore the fact that he can later assume a part that he formerly created is taken for granted (an argument again linking co-creation, immanent causality and the incarnation). Second, because he is immanent to all creation, it is in Christ that we move and have our being. It follows therefore that it is only natural he take a body as ours. Third, Athanasius puts forward two arguments (in the form of questions) drawn from the body itself: (a) does not speech issue forth from Mind into the tongue without the tongue being associated with

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<sup>57</sup> *On the Incarnation* 8.49.

<sup>58</sup> See Geoffrey Harpham’s *The Aesthetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pgs. 26-28.

Mind?, and (b) does not man actualize himself when he moves his toe without himself being associated fully with the toe?<sup>59</sup> Clearly, Athanasius is justifying how the power of the whole can be found in a part without, however, being degraded as the whole.<sup>60</sup> Athanasius writes: “The Word of God thus acted consistently in assuming a body and using a human instrument to vitalize the body. He was consistent in working through man to reveal Himself everywhere, as well as through the other parts of His creation, so that nothing was left void of his divinity and knowledge.”<sup>61</sup>

Drawing on the Stoic notion of *tonos* (tension), which was discussed in the previous chapter, Christ will be seen by Athanasius to have immanent power in the world, i.e., his ability to effect the whole of creation is not only unlimited, but immediate and immanent. Again, the central tenet of *On the Incarnation*, “nor, while he moved the body, was the universe left void of his working and providence.”<sup>62</sup> This is ontological movement, and it is a common notion found in the ancient world. According to David Fideler, as early as Pythagoras we find the notion that the human body “is the microcosm, the harmonic blueprint of the universe reflected in miniature.”<sup>63</sup> And Stoic ontology is equally unanimous about the universe being a giant body composed of members and parts, in which the parts can come to embody, and correct, the whole through meaningful action. In the Christian context, ontological movement and immanent power perhaps become two aspects of a single concept, which can be said to be christology’s original contribution to philosophical knowledge. What christology develops is a Christ causality, defined by the understanding that the body of Christ acts as an agent of cosmological effectivity—Christ alters, reconfigures and creates space anew. Though it shares similar

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<sup>59</sup> *On the Incarnation* 7.42.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 7.42.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 7.45.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 17.2-3.

<sup>63</sup> Fideler, *Jesus Christ, Sun of God*, p. 64.

properties, Christic causality is not immanent causality, if not for the obvious reason that Christ is the agent. The term “space” is a theoretical translation of the concept of the whole and/or God. Because God is conceived as all existence, as all that there was and will be, as the virtual mythos of all encompassing reality, as the fabric of the universe, God is in one sense the All. The term “space” is meant to capture this notion without ethical or moral overtones, yet also to bring our attention to the medium through which causality needs to execute itself. The agent of any type of causality needs a theatre to exercise itself, and space is a translation of a mythologically oriented conception of the cosmos. But is this space really the space of God? From the perspective of Christian theology, yes. Yet as I have been arguing, it is the Christ concept that makes this thought of God possible, so whereas for Christian theology Christ is made known through the act of God, in reality it is through the concept of Christ that this God is made known to thought. Through the operations of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the many others not discussed here, Christ lays out this immanent space, so it is properly his.

The Cappadocians likewise held a similar account of Christ’s causality in the cosmos. Jaroslav Pelikan’s penetrating study of the influence of “natural theology” on Cappadocian christology reveals similar conceptions of Christ moving the cosmos. For Pelikan, the prime motivation behind the assertion of Christ moving the cosmos was the perennial problem of Christianity in late antiquity: polytheism. For the Christians, the unity of mankind was a corollary to monotheism.<sup>64</sup> If the God of Israel was One, and not one of Many, it therefore had to encompass all of creation. What may be called Christian “universalism” rests on a closely related note, i.e., the unification of all humanity under one God. But Christians had to slightly modify the Judaic monotheistic structure from which Christianity grew. Christians had to have a God that was One

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<sup>64</sup> Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 313.

yet a God able to enter the parts of creation. A new life through faith in Christ is the prime illustration of God being able to enter the parts (a singular life). What the concept of Christ achieved was a concept of God able to unify the parts of creation. Moreover, Christians also interpolated into their doctrine another concept well known in the ancient world—culture as an “advance to perfection”—however it was now through their savior that the world re-gained its direction. Whereas according to the Christians the Greek worldview was that of nature and history moving without direction, the Christians offered an eschatological hope of a new universe, a new universal cosmological harmonics.<sup>65</sup> Christ could only be a new direction for life’s forms if he had something to do with the creation of all the forms. Since *origin determines nature*, the origin of the forms of life *in* Christ determined their nature as advancing towards perfection *in* Christ. Gregory of Nyssa and Basil, like Athanasius, thought it necessary to link beginning and end if one were to ascribe Christ immanent powers. Naturally, in order to think advancement of any nature recapitulation had to be assumed, which it was by Nyssa.<sup>66</sup> Pelikan calls Nyssa’s eschatology christocentric, as one might expect.

Whereas for the more Platonically minded Cappadocians the final *telos* of existence was towards a final Good, for Athanasius it was closer to Stoic harmony. Another point of difference distinguishes the “Alexandrians” from the “Cappadocians.” For the latter, Basil in this instance, it was God who after giving each thing its form “welded all the diverse parts of the universe by links of indissoluble attachment and established between them so perfect a fellowship and harmony that the most distant, in spite of their distance, appeared united in one universal sympathy.”<sup>67</sup> These so-called “indissoluble” attachments, while created by God during creation

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 313.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 321.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 97.

for the benefit of God, are for Athanasius the very functionality of Christ. Athanasius' "kinship of the flesh", or what Burrus called the "sacred blood transfusion," is precisely this attachment between the phenomenal forms of life. It is the glue and potential of communication of parts in the whole. For the Gregory of Nyssa, it was the will of God that allowed his speculative thought to move from "part to whole," but also from the whole to the part. And Macrina, reiterating Gregory's conception of God's will, writes "the movement of God's will becomes a fact at any moment that God pleases, and the intention becomes at once realized in nature."<sup>68</sup> Pelikan quotes Col. 1:17 as proof of a latent christocentrism in Cappadocian thought ("In him all things are held together as a system"), and follows it up by observing that recapitulation is perhaps the most central framework for understanding this "system" of Col. 1:17. Pelikan acutely observes that the contingency of creation relies on a christocentric premise, and is grounded on a christocentric cosmology, but what can be added to Pelikan's study is the fact that it is the concept of Christ that makes the thought of the Christian God possible, not vice versa.

Another aspect of Athanasius' thought distinguishing him from his Cappadocian counterparts is his language of Christ as physician. In the *Life of Antony*, "Fragments of the Moral Life," and elsewhere, Athanasius writes that it were as if Christ were a physician sent by God to heal humanity. Seldom commented upon in the critical literature, there is perhaps more to the idea of Christ as "physician" and the medical metaphor than is given credit.

### **Galen and the Medical Discourse of Parts**

The language of part/whole is also found in Greek medical and biological thought, in which,

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted by Pelikan on p. 258.

largely beginning with Aristotle, finds its way into the famous Roman physician-philosopher Galen, who in the second century C.E. would write an important treatise called *On the Use of the Parts*. Plato would devote considerable time to a theoretical articulation of the part/whole relation in three of his late dialogues (*Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and *Sophist*) and Aristotle is no less interested.

In what modern medical discourse calls “functional analysis,” the ancient world’s interrogation into the health of an organism begins with an analysis of how its parts relate to the whole. A part is judged useful through its beneficial contribution to the whole organism, what is called its *chreia*. The latter is not to be confused with *energeia*, or its active change. A part may contain both, and the distinction is that *chreia* refers to the part’s role it plays in the survival of the organism, while *energeia* refers to the specific motion of an organ. *Chreia* is often accomplished through a part’s *energeia*.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, a part’s potential for *energeia* is dependent upon the “character of the substance” constituting the part. If a part is made of inferior elements, so too will be its *energeia*, and, by default, its *chreia*. Once defined, the *chreia* tells us why a part exists, the *for what* of its being. A body is a product of intelligent design (by a craftsman or demiurge), and so therefore, for Galen the “existence, structure and attributes” of an organism’s parts need to be conceptualized against their *chreia* for the whole organism.<sup>70</sup> Sedley writes “the most important ‘cause’ (aitia) to consider in explaining an organ is the ‘aim of its activity.’”<sup>71</sup>

The language of the part/whole is ubiquitous in the ancient world, and can be found in ethical, juridical, political, philosophical, cosmological, numerological and aesthetic writings, among others. Plotinus will use the language of part/whole to describe the nature of the soul’s relation to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 383.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 371.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 385.



the body, the way a seed relates to the tree, and the way science works through its interrogation into parts—all within a few pages.<sup>72</sup> Closely related, and in many circumstances indistinguishable, is the problem of the one-many, which is evident when in the *Parmenides* Socrates argues that he himself could be considered many because of his varying parts.<sup>73</sup> However, the relevance here is the notions of health (of the cosmological body), authorization (what allows a part to fix the whole) and use value (the *chreia* of Christ). While it is not being claimed here that Athanasius is borrowing ideas from the medical literature, what is being argued is for a congruence of ideas between Athanasius' notion of a physician Christ as a part fixing the whole in relation to the prevalent discourse of part/whole in the wider medical philosophy.

For Athanasius, the health of the whole (God) is dependent on the harmony of its parts, and harmony relies on correct *chreia*, that is, each part must contribute to the overall function of the organism. Though the language of teleology is frequent in Athanasius to describe human life, when he speaks of the cosmos as a whole, his language drifts into that of “harmony”; though, of course, going from discord to harmony is a type of *telos*. In *Orations Against the Arians*, a text dating much later than *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius writes of the Word's imprint on creation, its purpose being “so that the whole universe would not be divided, but be in harmony with itself as one body.”<sup>74</sup> According to the *Life of Antony*, it was as if Christ were a physician “given to Egypt by God,” a sentiment echoed numerous times by St. Antony in his letters.<sup>75</sup>

Intricacy and the interdependence of parts speaks less of the parts than of the maker of the Whole; “The mutual dependency of parts points to the contingency and dependency of the

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<sup>72</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, 4. 9, section 5, 480a.

<sup>73</sup> Harte, Verity. “Plato's Problem of Composition,” in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, eds. John Clearly and Gary Gurtler, vol. 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Davis, *Coptic Christianity*, p. 24.

<sup>75</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, p. 94. For the Letters, see Rubenson, Samuel. *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

whole.”<sup>76</sup> We have seen how Athanasius, and Gregory, linked the end with the beginning through an identification of the same agent of Christ as co-creator and as telos (recapitulation). But what may allow him to make this philosophical procedure is a simple principle: *origin determines nature*. Christ’s role as re-creator in life is possible only in virtue of him also being co-creator before life existed, and nowhere but in his miracles is Christ’s status as divine creator in the world proved.<sup>77</sup> His origin as co-creating logos determines his nature as re-creating, cosmological being who harmonizes the universe. Christ can re-fashion created things because he himself is uncreated. To use the language of Deleuze and Guattari, the co-creating Christ is said of the re-creation of ontological difference because he, as an agent of prior creation, inhered in the moment of creation so as to impart difference. *Christ is an engineer of difference* since he creates difference then and creates within difference now. Christ is not made in the image of God, but God is conceived in the image of differential Christ. When Deleuze and Guattari say God is a lobster, they perhaps misspoke.<sup>78</sup> The provocative phrase was intended to call attention to the double articulation of God, of God as spoken of in two registers, just as are the geological strata forming the basis of their analysis.<sup>79</sup> As another name for an abstract machine, God can be doubly articulated—as an agent of territorialialization and deterritorialisation, as object-forming and object-effacing. Within this double movement one finds the heart of Deleuze’s ontology: the virtual becoming actual while the actual dissolves back into the virtual. But though God is given the attributes of the doubly articulated lobster, in fact Christ is the lobster, the double articulation. Christ is the middle term between two aspects of himself. First, God as the “origin”

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<sup>76</sup> Leithart, *Athanasius*, p. 98

<sup>77</sup> Davis, *Coptic Christology*, p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, chapter titled “God is a Lobster.”

<sup>79</sup> John Protevi writes, “But the abstract machine of nature is not just stratification producing organisms, but also destratification producing the plane of consistency. So the Lobster-God is neither transcendent, nor is he all of nature, but only one aspect of nature as abstract machine of stratification and destratification. The partiality of the Lobster-God,” in Mary Bryden, ed., *Deleuze and Religion* (NY: Routledge), 2001, 30-41.

of Christ, and second, the world as the origin of God and Christ. But Christ makes this articulation of God as double possible. Since conceptual personae have one side faced toward nondifferentiation and the other towards differentiation, it likewise applies to Christ that his one side facing nondifferentiation is God while the other towards differentiation is creation.

And Christ can create again and again in life because he is eternally begotten by the Father, being an inexhaustible resource for immanent activity in the world (repeated as well at the ontological level: eternal generation).<sup>80</sup> Conceiving the Christian Logos as activity, however, was not a new idea in the ancient world. In the attempt to accommodate the movement of Christ with the eternal movement of God, authors would invent strange answers. For instance, Marius Victorinus, an ardent third century defender of the Nicene formulation, would likewise formulate a metaphysics of movement and pseudo-movement based on a distinction between God and Christ. Christ as logos is “movement in motion” while God’s movement is “movement at rest.”<sup>81</sup> Regardless of the strange articulations involving movement, understanding the Logos as activity was common. All of which makes a new God possible—a God immanent in the parts, but not identified with it, a God able to appear in the parts when so willed, and a God able to reconfigure the whole in virtue of being able to fix a part.

## Conclusion

While the thinkers discussed previously (Irenaeus and Tertullian) were presented in a single chapter, Athanasius’ work will be taken up in the following chapter as well. As the third thinker to be taken up in this strategic genealogy, the purpose of this analysis is to distill a logic of Christ

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<sup>80</sup> Within this division of labor, according to Leithart, there is an inferiority of human creation; humans cannot be “efficient” or “making causes.” As humans, we are not able to bring things out of nothing, but only arrange the sensible as we see it.

<sup>81</sup> Hanson, *Doctrine of God*, p. 540.

that will find itself embedded in ascetic discourse. Since the lives of ascetics were imitations of Christ, then, one would presume, it is only natural that the attributes of Christ would be applied to ascetic bodies—which is exactly what happened. This chapter exposes the world-harmonizing logic of the Christ figure in Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, and the following chapter will analyze how this logic was deployed in ascetic literature and applied to bodies. Ontological movement is the thread connecting the two chapters, since it is equally an attribute of Christ and human bodies.

The overall logic of the whole/part argument as it relates to ontological movement can be summed up as follows: Creation is moved in the advent of Christ.<sup>82</sup> God moves creation, including his own nature, when a pre-existing part splinters (or is *begotten*) from the whole in the hopes of bringing the parts back together again. This is ontological movement from the perspective of the whole, and it follows the logic of the incarnation precisely: in order for divine immanence to be established, the whole must assume the form of a part—Christ assumed the form of a curse so as to rid us of ours. It is only by this internal operation that creation can be renewed. Further, it is not enough for the whole to *just enter the part*. The avenue through which it is incarnated must first be justified by a pre-existing principle in the parts themselves (co-creation implies the ease of the whole entering the parts). To use the language of transcendence and immanence, there is already a collapsing of the whole (classically understood as the transcendent) and the parts (what is immanent to the whole) in such a manner that the identity, function and justification of whole depends on its consistency of parts.

From the perspective of the parts, what Heidegger called the *ontic*, Christ thereby moves creation when he moves. In Athanasius' ascetical writings, to which we now turn, the power of the

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<sup>82</sup> It is interesting to note that the letters of Saint Antony refer to the advent of Christ as God's "motion."

(Christ) part takes on a different dimension, and the relationship between ontological movement and bodily movement is often blurred. If Athanasius believed that the incarnation allowed the Christ body to move the cosmos, what about our bodies? *Imitatio Christi*, as the type of christology espoused in the *Life of Antony*, will layer onto the human body the movements of the Christ body in such a way that the gestures of the human body will become a point of focus and interest for Athanasius and others writing in his wake. The literature of the ascetic body is written with an eye to the repetition of the entire Christic battle—from co-creation to fragmentation to recapitulation to immanence. The ascetic hagiography is therefore a re-writing not just of the life of Christ, but of his philosophical underpinnings as recapitulated being. The fragmented ascetic body replicates the state of affairs of the world prior to the crucifixion (in a state of disorder), performing the redeeming act through the ascetic performance, creating harmony once again. As we shall see in the following chapter, the repetition of Christ requires quite a bit of conceptual innovation on Athanasius' behalf.

## Chapter 4

## Body Parts: From Recapitulated Body to Immanent Body

### Abstract:

This chapter will ask several questions: How does a body express the glory of creation? In what manner can the human body be understood to be a replication of the cosmos? What is the ascetic performance about? How can one achieve flesh? The previous chapter was a study of the logic of the incarnation in Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*. Using Athanasius' later text, *The Life of Antony*, this chapter will concern the ascetic obsession with controlling body parts—or members—and how the earlier logic of *On the Incarnation* has authorized the power given to harmonized and disharmonized body parts. As points of hermeneutical focus, four areas will be given special attention regarding how the body was used to create ascetic agency: imitatio Christi (form of task), demonic appendages (medium of resistance), desire (universal substrate), and immanent body (counter actualization).

## Avant Garde Bodies

The awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life.

Deleuze, *Cinema 2*

How does a body express the glory of creation? In what manner can the human body be understood to be a replication of the cosmos? What is the ascetic performance about? The analysis below—of Athanasius’ ideas of the incarnation and his conception of the ascetic body—should be understood in multiple registers. This analysis is as much a study on performance art as it is on early Christianity. It is as much an analysis of the charisma of beauty as it is on one of the first Egyptian monastics, St. Antony. It is as much about what profits from courage and how Nietzsche should not have been so critical of the ascetic project. It is as much a study into the shape of ontology and the logics allowing certain philosophical operations to occur. It is as much about how the question of the “good life” was answered less than two millennia ago. And finally, in an era where technologies of all stripes are attempting to open up the body for its own exploitation, whether it is for profit, power, medicine or politics, it is equally about another era’s interrogation into the opening *that is the body*, how to define it, and what to let in. This is a lesson no less relevant in the early twenty first century.

The treatment of *On the Incarnation* in the previous chapter focused on the metaphors and imagery of “ontological movement,” both as it is borrowed from Stoic ontology and how it

differs. The effective and sometimes cosmological power given to the ascetic body in the *Life of Antony* is a direct result of the logic of the whole/part developed earlier in *On the Incarnation*. In this chapter, what the analysis of the *Life of Antony* will accomplish is 1) how the immanent body is the achievement of lived bodies; 2) the manner in which ascetic bodies are repetitions of the Christ body; and 3) the dynamics of counter-actualization, which is a phrase borrowed from Deleuze to describe the manner in which a body is developed and/or dissolved so as to become a vehicle of creation. We will say of the lived body what Deleuze, in answering the question of *what is an event?*, says of the plant: “The plant sings the glory of God, and while being filled all the more with itself it contemplates and intensely contracts the elements whence it proceeds.”<sup>1</sup> Deleuze’s notion of counter actualization, developed in *The Logic of Sense*, is an attempt to understand the body’s relation to the earth, and, more specifically, how a body can become a vehicle for creative power in the world. Deleuze believes that certain bodies, if constructed properly, can immanently effect life. The latter is only possible because they embody life (the All), since it is only through this fact of embodiment that their effectivity can be immanently registered. Deleuze is a thinker of becoming and process, and framing part of the ascetic task in terms of counter actualization is likewise to claim a certain trait of becoming in christology and ascetic literature. So, in a sense, the ascetic *sings the glory of God*, filling itself with divine creation so as to become an instrument of salvation like the logos in which it is modeling. The logic of immanent causality, once a property of Christ, likewise applies to certain forms of bodies, and it will be argued that ascetic bodies, as portrayed in the early hagiography, are a type of these bodies. Ultimately, the two texts must be brought together, since Athanasius’ conceptions of ontological movement in *On the Incarnation* justify the power given to the ascetic body in his *Life of Antony*. A subject receiving scant attention in the critical literature, there will

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (1993: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis), p. 78.



be a focus on the ascetic obsession with controlling body parts—or members—and how christology (beginning with Irenaeus) has authorized the power given to harmonized and disharmonized body parts.

This is the second part of the third and final late ancient thinker to be discussed. This reading of ancient texts has been a strategic genealogy of a concept of Christ that will find itself embedded within the discourse of the ascetic body. In many ways, this genealogy is experimental, intending to locate resources and tools for thinking a secret trajectory within christology. What is that secret trajectory? In this instance, *immanent bodies* are the final expression of a genre of logos christology begun by Irenaeus. The construction and hermeneutic of immanent bodies will require all the resources discussed in the previous chapters, and the concepts and ideas come together in the idea that bodies can effect space; that is, bodies are attributed with such universal power that their agency extends to the entirety of the cosmos. In Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, the ability to move creation is a clear attribute of Christ, but in the ascetic literature we find that this attribute is transferred to the ascetic body, but not without undergoing alterations in language. The ascetic does not strictly move creation or effect the cosmos, but there is within the literature an immanent causality attached to their being in such a way that their power is fundamentally grounded in the ontological movement of Christ.

The strategic genealogy presented concentrates on, first, how the concept of Christ, including all its conceptual architecture, becomes embedded within the ascetic project, and second, how the concept of Christ, as found in the conceptual persona of Christ, is a repetition of a logic of the body. The *logic of the body*—requiring the concept of immanence, recapitulation, flesh and

ontological movement to make sense of it—should not be understood to be strictly religious in nature. Placing Christ at the center of life and thought, this is christology’s motivation. However, a “reversal” of christology is to find *Christ the concept* in the material conditions of life, to investigate how concepts are born of the movements of the body. This chapter will conclude with how ontology repeats the phenomenon of lived bodies through an analysis of bodily parts and members.

### **Body Parts**

The question of body parts was as important for the ancient ascetic as it is for contemporary forms of self representation. Are we not in the twenty-first century obsessed with getting the right body parts? Primetime shows are devoted to plastic surgery, and the “actors” in said shows construct their bodies from the installment of new lips, bellies, eyes, hips and noses, and modify the contours of their body from the extraction and addition of flesh, some of which is theirs, another’s, or altogether non-organic. Famous bodies are interrogated with relentless scrutiny in popular print and visual media, which only further entrenches the race toward the perfect, ageless body. With the ability to manipulate the body increasing at an alarming rate, twenty first century Western subjects are all becoming artists and our bodies are becoming works of art. French artist Orlan has taken the furthest step in this direction, treating the surgeon like the priest as she blurs the boundary between aesthetics and esthetics. Orlan’s numerous and ongoing surgeries, some to transform her body so it can match the qualities of feminine Renaissance beauty, testify to the morphological (and technological) potential in which we understand the body in the twenty-first century. A body consists of parts, if there is even *a body* at all anymore.

It should not surprise us then, to learn that ascetics of the third century and onwards were thought to be *painted by God*, that is, through their discipline and virtue divinity was seen to be inhabiting their body. Clearly, the phrase does not refer to any adornment on the ascetic body. Quite the opposite—their experimentation took place on the body itself, on its moods, shapes, behaviors, habits and flesh. The “paint” of God was complex, bound to gesture, interpretation, virtue and the control of the will. But the fashionable bodies of today do have one thing in common with the ascetic bodies of the past. Both were thought to be *avant garde* figures for their time, expressing the finest attributes of that cultural milieu. This chapter will, in part, argue that ascetic bodies were *avant garde* because they were thought to literally interpret culture, and in this interpretation serve as a inscription pad in which culture, and its theological underpinnings, was written. Any movement of the ascetic body, then, externalized its consequences. In many ways, ascetic bodies are the first post-human bodies. Though they are post-human bodies living in ascetic hagiography, they are nonetheless technologized by christology. Judith Butler, following Foucault, claimed that discourse can also perform on bodies, and shape those bodies. Since this is the case, the bodies found in hagiography, most notably Athanasius’ *Life of Antony*, which cannot be said to represent all of ascetic hagiography by any means, are forms of *techne* designed as patterns for the reshaping of our habits. Given that for Edith Wyschogrod asceticism was in part an act to expand one’s power, gained from the disowning of that power, Nietzsche was incorrect in saying that the ascetic denies himself.<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche did not know what was being affirmed in the ascetic enterprise. Deleuze, the perennial Nietzschean, will help us make a case against Nietzsche’s negative portrayal of the ascetic.

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<sup>2</sup> See Edith Wyschogrod’s *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Borrowing from Stoic gesturology, which has its origins in the pedagogy of Greek rhetorical training, the ascetic body was represented in the literature as a complex system of bodily movements, and great attention was paid to mastering the limbs of the body. Such difficulty was there in mastering the body's limbs that the ascetic understanding of the body was not as a unified organism, but of a riot of independent parts. One of the tasks of asceticism therefore was the harmonization of these parts. Lest one think of mastering the body in this fashion as trivial, it ought to be pointed out that athletics is a massive cultural sector focusing exclusively on getting the body parts in line, mastering the limbs, bringing the members together—the baseball pitch, golf swing, soccer kick, gymnastics, or athletic movement in general. All testify to the inherent instability of using a body when it is pushed to the limit of what it can do. This dynamic instability is just once facet of the materiality of the body. The athletic analogy is, after all, not too far from ascetic self-understanding, as they were frequently referred to as “athletes of God.” Movement is different, attention to movement is a premium, and movement is interpreted differently when in the world as opposed to movement in a monastic setting. In short, a world of difference resides between “eating in the world” and “eating in the monastery,” and this difference must be applied across the spectrum of the ascetic performance.<sup>3</sup>

To use a phrase of Jane Bennett, who borrows it from Deleuze, there is a micropolitics to bodily movement. Late twentieth and twenty-first century performance artists created a genre of art out of using the gestures of the body to speak to a larger social body. Sitting is a gesture, as the Freedom Riders of the 60's highlight, as is standing in front of a tank, as the lone man expressed in Tiananmen Square. Gestures are only politically effective within the confines of habit and the

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<sup>3</sup> Valantasis, Richard. *The Making of the Self: Ancient and Modern Asceticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), p. 12.

politicalization of norms in public and private space.<sup>4</sup> The revolutionary gesture, as opposed to the habitual gesture, expresses the habitual system as a whole while also criticizing that whole. A logic of implication and explication is at work—ascetic bodies were performances, and their gestures both implicate political ideology while also explicating a modality of escape. After all, ascetics became famous for fighting empire, and the very notion of withdrawal, according to Valantasis, posits the fact that “social power is always contested. Two different societies, two different worlds compete for the definition, articulation, and modulation of power”<sup>5</sup>; “Ascetic reality is by definition a resistant reality within a dominant system.”<sup>6</sup> It is in this context wherein the rational lies for engaging late antiquity. The same is true here as it was with Foucault, history is being engaged to say something about the present.

I began with an epigraph by Deleuze which expresses that it is into the body that thought must plunge in order to reach life. Tertullian successfully accomplished this feat through his concept of flesh. This chapter is an attempt to do just that, but with a slight difference. It is not the body that we will think, but the body that *gives to thought*. The body that *gives to thought thoughts of the body* is the conceptual persona. In other words, our thought will eventually plunge into the virtual body of Christ organizing lived bodies. In order for this relation to occur—virtual body and lived body—a logic is needed, and Athanasius provides one.

### **The Drama of the Cross Can Do Without the Cross**

Athanasius’ Antony is a proud and learned ascetic, one who shuns humankind for the solitude of the desert, a man who, after his parent’s death, puts his sister “in the charge of respected and

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<sup>4</sup> Valantasis, *The Making*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 54.

trusted virgins” so that he could devote the remainder of his life to gathering the “attributes” of Christ. Antony would live to be a hundred years old during an era when the average life span was twenty-five.<sup>7</sup> In his hagiography, the first in history, Athanasius is not so much writing on a figure as he is *inventing a figure*.<sup>8</sup> The Antony of the *vitae* is Athanasius’ creation, and a new relationship at this historical juncture forms between Christ and human bodies with this text—bodies are given a supernatural agency in their quest to become Christ-like. Bodies become, to quote Patricia Cox Miller, a “locus of sanctity.”<sup>9</sup> Where this study adds to the theorization of holy bodies in late antiquity is in the manner in which Christ remains a conceptual persona, first laid out by Irenaeus, but which Athanasius relies on for the notions of *imitatio Christi* and the related idea of Christ as an immanent cause in the cosmological and human body. Paul’s epistles are no doubt the first texts promoting an *imitatio Christi*, of sorts, and the writings and literature surrounding the second century martyrs take *imitatio* into a repetition of the crucifixion, but Athanasius with his *Life of Antony* will provide the theoretical architecture for thinking about Christic bodies, what I will term in the second half of this chapter the immanent body.

Athanasius is known in the development of Christological debates for his unswerving insistence that God and creation are united. *On the Incarnation* reflects Athanasius’ insistence that logos and flesh are not isolated, but must be thought together: at these two extremes lie Christ as co-creator (logos) and recapitulated Christ (flesh as totalization of Christ). Athanasian christology, as it will develop in the middle of the fourth century, will provide the material for a vast reorganization of the body—asceticism. What Athanasius will construct is a theology of the incarnation that begins in the middle, between God and creation, a theology of whose middle

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<sup>7</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination*, p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 119.

body (Christ) will be stretched over the extreme terms (God and creation) so as to generate a new image of Christian thinking and a new body to go along with it. Though our other thinkers have attempted to do this in degree, it is Athanasius in his *Life of Antony* who completes the early inspiration behind Irenaeus' recapitulated Christ. Within this stretching, or laying out of a plane, Athanasius authorizes a radical revolution in theological thinking—*the drama of the cross can do without the cross*. Following and yet severely modifying Origen's claim that we can be martyrs "by the testimony of conscience," Athanasius would rather have it that we are martyrs by testimony of the body.

Throughout Athanasius' text, we find the conceptual persona of Christ appealed to time and time again. If the purpose of the recapitulation of Christ was to keep him ontologically protected, an act first producing the conceptual persona of Christ, then here in the earliest hagiography we find the finest expression of the conceptual persona. Given that for Deleuze the purpose of a conceptual persona is to develop a mode of existence ("Possibilities of life or modes of existence can be invented only on a plane of immanence that develops the power of conceptual personae"<sup>10</sup>), the ascetic persona is the actualization of the conceptual persona of Christ. The persona of Christ remains virtual and inexhaustible, for it is at the same time one with the material plane of existence (Tertullian's flesh), but on the other hand it is also distinguished from it by virtue of being the "pattern" to which the monastics seek to model themselves. For Tertullian, flesh was, and remains, the achievement of Christ, but for Athanasius the ascetic had to work hard to embody that flesh.

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<sup>10</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 73.

But what does it mean to say that flesh is an achievement of Christ? What could it mean to say that it is also an achievement of lived bodies to achieve flesh? In his treatment of ascetics, Athanasius will imply just that—though flesh is ubiquitous, it also must be earned, and the ascetic task is to earn it. Here he departs from Tertullian’s expansive, and, one might say, *easy* concept of the incarnation.

### **The Master Pattern**

As we saw with Irenaeus, recapitulation puts ontological power in Christ’s body. Modified by Tertullian and Athanasius, the concept of recapitulation becomes materialized to such a degree that it will be used to explain how the power of a part exercises such force over the expanse of the whole, since according to recapitulation theory Christ is the whole. This relationship between the whole/part is not a dialectic, but a necessary component to how Christ expresses himself from the viewpoint of our ancient authors. The power of Christ’s body on earth depends on the notion that he expresses the whole in his actions. This modification of recapitulation will also be used to express properties of the human body as seen in ascetic literature and hagiography. More specifically, as we shall see later in this chapter, the whole/part dynamic will be translated to the human body in terms of fragmentation/wholeness, and it is through this tension that the ascetic “technology of the self,” as Foucault termed it, will be understood in this analysis. A distinction is therefore required between the recapitulated body, which still contains traces of transcendent language, and the immanent body. Irenaeus’ recapitulated Christ, as rule and “head” of creation, remained mired in hierarchy, and was understood as a top-down principle of governance towards an end directed by God (final cause). In contrast, what characterizes the immanent body is the fact that the properties of recapitulation are transferred to the lived body. In other words,



ontological movement will become a fact of lived movement, split off from myopic discussions of purely ontological questions of the whole/part. Christ will no longer rule over creation, but will enter it as an immanent cause, guiding creation from within. The recapitulated body deals with Christ, while the immanent body is an attribute of lived bodies.

In terms of early Christian asceticism, the immanent body is the translation of the recapitulated body of Christ, with the monk represented in the literature as an *alter christus* in that his task is to channel Christic energy and through conquering his body (as Christ did his on the cross), serve as an equal conduit through which creation's regeneration is spread.<sup>11</sup> At the end of the *vitae*, it is said that even though monastics desire to live a solitary life, their actions have universal effects because "the Lord shows them like lamps to everyone."<sup>12</sup> The monk as a vessel for the light of Christ repeats the fact that Christ himself was a vessel for the light of God. When God "sent" Christ the world was permanently altered, and so there is a similar effect with the monastic body.

Ascetics repeat Christ's power, acts and accomplishments on a number of levels. Like Christ, the monk shows others the path. Brakke writes: "Just as the Word used his assumed body as an 'instrument' in the incarnation to the benefit of humanity, so too the Word now uses Antony's body as his instrument to the benefit of those around the monk."<sup>13</sup> Like Christ's achieved state of perfection, the monastic desires to return to an Edenic state. Like Christ, monks are given the power to heal. Like Christ's body, the monastic body needs to be cleansed so that it is no longer

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<sup>11</sup> I am using the phrase *alter christus* somewhat anachronistically, as the term is not applied until the mid-fourteenth century, wherein it is said of St. Francis of Assisi.

<sup>12</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius*, 244.

a copy of the divine, but shines with the splendor of the divine itself. After spending reportedly twenty years in an abandoned fortress avoiding all human contact, Antony's friends had finally had enough and "tore down and forcefully removed the fortress door."<sup>14</sup> Antony emerges as if from a "shrine," and the Lord works through him because at this moment many of those present were healed immediately (immanent causality). Antony's body remains steadfast with what "accords with nature," and this trope of nature as utopic place is repeated later in the *vitae* when Antony creates a pseudo Garden of Eden in the "inner mountain." In this far desert outpost, Antony planted vegetables and fed visitors and even rids the land of beasts.<sup>15</sup>

The moment when Antony emerged from the deserted fortress is also the famous moment when, after seeing Antony, others take up the ascetic cause and the "desert was made a city by monks."<sup>16</sup> Not only is his body reconfigured and restored, but so too are the people around him, the desert itself. What theoretically connects all these "powers" is a concept of the ascetic body as a repetition of the Christ body with the power of immanent causality—the logic of a part (Antony's body) effecting a new configuration of the whole (the desert, other people, etc).

Transparency of body such that the power of the whole shines through is the goal. What shines in Antony is what is passing through Antony. Upon receiving visitors, Antony is adamant that they not marvel at him, but "marvel at the Lord," since it is really the Lord within him that creates the marvel.<sup>17</sup> And, after repeated battles with demons, Antony exclaims, "It is *not I, but the grace of God which is in me.*"<sup>18</sup> Questions of the simulacra, the copy, the origin, repetition—all become

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<sup>14</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 42-43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 77.

<sup>18</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, p. 34.

part of the conversation, but these concepts also must be modified. Not only is being a copy the goal, it is the avenue through which to alter the original, since it was the case that Christ altered the concept of God. Here, being a copy alters the concept of Christ, making Christ less of a transcendent force above human affairs and but closer to a force within every human body.

On an ontological level Christ unified the parts of creation, but on a material level the monastic tempers the parts of his body so as to receive a taste of the resurrection, and in each instance of unification the power is tremendous. The monastic repeats some of the most powerful “ideals” lodged within Christian theology. Just as Christ was a pattern for ascetic practice that could be actualized time and time again, Athanasius’ Antony is a “picture” for monasticism. Speaking to many would-be readers, Athanasius writes in the opening paragraph of the *Life of Antony* that in hearing the following story, many will want to emulate Antony, and that indeed, “Antony’s way of life provides monks with a sufficient picture for ascetic practice.”<sup>19</sup> Just as Christ was at the center of an ontological continuum for Athanasius, the monastic body was at the center of what he understood to be the model of Christian piety.

The *Life of St. Antony* appears at the confluence of varying forces in late antiquity. The forces acting on the text, and which the text reflects, are the growing monastic movement in Egypt at the time, the burgeoning “Catholic” model of doctrinal arbitration spearheaded by Alexander and Athanasius, the Arian controversy, the location of divinity in virtuous living as opposed to locality, and the various philosophical and theological debates surrounding the incarnation. Of these socio-political dynamics, the Arian controversy is perhaps the most influential on the formation of the text. According to Brakke, the Arian controversy was “a conflict between two

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<sup>19</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, p. 29.

competing pictures of this Word, as model of virtue (Arian) and as enabler of virtue (Athanasian), and between two corresponding forms of Christianity, the school (Arian), and the episcopate (Athanasian).”<sup>20</sup> Athanasius’ insistence that Christ is an enabler, rather than a model, reflects his Christological concerns about the identity of Christ. Christ is an enabler because through the incarnation of the logos, our divinization becomes possible.<sup>21</sup> More than a mere Arian model, Athanasius will conceptualize Christ as a world-forming agent then, as first cause at the time of creation (near point), but also, now, as an immanent cause in our own bodies, which when set against ascetic practice becomes the virtual pattern used to (in)form the human body.

It could be argued that Arian christology was more easily attuned to the ascetic task, since their Christ was born fully human but had later achieved the grace of God through excellence in virtue. For their text, the Arians stressed supporting scripture, such as Luke 2:52: “Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man.”<sup>22</sup> For the Arians, the redeemer was a “representative creature” but by no means the only possible one.<sup>23</sup> For Athanasius, however, Christ cleared the path from demonic blockage, thereby allowing humanity to once again reach heaven through our own battles with demons. For the purposes of this study, which is focusing on the immanent power given to the ascetic body, it will become clear that Athanasius’ christology provides the body with more effective power than could Arian christology.

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<sup>20</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius*, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54.3.

<sup>22</sup> Gregg, Robert C. and Dennis E. Groh. *Early Arianism—a View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p.18.

<sup>23</sup> Gregg, *Early Arianism*, p. 30.

Though scholarship tends towards recognizing Athanasian authorship of the *vitae*, this view is by no means unanimous.<sup>24</sup> Most likely, Athanasius probably encountered Antony only once, and he appears in Athanasius' writings only once outside the *vitae*. Because it promotes a pattern of a body which is itself based on another image (Christ as image of God), the text was made to repeat itself. Athanasian christology is designed for repetition because within it contains the fundamental inspiration of repetition itself. To cite Deleuze, that inspiration is the fact that what gets actualized in the world is not the "logical" result of the virtual energies creating it. A gap necessarily exists between the virtual reservoir of energy (understood as Christ) and the expression that this energy gives rise to (ascetic bodies). This gap is opened up in terms of

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<sup>24</sup>Before one can situate the *Life* in a historical setting, it is first necessary to discuss authorship of the text, for depending on its historical placement is how one deals with the *Life's* authorship. Up until 1877, Athanasian authorship was taken for granted, at which point its authenticity was challenged by German scholar Helmut Weingarten. While Weingarten's theses regarding its authenticity were quickly refuted by many in his time, his claim of non-Athanasian authorship was taken up in a critical French edition of the work by Draguet. Draguet posits that the Greek version is dependent on the Syriac version, and the latter is a copy of a more original Copticizing Greek, most likely penned by one of Antony's close friends who wrote in the dialect. In 1986, T.D. Barnes calls attention to Draguet's thesis, sharpens it, and presents various historical and thematic reasons as to why we must posit an original behind the Syriac, of which the latter preserves the idiosyncratic textuality of a Coptic-Greek dialectic (Barnes, T.D. "Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate?: The Problem of the Life of Anthony," in *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 37 (1986): pp. 353-368). In 1988, Andrew Louth provisionally accepts Barnes' claim, but wants to contend for Athanasian authorship of the Greek version (Louth, Andrew. "St. Athanasius and the Greek Life of Anthony" in *Journal of Theological Studies* vol. 39. (1988): pp. 504-509). On the other hand, numerous others, such as David Brakke in his various texts on Athanasius Brakke, David. *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998); *Demons and the Making of a Monk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), Michael Williams (Williams, Michael A. "'The Life of Antony' and the Domestication of Charismatic Wisdom," in *Charisma and Sacred Biography* (Chambersberg, PA: JAAR Thematic Studies 48, pp. 23-45), and Samuel Rubenson argue for Athanasian authorship, though agree, as all seem to do, that the *Life* is not a work of biography or history, but a political work inspired more by the need for a "Christological corrective" than any desire to present the historical figure of St. Antony. Further, none argue the importance of the work for the formation of early monasticism. The most common form of critique can be seen by Williams when he writes that Athanasius is "engaging in polemical correction of competing traditions." In favor of Athanasian authorship, most often cited are the various names of authors virtually contemporary with Athanasius who ascribe the latter as the proper author of the *Life*—Evagrius of Antioch, Gregory of Nazianus, Rufinus, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and the *Vita Pachomii* (Rubenson, *The Letters*, 129). Concerning what still needs to be done to solve the problem of authorship, Samuel Rubenson writes that: "Still, there has been no attempt, neither in the case of the Greek nor of the Syriac version, at comprehensive textual criticism, in search of different layers indicating a variety of sources and authors." Further, and what seems to be the most sober of scholastic confessions, Rubenson writes: "In summary, it is obvious that the intense research on the *Vita Antonii* in the last hundred years has led to a state of greater confusion than ever before. The only consensus that can be detected is that the *Vita* in its Greek version has an Athanasian imprint, most obvious in the sermons, the philosophical debate and the interpretations of the struggle, and the intensified retreat into the desert" (Rubenson, *The Letters*, 131). Despite Rubenson's doubts, the best case for authorship seems to rely on analyses of content and thematic analyses of political undertones. More to the point, if Athanasius did pen the *Life*, and if it is indeed a response, then one should be able to discern in his text clear Athanasian themes, not to mention a theology consistent with his *On the Incarnation*, *Festal Letters*, and his views surrounding the Arian crisis. The most likely scenario, according to Brakke, is that the *Life* was written somewhere between 356-362, during one of Athanasius' five exiles, the latter caused by various infighting among the bishops with constant interference by the emperor on issues of doctrine and political control. If we take Brakke at his word, then it would be at least 20 years since the Council of Nicaea that he wrote the *Life*, and almost the same since he had become bishop in 328 following Alexander's death. Given that Antony died in 356 with the Arian controversies still potent and alive—Athanasius having just seen that year churches delivered to the hand of anti-Arians—it is likely that Athanasius took to writing the *Life* shortly thereafter.

representation and repetition. The monastic is a repetition of Christ, but a repeated representation, a fact underscored by Harpham when he observes that asceticism is an art of making oneself representable.<sup>25</sup> Of course, this act of representation, of making visible, of incarnating oneself, will be used to support the iconophile's argument in the sixth and seventh centuries that Christ's incarnation was itself a making-visible, thereby justifying the making-visible that icon painters undertook. In many ways, the concept of a soul, ideal or immaterial meaning in Western art can be traced to this logic.

Accommodating to difference, it is the pattern, not mold, which becomes entangled with image-making processes. Just as the point of the virtual/actual distinction is the protection of singular forms, here it is no different: the persona of Antony's *vitae* inspires, and is inspired by the conceptual persona of Christ. The "forms" that are being protected in our present case are modalities of existence (the Christian virtuous life), which is the ultimate expression of conceptual persona according to Deleuze. It is worth noting that the most famous repetition of the *vitae* is Augustine's conversion in book VIII of his *Confessions*, where the young African writes, after hearing the voices of children in a nearby house: "Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain 'Take it and read, Take it and read.'" Having heard the story of Antony's conversion Augustine convinces himself that "this could only be a divine command to open my book of scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall."<sup>26</sup> Thereafter, "all the darkness of doubt was dispelled," and Augustine's dramatic conversion is complete.

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<sup>25</sup> Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine. *Confessions* (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 177.

*The Life of Antony* reads like a movie script, drawing us in. Fantastical, dramatic, filled with demons, near death experiences and psychological breakdowns, it can rival any action movie. Set against the silent background of the deep desert, the story follows the story of a young Egyptian, Antony, on his path towards the withdrawal and the popularizing of the term *monachos*. Though the Gospel of Thomas may be the first place the word *monachos* is used, after 359 it is Athanasius' *vitae* that would become the most famous portrait of eremitic withdrawal, and would do more to promote the ideality of the monk than another other text.<sup>27</sup>

As readers of hagiographies, we never have access to the real bodies beneath the text. The saintly bodies of the ascetics are, to quote Miller, “neither real nor unreal; rather, they are effects of the hagiographical texts in which they appear.”<sup>28</sup> What we are witnessing in the texts, according to Miller, are “word-pictures” of the body, textual re-presentations that place the saintly body in a continuum with the Christic body.<sup>29</sup> Miller understands ascetic hagiography to tread a fine line between claiming too much holiness for the saint and too little. Claiming too much is to commit idolatry, and claiming too little is to remove the spiritual efficacy of the holy body. Miller writes, “Holy bodies are epiphanies of transfiguration that occupy a signifying space between transcendence and immanence.”<sup>30</sup> Where this analysis adds to Miller’s study on ascetic bodies is the lens through which I view their performative power. Whereas Miller focuses on the role of transfiguration imagery in ascetic hagiography and literature, I am emphasizing the role of crucifixion imagery to interpret the holy bodies. Of course, there is much overlap between the two, as there is an entire genre of altar piece art, as well as various currents in all Christian art,

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, Michael. “The Life of Antony and the Domestication of Charismatic Wisdom,” in *Charisma and Sacred Biography*. (Chambersberg, PA: JAAR Thematic Studies 48), p. 28. For the dating of when the term *monachos* is first used, see Brakke’s *Athanasius and Asceticism*.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, p. 115.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 104.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 115.

representing the crucifixion as a *trans*-figuration of some sorts. Any time we see a Christ on the cross beaming with heavenly light it is in this genre. Because of the *trans* in transfiguration, which I am interpreting more generally as a body across figures, or a multfigured body, or, more precisely, a form-less and virtualized body, I will be focusing on the formless in christology, as previous discussed, and how a specific tension is played out between the formless and the formed in ascetic bodies. We will be reading the task of asceticism as the construction of a body. But what is a body?

### **Nietzsche and Deleuze on Ascetics**

Following the basic insight of Deleuze's refusal to define a body in terms of identity, since a body is made to perform, a body is best defined by, first, what it is capable of doing and, second, what it is being captured by. We shall therefore focus our attention here on what is being constructed in the ascetic body, and what this body is intending to capture. Nietzsche's famous critique of the ascetic ideal in the third section of *Genealogy of Morals*, as well as sections in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, has had a large influence in shaping views of the ascetic project as body-denying, body-hating and body-negating. Nietzsche, well educated in Greek thought, brought to his critique of asceticism a Graeco-Roman image of what the healthy body was. If the task of Greek ethics was to make oneself a work of art, incorporating notions of beauty, control and physicality, the earliest ascetics found disfiguration admirable and deformity beautiful.<sup>31</sup> Understood against the backdrop of the original Graeco-Roman "athletes of God," the ascetic athletes did seem to simply negate everything the ancient world held in high esteem.

Yet thanks to Foucault and Peter Brown, current scholarship on late antiquity has moved quite far from Nietzsche's negative conception of the ascetic body—not only is the ascetic *not* denying

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<sup>31</sup> Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, p. 27.



the body, but affirming to the extreme the fact that body and soul are a true body-soul matrix, each relying on the other for their health. Asceticism does not deny the world, but experiments within the world to affirm principles and energies found in and on the body. Often described in otherworldly language, the results, powers, arts and energies of ascetic bodies are very much *of this world*. Ascetics were making themselves works of art, but scholarship needed the time to figure out exactly what type of art that was. William James even went so far as to critique asceticism for its “excessive worldliness.”<sup>32</sup> As it turns out, the ascetic *is* passionate about the creation of new values. Nietzsche might contend that the ascetic’s new values are simply internalized from Episcopal authority, yet the repeated claims, in Antony’s *vitae* as well as numerous stories in the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, attest to another reality. The monks often despised humanity, finding pilgrims, onlookers and general hangers-on irritating, a distraction to their contemplation and ruinous to the purity of the landscape. The monks forged their own path, and in deep desert eremiticism there was no ascetic priest. The eremitic monk was, according to Brown, the “lonely man.”<sup>33</sup> Antony himself repeatedly moves further and further into the desert trying to dodge the pious or just curious. So desirous of avoiding human contact, in one scene his friends break down his door to get a sight of him. Antony, clearly irritated, responds by moving further into the deserted Egyptian landscape. Another story from the *Historia Monachorum* reveals that in one enclosure in the Thebaid there was a monastery in which the gatekeeper refused to allow anyone inside the gates “unless he wished to stay there for the rest of his life without ever leaving the enclosure.” Visitors stayed by the gate, had a night’s sleep, then would be sent on their way the following morning.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid. 27.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, Peter. *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> Russel, Norman, trans. *Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Press, 1980), chapter XVII, On Isidore.

The main task of the monk is to get himself out of the way. Dogmatically rejecting all pretenses to individuality and subjectivity, the ascetic is involved in a process of constructive abstraction.<sup>35</sup> The ascetic must dissolve him or herself. One criticism of Deleuze is that his philosophy promotes what Peter Hallward calls a creative subtraction, which can be summed up in the following sentence, “The only positive or affirming thing that a creatural force can do is to dissolve itself.”<sup>36</sup> For Deleuze the creation of a body was a difficult process, and often dangerous, which can easily be said of the ascetics. Deleuze’s conception of a body was constantly referred to in conjunction with the ground of which it was a part. Earth and organism cannot be thought apart, and Deleuze was keen to imagine ways in which the human body could help the earth become more creative, not rob it of its creative potential. For Deleuze, it is in the dissolution of the body that the intensity of the inorganic shines gloriously: the becoming-Whole, the subject beside itself, pure life in all its multiplicity—these are all names of the final product of dissolution. In the case of the ascetic, we have an analogical situation: with a self-understanding that one was created in the image of an ontological force, the ascetic seeks to remove traces of bodily and subjective life such that one can attain the Christic force that first engendered the body. Though made in the image of God, the monk must remain formless, just as Christ must remain formless because only in this state can he be form-engendering, i.e., able to be repeated. The so-called attainment of “new life” in Christ is analogous to the new life the body receives when it dissolves itself into the abyss of virtual energies. For Deleuze, the creative act is not in creation, nor in creatures, as in human artistic or musical creation, but in the way the body dissolves itself. Such dissolution, or sacrifice, is what is called counter-actualization.

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<sup>35</sup> Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> Hallward, Peter. *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 80.

Hallward does not put forward a theory claiming that Deleuze's philosophy is ascetic, in fact he explicitly says quite the opposite.<sup>37</sup> Deleuze's philosophy of dissolution and counter actualization is ascetic, but not in the manner Nietzsche understands it.

Indeed, the monastic is involved in a subtractive process—sin, passions, desire, etc—but with each subtraction comes an addition, and with each addition comes power. I will understand power in the Deleuzian-Spinozian sense: the more power a body has the more it is able to receive, and emit, affect. A body is more powerful the more connections it can establish with the outside, what Adorno termed the “external.” This power will be understood in affective and socio-political registers. As to what the ascetic produces for culture, their greatest addition may be the thing which they can never offer, the thing that does not yet exist. Valantasis again, “Finally, the most influential power of all the ascetical constructions of social power remains the power that does not yet exist or that is not yet or fully constructed or real.”<sup>38</sup> As to what this power may be, one must leave ultimately to art and creativity, and to the socio-historic fact that an intention in a work of art, or performance, may or may not be translated into the dominant culture with the same significance as that in which it was created. In short, one never knows how a work of art, or body, is going to change the course of history. But this does not mean the ascetic body is powerless. What the ascetic body has, which Christ has in Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, is ability to effect the whole of creation with speed and immediacy—the power of the immanent, immanent power.

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<sup>37</sup> Hallward, *Out of This World*, p. 82.

<sup>38</sup> Valantasis, *The Making*, p. 52.

With Deleuze's theories of bodily construction inhabiting our analysis, it will be understood that the ascetic remains involved in a complicated discipline to blur the distinction between his body and that of Christ, what I will refer to as transparency. My thesis is straightforward: to be captured by Christ is the goal of the ascetic task in Athanasius' *Life of Antony*. The ascetic body is constructed for a very specific purpose: to capture the Christ concept and repeat the acts of Christ. But as to exactly what it means to be *captured by Christ* is not answered very easily. To answer this question, this study will locate four areas in which this task is accomplished: *imitatio Christi* (form of task), demons (medium of resistance), desire (universal substrate), and immanent body (counter actualization).

**(i) *Imitatio Christi***

Imitation involves perpetual becoming because Athanasius assumes as his subject-model the absence of a subject. As the goal which the ascetic desires to attain—a life *in* Christ made possible *by* the repetition of that life—the ascetic position of subjectivity is vacuous. Brakke writes, “Athanasius appears to have lacked a concept of an essential self or given personality; rather, conformity to some model defined a human being's character, for good or ill.”<sup>39</sup> Peter Brown observes that “The hermit's personality, as thus mapped out for him by the religious koine of the age, wavered between the stable guardianship of Christ and of his protecting angel and the unstable, incoherent forces of the demonic.”<sup>40</sup> Augustine's inner “warfare” in book VIII of his *Confessions*, in which he claims that the impulses of nature and those of the spirit are at warfare with one another, testifies to the lasting power of the conformity model of Christian identity. The sense of formlessness was bequeathed to Christians from Greco-Roman culture,

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<sup>39</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius*, p. 168.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *The Making*, p. 89.

whose notions of body can be defined as malleable, “constituted by forces surrounding and pervading the body, like radio waves that bounce around and through the bodies of modern urbanites...the body is perceived as a location in a continuum of cosmic movement.”<sup>41</sup>

Because of the lack of a subject, the goal of ascetic self-awareness was not, as one might imagine, the founding of a subject, but quite the opposite, its dissolution.<sup>42</sup> Hence Harpham and Patrician Cox Miller’s emphasis on the ascetic as an “emerging person” or an “evolving subject.”<sup>43</sup> Complete transparency and the complete void of a subjective position was the goal. Just at the moments when Antony should be claiming his subjective power, Athanasius has the young monk defer his power to another: “Working with Antony was the Lord, who bore flesh for us, and gave to the body the victory over the devil, so that each of those who truly struggle can say, It is *not I, but the grace of God which is in me*”;<sup>44</sup> “For the performance of signs does not belong to us—this is the Saviour’s work”;<sup>45</sup> “nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ.”<sup>46</sup> This deferral of power to a virtual body (Christ) is a crucial device that Deleuze will employ so as to not exhaust the ontological power of the virtual in the actual. Though the actual is a manifestation of the virtual, it does not encompass it. We saw this move before in Athanasius’ insistence that the act of God assuming a part does not harm the integrity of the whole, and we are seeing it again in Antony’s effacement of his status as just a part. As the form-giving, Christ must be protected at all costs.

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<sup>41</sup> I owe this illustrative quote to Dale Martin, who is being quoted by Graham Ward in his essay, “Bodies,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 168.

<sup>42</sup> In this statement, I am in disagreement with Valantasis’ view that ascetic subjectivity is a dialectic between an old and a new form of subjectivity. Though the statement “I am a Christian” does mark an identity of sorts, and can be found in the *vita*, it is not an equal subjective position as the one being rejected. One cannot with an confidence say that a life in Christ is a type of subjectivity.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, p. 124

<sup>44</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 38.

To put complete power into Antony is not only ontologically a bad strategy, it is also bad politics for Athanasius.<sup>47</sup> Writes Williams, “The repeated statements to the effect that it was not Antony who performed this or that wonder, but God or Christ, contribute to a depersonalization of power so as to facilitate its identification with a longer and broader history of power within the tradition, and therefore to insure a more predictable future for its use.”<sup>48</sup> Athanasius wants to ensure that any power individuals do have is deferred to a source outside that individual’s body, and further, to ensure that this power will live on.

Whereas Christ did not have to “work” to achieve his status as divine being (God simply incarnated him), the monk must labor tirelessly for divinity to enter his body, i.e., the value of achievement in ascetic practice and the oft-cited description of ascetics as “athletes of God.” Like the athlete, the ascetic must treat their body as a substance that can be changed. Instrumental, said Tertullian of the flesh. In the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Antony is reported to have compared the body to a lump of iron: “Whoever hammers a lump of iron, first decides what he is going to make of it, a scythe, a sword, or an axe. Even so we ought to make up our minds what kind of virtue we want to forge or we labour in vain.”<sup>49</sup> Antony is not negating the body, but has a clear vision of the type of body he is trying to create. The “achievement” of the ascetic, once he has reformed the body, resembles an earlier state: “The monk’s basic ascetic task is to preserve his “natural” self from the corruption of the passions.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the body is reformed, manipulated, deformed and altered dramatically, but the trials and

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<sup>47</sup> For Athanasius, imitation was not without political benefits. According to Brakke, imitation “promotes Athanasius’ efforts to form a Christian Church that is defined by the ethical life of imitation and the power of Christ made available in the Church’s sacramental life,” Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism*, 258.

<sup>48</sup> Williams, Michael A., ed. *Charisma and Sacred Biography* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> Ward, Benedicta, trans. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (London & Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975), p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making of a Monk*, p. 38.

tribulations of the Egyptian monk aimed at the restoration of an earlier state. Just as Christ was a new Adam, the monk is a repetition of Christ. In the deep, harsh desert, Antony will create a garden and tame wild beasts, and like Adam and Christ, create a new way of living. But the Platonic conceptions of the copy as inferior do not apply. As we have seen, Christ has by this time been ontologically protected through direct and indirect usages of Irenaeus' concept of recapitulation. Here, we see the outcome of that protection in the notion of Christ as an inexhaustible "pattern." Brakke writes, "The incarnate Christ's behavior represented a master 'pattern,' of which the numerous saintly patterns were acceptable variations."<sup>51</sup> As a textured plane of immanence, the ascetic achieves his goal of the whole being immanent in him as part to the degree that their bodies dissolve into the conceptual persona of Christ.

Though there is a lack of a secular subject-model upon which to ground the ascetic identity, this is not to say nothing is gained in transparency, for as Harpham nicely shows, the ascetic enterprise is very much a for-profit business. "Early asceticism is capitalism without money," writes Harpham.<sup>52</sup> What is gained is clear enough—Christ. Christ, as the object of desire, is gained, doubled over, and repeated on the body, power and affect of the monk. But this does not mean success is guaranteed. *Adiaphoria*, the most feared of bodily states, is the state of becoming unhinged from all reality, the "most terrible temptation of all...to betray their humanity."<sup>53</sup> Eternally left open, the ascetic in his experimentation was liable to all manners of becoming. In the state of *adiaphoria* "the boundaries of man and desert, human and beast collapsed in chilling confusion," writes Brown. A paroxysm and enfolding of bodies, materialities and mutual becomings, *adiaphoria* did not just mark the point at which the ascetic

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<sup>51</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism*, p. 164.

<sup>52</sup> Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, p. 30.

<sup>53</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 220.

had gone too far. Quite the opposite, it marked the place the monk had to go, only it was better that it didn't reveal itself outside the monk's body in the form of desperate wanderings, talking to oneself and general fits of madness. *Adiaphoria* assured that the monk had completely destroyed all traces of subjectivity, for as Foucault says of this special technology—no truth of the self without destruction of the self.<sup>54</sup> Bataille notices the same lack of concern for self, where in his definition of God, he writes “God—for me—means the lightening flash which exalts the creature above the concern to protect or increase his wealth in the dimension of time.”<sup>55</sup> For Bataille, temptation is inextricably linked to the desire to unground oneself, to “fail, faint and to squander all one's reserves until there is no firm ground beneath one's feet.”<sup>56</sup>

Though imitation would make the monastic body more visible, it also served the politics of locality. In other words, by making orthodox living an attribute of holiness, Athanasius was consciously removing the locus of holy power away from physical place and putting the “locus of sanctity” into saintly bodies.<sup>57</sup> Because it was in the living body, and the body defined by its movement, Christianity was in “every place.”<sup>58</sup> The monk could be restless and in constant motion—the monk is always moving, and desert “places” are constantly being colonized and deserted—because place no longer matters. One explanation for this could be the trajectory of thought, begun by Tertullian's notion of place without place.<sup>59</sup> Tertullian argued that Christ is devoid of the ancient, and stained, seed of Adam because he was born of the virgin earth prior to when Adam was created. Christ, as flesh and “life itself,” was and is everywhere, spread out and

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<sup>54</sup> Foucault, Michel. “Two Lectures at Dartmouth,” in *Political Theory* 21.2 (1993), p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Bataille, Georges. *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: First City Lights, 1985), p. 236.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 240.

<sup>57</sup> This nice phrase I am borrowing from Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination*, p. 119.

<sup>58</sup> Brakke, David, “Outside the Places, Within the Truth: Athanasius of Alexandria and the Socialization of the Holy” in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 448.

<sup>59</sup> See the previous chapter, section “Tertullian.”



infused into materiality like salt in salt water. Likewise, the constant motion of the monk where little Edenic territories are carved out of the desert landscape suggest almost nomadic tendencies of the ascetics. Of a desert ascetic John, who surpasses in virtue all the other monks of the time, it is said that “It is not easy for anyone to find him because he is always moving from place to place in the desert.”<sup>60</sup> As in this story, the ability to move, to create territories, thrive, then reterritorialize oneself was considered a great virtue. The monk was not worried about losing Christ when they moved their place, for Christ was embodied in action rather than local geographies. Christ was the literal and philosophical territory upon which the monastic lived, and upon which his narrative was constructed. Christ was a virtual territory, a conceptual persona, upon which the life of the ascetic marked his years.

A major tool available to the ascetic was their discernment. Since a theory of the individual self did not exist, and since the demonic was an extension of the self, self-awareness was paramount in the act of bodily construction.<sup>61</sup> Discernment was crucial in determining what was the result of one’s thoughts and what was not.<sup>62</sup> What is discovered in the struggle with the “tenacious material,” to use a phrase of Foucault, is the abyss of a sinful nature, and the concomitant impossibility of ever attaining true perfection. Because to attain true perfection, à la Christ, would amount to blasphemy, the ascetic had to reconcile himself to a life of unceasing desire, struggle and temptation. That his subject-position would never finally form in his technology of the self is taken for granted. Such a situation makes ascetic desire even more crucial. As Rubenson notes, discernment is close to gnosis. “In all this it is knowledge, *gnosis*, that is necessary. If a man does not know his time, if he does not realize the conditions in which he is,

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<sup>60</sup> *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, XIII On Apelles; On John.

<sup>61</sup> Brown, *The Making*, p. 90.

<sup>62</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 228.

he cannot attain true self-knowledge and knowledge of God.”<sup>63</sup> In the *Sayings*, Antony says, “Some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so they are far from God.”<sup>64</sup> It is no surprise then that it is through discernment of others that he was able to gather “the attributes of each in himself,” thus allowing him to embark on the ascetic mission. Athanasius praises Antony’s ability to discern the demonic spirits: “This too was great in Antony’s asceticism—that possessing the gift of discerning spirits, as I said before, he recognized their movements and he knew that for which each one of them had a desire and appetite;”<sup>65</sup> “For discrimination between the presence of the good and the evil is easy and possible, when God so grants it.”<sup>66</sup>

Vigilance and eternal watchfulness Antony espoused on nearly every occasion with novices: “His watchfulness was such that he often passed the entire night without sleep, and doing this not once, but often, he inspired wonder.”<sup>67</sup> Antony encouraged a public confession of one’s thoughts: “Let each one of us note and record our actions and the stirrings of our souls as though we were going to give an account to each other.”<sup>68</sup> A vigilant reminder to never shut down the senses unless one wants to allow a window of opportunity for the devil to enter—the body must remain open, always open, but it must gauge the flow of thoughts, food and passions entering the body.

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<sup>63</sup> Rubenson, Samuel. *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 82.

<sup>64</sup> Ward, *Sayings*, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 94.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 58.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 73.

**(ii) Demons**

“The monk must always consider at least a part of himself as demonic.”

David Brakke<sup>69</sup>

Not only was the desert the demon’s territory, the sidereal backdrop of the desert landscape provided a theatre where the monk’s gaze could exercise itself with the most facility.<sup>70</sup> If the martyrs had the crowded Coliseum as their venue, the monks had the desert crowded with demons. Midway through the *vitae*, Athanasius is clear that the monastics are a new type of martyr—martyrs of conscience.<sup>71</sup> The desert offered the opportunity for clear discernment in all aspects of visual imagery—truth in terms of good and evil, less distractions but stronger, more focused temptation, greater hardship but sweeter rewards. According to Goehring, “If ascetic life in the desert made the struggle with evil easier, it did so only in the sense that it made it more direct. In the desert, there was less to distract the monk from the fight and fewer ways for the enemy to confuse him.”<sup>72</sup> As the home and last refuge for the demons, the desert was the place where the monk must go if he is to have any effectiveness in helping himself and his fellow humanity.

The desert is the proving ground of messianic bodies and their combat: “...Antony positively develops this combat as the means of acquiring virtue, of gaining and possessing the immutable

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<sup>69</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making*, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> *Goehring*: 40—the desert was where Egyptians buried their dead; Egypt has the only true desert, and this geography fostered the idea that the holy man doesn’t interact with people, but we must be careful, says Goehring of Brown, of creating a dualism; retreat was always symbolic; “The latter error is due to the continuing success of the rhetorical intent of the hagiographical literature.” 75—but the dualism of city-evil and truth-desert is made problematic when for many monks the desert was the place of evil, or at least the desert offered clarity regarding good and evil. According to Brakke, “The monk’s advance into the desert was an assault on the devil’s territory,” repeating as well the ancient Israelites journey into the wilderness, whom, finding it desolate, left it an “inhabited country” (218), from *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

<sup>71</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making*, p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> Goehring, *Ascetics*, p. 75.

and permanent. The battle and conflict becomes the means of preserving and transforming the body into a subject capable of living virtuously.”<sup>73</sup>

In the *Life of Antony*, the theme of the demons appears in the text in two ways: through the narrative encounters Antony has with the demons, and through his lengthy sermon.<sup>74</sup> It is the four encounters with the demonic where Antony’s discerning expertise will be tested with the greatest consequences, and in each encounter Antony grows more devout and focused on his discipline. First and foremost, any encounter with the demons put the body in a state of paroxysm—the body gestures wildly, pulled and torn apart by demons. In the text, we can feel the pain and terrors accosting Antony. Antony tries to keep the demonic attacks private, which is logical given the premium on solitude, but one scene in particular stands out as exceptional in the *vitae*. Demons attacked Antony at the fortress, and his friends stood outside, anxious for his safety:

Since he did not allow them to enter [his friends], those of his acquaintance who came to him often spent days and nights outside. They heard what sounded like clamoring mobs inside making noises, emitting pitiful sounds and crying out, “Get away from what is ours! What do you have to do with the desert? You cannot endure our treachery!” At first those who were outside thought certain men were doing battle with him, and that these had gained entry by ladders, but when they stooped to peek through a hole, they saw no one, and they realized that the adversaries were demons.<sup>75</sup>

As their first line of attack, the demons attack Antony’s thoughts, but they quickly realize that Antony is too strong for this strategy. Instead, as their second strategy they attack his body by way of physical battle, illusion, apparition, and trickery. In the *vitae*, once the attacks become physical, they never cease to be so. In the manner in which they attach themselves to his body,

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<sup>73</sup> Valantasis, *The Making*, p. 44.

<sup>74</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making*, p. 27.

<sup>75</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 41.

the demons extend the range of the monastic body, testifying to the struggle of the ascetic to both open himself up to the outside and manage the contents of the act of opening. According to Harpham, the demons not only provide resistance, but are the medium through which achievement is gauged.<sup>76</sup> Seemingly of outside origin, the demons are as intimate to Antony's interior as any other object. The demons are part of Antony on a fundamental level, and provide a glimpse of the minor physics within the ascetic understanding of the body. The minor physics that the demons exploit is of a cosmological disharmony expressed in the language of bodily fragmentation and difference. Brakke's striking statement—"The monk must always consider at least a part of himself as demonic"<sup>77</sup>—refers to the fact that the interiority of the monk's self is analogous to the state of the universe. The monk's battle to harmonize his body and reach a state of "undifferentiated unity," as Brakke calls it, repeats Christ's act of cosmological harmony found in his *On the Incarnation*.

What is remarkable about Athanasius' demons is how they inhabit a liminal space of being both a projection of an internal state of affairs, and being very real physical beings with their own independent existence. In other words, one never really knows if Athanasius is using the imagery of the demonic as simply a metaphor—a literary device—or if he believed in their concrete materiality. As to the issue of how the demons inhabit the inside and outside of the ascetic body, one consistent property is that their actions correspond "to the condition in which they find us; they pattern their phantasm after our thoughts. Should they find us frightened and distressed, immediately they attack like robbers, having found the place unprotected. Whatever we are

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<sup>76</sup> Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, p. 56.

<sup>77</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making*, p. 7.

turning over in our minds, this—and more—is what they do.”<sup>78</sup> More specifically, the demons represent nostalgia and attachment, nostalgia for a life that was, and attachment for a life that the monk may desire. On the one hand, the weapons of the demons are “thoughts,” reminding him of food, sex, companionship, possessions, and various other items of a life that was. On the other hand, the demons represent the current struggle the ascetic experiences: the struggle with virtue, full-time devotion to God, the weakness of the body, and so on.<sup>79</sup>

A tale in the life of Pityron, in the *Historia monachorum*, reiterates this point, “For whichever passion one overcomes, one also drives out its corresponding demon.”<sup>80</sup> Representing passions, the ascetic needs to turn the demons into his virtue. According to analytic philosopher Lester Hunt, Nietzsche holds a similar view of virtue. For Hunt, Nietzsche’s theory of virtue, found mainly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, follows this general trend of converting one’s passions into one’s virtues.<sup>81</sup>

Just before Antony clashes with the philosophers, and just after he moved to the inner mountain, Antony has a vision in which he sees himself outside himself, and is being lifted off by certain beings. Antony sees a great ugly figure tossing souls from the air, with some passing through: “Next, he saw some foul and terrible figures standing in the air, intent on holding him back so he could not pass by.”<sup>82</sup> The foul beings in the air asked for an accounting of his life, and Antony’s guide-beings said that his slate before he was a monk has been wiped clean, but that of after becoming a monk you can take an account. “Then, as they leveled accusations and failed to

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<sup>78</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 63.

<sup>79</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making*, p. 28.

<sup>80</sup> Ward, *Historia monachorum*, p. 99.

<sup>81</sup> Hunt, Lester. *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 1990), see chapter 5 on Virtue.

<sup>82</sup> *Life of Antony*, pgs. 79-80.

prove them, the passage opened before him free and unobstructed. And just then he saw himself appear to come and stand with himself, and once more he was Antony, as before.”<sup>83</sup> In this passage, the air is a figure of the “soul’s passage.” The *Life* continues: “And his understanding was opened, and he comprehended that it was the passage of the souls, and that the huge figure was the enemy who envies the faithful.” According to Brakke, the element of the air was the principle element where the battle for salvation occurred—for Christ as well as for us.<sup>84</sup>

As agents and symbols of the Fall, the demons are manifestations of a fallen state of affairs. To rid oneself of demons is tantamount to achieving the Edenic state, long since lost since Adam’s transgression.<sup>85</sup> Writes Brakke, “Because Antony considers the monk’s like to be a process of return to an original undifferentiated unity, the demons represent the tendency toward separation, division and individuality.”<sup>86</sup> Conquering the demonic is tantamount to clearing a heavenly path for oneself, but for the ascetic it is also a “public” and/or a social performance, wherein the monk clears the path for others. This figure of the air repeats the claim that Christ was crucified in the air so he could clear the path for our souls, and the additional fact that Christ himself was the path. Athanasius now understands the monk to be performing a similar duty.

The demons are images of subjectivity, passion, temptation, desire and of the transparency of the ascetic body-mind complex. Without the demons, temptation cannot be encountered, and without

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<sup>83</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 79.

<sup>84</sup> Brakke writes: “According to Athanasius, the air, as the space between earth and heaven was the field on which Christ and his followers battled Satan and his demons: the cross, as a death ‘in the air,’ was the most effective means by which the Word could gain his victory because a literal ‘clearing of the air’ was necessary,” Brakke, *Athanasius*, p. 153.

<sup>85</sup> Athanasius’s demons come from Origen, and are not primarily Egyptian (Rubenson, 87). For Origen, the demons are fallen “minds” resulting from an original fall, and they would eventually return to God. For Antony, however, he seems to think that they are destined for perdition.

<sup>86</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making*, p. 21.

temptation, no success can be gauged.<sup>87</sup> Understood against the background of success, the “athlete” of God would therefore be without an enemy, and the ascetic task unravels.

Athanasius’ christology, in which the demonic is central, is structured by some form of repetition. Since the ascetic is involved in imitation, and cannot escape the entanglements of mimicry, it is only natural that in the desire to imitate, another form of imitation could serve to deceive the monk. Harpham observes,

In all they do, demons represent a principle of perfect imitation that is at once the goal of the ascetic and his undoing...And the purity of their mimicry perpetrates a crisis of the logos in the suspicion that the “original” is already structured by repetition; this suspicion is, indeed, virtually institutionalized in the doctrine of the Logos: ‘In the beginning was the Word.’<sup>88</sup>

Anxiety over the real vs. the copy, the christic vs. the demonic—all results of the institutionalization of repetition in logos christology. One might assume that the best way to rid oneself of the demons is to keep away from them, to avoid them, pay them no attention. In a certain sense, this is exactly what Antony does, but in another sense Antony must fully embrace the demonic, and incorporate their corrupt bodies into his with the best of his ability. The ascetic needs to court temptation, needs to enter it, and when he does assume the form of the demonic, his body being under siege, the imagery is of not rejecting anything, but of allowing oneself to be dissolved in the face of onslaught, to become the beasts.

In his sixth letter, Antony writes: “For they are in secret, and we make them manifest by our works. For they are all from one source in their intellectual substance; but in their flight from God, great diversity arises between them through the variety of their working.”<sup>89</sup> With

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<sup>87</sup> See also Valantasis, *The Making*, p. 134.

<sup>88</sup> Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> Antony, Letter VI, p. 20.



Athanasius' use of the language of diversity, we find ourselves once again in the territory of the One vs. the Many. If we were to use Deleuzian language, the word-picture of the ascetic under attack is an image of pure difference and ontological ungrounding. The demonic encounter is indicative of cosmological difference, to which the ascetic overcoming of the demonic satisfies the principle of unity. Writes Brakke, "Demons are built into the structure of the fallen cosmos as the principles of differentiation."<sup>90</sup> Hence the fact that the acts of the monk have cosmological registers, which will be taken up later in this chapter. The image of ascetic onslaught, however, is not a picture of a monastic becoming something other, but a picture of becoming itself, and this becoming is the becoming of the body in the endless task of "athletic" modification. Since the demons are intimately tied to the power of one's will to calm the passions, redirecting the flood of desire inherent to the body is crucial to rid the demons.

### **(iii) Desire**

"Bestiality with the monastery's donkeys could not be ruled out."  
Peter Brown, *Body and Society*

At the center of ascetic desire is the art of construction. In what follows, we will see how desire is the fuel of this construction, for it was in the art of defining, managing and spiritualizing desire that Christianity will make inroads into Pagan sensibility.<sup>91</sup> The early groups of the second century were so heterogeneous, and from such different social and religious backgrounds, that according to Brown "a sexual nature was the one thing they had in common."<sup>92</sup> What is universal is a division in the heart of humanity, a void or a wound, as Augustine would call it, at the center

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<sup>90</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, pgs. 21-22.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Brown writes: "By concentrating in a single-minded manner on sexual restraint and on sexual heroism, the Christians of the age of Justin had found their way to presenting themselves as the bearers of a truly universal religion." *Body and Society*, p. 60.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

of human subjectivity. As we saw with the ascetic abyss of subjectivity, here we learn that desire is the fuel of the ascetic narrative, and maps out the topography of a subject not in search of itself, a body which must desire and deform itself. Burrus observes, “In hagiography, the sexed subject—the subject itself—is continually deformed, unformed, and reformed in the dynamic of a desiring resistance, a resisting desire.”<sup>93</sup> According to Burrus, the management of desire is a profound skill of the ascetic, sliding between the temptation to close desire’s circuits but also the resistance to that closure. It is because of the inability to close desire that the ascetic subject came to realize the vacuous gap at the heart of its subject-model, the solution to which it posed: fill up the heart, mind and body with Christ. Only then will one be complete—what one was intended to be. It is because of the omnipresence of desire that the interior of the ascetic was an open amphitheatre, an emerging subject.

The monk could not just negate desire. The ascetic praxis of managing desire is that it had to be courted, and the ascetic had to put themselves at the limit of mental and bodily health (*adiaphoria*). Attributed to Abba Antony, it is said that “Whoever had not experienced temptation cannot enter in the Kingdom of Heaven... Without temptation no-one can be saved.”<sup>94</sup> Likewise in one of the famous scenes in the *vitae*, Antony is battling the demons, and when finished, exhausted and nearly dead, a beam of light descends on him and the pain in his body disappears. Aware that it is God, Antony reasonably asks God where he was during the demonic attack. God answers that “I was here, Antony, but I waited to watch your struggle. And now, since you persevered and were not defeated, I will be your helper forever, and I will make you

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<sup>93</sup> Burrus, Virginia. *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> Ward, *The Sayings*, p. 2.

famous everywhere.”<sup>95</sup> This is God’s only appearance in the *vitae*. Like the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel (demons are angels too), God rewards the athletic struggle.

Desire made the ascetic, made the ascetic project, and it constructed the social and political imagery of the ascetic world. Desire is production on a number of levels. Likewise, for Deleuze desire is not defined in terms of negation, lack, suppression or repression; this is what Deleuze refers to as the “curse” of desire, mostly thanks to Freud. Rather, *desire is being*.<sup>96</sup> Desire is what constitutes bodies, who are themselves manifestations of being like all other organic life. Desire is taken up by Deleuze and Guattari most forcefully in *Anti-Oedipus*, where desire is reconceptualized in terms of production and consumption. Desire produces the social, rather than the laws and propaganda determining what a body desires; desire is responsible for the material configuration of the real. Deleuze and Guattari write: “Desire produces reality, or stated another way, desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production. It is not possible to attribute a special form of existence to desire, a mental or physical reality that is presumably different from the material reality of social production.”<sup>97</sup> Desire is not a unit in the human body, or a force that can be opposed to other forces, but rather the name for the machine that is the body. Though their analyses are primarily devoted to a critique of Freud and contemporary flows of capital, when taken in the larger context of Deleuze’s writings desire speaks much more specifically to the task of construction. As F. LeRon Shults acutely observes, desire plays a major role in the construction of immanence and its enigmatic relation to the body without organs. In the opening paragraph of “November 28, 1947: How Do you Make Yourself a Body

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<sup>95</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 39.

<sup>96</sup> A good text on the relation between theology and Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of desire is F. LeRon Shults’ “De-Oedipalizing Theology: Desire, Difference, and Deleuze,” in *Desire: The Seduction of Christian Theology*, eds. F. Leron Shults, Jan-Olav Henriksen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

without Organs?,” Deleuze and Guattari immediately link up the productive capacity of desire with the bodily construction. In regards to constructing the body without organs, they write:

At any rate, you make one, you can’t desire without making one. And it awaits you; it is an inevitable exercise or experimentation...you can botch it. Or it can be terrifying, and lead you to your death. It is nondesire as well as desire. It is not at all a notion of a concept but a practice, a set of practices. You never reach the Body without Organs, you can’t reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit.<sup>98</sup>

And a few pages later: “A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate.”<sup>99</sup> Desire “fills itself and constructs its own field of immanence.”<sup>100</sup> Dismantling the body never meant killing yourself, but “opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage...”<sup>101</sup>

But what is a body without organs, and what is the relation to the ascetic body? Simply put, the BwO is a limit of intensity, an image of deterritorialization, wilderness, apocalypse, the potentiality of the virtual itself, a formless body dissolved into the ungrounded force of difference. A body without organs is a “body as event.”<sup>102</sup>

The BwO requires practice and a set of practices, and must involve experimentation. Failure is always an option, as is death, write Deleuze and Guattari. How close is the ascetic body to the BwO? Not close at all, for the BwO cannot be reached. But neither can the christic body for the monk, as that would be idolatry. The ascetic task is endless. But this does not mean that some manifestation of the BwO is not what ascetics desire. Is not Christ a virtual, formless body inhabiting a virtual, spectral presence in the lives of the ascetics, to which they desire with all

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<sup>98</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis), p. 166.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 173.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 177.

<sup>102</sup> Hallward, *Deleuze*, p. 98.

their being? Is not the ascetic project nothing but a vast experimentation of the body, courting death at each turn, designed to make the ascetic body dissolve in the nearness to the divine, and, in this dissolution, become populated with the intensity of creation, understood to be Christ itself? Is not the ascetic body designed to perform, in duplicate, with that of Christ? What, then, is Christ? Can Christ be conceptualized as a bodily state of affairs, rather than a transcendent element governing and hierarchizing the ascetic project? Irenaeus claimed that Christ assumed all of humanity in his incarnation, assuming not just physical imperfections, but the virtual corruption found in all human and non-human entities. Without question, with his theory of recapitulation, Irenaeus transcendentalized Christ. Tertullian insisted that Christ, as flesh, was “life itself.” So it is not the case that ascetics are also desiring to be “life itself,” understood under the name of Christ?

To make this conceptual leap, we need to better link Christ and body under the heading of immanence. Immanence will mean here what it is—it describes a state of affairs such that an act begins and ends inside an agent. According to Brown, the body-image the ascetics brought with them to the desert consisted primarily of a notion of the body as autarkic system. Brown writes:

In ideal conditions, it [the body] was thought capable of running on its own “heat”; it would need only enough nourishment to keep that heat alive. In its “natural: state—a state with which the ascetic tended to identify the bodies of Adam and Eve—the body had acted like a finely tuned engine, capable of “idling” indefinitely. It was only the twisted will of fall men that had crammed the body with unnecessary food, thereby generating in it the dire surplus of energy that shows itself in physical appetite, in anger, and in the sexual urge.<sup>103</sup>

Brown’s claim that the ascetic was not just returning to a prior state, but that it was a state immanent to the body under the right conditions, reinforces the observation that the body is a self-sufficient machine. The ascetic was not after *adding* Christ to his or her body, but creating a

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<sup>103</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 223.

body that needed (no)thing. It was this body—in need of (no)thing—that was prelapsarian, and is structurally akin to Tertullian’s virgin earth. But it is also a Christic body in a very narrow sense: insofar as Christ is layered onto the texture of material life (*the* Incarnation), Christ is also self-sufficient, creating the world anew from inside its parameters (immanent causality). Further, Brown’s thesis explains how in response to the question, *what shall I do?*, Antony responds “Do not trust in your righteousness, do not worry about the past, but control your tongue and your stomach.” Too much food begins the downfall and disorderliness of the passions. The body is not so much finding itself as it is constructing itself so it can be a repetition of the cosmological balance of nature—harmonious, self-sufficient life force, whose powers remain in immanent flux. The very real and supposed power of the ascetic body relies on this autarkic system, for with autarky no disorder can arise. Conceptual power surrounds the ascetic body as if by halo.<sup>104</sup>

#### **(iv) Immanent Body**

##### *Body Parts*

Mention of body parts are so frequent in ascetic literature that one is led to believe that the dominant image of the body is that of fragmentation into parts. The ascetic task is therefore to bring the parts back into unison. Pseudo-Macarius the Egyptian in his Homily IV, composed in Asia Minor at the turn of the fifth century, writes of not just protecting the body from “evil things,” but the parts of the body.

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<sup>104</sup> Antony warns that the clock to which ascetics should count their accomplishments is not how long one has been in the desert, nor the months spent in hardship or years in solitude, but in the strength of their desire. The way of virtue ought not “to be measured in terms of time spent, but by the aspirant’s desire and purposefulness” (36). The temporality of the ascetic body leans over a precipice, and borrows urgency from the martyrological literature of being ready to present oneself at any time. Athanasius writes of Antony, “He observed that in saying *today* he was not counting the time passed, but as one always establishing a beginning, he endeavored each day to present himself as the sort of person ready to appear before God.” *Life of Antony*, p. 37. What is interesting in ascetic imitation is how it incorporates crucifixion and martyrological imagery, silence amid suffering and the paroxysm of the body. “And in order that we not become negligent,” Antony states, “it is good to carefully consider the Apostle’s statement: *I die daily.*” Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, p. 45.

Just as in actual existence this body is dull witted, in the same way even the soul, being a subtle entity, embraces the eye through which it sees, the ear through which it hears, likewise the tongue through which it speaks; the soul is held together embracing the hand, and in general all the body and its parts through which the soul completes all of the pursuits of life.<sup>105</sup>

By “gathering” the body parts together, the ascetic protects the “beautiful tunic of the body unorn, unburnt and unblemished.”<sup>106</sup> According to Pseudo-Macarius, the parts of the body are liable to distraction, each with their own weaknesses and passion. This bodily rebellion leads to fragmentation. In many ways, the soul is coextensive not with the body’s parts, but with their immanence to each other, i.e., their immediate and functioning totality. Graceful movement defines the beautiful soul because graceful movement is indicative of a well-trailed will. In Coptic Manichaeism, the imagery is found in the *Kephalaia* of Mani, where in a poem Mani speaks of illness overcoming the body’s parts. To heal the fragmented body according to Mani, a wise man must perform incantations over the limbs of the body, hoping to return the body to its natural state of wholeness.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, when the ascetic fasts, his members take part in the fast.<sup>108</sup> Once thought to be penned by Augustine, Ambrosiaster’s *On the Sin of Adam and Eve* reveals that the whole body is equated with usefulness. Ambrosiaster is in the passage speaking about the cessation of human generation, and he asks if the world would be dysfunctional if some things ceased to be while others continued, but the reference to the health of all the body’s limbs is unmistakable: “Either it operates as a whole or it comes to rest as a whole. Is a body useful, if some of its members thrive while others wither?”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Pseudo-Macarius, in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. Vincent Wimbush (Mineapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pgs. 86-87.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 84.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 197.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* 190.

<sup>109</sup> Ambrosiaster, “On the Sin of Adam and Eve,” in *Ascetic Behavior*, p. 102.

What I will term the *immanent body* is the goal of certain ascetic practices—controlling the body’s members through suppressing the passions and focusing on the intellectual part of the soul. Each task cannot be thought without its partner—controlling the limbs is not merely a performance of a well-trained will. Internality and externality were each instrumental to one another. The ascetic task of putting the body back together highlights the often neglected view that, in its natural state, the body is defined by a riot of independent parts each moving in their own directions. Demons attacking the limbs of the body, such as we can see with the numerous depictions of the *Temptation of St. Antony*, frequently in art history, is a visual imagination of bodily fragmentation and deformation—an aesthetic moment of pure difference. Though it is hard to say exactly where the notion of bodily fragmentation comes from—lived experience, pre-Socratics, ancient theories of medicine and physics, Stoicism, etc—we *can* pinpoint the relation of the task to unify the body with the ontological imagery of the world as a giant body. In other words, the task to unify the body, to make it whole again, is to repeat the ontological problem of difference at the level of the body. Limbs immanent to other limbs is what is immanent in the immanent body—body as duplicate harmonious universe, limbs communicating with perfection and precision.

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Figure 7. Photograph of dancer Amanda Wooden. Photo by Jordan Matter, 2012.

But what is it about limbs? Limbs are the body's natural adornment. Limbs are the body's jewelry. For fashion theory, limbs are territories and units of sensation. Limbs allow us to use tools. The athlete of the Greco-Roman period had to have a harmonious physique, each muscle proportional to the others and each limb suited perfectly to their bodies proportion, a property required of our modern day body builders as well.<sup>110</sup> Da Vinci and Alberti, two of the great theorists of Renaissance painting, would make this concept of proportional harmony the cornerstone of the beauty of the painted figure. Considered athletes of God, ascetics had to wear their virtue like the athlete wore their body—in control, with power and will, decisive. This translated to beauty, grace and supra-worldly description on the side of athletes and monks alike.

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<sup>110</sup> See Emiel Eyben's *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1993).

Mallarmé would write of the grace of the dancer as inhabiting a field no longer relegated to a horizontal, phenomenon field—a body, one could say, without a territory (Figure 7). For Mallarmé, grace is sublimity, and is the reward of the body when it creates the conditions of its own weightlessness.<sup>111</sup> Dance theorist Sondra Fraleigh adds to Mallarmé’s definition of grace the concept of intentionality: “It is the entire body conscious of intentionality... These are those times when you become absorbed into your body’s consciousness, your intentions dissolve, and movement becomes easily commensurate with body. No element of the movement is foreign to you; you claim it as yours.”<sup>112</sup> With an emphasis on intentional movements, of letting the discipline sink so deep into the body that the body becomes the practice, the ascetic body is, according to Fraleigh’s definition, dancing. Andre Lepecki provides an equally powerful theoretical account of the dancing body, bringing ever closer the ascetic body and dancing body through a conception of sociopolitical agency,

This body, visceral matter as well as sociopolitical agent, discontinuous with itself, moving in the folds of time, dissident of time, manifests its agency through the many ways it eventually smuggles its materiality into a charged presence that defies subjection. Dance as a critical theory and critical praxis proposes a body that is less an empty signifier (executing preordained steps as it obeys blindly to structures of command) than a material, socially inscribed agent, a non-univocal body, an open potentiality, a force-field constantly negotiating its position in the powerful struggle for its appropriation and control.<sup>113</sup>

Defying subjection, moving in the folds of time, smuggling into materiality a charged presence, a socially inscribed agent, an open potentiality resisting appropriation and control—as much is being claimed of the ascetic body. The ascetic body is also performing like an athlete, and

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<sup>111</sup> Mallarmé, Stéphane. “Ballets,” in *What is dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*, eds. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 134.

<sup>112</sup> Fraleigh, Sondra Horton. “Witnessing the Frog Pond,” in *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 1999), pgs. 200-201. See also Fraleigh’s *Dance And Lived Body* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 1987).

<sup>113</sup> Lepecki, Andre. “Introduction: Presence and Body in Dance and Performance Theory,” in *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004), p. 6.

anyone familiar with the notion of the athletic body in Graeco-Roman antiquity knows that grace is the sine qua non of the athlete. When in motion, the divine athlete's limbs swung with cosmological harmony. As every athlete knows, any difficult athletic movement requires the entire body. Each limb must work with each other—the entirety of the body must enter the singularity of the limb. The Whole must enter the Part. Myron's *Discus Thrower*, carved in the fifth century b.c., represents the athletically dancing body caught in the moment when the body recoils itself so as to generate outward movement.



Figure 8. *Discobolus* of Myron. Roman marble copy of a fifth century Greek bronze.

This tension, or *tonos*, captures the moment of athletic grace, the moment when movement becomes athletic. The downward turned face of the *Discus Thrower* (Figure 8) intensely focuses on bodily control, especially the arc of his back arm, in which the slightest twitch of this limb,

causing a misfire or misdirection, signals inevitable failure for the flight of the discus. Like the baseball pitcher or the golf swing, the plane of arc that the limbs must follow is so exact it takes years to master, and entire sports are conceived on this fact. When an athlete has lost his swing, there is no formula to get it back. Though ascetics are not engaged in any of these types of activities, these facts however remain true to lived experience, and the Greco Roman notion of the ascetic as an “athlete of God” was surely just one perceptual register in which to understand the ascetic’s control of their limbs. Controlling the limbs was for Greek athletics an act of divine favor, and the athletic body was cosmological in that, like the role of the logos for the cosmos, it held unruly forces together when their nature was to fragment. The body for the Greeks was the same as it was for the early Christians—the body’s movement was interpreted in ontological and cosmological registers.

Due to his burning service for God, Symeon the Stylite had “chastity of body with pure limbs,”<sup>114</sup> but we are not told exactly what “pure limbs” are. According to his *vitae*, “In open view the flesh of his feet ruptured from much standing, but his steadfast mind was on fire for his Lord, a contest in secret. The vertebrae of his spine were dislocated through constant supplication, but he was fastened and held together by the love of Christ.”<sup>115</sup> In the *Life of Antony*, an encounter with a “very tall demon” is being relayed by Antony, and, as is common in the *vitae*, he fights off the demon with “the mention of the name of Christ.”<sup>116</sup> Repeatedly, the demon whipped the beleaguered Antony, but upon repeating “Nothing *shall separate me from the love of Christ*,” the demons lashed out at each other instead, and Antony’s body remained

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<sup>114</sup> From “The Syriac Life of Simeon Stylites,” in *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1992), p. 129.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 129.

<sup>116</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 61.

intact.<sup>117</sup> On another occasion, Antony is asked to pray with some monks in a boat. After entering the boat, Antony perceives an odorous smell that no other monks can discern. The other monks try to convince Antony the odor is coming from dead fish, presumably lying around in the boat, but Antony, the wiser of the bunch, recognizes it to be the scent of a demon that had possessed a young boy. In typical dramatic fashion, Athanasius writes: “But being rebuked in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the demon departed and the man was restored to health.”<sup>118</sup> Being able to summon Christ against the tendencies of bodily fragmentation that encounters with the demonic involve is a power of the ascetic. Christ restores the unhealthy and comes to the rescue when Antony’s body is being lashed by demons.

Christ as support for the ascetic project is typical language for ascetic literature, but in the reference to his dislocated spinal column, with one’s love of Christ as the agent of bondage, it is hard to tell the difference if this is purely literary technique (metaphor) or reflects the true belief that Christ was a material sinew holding the monk’s body together, though I am apt to lean towards the latter. Just as we saw with the phenomenon of the demons, it is real and not real, residing not in both categories at once, but perhaps constructing a category unique to this specific tradition, i.e., embodied thought grounded in the conceptual persona of Christ, or what Miller calls the figural imagination of late antique Christianity. Christ is not only holding the theology together, but, according to the hagiographical accounts, holding actual bodies together.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 78.

<sup>119</sup> In a reading of two texts, Origen’s *Dialogue with Heraclides* and the *Apocryphon of John*, Valantasis found himself intrigued with the emphasis on Adam’s body parts. Though the hermetic nature of commentary on Adam’s body parts may in truth have little to do directly with Antony’s texts, the imaginary structure employed in these texts do point to a fundamental congruence on the power of the body parts in relation to cosmological speculation. In the *Apocryphon of John*, Valantasis finds that the parts of the body are identified with creative powers, the rulers of the seven senses, the four elements and the human emotional structure (Valantasis, *The Making*, p. 126). Concluding that the section in the creation myth dealing with the body parts may be a later addition, Valantasis’ analysis highlights the association of body parts with abstract qualities over and above their utility function. Moreover, discussions of body parts are to be found in creation narratives, though there is no clue in the text as to the meaning of

At the end of the Antony's *vitae*, it is said that Antony retained the health in his feet and hands, and in his "Letter to Marcellinus," Athanasius speaks of how the wrong desires create a state of discord in the body, which manifests itself in the parts of the body.<sup>120</sup> More than any other, Antony's *Letters*, eight in total, express a direct theorization of the movements of the body.<sup>121</sup>

The Antony of the *vitae*, however, differs remarkably from the Antony of the *Letters*. The major difference between the two is the *Letter's* emphasis on self-knowledge. Rubenson concludes that the Antony of the *Letters* is closer to a spiritual teacher of gnosis, as opposed to the power-deferring combative ascetic of the *vitae*. Of the Antony of the *Letters*, Rubenson writes, "his theological background, his emphasis on self-knowledge and the lack of references to authoritative writings or to ecclesiastical leaders suggest that he was what could be called a charismatic teacher of spiritual *gnosis*."<sup>122</sup> While the *Letters* emphasize Jesus, rationality, the *parousia*, cosmology, the Holy Spirit, and speak of demons as non-visible internal agents, the *vitae* is decidedly Christocentric and only mentions the Spirit on one occasion as the giver of grace. Demons are visible in the *vitae*, and while rationality does play a part, spiritual combat and bodily practice is arguably more important than self-knowledge.

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such abstract qualities. Turning to Origen's Dialogue with Heraclides, recorded sometime between 239 and 244 c.e. in a meeting in Arabia to test the orthodoxy of a local bishop, Valantasis finds that the role and function of speculation on Adam's body parts serve a larger role in the construction of esoteric metaphysics. The spiritualization of the body parts, it seems, serve as a genealogical midway point, which begins with speculation on the birth of Adam, the spiritualization of body parts, and finally, with Origen, speculation on the inner/outer parts of the body. Valantasis sums it up in the following manner. "The teaching is such that ascetical theological categories are tied to body parts so that by focusing on a body part, attainment of an ascetical ideal correlative to that part is made possible" (Valantasis, *The Making*, p. 133). That the training of parts will lead one closer to the ascetic ideal Antony's letters proves decisively.

<sup>120</sup> Athanasius, "Letter to Marcellinus," in *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1989), p. 124.

<sup>121</sup> See also Ward's *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* on the three movements, pgs. 5-6.

<sup>122</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters*, 141.

Antony speaks of three motions of the body in his first letter, which are taken up and repeated in the following letters. The movements are as follow: 1) *natural*—“There is that which is implanted in the body by nature, compacted with it in its first creation; but this is not operative if the soul does not will it, save only that it signifies its presence through a passionless movement in the body.” Movement exists here, but it is passionless, having its origin in the soul. This is Edenic movement. 2) *abundant*: a movement from too much food and drink, which causes the blood to heat up, which leads to the passions, which leads to the Fall, which leads to fragmentation. This reiterates Brown’s notions of the body as autarkic system. 3) *demonic*: a movement of the demons when they become mixed in the body’s limbs. These three movements constitute the aesthetic system of movement for Antony. Eagerly seeking to gain the first movement (natural, i.e., Edenic), the second two form the structure of ascetic temptation. Abundant and demonic movement are inextricably linked, most likely as a trickle down effect from the second to the third. Too much food creates one movement which thereby opens the passions and allows the demons to take over the body.

While not addressed as directly in the *vitae*, the letters are clear that the demons are mingled in the limbs of the body. While some “wounds of the soul,” however, remain outside the body, “being mingled in the will,” the movements of the body have their origins in a will divided against itself.<sup>123</sup> Though the principle of essence to appearance seems to predominate how disorder manifests in the body (from will as essence to limbs as manifestation), it is not the rule that one cannot fix the problem of disorder from appearance to essence. In other words, the ascetic reaches the will through the body’s limbs. Guided by the spirit, Antony in the letters

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<sup>123</sup> Antony, Letter I, p. 3.



speaks of purifying the eyes, tongue, hands, belly and feet. Only after going through the body parts, does Antony speak of the resurrection:

And I think that when the whole body is purified, and has received the fullness of the Spirit, it has received some portion of the spiritual body which it is to assume in the resurrection of the just. This I have said concerning the sickness of the soul which are mingled with the members of the bodily nature in which the soul moves and works; and so the soul becomes guide to the evil spirits which by it have been working in the limbs of the body.<sup>124</sup>

The body whose parts are purified attains some “portion” of the resurrected body. For Athanasius the resurrection is not *just* about the end of time, but of restoring in time man’s original body and will,<sup>125</sup> and in his letters Antony preserves a tension between the already and the not yet of Jesus’s coming.<sup>126</sup>

### *Ontological Slippage*

Letters III, V, VI and VII bring forth the Stoic logic of a world with a harmony of parts, or members working together as one. Letter VI in particular explicitly connects body and cosmos and the mutual problem they share—alienation of limbs. Antony begins by citing Col. 1:15-18, which is a summary of Christ’s pre-existence and co-creation, and reiterates the basic tenets of recapitulation, which states that (i) Christ is the head of the church, and that (ii) his body is the Church. Antony’s language would not strike us as strange were he to keep the conversation on the ontological level, but this is not what he does. The passage continues:

Therefore we are all members one of another, and the body of Christ, and the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’; and if one member suffers, the whole body is moved and suffers with it. But if a member is estranged from the body, and has

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<sup>124</sup> Antony, Letter I, p. 5

<sup>125</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters*, p. 78.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

no communication with the head, but is delighted by the passions of its own body, this means that its wound is incurable, and it has forgotten its beginning and its end.<sup>127</sup>

The strangeness of the passage is constituted by the slippage between the ontological and the bodily. The imagery is of a cosmic body with alienated members who can no longer communicate with the head because the members, which are themselves bodies in their own right, are estranged from their own bodies thanks to the passions. Because the limb-bodies are estranged from themselves, they can no longer communicate within themselves, and this dysfunction repeats itself a second time in a dysfunctionality in the cosmic body. The lack of communication reveals a state of affairs—the “wound” of humanity—and because of it the member “has forgotten its beginning and its end.”<sup>128</sup> Christ, as physician, makes it possible for us to activate communication once again on both levels by recapitulating the beginning with the end. This technical operation occurs because, as I have argued earlier, Christ is a body-ontology, and so any philosophical operations at work on this level have dual effects when it comes to bodily understanding (ascetic practice) and ontological cohesion.

So remarkable and frequent is the sliding between language of the actual body working together and the cosmological body working together that one is led to conclude that the ascetic self-understanding of controlling the body’s limbs necessarily repeats the ontological power of Christ bringing difference under the cloak of unity, or of constructing unity on the basis of a harmony of parts. *My thesis*: the monk’s body is an immanent body because it is at once a cosmological body, replete with the cosmological drama of fragmentation, recapitulation and creation.

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<sup>127</sup> Antony, Letter VI, p. 22

<sup>128</sup> Antony, Letter VI, p. 22.

But what logic is employed to justify Antony's language? Letter VI invokes the logic of the incarnation, stating that Christ took the form of poverty to rid poverty, weakness to rid weakness, and so on. Humanity was wounded, and Christ, adopting the form of the wounded, came to earth as a wounded "physician." Christ's assumption of the wound healed the wound. In theoretical terms—assumption of the whole by a part heals the whole *and* the parts. Monastic practice is in some sense therefore a distilled, albeit lengthened, crucifixion. The monk's body is given cosmological power because written on the body is the (Christic) narrative of cosmological fragmentation, recapitulation and creation.

Christ is indeed immanent to the ascetic body, but the answer to *what is Christ?* is not a hierarchical being governing the ascetic body. It is instructive to remember how we got to this point. Irenaeus established the fact that Christ gathered humanity into his body. Drawing on the Stoics, Irenaeus would reaffirm Paul's statement that the cosmos is a body. Tertullian established the fact that Christ was more than just the cosmos, but the "fabric of life," and with the caveat that Christ had another name, Flesh. Moreover, Tertullian was insistent on the absolute proximity of flesh to living man, thus paving the way for ascetic notions of achieving that proximity. Flesh is instrumental, according to Tertullian, which can be understood in two registers: Christ taking flesh was an instrument of God to incarnate the world, or our flesh is instrumental in becoming Christ-like. These were not two different acts, but had to be thought together, mostly thanks to the power of the conceptual persona that Irenaeus laid out. Athanasius' logic in *On the Incarnation* drew from Tertullian the fact that Christ's assumption of a part unified the whole, but Athanasius will further refine the dynamics of the ontological movement of a part and how this has significance for the whole. Moreover, whereas the Pauline language of the ontological

body is that of Christ as the body of the church, “to Antony it is an image of the entire creation.”<sup>129</sup> Athanasius’ *Life of Antony* completes the conflation of Christ and lived body by placing Christ at the center of the ontological spectrum—Christ as immanent cause—thereby allowing for the concept of *imitatio Christi* to take hold in practice.<sup>130</sup>

Two acts repeat themselves in enfolded con-substantiality, and the difference between lived body and the cosmos blurs to non-differentiation. The virtual event that is Christ’s incarnation and subsequent unification (being speaks in one voice after the Christ-event) is repeated in historical time with similar consequences. The door is opened for the ascetic body to take part in the creation of new life, to pick up, as it were, where Christ left off, to become, in Deleuzian language, deterritorialized. “And all that the Savior did through the Saints, he does in our own times through these monks,” says an anonymous source in the epilogue to the *Historia monachorum*. And as if to frame the activities of the ancient athletes, the prologue reads “Indeed, it is clear to all who dwell there that through them the world is kept in being, and that through them too human life is preserved and honored by God.”<sup>131</sup> Life’s creation and preservation is an act of the ascetic body.

### *Avant Garde Bodies*

If by avant garde we mean the property of an individual to further creation through creative acts, as it was first defined in the early nineteenth century by Saint Simonian Olinde Rodrigues to describe the artist, scientist and industrialist, the ascetic body is an avant garde body, guiding

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<sup>129</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters*, p. 78.

<sup>130</sup> See Brakke’s *Athanasius and Asceticism*, p. 150, for more of how the transfer of incorruptibility from the Word was given to lived bodies.

<sup>131</sup> Ward, Prologue to *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, p. 50.

creation to new and different forms of creaturehood.<sup>132</sup> Curiously, the current theorization of the avant garde artist locates a similar tension between artist and social body that we have found in the ascetic body. As cultural vanguards involved in communication with transcendent forms and mystical processes, the artists of the earliest avant garde movement act as figures of propheticism, privy to hermetic realms of creation, redemption, and beauty. One need only think of the upward moving triangle of Kandinsky's theosophy.<sup>133</sup> The project of the historical avant garde was equal part social and aesthetic, with their utopian visions taking shape in the smallest of perceptual cues and the largest of industrial vision (Bauhaus, Russian Constructivism). Mark Taylor notes that "influential members of what eventually came to be known as the avant-garde advanced utopian visions, which, though not acknowledged as such, were actually artistic visions of the kingdom of God."<sup>134</sup> Peter Berger's *Theory of the Avant Garde*, one of the earliest theorizations of the problem of "proximity" of the avant garde to culture, reiterates the problem of the ascetic body's relation to surrounding life. The avant garde artist remains in a problematic situation *vis-à-vis* culture in that to bring together art and life-praxis, which was and remains the goal of the avant garde, the distance had to be collapsed between art and life.<sup>135</sup> However, when the distance was collapsed, the theoretical edge garnered from "critical distance" was lost as well, which thereby disabled art's ability to create the objects for culture's renewal. Too much cultural intimacy allowed their art to become life—in the form of stagings, readings, performances, and so on—but at the same time artists lost the critical edge, the distance as it were, required of a cultural prophet. In essence, the question is: to what degree can an individual and the acts surrounding their being express the cultural body while at the same time renew that

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<sup>132</sup> For the growth of the organized town and the person who must perform the laborious "liturgies" to keep the town functioning properly, see Rubenson 88-92. Antony's discernment is equal parts practical and political. Heavenly power, then, was associated less with contact with the divine and more in their relationship to this world.

<sup>133</sup> See Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Wittenborn, 1914).

<sup>134</sup> Taylor, Mark. *Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>135</sup> Berger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant Garde* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 83.

cultural body? We can translate this, once again, into the logic of the part and the whole—the ability of the part to be the whole and yet distinct from it. As we have seen, this was foremost of Athanasius' concerns for Christ—that Christ be equated with it on a material level but distinct from it on a virtual level.

Given that the agency granted to the ascetic body requires that they too express creation through their embodiment of a repeated Christ, the logic of the ascetic remains on the structural level analogous. To be a vehicle of God, to express the glory of creation in a single being, to shine with luminescence, to explicate the cosmos, to have one's being rest in being itself, to renew creation—this is the by-product, if not the goal, of asceticism. Writes Valantasis,

Asceticism functions as a system of cultural formation; it orients the person or group of people to the immediate cultural environment and to the unexpressed, but present, systems that underlie it...Asceticism may be defined as performances designed to inaugurate an alternative culture, to enable different social relations, and to create a new identity.<sup>136</sup>

No longer is creation a top-down emanative or telos driven causality, but the principles whereby creation is renewed are immanent to creation itself. The property of Christ's co-creation cannot be overestimated, for it is this property above all others allowing the early Christian authors to justify the fact that Christ could renew Creation not just because he was sent by God, but because he was always-already part of creation. Christ could renew creation because he had made it. The creation of the immanent cause is therefore a repetition of the original cosmological act of creation. God did not send Christ, and the Christ did not embody God, but rather this specific articulation of Christ made the thought of an immanent God possible, since the tools for thinking divine immanence were not readily available. Transcendence was not erased from the

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<sup>136</sup> Valantasis, *The Making*, p. 8.

philosophical terrain, but rather transcendence was renamed as the harmonization of the parts; the whole, as the image of the harmonization of parts.<sup>137</sup>

Deleuze terms this process of renewing creation from within “counter-actualization.” To renew creation from within, one had to dissolve the self and become transparent to the forces around them. Bataille terms such subjective death the moment of opening unto the infinite, where “death desired by the holy man turns into divine life for him.”<sup>138</sup> According to Bataille, the mystic and saint desire an object in which it is hard to say whether it is the glory of life or the blackness of death.<sup>139</sup>—“In each case it is hard to say whether the object of desire is the incandescence of life or of death.” It is only on the edge of death that the world becomes transparent to the ascetic.<sup>140</sup>

The dissolution of the self, which is broadly conceived the placeholder for one’s identity, is instrumental for Bataille. Under certain conditions, Deleuze found the dissolution of the self not only safe, but productive, and, in most instances, required. But what motivates the theorization of counter-actualization when Deleuze’s ontology is already teeming with creative life? The problem is that the forms of creation, as the process of actualization hints toward, are divorced from the virtual. The forms and objects of creation are helpless to add to the creativity of nature. In other worlds, only virtuality is creative. Creation goes from virtuality to actuality, and not vice versa. But in rare instances the creature can embody the form-giving virtual powers and in turn speak for the whole. Hallward sums up this fact nicely, “The actual is not creative but its

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<sup>137</sup> See previous chapter on the Whole vs. Part.

<sup>138</sup> Bataille, *Mysticism and Sensuality*, p. 230.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 240.

<sup>140</sup> Bataille again on the mystic’s state, “In the inert beatitude of this state, when each object and the whole universe have become utterly transparent, hope and dread have both vanished. The object of contemplation becomes equal to *nothing* (Christians would say equal to God), and at the same time equal to the contemplating subject. There is no longer any difference between one thing and another in this respect; no distances can be located; the subject lost in the indistinct and illimitable presence of the universe and himself ceases to belong to the passing of time. He is absorbed in the everlasting instant, irrevocably as it seems, with no roots in the past or hopes in the future, and the instant itself is eternity” (249).

dissolving can be.”<sup>141</sup> These instances are rare, requiring experimentation, risk and the creation of a new body able to dissolve itself so as to capture the life around it. In this Deleuzian becoming-virtual there is a danger, or, one should admit, a probability of becoming-imperceptible, anonymous, and asignifying. The counter-actualized being loses its status as being in favor of the abstract Whole.

Using Deleuze’s concept of counter-actualization, we can see how the ascetic body adds, completes and renews creation. This process is guided by the fact that Christ is not just the name of a religious figure, but the image of a body-ontology. For Deleuze’s notion of counter-actualization to be possible, a certain ontological configuration had to be constructed; that is, each being, or part, had to be understood as an expression of the entire system. Once this is established, whatever can be seen in the part is expressive in some manner of the whole. It is the logic of implication and explication so crucial to process thought. The disciplining of the will and the body put the body in order, and was more than analogous to the harmonizing of the cosmos—the ascetic body under control was understood with the language of a self-sufficient universe. But as we know, the ascetic project was not just about the spectacle of control. Equally populated by stories of deformity and the state of being out of control, ascetic hagiography provided a view of human life in its most extreme conditions. The imagery of the human condition highlighted by this literature is that of the task of perpetual re-creation.

### **Effecting Space**

Broadly conceived, counter-actualization concerns the creative potential of the human body to influence life. We can understand this potential in another register—effecting space. Since in the

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<sup>141</sup> Hallward, *Deleuze*, p. 82.



following chapters we will see how the ascetic body has influenced Western painting, it is only fitting that this potential be put into spatial metaphors. *Effecting space* should be understood as a theoretical translation attempting to broadly define ascetic power. The “space” in question is not physical space. Space refers to a mythological and cosmological field that was believed to have been altered in Christ’s advent. Broadly conceived, this space is not empty, but defined as a fabric whereupon any alteration immanently registers an effect elsewhere. It is a translation of “the universe” yet it differs from this positivist notion in the sense that this “space” is enfolded within the Christ concept, and, moreover, co-defined by the Christ concept. This specifically Christian cosmology is made possible by the concept of Christ, since Christ is, in a way, commensurate with it. Immanent causality is the main feature of this space.

Though with Athanasius the concept received more definition, it was found in a more primitive manner in the work of Irenaeus and Tertullian. Recapitulation concerns the retroactive deployment of Christ across a historical spectrum, in such a way that Christ corrected the corrupt Adamic body. As a “second Adam,” Christ drew the historical plane of bodies upon him, acting as a device of capture for all historical bodies. For Tertullian, effecting space was found initially in the flesh, where Christ, by donning human flesh, divinized humanity. Flesh was itself an active space wherein the drama of the incarnation took place. Just as the flesh was equally a cosmological, material and mythological site upon which the Christian story was told, space is equally so. In *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius held a Stoic-influenced theory of Christ harmonizing the cosmos, and ontological movement was the name given to this act of Christ: “nor, while he moved the body, was the universe left void of his working and providence.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> This was taken from the Archibald Robertson translation, titled *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation* (London, 1885). Passage found on page 41.

However, as the third thinker to be taken up in this genealogy, Athanasius makes a critical move that would have profound consequences for the history of Christianity. With his *Life of Antony*, he develops a way of speaking about human bodies that calls forth his christological views. The Christ who moves the cosmos is now translated into the Antony of the desert. The translation of idioms is not exact, and the language changes from that of the cosmos to more immediate insinuations of the ascetic altering social and political reality, with of course numerous other examples of altering mythological space. But herein lays the power and agency of ascetics—the power of the cosmological Christ was transferred to human bodies. The Christ performance was repeated in virtue of a repeatable Christ, the latter made possible by the conceptual persona of Christ. Ascetics were, after all, imitations of Christ. But what exactly does *imitation* mean in this context? Monks didn't simply imitate Christ. Athanasius creates a christology of the human body that imitates, albeit in a philosophical manner, the Christ of christology. How exactly is this done? How exactly does the monk effect space? Since it is not a simple translation of the ontological movement of Christ, one must engage aspects of the ascetic tradition that assume this power to be active.

First is the power over the demonic. By conquering the demonic, the ascetic clears the “air” for the world. Antony does not just make it possible for his brethren in the desert to rise to heaven, but all of humanity. The ascetic therefore has a universal power, and the starkness of the desert backdrop is intended to call attention to this universalism. The desert is, as it were, a universal stage whose consequences are felt on the global stage. The conquering of demons occupies a central part of the *vitae*, which cannot be said of Athanasius' other works. The term “space” captures the physical and bodily aspects of the ascetic enterprise, since it is through the body, not

the mind, that the ascetic achieves their goal. The ascetic's body is an instrument just as Christ was an instrument: "Antony becomes the instrument of the Logos, as the humanity of Christ had been the Logos' instrument in the incarnation."<sup>143</sup> The ascetic is represented not as retiring into the desert, but "as marching into the desert to engage the devils in battle, and so to make a positive contribution to the salvation of the world by participating in the Logos' saving work."<sup>144</sup> In other words, Antony's contribution to Egypt is immense, since it is insinuated that no other monks after Antony have to do battle with the demons. Antony's victory is national as much as it is personal.<sup>145</sup>

Athanasius is intent to erect a model of piety based on the notion that deification can be achieved without martyrdom.<sup>146</sup> For Clement actual death is preferred for deification, yet nonetheless he paves a way for an intellectual sacrifice.<sup>147</sup> Whereas for Origen the Christian drama and story was primarily an epistemological one, for Athanasius' Antony it is equally physical.<sup>148</sup> According to Goehring, "Antony's innovation lay not in the idea of withdrawal per se, but in its translation from an ethical to a physical plane...Antony expanded this concept of withdrawal to include a physical separation from one's fellow Christians through flight to ever more remote retreats."<sup>149</sup> Though Antony was not the first ascetic, the physicality of Antony's invention concerned not just the physical body nor his physical isolation, but the shared ontological movement within the earth-body relation.

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<sup>143</sup> Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, p. 82.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* 82.

<sup>145</sup> Brakke, *The Making*, 27.

<sup>146</sup> According to Daniel Wilson, the main reason of the incarnation for Athanasius "is for the purpose of deification, and only a divine Savior can perform deification by uniting with humanity," Wilson, *Deification and the Rule of Faith*, p. 46.

<sup>147</sup> Brakke, *The Making*, p. 26.

<sup>148</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism*, p. 145.

<sup>149</sup> Goehring, James. *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, p. 25.

The ascetic primarily uses his body to do his “saving work,” not his contemplative powers, to exercise his logos, which explains why in the *vitae* there is no language of the “soul’s ascent to God in contemplation, but rather of its descent into the world given over to sin, a descent to the place of the demons there to do battle with them.”<sup>150</sup> Andrew Louth notes that this lack of a contemplative emphasis—what he terms the “anti-mystical strand” of monasticism—will find its way into the rule of St. Benedict, likewise providing no language of contemplation. Athanasius modifies the various Neo-platonisms of the day by not positing the soul’s natural flight from the body to the heavenly place of incorruptibility, but the heavenly logos becoming corruptible in the body. Just as Christ had re-created the world, so to Antony refines the ideal image of the Christian, re-creating and clearing the mythological “space” towards righteousness.

Second, Antony has the power to vitalize the desert, to make the desert a city. Antony has the power to convert. After being inspired by Antony, many monks take up the solitary path, “And so, from then on, there were monasteries in the mountains and the desert was made a city by monks, who left their own people and registered themselves for the citizenship in the heavens.”<sup>151</sup> But there is an *immediate influence* to make the desert a city, and a *far influence* to make the “real” city a desert. The context in which to understand the desert becoming a city and the city becoming a desert is both political and soteriological. Political because Athanasius, as the scriptwriter behind the scenes, believes Alexandria to be equally purified like the desert. Soteriological because the theological context concerns the advancement of Christian civilization.<sup>152</sup> Ascetics are, quite literally, understood to be pulling civilization upwards to

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<sup>150</sup> Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 97.

<sup>151</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, p. 43.

<sup>152</sup> See Pelikan’s *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 312, for more on the “advancement towards perfection.”

greater levels of purity, and therefore, reward. Just as Christ harmonized the universe in his incarnation, so too the ascetic carries the burden of a corrupt civilization on his back. It is in this sense that ascetics are the “new heroics” of the age.<sup>153</sup> According to Burrus, the valorization of the desert is not a simple rejection of the city, but its refashioning. Alexandria, the home and center of Athanasius, is not aligned with the defiled city, but likewise a desert in need of purity. Bringing the ascetic cause into the city is the true political and theological goal of Athanasius.<sup>154</sup> The refashioning and re-creation of the city, however, takes place by avenues other than just inspiration. Indeed, a mystical bond connects Antony’s power in the desert to his power in the city. Akin to the “kinship of the flesh” that Athanasius believed humanity to have had with Christ, there seems to be a similar bond between Antony and the city. Antony’s home, writes Burrus, “is in some important sense still Alexandria.”<sup>155</sup> Antony’s kinship of the flesh is not just with his fellow humans, but with city centers as well, testifies to this ability to create space anew, to have power from afar via a mythological space of immanent causality.

## Conclusion

If one had to update Athanasian christology in the language of twenty-first century theology, we would have to say that it trafficked in a process theology based on a language of movement between the conceptual persona of Christ and the body of Antony. This language of movement is the flowering of the logos christology begun centuries earlier by Irenaeus, in which the body of Christ is said to have recapitulated all of humanity. Athanasius’ logic in *On the Incarnation* addresses the part/whole problem directly, claiming that the Christian incarnation can be

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<sup>153</sup> Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, p. 77.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 74-75.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* 76.

understood theoretically as the whole entering a part, and, in this process, correct the parts and the whole. This language took many forms, but it was predominantly worked out in the Stoic language of a body and its members.

The ascetic body is an avant garde body with cosmological properties of harmony and unification because it was understood through the registers of Christ's similar project of unifying cosmological difference. Understood not only as a repetition of the Christ body, it was the concept of Christ as difference and unity of difference (the univocal name) through which the ascetic body was conceived. Christ *was* difference because in him was (i) the principle of creation of different beings (co-creation), and (ii) through him difference was gathered—recapitulated being. Under the imagery of limbs and members, the ascetic struggle was in part controlling the internal riot that was endemic to the fallen body—arms and feet and hands have an autonomy of their own, needing to be put under the control of a single will. Internal connectivity had to be established, and immanence of action in the body, where an arm moves only with the approval of the entire body, became a hallmark of ascetic beauty.

What this analysis says about early Christianity is that, after all, Christ is the name of a concept. Concepts are not static representations of states of affairs in the world, but revolutionary bits of intelligence equally oriented towards future states. Christ had to be invented. But why was he invented? One could respond with numerous answers, and many have, but in our present case it is clear that Christ was invented so as to lay out a new plane of immanence in the ancient world. Christ was created philosophically, and therefore was meant to solve philosophical problems: the problem of diversity, salvation, cosmological harmony, and so on. However, this is not to say

that philosophical problems are unrelated to problems in life. Asceticism, developing through, on, and from Christ's plane of immanence, is a direct response to the question of *how ought one to live?* Upon this plane of immanence new modes and practices of thoughts developed. Guiding the creation of new practices was the conceptual persona of Christ, inhering in thought like a virtual tendency or disposition, like a mountainous topography guiding the streams and rivers of christology. This topography gave to early christology and ascetic literature an aesthetic of suffering (the glory of crucifixion/martyrdom/mutilation/deformation), and the concomitant expression of stasis (control/rationality/direction). Taken together, these two aesthetics do not compete, nor do they constitute a dialectical system in need of sublation. Rather, they are two modalities of expression in which the conceptual persona of Christ nurtured Christian thought. Moreover, since for Deleuze and Guattari the veracity of a conceptual persona is tested by the modality of life it inspires, the conceptual persona of Christ is one of the most enduring in Western philosophical history, and it is surprising that Deleuze himself, or his readers, never turned to Christianity to explore the role of personae further.

As I stated at the outset, this analysis is as much a study of performance art as of early Christianity, as much of beauty as of St. Antony, as much of Nietzsche and as of the shape of ontology and the logics allowing certain operations to occur. Now our attention will be directed towards art and the revolutionary role the ascetic body played in constructing a new image of the painted figure, one which was to aid in the construction of the Renaissance canvas. Specifically, the notion of effecting space will be taken up in the turn to art, since the logic of the immanent body will be found operative in paintings and depictions of ascetic bodies.

## Part II.

### **The Extended Body: Aesthetics**



## **An Introduction to Renaissance Aesthetics**

### **Toward Art**

The first section comprising the first four chapters can be understood as the construction of the concept of Christ in late antiquity. Aside from being a genealogy of an idea, the reading of the construction of Christ was strategic so as to highlight its contributions to the visual imagination in late antique thinkers, such as Irenaeus (recapitulation), Tertullian (materialism and flesh), and Athanasius (ascetic body). That logic, simply put, was the ability of a body to effect the space around it in an immanent fashion, i.e., in an unmediated way. The initial chapter was framed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of conceptual personae. I quickly departed from any orthodox or simple appropriation of this idea. The basic insight of this concept is that philosophy and/or theo-philosophical systems are often structured by personified figures inhering in the system. These figures or personae give a philosophy a style and a movement to its concepts. It is remarkable that this idea, which bears so much weight in Deleuze and Guattari's late collaborative piece *What is Philosophy?*, has received little to no attention in the critical literature surrounding their work, not to mention its clear affinities with Christianity, which is arguably one of the most important philosophical systems in Western history to employ a persona in its theoretical architecture.

The concept of immanence specific to Christ was christology's contribution to late antique philosophy and theology, and it was argued that the final flowering of this "high christology" was a bodily practice centered on ascetic imitation. In one sense, the first section is in part a genealogy of immanence via practices of bodily and figural representation within the Christian theological and philosophical tradition. But why turn to visual art? And what is the thread that connects late antique christology and asceticism with medieval art nearly a millennium later? The following two chapters will attempt to answer this question.

Simply put, the turn to art is the testing of a thesis, and the engagement with visual studies is a case study in a logic of the body. The presence of a philosophical persona to authorize a visual and artistic practice produced the immanent body. In this sense, this text is faithful to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of a conceptual persona, whose function it is to establish modalities of living. Christ was the figure, or conceptual persona, that first, played a crucial role in ascetic practice and the creation of the ascetic body, and second, provided the perceptual hermeneutics in which to interpret that practice. The figure of St. Antony is a repetition of Christ, and Antony's political and cultural "power"—his ontological power—must be thought as an *extension* of the power afforded to Christ in the christological writings previously discussed. The attribute of Christ's ability to harmonize the cosmos is applied to the ascetic body. These bodies are extended. Extension must be thought in a few registers. Extension is another name for immanent causality for the following reasons: (i) immanent causality established a modality of thinking in which it was possible to understand the ascetic as embodying the All; (ii) the features of embodiment allowed thought to trace in this All an immanent causality in which the ascetic body had the powers to alter creation immediately from their bodies. Of course, the ascetic body

did not literally “move” creation. Mountains did not move when the ascetic body moved, and rivers did no cease to flow downhill. Moving the cosmos is the language of mythos and poetry, which does not take away from its psychology and religious power.

This notion of the power of movement, detailed in chapter 4, was intended to call attention to the notion of material redemption so crucial to conceptions of the incarnation, wherein life itself—including material objects—became part of divine life. Movement is equally a term of Christian salvation (the law of death has been replaced by the law of life) as it is materially transcendental (the conditions of life now contain the principle of salvation). Movement is another name for the immanent causality of the Christ body, and later, the ascetic body. For instance, once Antony cleared the air of demons all the faithful could immediately pass from earth to heaven, just as after Christ’s crucifixion it was proclaimed that a new life was now possible. Antony’s power was immanent and extended, the latter because of Christ’s previous articulation as recapitulated being. Christ is, therefore, the original power of extension. However, in a strange alliance between aesthetics, history and theology, this concept of extension becomes relevant when put into the context of visual art, especially Renaissance painting. The notion of an extended body effecting the space around it will become a critical attribute of the Renaissance figure, as well as one of the formal properties of the painted canvas.

### **Extension in Art**

“Giotto is made to stand at the commencement of a development that, in the eyes of Meier-Graefe and his fellow early Modernists, was to lead in the end to the work of Cezanne. In other words, it was to lead to what for the Modernists was the central achievement of modern art.”

Charles Harrison

The argument put forward in the following chapters on art is that the ascetic body, as it is represented in art—beginning with St. Francis and the *Antony series*—reflects and contributes to the Renaissance’s revolutionary idea of the living body as a moving body. Da Vinci and Alberti in their respective treatises on painting both argue that the truly alive figure, which is the sought after figure of Renaissance painters, was the figure in motion. The manner and style in which the ascetic body is represented as *in motion* not only highlights the changing perceptions of the time as to what a living saint *was*, but expresses an early trait of the abstract canvas; hence the above quote by Charles Harrison claiming that there is a tenuous line of artistic development beginning with Giotto and leading to Cezanne, the latter often considered the founder of Modern abstract art.

As I have noted, this concept of extension is predominantly theo-philosophical, though its effects are clearly material in nature. Extension is a property and result of the conceptual persona of Christ. The ascetic body, like the Christ body, was understood to effect the space around them.<sup>1</sup> Though the topic of the Christic cause will be taken up in the concluding chapter, what justifies at this juncture the transition to art is precisely this point—the articulation of a body to effect the space around them. The following two chapters argue this point through a focus on the artistic canvas as a space of immanent communication, defined by the properties of internal resonance and communication. The notion of a canvas as an internally resonating entity defined by speeds and effect is not a new concept. Wassily Kandinsky, writing in 1911, and one of the major theorists of early Modernist abstract art, wrote as much in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Kandinsky was attempting to justify, on formal grounds, the decline of representational strategies

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<sup>1</sup> See final chapter.

in art, claiming that due to the lack of representational depth in the Modern canvas, certain “spiritual” vibrations populated the abstract canvas. These vibrations come from the abstract forms themselves, but also from their interaction. The general thrust of Kandinsky’s argument, and for those theorists following him, was that forms on the abstract canvas now communicated with each other, in an immanent fashion, and that it was this communicative property that “held” together the “flat,” abstract work of art. As will become clear, the following analysis of art assumes this thesis—immanent communication as a property of the abstract canvas—and will attempt to locate this “immanent communication” within depictions of the early representations of saintly bodies. Moreover, it will be argued that this concept of immanent communication relies on a logic of the body found in ascetic discourse and literature, namely, that the ascetic body had the power effect the space around him. In turning to art, the space around the ascetic body is the canvas, and they effect the space through a concept of theological force. What allows this property of effecting space to be found in art, as opposed to asceticism, is a logic of the body developed within early Christianity whose imaginary structure and content is applied in the strategies of visual representation.

At stake in my reading of late medieval and Renaissance art concerns not only the artwork involved, but conceptions of what Modernism is, and how its trajectory is conceived as a continuous tradition. To cite Giotto as a deep source of Modern art is therefore to make a claim about the teleology of Modern art, namely, that it had one.<sup>2</sup> In fact, this claim *may* say more about our contemporary understanding of Modernism than of medieval art. But as Harrison has shown, the idea that Giotto was “modern” is not limited to the contemporary period, but can be

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, the *telos* of art runs all throughout modes of recasting the history of art, and can be found very prominently in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well, as noted by Rachel Teukolsky in *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 94.

found in numerous examples among Giotto's contemporaries in the fourteenth century. Among those "modern" traits, according to German art historian Julius Meier-Graefe writing in 1915, are individualism of expression, emphasis of the pictorial over the decorative, and the autonomy of the work of art.<sup>3</sup> To believe that it is these elements that define Modernism is already to take a stance as to what Modernism is, a view not shared by all. However, the notion that Giotto's innovation does in a tenuous manner lead to certain traits of the Modernist canvas is the view adopted here.

### **Autonomy, Self-referentiality and Immanence**

First, I will discuss the function of the ascetic body as it appears in visual art, especially 13<sup>th</sup> and fourteenth century Italian painting. To be clear, the *Antony series* is my own term with no art historical precedent. The *Antony series* not only represents a new figure for the history of art, which builds on the imagery of the stigmata of St. Francis, but will exhibit some of the traits of Modernism (especially Cubism) that Harrison, and others, find in Giotto's technique.

Second to be discussed is the role of *istoria* (narrative) in Renaissance painting and how this concept, perhaps more than any other, fragments the body while also unifying the communicational properties of the canvas. The discussion of stigmata and the *Antony series* deploys a technique of representing the body that is later picked up in the theory of *istoria*.

Utilizing contemporary art criticism and theory, it will be argued that we can find the properties of the ascetic body in visual art within the concept of *istoria*. Further, the *telos* of the

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<sup>3</sup> Harrison, Charles. "Giotto and the 'rise of painting,'" in *Siena, Florence, and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 73.

fragmentation of the body within notions of *istoria* helps to engender what is termed in art historical scholarship as the autonomy of the work of art.

By autonomy, what is referred to is *not* the autonomy of the aesthetic experience from the normal categories of human experience, as the Kantian sublime indicates, nor the autonomy of the work of art from culture (art for art's sake), as certain strands of Modernist theory espouse. What autonomy refers to is a structuralism of the canvas as an auto-referential entity, in the sense that all the work of art requires is what is phenomenologically before the viewer. In other words, autonomy refers to the fact that the Modern canvas needs nothing to signify, as its entire signifiatory agency takes place on the plane of the canvas. Conceptualizing the work of art in this manner is old fashion, given that socio-critical trends in art historiography have moved away from this type of Greenbergian analysis into conceptualizing the work of art as socially embedded. However, by focusing exclusively on the canvas' formal properties it should not be assumed that this socio-critical analysis is irrelevant. The absence of this form of analysis comes merely as the result of a desire to trace out an idea, and nothing more.

For Greenberg, what was new about the abstract canvas was precisely the fact that its logic of representation had little need for reference to the world of nature, to which painters had turned for a millennia. In 1949, at the height of the popularity of the abstract canvas, Greenberg writes of Cubism, "We no longer peer through the object-surface into what is not itself; now the unity and integrity of the visual continuum, as a continuum, supplants tactile nature as the model of the unity and integrity of pictorial space."<sup>4</sup> Greenberg's phrase of a "visual continuum" defined by

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<sup>4</sup> Greenberg, Clement. "On the Role of Nature in Modernist Painting," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 173.

unity and integrity is a direct argument for the autonomy of the work of art as a visual, self-referential field. It will be subsequently argued that the self-referentiality of the work of art is another name for immanent causality. To those for whom the autonomy of the work of art robs the work of its ability to engage in political questions, here the opposite is argued. The power of the work of art to emit *affect* comes as a result of its ability to assemble *effect* through its self-referentiality.

As I said above, the conceptual links between Giotto and Cubism have been made in art history, albeit in a fragmentary nature. What this study attempts to do is make these links more explicit, and unravel the knot of the influence of the ascetic body in Renaissance art. To summarize, (i) Giotto's painted figures, especially his depictions of the stigmata, rely on an ascetic logic of the body; (ii) this logic of the body finds itself expressed in the Renaissance conception of *istoria*; (iii) since it was the duty of *istoria* to unify the visual space of the canvas, *istoria* as a theoretical component of the canvas shares traits of the Modern, abstract canvas; (iv) therefore, historical understandings of the birth of painting in Western art are enriched from a late antique conception of the body.

In sum, the two case studies in Renaissance art are a creative adaptation of the logic of the immanent body, especially its ability to effect space around it. While the analyses of art are not essential to understanding the nature of the immanent body, they do provide a fuller picture as to how this body works in concrete practice.



## Chapter 5

Christological Aesthetics: The *Antony Series*

Appearing not long after the muscular and heroic Renaissance figure is being discovered in Italian painting in the 13th and 14th centuries, what I will term the *Antony series* represents a collection of works rejecting this figure. Further, it will do so by utilizing a millennium-old Christian logic—the genre of the gesturing monastic body. The *Antony series* serves not only, however, as a corrective to the heroic bodies of classical Renaissance painting, but actually plays a more profound role in the history of Western painting—the birth of the autonomous work of art. It is not only through the figure that the Western canvas will be born in Italy in the duecento and trecento, but the figure will also be utilized in what will be some of the first abstract works in Christendom—the *Antony series*. Hence, I argue for an inextricable relationship between the *Antony series*, abstraction and the birth of the canvas.

**Introduction**

This chapter is the first of two case studies exploring the formal role of the painted ascetic body in Renaissance art. Neither exhaustive nor comprehensive, the purpose of this chapter is to document how the logic of the body, as distilled in the previous chapters, finds itself creatively deployed onto the painted canvas. The ascetic body was not just appropriated for painterly delight, but was used because of how the ascetic body was perceived. Certain aspects of late antiquity and its theological heritage arrived with the ascetic figure as it made its way into the

visual culture of Europe in the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The qualities of effecting space and of free floating ascetic bodies were appealing to the Renaissance painters for a number of reasons. The ascetic body was much more than just new content for visual art, but would help alter the way art was constructed. One of those ways is the ascetic contribution to the painted canvas: its contribution to the telos of the autonomy of the work of art in Modernism. Originating within the language of Kantian aesthetics, autonomy is not defined by purposelessness nor a lack of functionality in this current context,<sup>2</sup> but as a trait of the canvas to be defined by its formal communication between the parts on the canvas. It is in the internal resonance and immanent communication of canvas' parts that a painting's self sufficiency (autonomy) is achieved. Since countless studies on the autonomy of the work of art exist, this and the following case study argue specifically for the role of the painted ascetic body in achieving this autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

A canvas is *not* a painting, and anything painted is not a canvas. While the use of paint is ubiquitous throughout history, the canvas (as a mobile system of immanent signification bereft of its ritual and liturgical setting) is the product of the West, and therefore can be understood through specific philosophical, and, as I will argue in this section, Christological categories. As we have seen previously, christology separates itself from theology in that it is concerned with a conceptual persona, Christ, and in the way that this *figure* organizes all aspects of Christian thinking. In the attempt to think asceticism and the visual arts together, as relying on similar principles, our first point of contact between the arts and christology in this chapter will therefore be the *figure*, as it is not only through the figure that the Western canvas will be born in Italy in

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<sup>1</sup> See Siglind Brulh's treatment of the resurgence of the painted ascetic in his *The Temptation of Paul Hindemith Mathis Der Maler As a Spiritual Testimony* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 1998), p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> See Kant's treatment of the sublime in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

<sup>3</sup> James Elkins and Michael Newman's *The State of Art Criticism* (NY: Routledge, 2008) provides a nice overview of the autonomy of the work of art and its relation to commodification.

the duecento and trecento, but the figure will also be utilized in what will be some of the first abstract works in Christendom. These are what we will call the *Antony series* in our attempt to unify the works under a single heading, a series whose remarkable vitality has failed to receive any scholarly attention. To date, there is no such thing as the *Antony series*, but as you will see it deserves the title of a series due to the specific problems they address, the manner, style and formal consistency of the works, as well as the Christological assumptions it deploys.<sup>4</sup> The Antony of Egypt, subject of the previous chapters, is not to be confused with St. Antony of Padua (1195-1231). Because of St. Francis' admiration, the latter was also a popular painted figure in the late medieval and early Renaissance period, and can be distinguished not by the demonic but by a book.<sup>5</sup>

Given this early form of abstraction the series prefigures the undifferentiated, color-field works of Modern painting, paintings which Clement Greenberg would define as "sheer sensation" and "decentralized."<sup>6</sup> The *Antony series* creates a similar plane of sensation, but it is through his figure that it is accomplished. This chapter has two parts: after a discussion of historical context, the chapter will move into specific theoretical concerns.

### **The *Antony Series***

"My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (--its will to power:) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement ("union") with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power. And the process goes on—"

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<sup>4</sup> Siglind Bruhl's *The Temptation of Paul Hindemith* seems to come closest to a thematic treatment of St. Antony in visual art, though his focus is undoubtedly later in history, beginning perhaps in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Ross has provided a succinct write-up for how to distinguish the two in the visual art tradition; *Medieval Art: A Topical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996). See Ross's entries on both saints.

<sup>6</sup> Greenberg, Clement. "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 155.

Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 636.

A giant, club-wielding bird is just about to strike a helpless, unarmed man; the bird's tongue points violently from its cracked beak; its knuckles are gnarled and worn (Figure 9). On his back, the man cries out in terror, his right arm shielding himself from various other beasts, animals equal part hatred, fantasy and "orthodox" theological fiction. One demon, which we cannot see, pulls the man's white hair and the flesh of his forehead stretches from the tension. The painting is a clamor of eyes, arms, teeth, shrieks and bone; but it is equal part dynamism of color, line, shape, immanent pain and lack of perceptual depth. If you squint hard enough and look at the center of the painting, the body disappears in the violent onslaught. You do not know where his body begins and ends. The supposed foreground and background, so crucial to the Renaissance picture space, dissolves. The beast's hand that is pulling his hair bleeds into his body and what looks like a rat with horns seems to be gnawing on the man's cape, or is that the rat's own clothing? Clothing and fabric, what we'll understand as an analogy of the picture space itself, lose their rightful property and become their opposite. The forms of victim and perpetrator, violator and violated blur and expand in color. The space is topological: each redeems the other, and yet, the final redemption is other than the bodies—the surface is redeemed through this expansion.



Figure 9. Detail from Grunewald's Isenheim Altarpiece. Antony is central and in Blue. Photo, Art Resource, NY.

The colors are earthy but not subdued; in fact, there is as much a violence of color as anything, and it is a remarkable feat to make the desert, where this scene takes place, so colorful.

The man I've been describing is Saint Antony, and the scene comes from the *Life of Antony* and depicts the fact that in his attempt to achieve closeness to God Antony must first battle the demons blocking his passage. The painting is Matthias Grunewald's *Temptation of St. Antony* (1515)—a scene from his *Isenheim Altarpiece*—and it is far from triumphal. Agony is more precise, but as we will see, these pictures only work if we understand it as willed agony, which will be translated into a form of joy.

Grunewald's Antony, and nearly all those in what I will term the *Antony series*, are themselves captions or stills of indiscernible passage. The body of Antony, stretched vertically and horizontally across the canvas, is the objective zone of indiscernability.<sup>7</sup> Stretching, blurring and extension—in other words, we can't discern the real figure because it is not about the figure's formation, but deformation. As we saw in the previous chapters, the concept of deformation can be traced to first, the logos Christ in his position as co-creator, and second, his status as “Son of Man,” which though Pauline in conception, was considerably modified by Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origin all the way to Athanasian orthodoxy. In the latter it finally achieved the precision it was lacking, and asceticism was the register through which this occurred. As the Son of man, Christ entered a historical narrative and modified the matter of his body to suit the desires of the age; he was an avant garde body in every sense of the term, pushing specific milieus towards higher self-realizations. Coming first in the form of the various prophets, he was finally “recapitulated” in his last appearance in Jerusalem, and it is the crucifix that is the image

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<sup>7</sup> Deleuze found in Francis Bacon's paintings *zones of indiscernibility*, where structure, figure and contour supply the movement to painting. The color-figure melts into the background via an organic ring (contour) that surrounds it; the ring opens and closes and the figure inside the ring is exposed to the outside elements. The movement goes in two directions: towards increased figuration and towards increased deformation. Deleuze's book on Bacon is his most religious in that it directly borrows from the language of martyrdom, body, crucifixion and sensation. Deleuze will find in this movement of figure to background and background to figure, though it is not stated outright, a basic Christological premise. That premise is the capturing of a body in passage, and the inability to discern deformation from formation. Indiscernability is the name of this twofold property of the body.

of this summing up; this recapitulated gathering of all mankind, materiality included, on a second “tree” is the imaginative fodder for the early theologians. Each theologian would advance the complexity of the Christ body, giving it more activity within history until it would come to its final conclusion in asceticism, a movement that constructed an immanent crucifix within bodily life. For as Origin (and Paul) says, “we die daily” signaled the monastic enterprise as a repetition of the crucifix. The monk’s body, therefore, would work the same miracles as Jesus’ body, yet the temporality would extend itself over a lifetime (Antony lived to be 105 at a time when the average lifespan was 25). With their body “painted by Christ,” the monastic enterprise actively performed the power of the incarnation, and the agency given to the monastic body is a mere repetition of the avant garde body of Christ, avant garde because his appearance signaled both the presence of a corrupt humanity and the potential of its renewal.<sup>8</sup>

The logic we are tracing is thus: the body is dismantled in favor of a higher formation. In turning to aesthetics, it is these scenes of St. Antony, painted over and over again in history, appearing as contemporary as Cezanne, Dali, and the famous surrealist Max Ernst, which are Christianity’s most radical affirmation of the aesthetics of the body’s dismantling, and can be situated in a long tradition of ascetic logic. In their surprising consistency, the *Antony series* forms a lost cannon within painting’s history, challenging the integrity of the Renaissance figure shortly after its inception in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Each age has appropriated the saint for a variety of reasons. French novelist Gustave Flaubert would spend nearly his whole life writing his *Temptation of St. Antony*, only to find himself unable after 30 years to be satisfied. The earliest known painting we have by Michelangelo is one of the temptation of St. Antony, and the knotted

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<sup>8</sup> Saint Simonian Olinde Rodrigues first uses the term in his essay, “L’artiste, le savant et l’industriel” to designate the power of figures in social reform. He locates three main figures: the scientist, artist and industrialist, however here the use of the phrase the avant garde is meant to place the Christ body in conversation with a certain understanding of the body to bring a culture forward, and further, to connect this notion of telos to material redemption. For the most complete and theoretically nuanced treatment, see Peter Burger’s *Theory of the Avant Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

form of Antony's wrestling body, as we saw in Grunewald, would mark Michelangelo's bodies for the rest of his life. Michelangelo's painting, done at the early age of 12 or 13, is an exact copy of Schongauer's engraving, except done in color. More classical names like Matisse, Velasquez, Dürer, Goya, Rivera, among many others, have donated their hand to the Saint (see Figures 10-17). Each age has depicted the saint to work through its own historical curiosities: the late 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> because of the social and political upheavals of the ascetic movements; the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> because of the increasing patronage towards monastic churches; the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> because of formal radicalism that depicting the ascetic body entailed; the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries because of an increasing interest in psychology;<sup>9</sup> the early 20<sup>th</sup> because of the discovery of the unconscious (Dada and Surrealism). St. Antony has been depicted hundreds of times by various artists in various ages, all the while retaining a congruous style.

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<sup>9</sup> Hauptman, Jodi and Odilon Redon. *Beyond the Visible: The Art of Odilon Redon* (NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), pgs. 91-93.





Figure 10. Salvador Dalí. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1946.



Figure 11. Max Ernst. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1945.



Figure 12. Paul Cezanne. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1870.

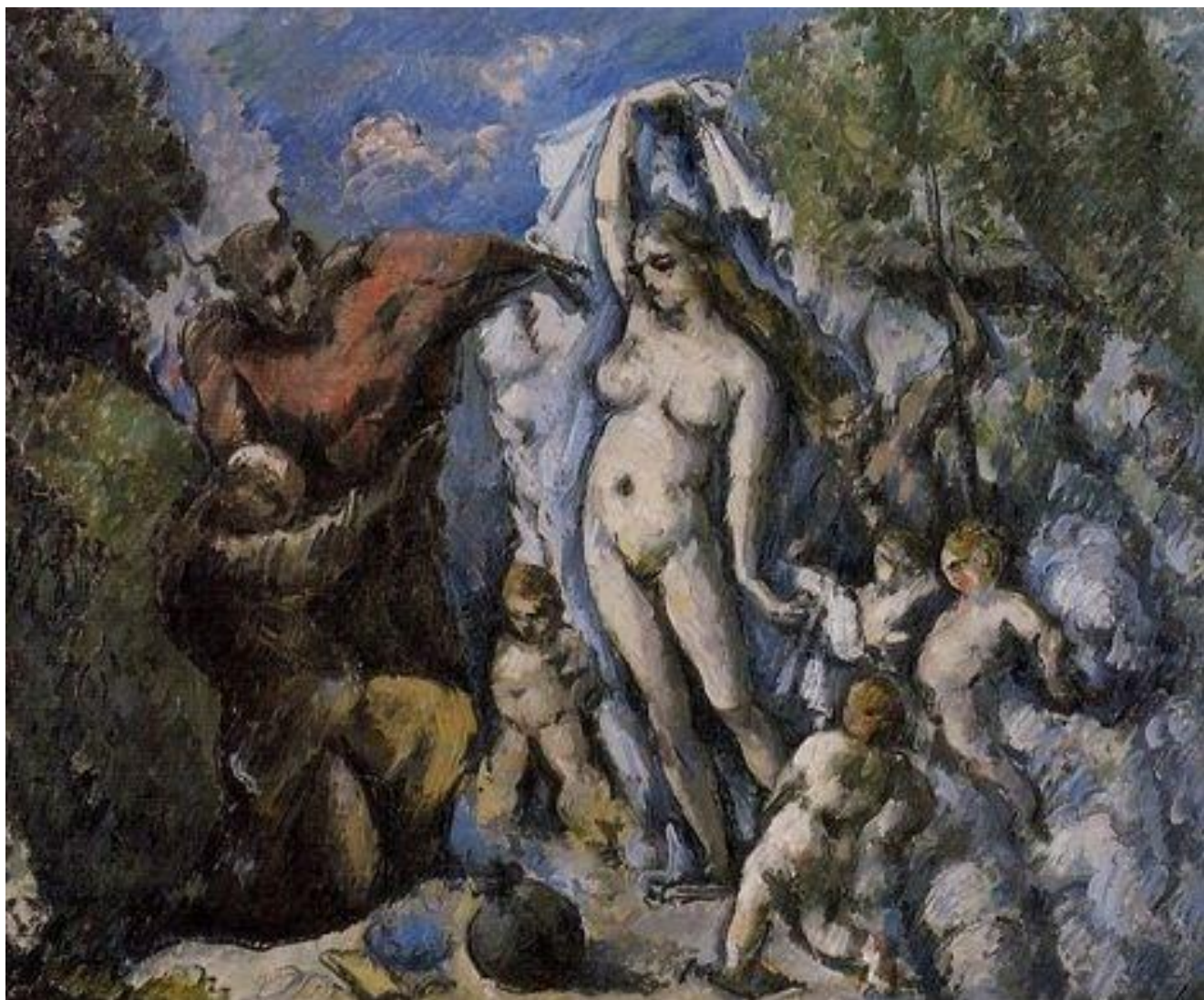


Figure 13. Paul Cezanne. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1875.



Figure 14. Lovis Corinth. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1897.



Figure 15. Martin Schongauer, *Saint Anthony Tormented by Demons*, ca. 1470–75.

Engraving. Photo courtesy of the British Museum.



Figure 16. Bernadino Parentino. *Temptations of St. Antony*, 1494.



Figure 17. Joos Van Craesbeeck. *The Many Temptations of St. Antony*, 1650.

Though such repeated visualization of a saint is common in art history, the *Antony series* is not only a form of content being deployed in art, but when set against the prevailing Renaissance aesthetic, it represents a counter-movement in artistic style. According to a rather dated text by Thomas Wright, depictions of the demonic had strong roots in medieval comic art which went dormant during the late medieval period. An interest in demonology was rediscovered by German and Flemish artists during the late Renaissance, and it is to this rediscovery that one can credit the initial popularity of the temptation of St. Antony in the 16<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which is where we find numerous productions of the saint being undertaken. According to Siglind Bruhl, the remarkable consistency in subject matter and execution of the



*Antony series* can in part be due to the fact that prints and woodcuts, which do constitute a majority of the series, circulated widely among pilgrims of Medieval Europe.<sup>10</sup> Demonology, as one might expect, found itself at the hands of the grotesque *diablerie* painters. The German-Flemish school of the grotesque, composed of Cranach, Schongauer and the Brueghels, seems to have died at the end of the sixteenth century, but then travels to Italy and France, where names like Rabel, Callot, Rosa and Cochin will reinvent the image of the saint.<sup>11</sup>

Just as the monastics retooled the ideal image of the Greek body, effectively substituting for the healthy, agile, virile warrior an emaciated body (the “athlete of Christ”), the *Antony series* serves *not* only as a corrective to the heroic bodies of classical Renaissance painting, but actually plays a more profound role in the history of Western painting. The *Antony Series* represents the inspired source of the painted canvas as it began its evolution away from the Byzantine style in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, which is not to say that as we move from Giotto’s innovation in figural depiction to the Antony series there is a concrete art-historical connection between the works. Rather, the line of connection between Giotto and Antony is strongest when understood through theological currents, almost as strong when seen through certain devotional practices, and weakest as a direct line of artistic lineage.

### **What is a Christological body?**

The frame completes the work of art, organizing a zone of perception opposed to habitual perception; this is most apparent in the fact that we *look differently* at a canvas than we would at

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<sup>10</sup> Bruhl, *The Temptation of Paul Hindemith*, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, Thomas. *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (London: Virtue Brothers & Co., 1865), see pages 288-308. See also *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. by Jean-Claude Schmitt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

the wall it's hanging on.<sup>12</sup> Certain faculties are called into action; our bodies cease to move, our eyes scan the surface, and it is a hermeneutical game of competing approaches—emotion, reaction, color, texture, figure, size, context, etc. In fact, it is hard to think of painting other than on a canvas. All Modern art rests on a canvas, as does Baroque, Mannerism, French Realism, etc, and it can be argued that all Western art, at least until the Minimalism of the 1950's and 1960's, worked within the assumption of the canvas: the frame of the canvas designates that art is an object; and that said object is delineated here (in the canvas). Clement Greenberg writes: "The easel painting, the movable picture hung on a wall, is a unique product of the West, with no real counterpart elsewhere."<sup>13</sup> The canvas, understood in its contemporary sense, emerged as an adaption of Byzantine iconic style through the theological concept of force. Painting, as we understand it today, is primarily an art of capturing forces, and the canvas is a mobile body analogous to the monastic body.

In the case of Grunewald's Antony, force is inscribed in gesture. His body is Christological because its success is measured by its openness—the goal of asceticism—not its isolation. The task of asceticism was to open the body via discipline, and the body's deformation is given value above the healthy body. St. Antony is unique among the cast of painted characters in Western art for, first, the freedom artists grant themselves in expressing his body, and second, the fact that when he is painted Antony is nearly always *isolated and surrounded*, forcing all the painted forms and colors to descend on his body in the same way the demons descend on him. The movement is one of intensification, and the painting compresses the pictorial violence on Antony's body. Antony writhes in violent onslaught. It would be a mistake to merely read these

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972) is a good place to start to learn about the artistic eye and what goes into "looking" at a work of art.

<sup>13</sup> Greenburg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," p. 154.

images as the simple deformation of a body. Rather, what is being depicted is not the inferior state of a superior body, but an experimental interrogation as to *what a (painted) body is*, since a large portion of Renaissance painting was, after all, a search for the body.

This body is not a body per se, but a *pack of gestures*; it is a pack because Antony's figure belongs to no one. There is no one will to ascribe to his gestures. Antony is given over, exposed, stretched, opened—there is no interior to Antony. The exterior of the body does not represent an interior. As with asceticism, the way to approach the body was through its members: a discipline of movement. The body simply *is* a state of conflicting forces, and if the task of asceticism was to pacify those forces, the goal could never be achieved.<sup>14</sup> One had to forever work within and through temptation, hence the impossible task that was the ascetic project; to be human was to be as Antony was—surrounded. The state of *being consumed* translates, in aesthetic terms, to a chaotic gesturology of bodily deformation, and the gestures, because they are the very instantiation of a split will, cannot be given names. The integrity, and, one might say, the transcendent property of the body is lost in the radical gesturology. The painters of Antony, however, are merely taking Giotto's discovery to its ultimate conclusion. To understand the profound role of gesture in Western art, we need to go to Giotto, considered the deep source of Renaissance figurology. Only then can the Christological properties of Antony be discerned. Before we get into detailed theoretical discussions of what the figures are accomplishing in the Antony series, first we must understand the historical situation in which they arise.

### **Giotto and the Stigmata**

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<sup>14</sup> Brakke, David. *Demons and the Making of a Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 20.

According to Moshe Barasch, it is the gesture that allowed art to emancipate itself from the confines of Byzantine formalism, i.e., the timeless faces and bodies of icons.<sup>15</sup> With Giotto's genius for depicting real bodies, especially the narratives of St. Francis and the stigmata, the transcendent dynamics of the iconic space was translated into the force of incarnate spirituality understood via the life of a contemporary holy man.<sup>16</sup> These social developments paralleled the growth of Dominican and Franciscan piety movements and a cult of the saint that understood God, especially in the latter, to act in this world. Centuries later, Hegel noted Giotto's genius for this fact in his *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, where he commends Giotto's ability to depict the realities of Christ's time on earth: "Every sort of object and every sort of setting that has been in any sense touched by Christ's presence in the world, or by the saints, old and new, now finds a place in art."<sup>17</sup> It is as if the concept of Christ's recapitulation has been exhumed, and rather than being relegated to his presence in/as past prophets, Christ finds himself embedded in contemporary bodies and how these bodies act in history—bodies which portend an immanent, Christological value. Above all else, St. Francis' stigmata would be finest representative of the theological and artistic developments.

Giotto was born around the year 1226 in Vespignano, just outside Florence. He died in 1337 and is buried, according to a few sources, in Santa Maria del Fiore, the Cathedral of Florence. From his disputed self-portraits found in the Church of Santa Croce and in his *Last Judgment* in Padua, we know little about the man himself. Giotto may have suffered from congenital dwarfism,

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<sup>15</sup> See Moshe Barasch's *Giotto and the Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> More specifically, according to Caecilia Davis-Weyer in *Early Medieval Art, 300-1150: Sources and Documents* (Canada: Medieval Academy of America, 1986), pgs. 168 and thereafter, the resurgence of the ascetic tradition, and their representation in the arts which naturally followed, can be attributed to a reaction against the luxuriousness and decadence of Romanesque art. See also Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz's *History of Aesthetics: Medieval Aesthetics* (Warsaw: PWN Polish Scientific Publishers, 1970, II), p. 290; Eco, Umberto. *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1886), pgs. 6-8.

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, George Wilhelm and Henry Paolucci. *Hegel on the Arts: Selections from G.W.F. Hegel's Aesthetics, or the Philosophy of Fine Art* (Michigan: Griffon House, 2001), p. 119.

which would explain the tradition that he was in fact the painted dwarf in the Church of Santa Croce, a fact that supports Giorgio Vasari's claim—the famed Renaissance biographer—that he was uncommonly ugly. Vasari even writes that there was “no uglier man in the city of Florence.” Dante Alighieri, a close friend of Giotto, would make the same claim about Giotto's “plain” children, amazed at how a man who makes such beautiful pictures could conceive such aesthetically uninteresting children. Nonetheless, the picture of the dwarf at Santa Croce shows a man with a round face, large eyes set below a bony brow, thin lips and a nose that bells outward at its end. The man with the white hat in his *Last Judgment*, supposed to be a self-portrait as well, has him of normal stature and countenance. Nevertheless, such mythologies of ugliness no doubt lend credence to the aleatory appearance of outstanding beauty from his hand, hands which would begin the Renaissance.

Giorgio Vasari, author of the most important document for Renaissance art, the *Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, From Cimabue to Our Times* (1550), wrote centuries later that it was the great painter Cimabue who discovered the young Giotto while tending sheep on his father's farm. The myth has it that at the age of ten Giotto was “impelled by nature herself” to draw pictures of things. Wandering the Italian country side, it was Cimabue who stumbled upon the young prodigy. Astonished at the small drawing on a flat piece of rock, Cimabue asked Bondone, Giotto's father, if he could take the boy with him to Florence. Unable to turn down an offer from the famed Cimabue, Giotto goes to Florence and the rest is history.<sup>18</sup> Surely legend, the story is symbolic of Giotto's dark horse status when it comes to the birth of the Renaissance, representing more the Renaissance's anxiety of influence than its true

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<sup>18</sup> Vasari, Giorgio and Betty Burroughs ed. *Vasari's Lives of the Artists: Biographies of the Most Eminent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors of Italy* (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1946) p. 16. Other texts that account for other artist during the period are: Cole, Bruce. *Masaccio and the Art of Early Renaissance Florence* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1980); Levey, Michael. *Early Renaissance* (London: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967); Clark, Kenneth. *The Art of Humanism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

beginning. Yet despite the slow development that all arts are required to undergo, in the opening lines of Vasari's monograph, he boldly claims: "Giotto alone, in a rude and inept age, when all good methods in art had been lost, dead and buried in the ruins of war, set art upon the part that may be called the true one."<sup>19</sup> The rude and inept age is a reference to what Vasari calls the "rude Greek [Byzantine] manner," a pictorial style of iconic, stylized bodies, golden and unrealistic faces of saints that dominated medieval art. Retroactively attributing to Giotto a pure natural humanism—the hallmark of the Renaissance—it is paradoxical that Vasari is quick to align Giotto with Nature when Vasari, paragraphs later, admits that it was Giotto's *Stigmatization of St. Francis* that he likes best, an image which blurs the distinction between the mystical and the natural (Figure 18).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Vasari, *The Lives*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Vasari, *The Lives*, p. 17.



Figure 18. Giotto. *Stigmatization*. Bardi Chapel, Florence. 1319-1329. Fresco.

Giotto is famous for his large narrative-cycles of Saint Francis, whom at the time of Giotto's birth had been dead forty one years. In many ways, St. Francis and Giotto form one of the most important relationships in art history, as important as the Vatican and Michelangelo or Alfred

Barr and the Museum of Modern Art in NY. Giotto is the painter's hand, but St. Francis is the figure; Giotto is the technician, but he expresses St. Francis in a way never before seen. Painter and painted cannot be historically isolated. Giotto would even name his children Francesco and Chiara.<sup>21</sup> In this context, what goes under the name of St. Francis is best described as an anti-clerical, naturalistic piety movement focusing on the poverty and humility of Christ. St. Francis died in 1226. He was canonized two years after his death.<sup>22</sup> Three *vitas* of Francis' life—one of them begun at the same year of his canonization—would provide most of the artistic imagery for the Franciscan tradition.

The Franciscan piety movements would affect art in numerous ways.<sup>23</sup> First, Franciscan building requirements were different than most. Their buildings were natural and plain, and this led to the creation of distinct hall-churches whose interiors, devoid of ornate columns and load-bearing arches, provided the suitable environment for large, flat-wall frescoes.<sup>24</sup> Because the Friars often preached in the vernacular, the aesthetics had to match the language in accessibility, and so the naturalistic style of Franciscans followed suit.<sup>25</sup> The rapid popularity of the Franciscan movement required an immediate demand for art, and frescoes, as opposed to the laborious construction of traditional panel art, met that demand. Giotto would be considered a master of the large-scale, narrative fresco. A new type of architectural addition would also come as a result of the growth of the Franciscans, and this came in the form of small chapel additions to churches,

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<sup>21</sup> Cook, William. "Giotto and the Figure of St. Francis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Giotto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> Cook, "Giotto and the Figure of St. Francis," p. 135.

<sup>23</sup> A good text on the overall historical context of ascetic movements in Europe is Jesse Lyman Hurlbut's chapter titled "The Medieval Church: Development of Monasticism, Medieval Art and Literature," in *The Story of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1907).

<sup>24</sup> Moleta, Vincent. *From St. Francis to Giotto* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> The paired-down ascetic of monastic churches was common in the medieval times, and was not unique to the Franciscan churches and chapels. For the Cistercian influence on aesthetics, see Veronika Sekules' *Medieval Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially the section titled "Asceticism Versus Aestheticism in the Monastery," beginning page 77.



especially the ones opening off the transepts and the nave of the Lower Church at Assisi.<sup>26</sup> Such additions provided, like the hall-style church, large, unobstructed flat surfaces and constituted a serious design challenge for any daring artist, not to mention increasing amounts of commissions. Giotto would be at the forefront of filling these spaces.

Secondly, in addition to the large scale frescoes preferred by the Franciscan's, around 1300 there appeared a new form of altar art—the monumental crucifix (see Figure 19).

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<sup>26</sup> Cannon, Joanna, "Giotto and Art for the Friars: Revolutions Spiritual and Artistic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Giotto*, ed. Anne Derbes and Mark Sandona (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2003), p. 128.



Figure 19. Giotto. Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Tempera on Panel, 1300.

Intended to evoke an emotional response from its viewers in line with Franciscan philosophy, especially its emphasis on Christ's passion, the monumental crucifix dominated the altar; often, the wounds of Christ were dripping blood, a fact supporting the act of transubstantiation that occurred below. At the time, devotional texts began to appear focusing primarily on Christ's

passion, foremost among them *Meditationes vitae Christi* (Meditations on the Life of Christ).<sup>27</sup>

These texts were often distributed by the Franciscans. Combining visual imagery with textual imagination, the movement was beginning to produce a specific body of media intended to strike at the private *affectus* of the faithful. The new cult of *affectus*, however, was not confined to the Franciscan's. St. Thomas Aquinas, the great Dominican theologian, would write in the middle of the thirteenth century that art in churches could be justified not only to educate and solidify memory, two arguments known to late antiquity, but to “excite feelings of devotion.”<sup>28</sup> The latter's emphasis on emotion, feeling and affect—in short, art's power—reflected new developments in the role and function of art.

Thirdly, the body of St. Francis provided a new subject in Western art—that of a contemporary layman who had modeled his life on Christ, and whom Christ had countersigned in the form of the stigmata. St. Francis spent time outdoors, wrote poems about the Sun, built his own hermitage, and was the first to receive the five wounds of Christ: two on the feet, one on each palm and one on the side. St. Francis and his followers would open an age of the cult of the crucified, and Francis is both responsible for this shift and he is also a product of its time. During the thirteenth century, the panel cross traditionally hung above the altar changed in appearance, and not just in size. Prior to this century, it was traditional to depict the crucified Christ with open eyes and a body that portended the resurrection—the *christus triumphans*. However, it was during this century that saw the popularity of the *Christus patiens*, which was a Christ that really suffered, a Christ that hung dead on the cross with closed eyes, brown flesh, limp arms and exhausted torso; such affects opened up an empathic space between the picture and spectator,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 121.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 124.

suiting the spiritual needs of the time;<sup>29</sup> that space was private, solitary in its public nature, devotional, and not entirely unlike the function of the icon. Yet the *Christus patiens* accomplished the effect not through the golden, transcendent body, but via the broken, deformed body. Cimabue's *Crucifix* in the 1270's (Figure 20) at San Domenico, Arezzo, can serve as a transitional piece.

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<sup>29</sup> Belting, Hans. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image in the Era Before Art*, trans E. Jephcott (Chicago and London, 1994), p. 358.

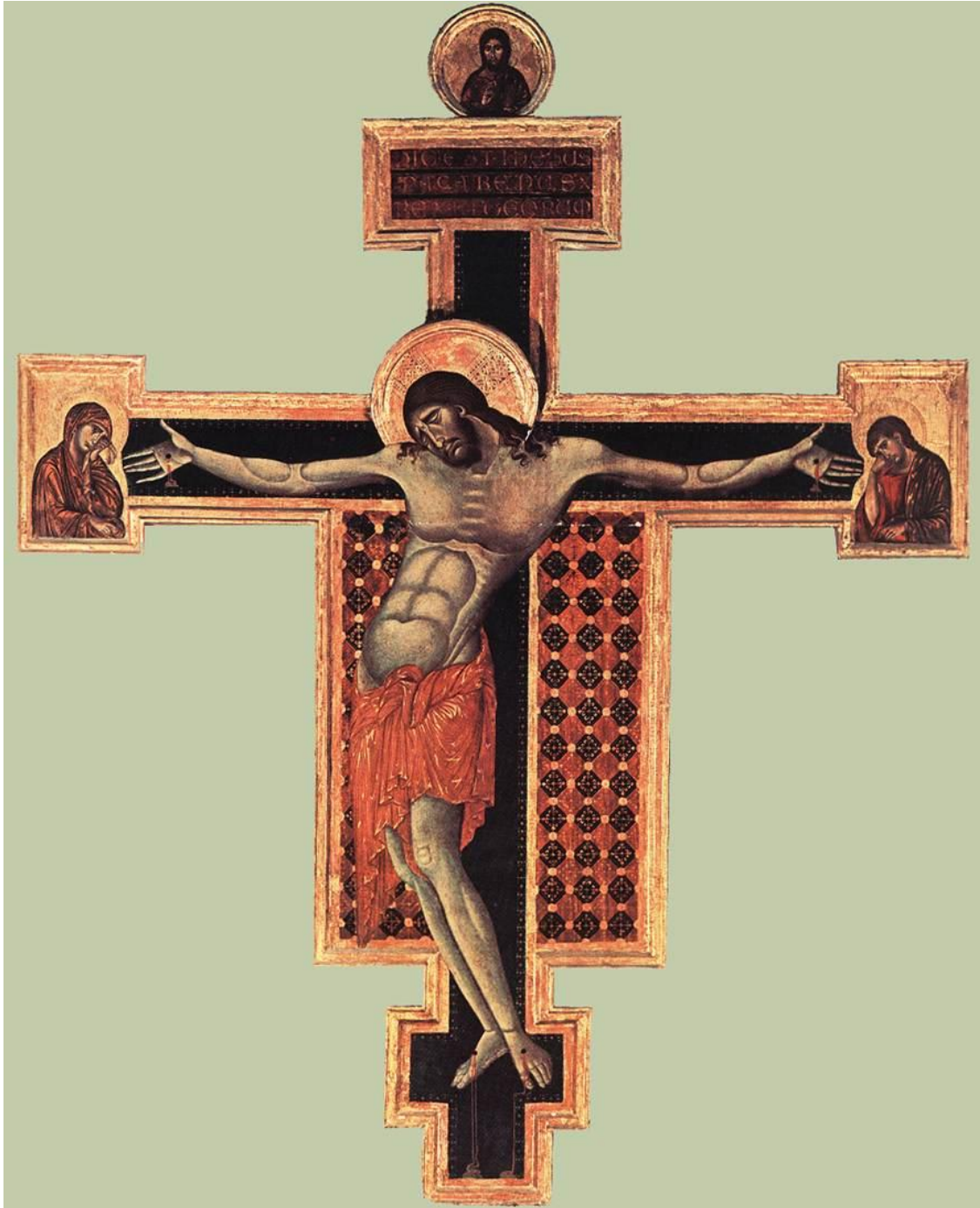


Figure 20. Cimabue. Crucifix, 1270's, San Domenico, Arezzo.

Here, Christ is stylized in the Byzantine manner and yet he suffers in the manner of the new style. His body has weight, yet his muscles are organically geometrical and darkly outlined as in

icons; he is humanly suffering yet his body is angular, so curved on the cross in fact that the edge of his left hip marks the center of the crucifix's central pillar. Strong attempts were made by Cimabue to shadow the failing body, but he is still caught in a Byzantine manner. More than anyone, the Franciscans encouraged identification with the *Christus patiens*.<sup>30</sup> Pushing the *patiens* further, Giotto's *Crucifix* (1300) in Santa Maria Novella, Florence, depicts a sickly, fully dead Christ whose nail holes feel as if they are about to rip from Christ's hands due to the fact that you feel him hanging. Christ's muscles are not stylized but realistic, and so too is the masterful shading upon his entire figure. The dramatic curved flare of Cimabue's *Crucifix* has been neutralized in favor of exactly how a dead body would hang on the cross. Giotto's Christ drips blood from all his wounds, and while Cimabue's Christ does bleed, his blood pools unrealistically on the framing of the crucifix. In Giotto's version, Christ's blood falls to the ground; the blood from the holes in his feet spatter on the rock below, and the wound in Christ's side, barely visible in Cimabue's version, gushes as water from a sliced garden hose.

Aside from Christ and the Virgin Mary, St. Francis was the most depicted figure in 13<sup>th</sup> Italy. It is possible that more than 20,000 images of the saint were created in less than a hundred years after his death.<sup>31</sup> The earliest images, however, of the newly canonized saint depicted him as a saint with halo, which is standard fare for the iconic image of the holy man during the mid thirteenth century.<sup>32</sup> These were done in the prevailing Byzantine style on wooden panels in the manner of icons. What distinguished St. Francis from all the others were the nail holes in his hands, and this representation created an easily identifiable figure new to art history, one which

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<sup>30</sup> Adams, Amy. *Italian Renaissance Art* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), pgs. 10-13.

<sup>31</sup> Cook, "Giotto and the Figure of Francis," pgs. 135-6.

<sup>32</sup> Moleta, *From St. Francis to Giotto*, pgs. 13-15.

was “instantly identifiable even without an inscribed name.”<sup>33</sup> St. Francis would forever be defined by his body—by the event of Christ’s descension in the stigmata. It was a new perspective on the incarnation, and its visual implications, both in terms of pictorial space and the gesturing figures that populate the works, will be ultimately be expressed in the *Antony series*. In short, gestures would distort the beauty of the icon.<sup>34</sup>

Fourthly, because of the stigmata, painting not only has a new body but a new event. Because history is now a place where we find Christ embodied (the stigmata is the watershed event for the new incarnate spirituality and pietism) the painted canvas is now a place for Christ’s *real* presence, as opposed to the transcendent presence of divinity through the iconic body of the saint; hence St. Francis’ moniker as *alter Christus*.<sup>35</sup> We saw a similar move in terms of the icon, where John of Damascus authorizes the painted icon by virtue of God making himself visible in Christ. This visibility authorized the visibility that the artist enacted, and so therefore the icon, because it was a body and because Christ took the form of a body, could be seen to give way to a meditative transcendence bordering on God’s real presence. At this point in history, the descension of Christ in terms of the stigmata is more important than God’s act of making himself visible. Everything requires an ascetic logic of the body. The immanence of Christ repeats itself in another body (St. Francis); that body is shocked, awakened, and can only be effectively represented by this shock. But further, this shock does not serve just the pictorial space, but the viewer’s body. We become physically engaged with the picture (*affectus*), and this is accomplished by spontaneous gesture. This repetition authorizes a new understanding of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 264.

<sup>35</sup> Davidson, Arnold I. “Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or How St. Francis Received the Stigmata,” in *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Spring 2005): 451. See also “St. Francis of Assisi as a Second Christ in Early Italian Painting,” by H. W. van Os. *Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1974), pgs. 115- 132.

body. In aesthetics, this new understanding will be found in the gesturing figure. A christology of the body must now cater itself to lived bodies.

Fifthly, this event is both isolated (stigmata) and extended across a life. For what may be the first time in history (around the 1270's), in the lower nave of the Lower Church of San Francesco a pilgrim could find opposing, life-size narratives of the humble saint and Christ. Each on their own wall, the pilgrim could view scenes from the passion, then turn around and view a contemporary scene of a recent holy man. San Francesco provided a living hagiography, collapsing the bodies of the two men, just as Athanasius had done for the first time in his *Life of Antony*. The parallels and theological implications cannot be mistaken. St. Francis was more than a saint—*not only* his life but his bodily afflictions ran parallel to those of the passion.

### ***Christus Patiens***

St. Francis' stigmata atop Mt. La Verna was the sign *par excellence* of the new form of what a saint was—a performative manifestation of Christ's ability to incarnate himself at will. The stigmata has no biblical prototype, appearing once in the New Testament, Galatians 6:17, and even there little can be determined if Paul is referring to Christ's actual wounds.<sup>36</sup> Christ's bodily descent, however, does have precedents, and ascetic literature is rife with references to holy bodies painted by God, a body that would elicit from its viewers what Patricia Cox Miller terms a visceral seeing.<sup>37</sup> What we are dealing with here is the aesthetic equivalent of visceral seeing. Whereas the divine bodies of the early monks were no less painted than the violent marks of the

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<sup>36</sup> Davidson, "Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or How St. Francis Received the Stigmata," p. 465.

<sup>37</sup> See especially Patricia Cox Miller's *Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). In his book titled *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003) Gilles Deleuze will refer to the analogous concept of "haptic perception"; see also Ronald Bogue's essay titled "Gilles Deleuze: The Aesthetics of Force," in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Paul Patton ed., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).



stigmata—the former consisting of battles with demons and emaciated yet glorious flesh—they remain in history as testaments to the full expression of the incarnation. The monks as well took part in testifying to the glory of the incarnation. We must remember, however, that the crucifixion is the arche-gesture of asceticism and the stigmata—the gesture of willed suffering.

The expressionistic gestures of St. Francis in Giotto's *Stigmatization of St. Francis* in the Bardi Chapel, Florence, are revolutionary for their depiction of a body under intense forces. St. Francis is kneeling and his mouth betrays a seductive rapture bordering on joy. It is indeed within the genre of crucifixion aesthetics, and yet is revolutionizing *what a crucifix can be*. The traditional backdrop of the Crucifixion is the wooden cross with Christ's body hanging on the wooden frame; body and frame (figure and structure) form a pair, and we cannot think the power of Christ's message without the cross. Christ is a sacrificial victim. The cross, therefore, is a theological prosthetic. Christ never really interacts with his device of torture; he remains aloof to it. His back and shoulders press against it, but his head usually hangs downward, away from the wood. The forces are mainly those of gravity pulling his thin bones downward, and the crucifix is a profound gesture of isolation. The crucifix is meant to isolate this body from the rest of the bodies, but it does so through the throngs of pain. Except for depictions of the Passion narrative where Christ embraces the cross, typically his back is always turned toward it.

Christ hangs alone, his head dangling from the cross, and the cross strangely appears to embrace him in *fait accompli*. If there is a pedagogical "background" to this image it is necessarily Christological—the background is the incarnation, as only it can provide resonance between structure and figure, Christ and crucifix, Christ and St. Francis. Which is also to say that thoughts of the incarnation (incarnational theory) had to come historically later than the crucifixion, which

is in fact the case. Agreement was not had until four centuries after Christ's death. *The Incarnation*, as a titled theological category of thought, is but a series of philosophical reflections on this problem, and as early discussions testify to the dying man-God on the cross, it was a problem. The incarnation was a solution.

If the incarnation made sense of the crucifixion, then a similar doubling of the logic applies here: only the crucifixion can make sense of the stigmatization. In other words, the stigmatization is yet another expression of the incarnation itself. Of course, one could disagree and propose the resurrection as the finest expression of the incarnation. Yet to do so one is substituting the product for the process, or to use Deleuzian language, the expression for the expressor. The resurrection is the product of the crucifixion, and though the resurrection does give glory to the crucifixion, it is the latter that organizes the material on which to think about the Christ body. The "final" expression of Christ is *the* resurrection, but what is achieving that expression, what is getting the work done, is the crucifixion. Simply put, the event of the resurrection must be relegated to what is happening on the cross because it is here and only here where the incarnation is tested.

We must now think stigmatization in terms of crucifixion. Giotto's monumental *Crucifix* in Santa Maria Novella, however, does much to force Christ to interact with his instrument. This is accomplished by weight, shading, blood, gesture and even the lack of gesture to signify a dead body—*Christus patiens* replaces *Christus triumphans*.<sup>38</sup> The stigmata reverses the force. Rather than Christ's body undergoing force, in the stigmata he is the giver of force, and the translation from a divine body becoming-human to a body becoming-divine requires that a new form of the

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<sup>38</sup> For more on *Christus Patiens*, see "Christus Patiens? Did Christ Suffer Pain in the Passion?," in *The Passions of Christ in High-Medieval Thought: A Essay on Christological Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), by Kevin Madigan.

crucifix be established. Then the revolution occurs: Giotto paints St. Francis' entire body as a live crucifix.

Giotto's Bardi *Stigmatization* is unlike any other. This picture differs vastly from the gesturing saint in the Assisi *Stigmatization*. In the latter, arguably not of Giotto's hand, St. Francis receives the stigmata passively; his body faces the seraph-Christ, and his hands never go above his head; they are rather placed slightly upwards, palms out, in an accusatory manner. "What me?" seemingly cries out the saint. His face could almost be contemplating, rather than feeling, the sweet pain that St. Francis personally described. As spectators, we are not privileged to the vision in Assisi, given the closed body language.<sup>39</sup> In the Bardi chapel's version, however, the body of the saint is turned towards the viewer, literally opening up the body for the spectator to feel and enter. St. Francis' hands rise far above his head as if photographically caught in the violent throes; his fingers are open, his body extended, and it looks as if his mouth is open ala the mystical union of Bernini's *St. Teresa*. Centuries later in his treatise on painting, Da Vinci will claim that the most expressive body is the extended body, where its limbs reach upwards in ecstasy. It is for this reason that Giotto is considered the father of the Renaissance. Giotto's bodies reach from themselves, out of themselves and toward themselves, as will Michelangelo's. Giotto's St. Francis does reach toward the angel in heaven, but it is an immanent angel in the body of the saint.

In the case of Giotto's *Stigmatization*, the background is pictorial space itself. How could this be? Pictorial space in the *Antony series* is immanent, thanks to its use of the figure, while for the majority of painted spaces it is marked by depth, hierarchy and values. As the hallmark of the

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<sup>39</sup> For more on the comparison, see Bruce Cole. "Another Look at Giotto's Stigmatization of St. Francis," in *Studies in History of Italian Art: 1250-1550* (London: Pindar Press, 1996), pgs. 93-106.

Renaissance picture space, linear perspective is the best representative of the latter. Perspective, and/or the illusion of it would dominate the pictorial plane until the advent of Modern art in the mid nineteenth century. If linear perspective repeated the iconic space of *surface as window* to the transcendent, then the *Antony series* is struggling to collapse the distinction between concept and material, God and vessel, divinity and saint. The figure of Antony in the series does not ask us to seek a transcendent God, as an icon would draw our gaze to the gaze of God. Rather, our gaze is forced unto his body, and whatever theological force remains on his body, self-sufficient and immanent. The insistence of Giotto in his stigmatization is to embody an invisibility—the force of Christ’s descent. Reminiscent of the golden lines in icons of the transfiguration, Giotto does this with golden lines of light. Holes are indeed depicted in the hands of St. Francis, yet there are strait, golden rays from Christ’s wounds, who flies in the air, to Francis’ wounds.<sup>40</sup> It is this transference of *suffering with line* (disfiguration) that allows the force of God to descend onto the body, and therefore by default, onto the canvas. The force of God collapses with the force of the body. Agents of a reconfiguration of immanence, the diagonal, golden *lines of flight*—to borrow a phrase from Deleuze and Guattari—extend their influence in an immanence without pretense to height or depth: they are indications of a body doubling; Christ becoming St. Francis, St. Francis becoming *alter Christus*. What is getting communicated is the collapse of space and temporal dimensions—an eternal Christ-body folded into a temporal body; which is another repetition of the incarnation, as it was in the latter that God took the form of temporal body. This infusion or crossing of thresholds causes a zone of indiscernability, of passage, to extend across the surface, from heaven to earth, and we can attribute to it the presence of immanent, theological force, just as Christ was the becoming immanent of God. The golden lines

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<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that the physical description of golden rays does not appear in the “first life,” written by Thomas of Celano. Commissioned by Pope Gregory IX, Thomas would finish his first life in 1230, four years after Francis’ death.

of descent are the agents of indiscernability, of this body doubling. Remarkably, the golden lines engender gesture, and gesture reveals Christ. In this sense, only bodies after Christ are properly Christological.

Giotto's use of line is a profound adaptation of the straight lines found in icons of the transfiguration. For example, in an early twelfth century Byzantine icon of the transfiguration the glory of Christ is depicted by thick golden lines streaming from behind his body to those witnessing it; all those who are present are covered on their knees, shocked, frightened and weighed down by the miraculous vision. It is both painful and joyful, blinding and beautiful. Similarly, another transfiguration icon from the twelfth century, found in Saint Catherine's Monastery in Egypt, shows similar golden rays emanating from the body of Christ, metaphorically piercing the spectators with dread, joy, fear and elation. Though these icons are of Christ's miraculous beauty, divine nature and power, Giotto's adaptation of the iconic technique equally blurs the distinction between pain and beauty, joy and suffering, cataphasis with apophasis. He has translated the techniques of the transfiguration and made them work for the stigmatization.

The crucifixion is the transcendental *a priori* of the stigmata, and both are expressions of the incarnation. The stigmatized body extends Christ's passive gestures to include a more profound deformation, a determination that reveals what the Crucifixion hides. The lesson from Giotto is this: bodies become in virtue of (theological) force, thereby giving birth to a gesturology of suffering. It is as if the saintly body of St. Francis can now gain its authority in virtue of the disappearance of Christ (the logic of immanence). Bodies no longer are alive in virtue of an invisible theological force but received their humanity by an extreme visibility. The stigmata

simply captures the point of suffering's passage—afterwards St. Francis is a duplicate of Christ. It was as if the transcendent element in icons had to be removed in order for a realistic figure in painting to emerge.

If it is the gestures of Giotto's bodies that loosened the tongue of Medieval art so that the Renaissance could develop the *movement figure*, then the *Antony series* takes gesture to its extreme conclusion—the body that disappears visually engenders *our* perceptual act of seeking an invisible force. Painting is an art of capturing forces because in painting bodies we are, by default, capturing force.<sup>41</sup> Force in aesthetics is a theological concept; force is an attribute of specific coordinates. Force is the name of one power masked by another (God masked by Christ, Christ masked by Antony, Christ masked by St. Francis), yet for most of history it retains the power to be isolated from its expression. Until Giotto, that is, when the expressor and the expression are unified in the singular, deformed body.

If painting is a matter of capturing force, then painting is beginning in the thirteenth century and relies heavily on a theological premise. Further, if it is the radical gesture that allowed real bodies to emerge in the pictorial plane in the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and following centuries, then painting relies on a theology of the incarnation. The figure is the foundation of the abstract object; abstract because, like Antony's wracked body, the force is identical to the figure, and merges with it completely. The Modern canvas relies on a similar infusion of force, except in latter's case the infusion is of a neutralized, abstract force; in other words, Modern painting has forgotten its origins. The property of Modern abstraction is de-theologized force. The body is

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<sup>41</sup> This statement, made by Gilles Deleuze in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, has profound historical resonance. Rather than ask *what is painting?*, we would do better to consider painting a faculty of the mind. Painting is an exercise in sensation, and the painter embodies an art of capturing that sensation.

properly Christological in that power is attributed in moments of effacement, passage, and the preferred mode of representation is decidedly non-representational—i.e., zones of indiscernment, a phrase Deleuze uses to characterize the property of Francis Bacon's figures to melt into their structural backgrounds. Though the relation between body and force appears to be fortuitous in history, it is not. A specific logic is being deployed in asceticism and aesthetics. In order for force to develop as the main component in the birth of Western painting, the body had to be utilized since it, and only it, is the only site in which to understand this (Christian) ontology.

### **Background, Figure and Temptation**

Earlier it was said that the *Antony series* is marked by an immanence of form without background. Presumably, a background adds depth and perspective to a painting (marking the logic of transcendence), thereby robbing it of its immanent property. By necessity, backgrounds have a foreground, and the mere presence of these two elements reveals the presence of illusion, which is a property of perspective. With perspective comes visual hierarchies, as the foreground is always more important than the background and the right always more important than the left. The eighteenth century paintings of the Romantic sublime are famous for singular figures contemplating a dark and mystical nature. David Caspar Friedrich's *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) and his *Monk by the Sea* (1808-1810) use background precisely for this reason—to isolate contemplating humankind from a paradoxically distant, intimate nature. Backgrounds anchor a painting in this world by allowing the figure to be distinct from it. But backgrounds do occur within the *Antony series*, and we must account for them. In the *Antony series*, it is often the desert or the city that is the background. We should, however, not be so quick to think backgrounds solely in terms of depth, nor distance in terms of perspective.

The desert figures prominently in ascetic literature and hagiography. More than mere background, the desert is the stage upon which the monastic wages his spiritual war. What attracted the monks to the desert we can never be entirely sure, given as such movements are to a variety of influences, but what remains constant is that the desert is where monks need to go in order to find the demons.<sup>42</sup> The desert isolates and compresses time and place upon the fleeting screen of consciousness, and amplifies the dark interiority of human temptation. One can of course fight the fight in the city, but only the desert distills life's movement to its bare essentials. The desert brings into focus the daily assault that occurs in the city without our awareness. Merely bringing to the surface what is ever-present, the desert is the place of truth. For these reasons, it is not correct to posit a city/evil and desert/truth dualism, as many have done.<sup>43</sup> For Athanasius, the author of Antony's *vitae*, the demons have taken refuge in the desert, and so Antony's quest is to civilize the desert, rid it of demons, and make the desert a city of God. The projection system that is the stark desert landscape is conducive to the production of media—the monks were on stage, they were actors in a drama; there were villains, victors, battles and miraculous events. There were even spectators, as texts like Palladius' *Lausiac History* testifies to. Some have argued that the *Life of Antony* is the first modern novel, under the assumption that the modern novel is defined by an interior psychological struggle.<sup>44</sup> As a witness to the struggle, the novel invents foes, friends, dramatic moments in order to create a narrative for the character, and writing produces affects for the reader through these movements.

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<sup>42</sup> See chapter four for more on the role of the desert in asceticism.

<sup>43</sup> Goering, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, pgs. 73-86.

<sup>44</sup> For more on the literary aspect of the early monastic literature, see William Harmless' *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).



Goehring remarks on the spatiality of the desert and how this spatiality is the most conducive element to this new media.<sup>45</sup> In some in the *Antony series*, it is as if the full spatiality of the desert has become the extended spatiality within the works—the lack of backgrounds are translations of the focused, intense desert theatre. The feeling of extension that one feels when viewing Schongauer's *Temptation* or Grunwald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* is also the feeling of the vastness of the desert landscape. Only the desert can engender a claustrophobia that topologically morphs into an expansion. The monks sought space for its amplification of an inner claustrophobia. The pictorial space is claustrophobia extended; it is too full, not empty.

Artists in the series have dealt with this claustrophobia in a number of ways. Some have underlined it through the use of demons. The demons are more than attachments to Antony, they are his extension, this being most pronounced in Schongauer. But even where it is not as isolated and frontal the extension occurs by surrounding demons in the air, blackness, or a cave interior, the latter where Antony had a few bouts with the demons. Two types of backgrounds call our attention. First, the cave scene is incredibly popular, and Brueghel and Parenzano use the blurry, dark claustrophobia of the cave to extend the body, or, more precisely, the event that is bodily temptation; temptation is always immanent to the body. Bosch populates the canvas with evenly distributed figures surrounding Antony.<sup>46</sup> But as said earlier, backgrounds often frequent the series.

Second, the city-background is an extension of the desert, as it were, and due to this, it holds affinities with Antony's body. We must caution, however, against formulas, as no formulas exist

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<sup>45</sup> Goering, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, pgs. 73-86.

<sup>46</sup> Though it is a dated text, for more Bosch and what Joseph Van Der Elst calls "one of the weirdest works of art which have come down to use from the Middle Ages," see his *The Last Flowering of the Middle Ages* (Garden City, NY: The Country Life Press, 1944), p. 103.

for navigating this strange tension. All artists have are methods. One method is that of repetition. Just as the stone mountain in Giotto's Bardi Chapel *Stigmatization*, and the Upper Church *Stigmatization* in Assisi, is a figural repetition of St. Francis' body, the desert is not a mere backdrop but a figural form in communication with the figure of Antony, much as Rothko's abstract shapes are meant to communicate with each other. The two features speak with each other. Albrecht Dürer's *St. Antony* (1519) exhibits this repetition of forms nicely. Both figures rise in pyramidal structure. Whereas in Dürer's Antony is turned away from the city, in Jan Brueghel's *The Temptation of St. Antony* the city is temptation itself. This method uses the city as a reminder, castigation and a form of temptation itself. The scene is a cave, and Antony is surrounded as usual. The cave is dark, but in the upper recesses there is an opening flooded with white light, and in this opening there lies a silhouette of a church. Similarly, in Marten De Vos' rendition a huge church is sandwiched between Antony's flight-bound struggle and demons on the ground. Lucas Cranach the Elders' *Temptation* (Figure 21) resembles De Vos' in composition, with a Church sitting idyllically in a serene valley while Antony fights for his life above.



Figure 21. Lucas Cranach the Elder. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1506. German. Woodcut.

Functioning as a pair, the city-church are temptations and reminders of the ultimate goal of asceticism—to bring God to the desert. Urban structures in general, therefore, function to mark the struggle of monastics: the church is both what they desire and what they cannot have. Their bodies are repetitions of the city in that the demons must be excised from both, yet it is always in the body that they must first be released, the city feeling this release immediately. They fight here for *that* over there. Their bodies are coded with empire, and Athanasius more than anyone uses the ascetic body as a stand-in for empire itself. What desert hagiography accomplishes for asceticism in literature, the *Antony series* accomplishes for asceticism in art.

### **Figure and Joyful Suffering**

The body completely wracked by suffering and torture expresses itself spatially. Deleuze found in Nietzsche a helpful hermeneutical device—a *body is defined by what is capturing it*, and it has as many senses as “there are forces taking possession of it.”<sup>47</sup> Forces, however, can never appear pure. It is of the nature of force to mask itself in order to survive; force will conform itself to any given material, just as Nietzsche will claim of philosophy’s adoption of the ascetic mask when it was struggling for its existence. Essentially, force has no name nor visible properties of its own—this is not a fact of force, as it has no facts, but a problem lodged within perceptual attribution, as in “this or that body is under force.” It is a problem of designating what is happening to this or that body. Force is what we attribute to bodies under pressure, and the name we give to it is just as likely to designate the provenance of that deformation. Yet for reasons previously detailed, force must remain the most cryptic (and fertile) element in crucifixion imagery. In the case of the latter, force is given a very specific name—that of Christ. But force belongs to the body and only the body, and Christ is merely another name for the body. The body

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<sup>47</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (1983: Althone Press, London), p. 4.

is the best conductor of force, hence the conducting (productive) property of Christ and the bodies that model themselves on this logic.

God was capturing Christ's body in the crucifixion, but what is capturing Antony's? Nothing other than the demonic. Because for Athanasius, the author of Antony's hagiography, the demons are manifestations of thoughts, the demons are really correspondences of thought processes: "For when they come, their actions correspond to the condition in which they find us; they pattern their phantasm after our thoughts."<sup>48</sup> The demons are therefore perfect bodily repetitions that represent both the goal of asceticism (the monk becoming like Christ) and its greatest danger (the ability of the demons to take any form and become the monastic body, which the *Antony series* comes close to expressing).<sup>49</sup> Hence the fact that the demons are often indistinguishable from Antony's body, as in Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Temptation of St. Anthony* (1506). Eugene Isabey's *The Temptation of Saint Antony* (Figure 27), some three centuries later than Cranach and Schongauer, remains faithful to the blurring and collapsing of Antony's body with his surroundings. Isabey has Antony surrounded by swirling masses of nude and clothed bodies, angels, temptations, wind, fruit, gold, color, movement. In Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Temptation of St. Anthony* (Figure 22) one can barely find the figure of Antony among the fantastic creatures, demonic dismembering and general madness.

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<sup>48</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of Anthony*, p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> Harpham, *The Aesthetic Imperative*, p. 9.



Figure 22. Pieter Bruegel. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1556.

The fantastical depictions can be explained by the fact that for many medieval artists the source text for depicting Antony was not the *Life of Antony* but the *Golden Legend*<sup>50</sup>, a collection of fantastical hagiographies written around 1260 by Jacobus de Voragine that would become the most printed book in Europe between the years 1470 and 1530.<sup>51</sup>

Paul Cézanne's *Temptation of St. Anthony* (see Figures 12-13), centuries after Isabey, blurs the figure in sharp impressionistic strokes, surrounded by a beautiful female nude, a demon and other small creatures. Like Grunewald's Antony, Stefano de Giovanni's *St. Antony the Hermit*

<sup>50</sup> Numerous printings of this book exist. A recent version is *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012)

<sup>51</sup> Dates provided by the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook, under the heading "Medieval Sourcebook: The Golden Legend (Aurea Legenda) Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, 1275 Englished by William Caxton, 1483."

*Tortured by the Devils*, 1423, (Figure 23) uses color as much as figure to blur Antony and the demons; the black robe of Antony is extended to the black of the devils, while the golds and reds of Antony's halo are repeated in the demon's bodies and faces. As usual, Antony is central and in focus.



Figure 23. Stefano de Giovanni. *St. Antony the Hermit Tortured by the Devils*, 1423.

But a serious problem confronts us. Ascetic hagiography and discourse are firm in their conviction that the divine body communicates through its gestures. The *Life of St. Antony* reads: “His soul being free of confusion, he held his outer senses also disturbed, so that from the soul’s joy his face was cheerful as well, and from the movements of his body it was possible to sense and perceive the stable condition of the soul.”<sup>52</sup> The body communicates its holiness through a

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<sup>52</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 81.

combination of Hellenistic grace, Stoic calm and Christian piety. Yet *this* semiotic in Antony's *vitae* is one of joy, and differs markedly from that in the *Antony series*. So there appears to be a discrepancy between a stable soul seen in a joyful body and that of body under demonic onslaught. There may not be any discrepancy at all. They could just be two different scenes in a man's life, and yet if the divine body communicates itself through the monk in gestures, why is it that the most gestured figure covers the body under the attack of demons? Isn't that akin to saying that God itself is another form of the demonic? Can we read the dismantling of Antony's body as one of joy? In Celano and Bonaventure's *vitae* of the Franciscan, it is said that during the receiving of the stigmata, the saint felt sorrow and joy. Bonaventure writes of the stigmatization:

Two wings were raised above His head, twain were spread forth to fly, while twain hid his whole body. Beholding this, Francis was mightily astonished, and joy, mingled with sorrow, filled his heart. He rejoiced at the gracious aspect wherewith he saw Christ, under the guise of the Seraph, regard him, but His crucifixion pierced his soul with a sword of pitying grief.<sup>53</sup>

Celano describes it in no less paradoxical terms. Much depends on how we understand joy. We have to ask the question differently—*what event does the joyful harbor?* The joyful harbors a performative, neither one of pain nor pleasure, but extension. Compatible with Spinoza's idea that joy increases with the body's power, and/or the politics of Zarathustra's dance, the body extends itself universally and more powerfully the more joy it has. Nietzsche will term the body's innate ability for extension its will to power. Conversely, however, the body must receive as much as it extends. This form of universal extension is well known in theology—Christ's body was always a stand-in for the cosmological story. Christ's body was the all, and extended itself across materiality and history either as eternal Logos, incarnate materiality, divine

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<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Cole, "Another Look at Giotto's Stigmatization of St. Francis," pgs. 101-102.



intelligence, Mind eternal, Hegel's absolute, and so on. On this account, Christ recapitulated all of humanity in his body, making possible a renewed humanity; but of course, his extension was a retroactive invention by the early Fathers, acting as a solution to the *how* of Christ's divinity, and the *why* of his active involvement in worldly affairs. God was already an abstract form of universalism, but the philosophical tradition that the early Fathers inherited made it difficult to think both his isolation as Eternal being as well as his immanence in the world. With the concept of Christ, the early theologians solved this problem at the cost, no doubt, of God's transcendent status.

And so, to the problem of seeing the divine in the gestures of Antony's tortured body, a simple solution is found: the joyful *is* the encounter with temptation, the latter the most necessary of ascetic psycho-somatics. One can see Antony's soul regardless of its turbulence, and, more importantly, one can see it more clearly, honestly, in virtue of that turbulence. *The soul is turbulence, is conflicting forces, is the body.*

The joy in the joyful space comes from a prior Christo-logic—the performative glory of martyrdom. Appearing alongside the growth of Christianity, fueled largely by widespread persecution, martyrdom was one of the earliest interpretations of the *Christus triumphans*, and it remained but one expression of what was really going on in the crucifixion event. Asceticism, which can be understood to be the replacement image of the martyr, begins later in history, but the joy of the martyr's death in his final moments will forever be lodged within Christianity's own understanding of asceticism. Ignatius' wild desire for complete dismemberment is perhaps the most famous masochistic text in Western history. In his "Epistle to the Romans" of the early second century, Ignatius exclaims, "Let fire, cross, groups of wild beasts, the scattering of bones,

the cutting up of limbs, the grinding of the entire body, and the devil's evil punishments come upon me, only that I may attain to Jesus Christ."<sup>54</sup> Though he is without a stage in the desert, Schongauer's Antony resembles Ignatius in imagery and bodily dismemberment. And yet, the stage is the painting—affect travels across it as cries for mercy in an ancient coliseum, ending up on our hearts. To be more precise, Antony's *body is the canvas*. His body is the will to power in aesthetic terms, given that it desires full extension. A revealing comparison is Dürer's *St. Michael's Fight Against the Dragon* of 1498 (Figure 24).

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<sup>54</sup> Ignatius, "Letter to the Romans," in *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*, Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie eds. (London: Routledge, 2002), pgs. 107-111.



Figure 24. Albrecht Dürer. *St. Michael's Fight Against the Dragon*, 1498.

Resembling the *Antony series* in innumerable ways, with the floating, isolated central figure surrounded by an onslaught of demonic forces, St. Michael can in no way be mistaken for St. Antony. The difference is that the former has a weapon, actively fighting the dragons, while the

latter has no weapons. St. Michael is trying to protect the integrity of his figure, his formation. St. Antony welcomes his deformation.

Because his body is open to temptation (desire opens), Antony's figure has the property of extension. His body is extended in virtue of its indiscernability with the surrounding figures. Deleuze remarks that for Bacon the contour line, the organic membrane surrounding his figures, becomes the "trapeze apparatus or prosthesis in a new sense, for the acrobatics of the flesh."<sup>55</sup> The contour line is the fluid boundary separating an organism from its surrounding, and in Bacon's work the membrane is punctured so that the outside bleeds toward the figure and the figure bleeds outward. For the *Antony series*, the demonic is the outer membrane isolating the figure from the outside, yet also the agent by which it is swallowed by the outside. Just as the crucifix is a prosthetic for Christ's becoming flesh, Antony's flesh is in a process of becoming Christ through its radical deformation. It is through the demonic membrane that Antony becomes Christ.

We spoke earlier of Giotto's *Stigmatization of St. Francis*. Giotto uses bold lines to mark the lines of force. What Schongauer adds to Giotto is focus, and he interprets the line of descent across the entire body, multiplying it. The entire body is stigmatized, without line, and by demons. In Giotto, the stigmata, even while being the central tenet of the mural, is in Schongauer centralized to the point of having no background. The struggle is spread before us in the form of a figure, populating the entirety of pictorial space. What is born in this (ascetic or aesthetic) struggle is the canvas. The canvas, as one of equal resonance among marks follows from this extension, does not precede this extension. Space follows from force; space is born of force, and resonance is the quality of space. The body is awakened by the force of God's radical incarnation

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<sup>55</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p 29.

(Antony first, but enacted in St. Francis). Gestures are an expression of this force. A body is a contour line of God—he enters via deformation.

All the elements in the *Antony series* center their formal action around Antony's isolated body, and especially in Schongauer's simplified and pair-down version, one can discern remnants of the iconic tradition's emphasis on flatness.<sup>56</sup>

All the forms, shapes and lines in the paintings compress on his body, which is the central point of the canvas. Schongauer's takes this resonance to a new level. Schongauer's Antony is weightless in the air against a colorless background. Demons with clubs pound the monk's body, tearing at anything they can get their hands on—a wrist, an arm, a leg, his cloak. The picture space is remarkably flat. There is representational "depth" only in overlapping figures, only in the violence to come forward. Full and robust, the composition fills the white space with pointed wings, talons and aching feet. Only this figure has allowed disfiguration to be credible and worthy of depiction; only with this figure can the space of the canvas be opened up to an even palate of sensation, for, after all, what are we witnessing if not a pure multiplicity of sensate experience, where blurring of shape is more important than form, when shared line and shared color are more valuable than definition.

## The Erotic

"Hence the ecstasy of exposure."  
Michael Hardt

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<sup>56</sup> According to Alexei Losev, the medieval icon painter was not interested in the proportions of the body, but "the harmony of the body was contained for him rather in an ascetic sketch, the flat reflection of a supra-physical world," Cited by Maria Rubins in *Crossroad of Arts, Crossroad of Cultures: Ecphrasis in Russian and French Poetry* (NY: Palgrave, 2000), p. 23.

Often, as in Eugene Isabey's *Temptation* the demonic is substituted with nudity and sensuality, further drawing the parallel to eroticism and suffering, the demonic and pleasure, dismemberment and the dark touch of joy (see Figure 25). Orthodox readings of monastic desire understand pleasure to be had in the overcoming of temptation. The erotic is what precisely needs to be avoided, and this is exactly the case in Antony's *vitae*.



Figure 25. John Charles Dollman. *The Temptations of St. Antony*, circa 1925.

The demonic, if it is anything, is not the same as joy or pleasure. Monasticism is a project of doing away with temptation and desire.<sup>57</sup> And yet, as the series testifies, temptation is the vehicle through which the monastic body is defined. Temptation opens the body up, literally and

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<sup>57</sup> See the section titled “Desire” in chapter four.

figurally, and it gives the body the scope it needs in order to be equated with the ontologically prior body, Christ. If he or she is glorious, they are glorious in virtue of the battle with temptation. Temptation cannot be extracted from the monastic enterprise—it must literally surround the monk on all sides; in the case of the Antony series, it surrounds him to such a degree that the line between his body and theirs dissolves:—“The monk must always consider at least a part of himself as demonic.”<sup>58</sup> Extension is the name for the body’s attachment to these “exterior” figures. Temptation is extension. Rather than avoid temptation, the monastic needs it and requires it. Pictorially, the extension flattens the body, but theologically, temptation opens it, gives it dimensionality. In aesthetic terms, the extension of Antony populates the canvas with sensation, a fact that gives this series its modern, abstract characteristics. Michael Hardt comes close to articulating the monastic phenomenon of erotic exposure and how in the face of desire ecstasy follows suit. Hardt writes: “In erotic exposure the boundaries or discontinuities between self and other are broken down and dissolved to open a kind of communication or communion.”<sup>59</sup> Though the monastic must resist desire, he must equally court desire and open up his body to its powerful agents.

If in previous variations extension (which is another name for the building up of consistency of surface) occurs via the demons or the city, we can add desire as a third principle of extension. Extension always occurs through figure, color, line and blurring. Felicien Rops is the most radical of those using nudity. In his version of *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1878 (Figure 26) a nude female hangs crucified from the cross. Hanging where Christ ought to be, she smirks in erotic invitation.

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<sup>58</sup> Brakke, *Demons and the Making*, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Hardt, “Pasolini,” p. 83.



Figure 26. Felicien Rops. *The Temptation of St. Antony*, 1878.

Remarkably, Antony gazes upwards with his palms to his ears. His beard flies ragged and tosses in the wind, and his clothes are in tatters. Above the nude's head is a sign that reads EROS where INRI should be. Antony's posture is eerily similar to Giotto's Francis, with his body open to the



viewer, one knee planted and arms extended. A post-mortem Christ seems to float behind the cross, and demonic angels toss about in the air. A demon appears on the other side of the cross. Rop's picture defies words. Is the body of Christ a desirable object? Or is Rops taking part in the "Christ as Scarlet Woman" tradition, which, according to Oliver St John and Sophie Di Jorio, Rops interpreted from an apocalyptic passage in the Book of Revelation.<sup>60</sup> We are not exactly sure what inspired Rops, but we do know he is working within the thematic of the demonic and ascetic desire.

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<sup>60</sup> St. John, Oliver, Sophie Di Jorio. *The Ending of the Words - Magical Philosophy of Aleister Crowley* (Crown Quarto, 2008) p. 44.



Figure 27. Eugene Isabey. *The Temptation of St. Antony*. 1869. Oil on canvas.

Seeming to pull in all directions, and without general strategy, Athanasius' *Life of Antony* gives us hints as to what the demons want. Firstly, they want to keep Antony on the ground. Demons populate the air for a very specific reason—keeping Antony from bodily resurrection: “Next, he saw some foul and terrible figures standing in the air, intent on holding him back so he could not pass by.”<sup>61</sup> The foul beings in the air asked for an accounting of his life, and according to the *Life of Antony*, Antony's guide-beings said that his slate before he was a monk has been wiped clean, but that of after becoming a monk you can take an account. “Then, as they leveled accusations and failed to prove them, the passage opened before him free and unobstructed. And just then he saw himself appear to come and stand with himself, and once more he was Antony, as before.”<sup>62</sup> Schongauer as well captures this passage, of a body literally stretched in space. According to Siglind Bruhn, Grunewald's immediate model for a singular body in space can most likely be traced to a copper print by Bernardo Parentino, itself made after some images Andre Mantegna had done of Antony.<sup>63</sup> The space does not precede the body, just as “new life” did not precede the ministry of Christ. It was Christ who first cleared the air, making passage *within verticality thematic*, and Antony was merely following suit. Antony's body merely doubled Christ's body when it entered the arena of force and became deformed in the process.

The passage within the air, without gravity, suspended in demonic onslaught is what conditions the strange ethereal expansion of Antony's figure. Without the concern of gravity, the demons attack him from all angles, his feet, hair, hands and midsection. This tearing apart is also his expansion. The only dimensions in these series are not those of gravity or landscape, but horizontality and verticality—the canvas does not open up behind the figure, but across it,

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<sup>61</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 79.

<sup>62</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 79.

<sup>63</sup> Bruhn, Siglind. *The Temptation of Paul Hindemith*, p. 114.

through it, and only by it. What results is an immanent, modern picture space where our eye traces the figure's entirety, where color, and form are content, communicating with each other across the figure. The figure is decentralized, and without value as an individual subject; no one demon takes precedence, as it is a total body onslaught; there is no body per se, only a dispersed, deformed figure. His ultimate value is his sacrifice.

### **A Higher Formation?**

Another principle of ascetic discipline is the fact that the ascetic body must never come to completion. Deformation is not a virtue in light of a higher formation. The deformed body is guided by its transcendental body—Christ—but it is guided by it in a strange manner. First, we have seen how the crucifix has engendered an aesthetics of the body's dismantling. Second, we can also understand transcendental in the ontological sense of Christ's status as a screen for creation, his logos (near point). The first is the ontological image providing the rational for the second. Everything springs forth from a meditation on the crucifix. When the thinkers placed Christ at the near point, they attributed to him a ceaseless quality; his work is never to be completed. Of course, in history his work was completed on the cross, but for humanity this completion becomes our incompleteness; the body is never finished erasing the original stain of its corruption, and so therefore the image of man becomes one of impossible completion, which is the property of (Antony's) extended body.<sup>64</sup> Man must never risk full deification.

What must be protected at all costs is the ontological athleticism of Christ's body at the time of its *becoming*. Theologians are anxious that Christ never fully form, and that he remain in a permanent state of ungrounding. This is the fundamental aesthetic quality of appearance peculiar

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<sup>64</sup> See Patricia Cox Miller's *The Corporeal Imagination* for the tension that early Christian writers had to have when writing about the resurrected body, i.e., it could never be fully resurrected or fully deified, as that would be idolatry according to Miller.

to a human body that has no shape and yet informs all shapes. Harpham writes: “Christ must resist the tendency to form; he must remain in finite and inchoate, free from all objectification of his being, all commodification of desire—we might say he must remain in parable and resist all metonymy.”<sup>65</sup> This anxiety to keep Christ inchoate had practical consequences, for how could a totally complete, fully formed being be said to exist inside another fully formed being, which is us. First, in order for Christ to be able to redeem humanity he must be isolated from it. This was the concern of the early Fathers in their insistence that Christ not be fully equated with humanity. Though it is commonly asserted that this distance is one of transcendence, the *logos* status of Christ is in fact a function of becoming. The problem resides in making a place for immanent life. Just as for Deleuze the concern in drawing a distinction between the virtual and the actual is *not* one of transcendence vs. immanence, nor to claim truth vs. falsity. Rather, the problem is to protect the virtual *so as to* be able to account for new actualities. The early fathers have the same concern. They are adamant that Christ never die. He must live on. Why? So the Christ can be present to us in all our times. How? The difference is one of intensities (virtualities) and formations (actualities). What is at stake is reserving for Christ a special virtual status, and *eternal generation* is the classical nomenclature to describe the virtual property of Christ. One only has to ask the question of *Does Christ get tired?* to grasp the requirement that he be a ceaseless, restless power.

How exactly does Christ resist the tendency to form? Christ will be characterized by a bodily logic known more precisely by dancers than theologians. Athanasius, in an imagined refutation hinted at earlier, interrogates the Greek image of thought.

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<sup>65</sup> Harpham, *Aesthetic Imperative*, p. 57.

The Greek philosophers say that the universe is a great body, and they say truly, for we perceive the universe and its parts with our senses. But if the Word of God is in the universe, which is a body, and has entered into it in its every part, what is there surprising or unfitting in our saying that He has entered also into human nature?<sup>66</sup>

An image common among the Stoic philosophers, Athanasius is well aware that for Christianity the debate really hinges on the meaning of an (ascetic) logic of “human nature,” as there must be something already immanent in human nature, now, which reveals the manner in which God incarnated a body. Athanasius is no doubt rigid in his formulations, drawing a strict divide between the whole and the part (the one vs. the many).<sup>67</sup> The universe is a whole body composed of shifting parts, yet how to differentiate between God’s presence in the whole and God’s presence in the parts? As we suspected, it is a difference between two forms of repetition. Strangely, Athanasius doesn’t concern himself with the formal difference between the whole and the part, for the very question negates the revelation of Christ, a revelation that rearticulated the question in terms of how in creation God can express himself in the form of a body. Athanasius continues:

Take a parallel case. A man’s personality actuates and quickens his whole body. If anyone said it was unsuitable for the man’s power to be in the toe, he would be thought silly, because, while granting that a man penetrates and actuated the whole of his body, he denied his presence in the part. Similarly, no one who admits the presence of the Word of God in the universe as a whole should think it unsuitable for a single human body to be by Him actuated and enlightened.<sup>68</sup>

Athanasius at once utilizes the whole-part distinction in order to make room for a new image of thought expressed on the inherent movements of the body. We say *expressed* because Athanasius is not simply asking us to imagine, in literary fashion, how God could move in the universe in

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<sup>66</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, p. 76.

<sup>67</sup> See chapter three and the discussion on the whole and the part.

<sup>68</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, p. 77.

the same way the body moves its toe. Athanasius is not presenting a metaphor. Rather, Athanasius is translating a certain ontology into a bodily epistemology in order to authorize his conceptions of corruption and incorruption. Moreover, this is how the Son theoretically appears in the world, the practical appearance being his mask of the prophet. It is not the case that Athanasius, at such a young age, is unaware of overlapping logics at work: “Man is a part of the creation, as I said before; and the reasoning which applies to one applies to the other....All things derive from the Word their light and movement and like, as the Gentiles authors themselves say, “In him we live and move and have our being.””<sup>69</sup> Equally powerful, Christ moved into our bodies as God moved in Christ. A single movement, but two forms of gesture.

A logic of immanence therefore presents itself: one must assume the form of that which one desires to correct. One tree had to replace another. In order for man to be cleansed and the way shown to him and materiality redeemed, Christ had to adopt the form of man. Yet, as we have seen, much philosophical maneuvering had to take place, foremost being a three point ontological narrative, with Christ inhabiting a near, immanent and far temporal point.<sup>70</sup> Equally aesthetic and ethical, herein lies the origin of ascetic *imitatio Christi*.

## Conclusion

In the previous chapters, we have thought together two bodies, which are two forms of repetition: crucified body and ascetic body. With the *Antony series* and Giotto, we have added a third—the aesthetic figure. As a conceptual persona, the first is found in early theological literature and expressed in christology, the new form of philosophy in the ancient world. Christ was understood to be without end and beginning, and so resembled Greek notions of eternal

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 77.

<sup>70</sup> See chapter one, “Conceptual Personae.”

Nature. “All things move in Christ” sums up this conception. As the visible, repeated image of God, Christ is bound to repeat, but repeat human nature with difference, that is, to continue to create inside immanent humanity, all the while remaining a virtual presence within it.

The second we saw in various guises in hagiographical texts where the monastic found himself clothed in Christ. An ascetic moved about in the crucified body of Christ through his discipline, channeling the suffering and purifying rites of the Crucifix in the desert. The silent gestures of the crucified Christ are translated into a gesturology of divine expression. Pilgrims found Christ at work because they could viscerally see the force of the incarnation at work. Antony’s struggle was defined by exposure. The art of the human body found its divine inspiration in embodying the force of Christ so as to be victorious over the force of the demonic. Actual martyrdom extends itself over *a life*, the monk’s life, and over the body. If the crucified body was a compression of humanity’s suffering, then the ascetic body was its unfolding.

A third form of repetition, the aesthetic figure, was first found in Giotto’s *Stigmatization*, which is itself a culmination of the previous forms of repetitions, then second in the *Antony series*. The *Antony series*, in lineage with Crucifixion imagery and Giotto’s gesturing bodies reveal a simple logic long at work in aesthetic theory: the event of the body remains Christological because by attributing force to the gesturing body we admit it is taking part in another body. Force populates the canvas, removing the dramatic or narrative quality of pictorial space and replacing it with abstraction—i.e., expression. The crucifixion, martyr’s death, ascetic struggle or the stigmatization are not stories but express the power of theological embodiment. The narrative quality of the pictorial space is only replaced by a non-narratable event: force. Further, sensations masks force with color, line and form—three of the main forms of pictorial sensation.



Indiscernability is the name we attribute to zones where force has become most palpable: when the body is dismantled in virtue of a higher formation—deformation.

Through the work of Giotto and the *Antony series*, this case study has attempted to unravel the knot that is the ascetic body's role in early Renaissance art. As we have seen, the contribution of the ascetic body to Renaissance art is multi-tiered. Theology, pictorial construction, affect philosophy, the cult of the saints, etc—these are all areas where one can locate the influence ascetic theory and its visual imagination has had on the Renaissance. In the following chapter, and second case study, the notion of *istoria* will be taken up. So crucial to the *Antony series* was the body's gesture, since it was gesture that aided in the earliest developments of Western art away from Byzantine influence. Latin for story or narrative, *istoria* would become with Da Vinci one of the most important aspects of the painted canvas. While attention will be paid less to asceticism and its logic, it will become clear how *istoria* employs gesture to create communication within the painted canvas (autonomy). In other words, a latent ascetic logic does reside within the notion of *istoria*.

## Chapter 6

*Istoria*—Da Vinci's Renaissance Bodies

*The most prodigious strokes of madness appear on canvas under the auspices of the Catholic code.*

Gilles Deleuze

This is the second case study to explore the ascetic logic of the body in the visual arts. In the previous chapter, it was shown how the *Antony series* provides the viewer with a singular figure surrounded by demons. The scenes in the series depicted a specific moment in the hermit's life, and the series gains its power from a remarkably consistent style. What is “modern” about this series is how it is attempting to portray a different body (disfiguration) than the one that will eventually gain traction in the Renaissance and be known as the hallmark of Western painting: the anatomically rendered nude figure. The body in the series, however, never acted to simply display a body—it served an artistic function. Antony's figure allowed artists to take chances in terms of composition, chances that would eventually contribute to a notion of the art work as a self-sufficient field, another form of a body whose main properties were immanence, correspondence and communication—i.e., autonomy. Autonomy is *not* here being used to define

the work of art as without function or purpose, as does Adorno, though Adorno did claim a functionality in art's lack of functionality.<sup>1</sup>

It is in this context of autonomy that we turn to Leon Battisti Alberti's concept of *istoria*. Like Giotto's stigmatas and the *Antony series*, this case study is an attempt to unravel the creative deployment of the ascetic logic of the body in the visual arts. What is not being claimed is that *istoria* historically relies on an ascetic concept of the body. Rather, all three discursive formations—asceticism, Antony series, *istoria*—return us to a logic of the body that is not created by said traditions, but exploited by them.

### **From Temptation to Torment**

During the Italian duecento, a revolution in the visual arts gave birth to a new conception of what painting could be. At the time, however, it was not entirely clear what the “modern” styles of Cimabue, Duccio and Giotto, among others, were doing to revolutionize the prevailing Byzantine iconic style. It would take a few centuries until their “modern” style, as Vasari termed it, received formal attention.<sup>2</sup> In retrospect, a few things are clear: the paintings and murals are beginning to rely more and more on the painting's internal characteristics for their status as works of art. In contrast to the iconic tradition, whose expressive features are often as highly stylized as much as formally coded, the new bodies of Giotto appear lifelike. Figures speak to each other in dramatic narratives on the canvas, communicating across bodies or singularly, on a single body. The icon that was the window unto God is being painted over in praise of a window unto nature, and the gaze of the body, formerly thought to transcend the symbolic face of the

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent treatment is Adorno's opening chapter in *Aesthetic Theory*, trans C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> See Giorgio Vasari's “Giotto: Painter, Sculptor and Architect, of Florence,” in *Lives of the Artist: Biographies of the Most Eminent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors of Italy* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1946).

saint, now remains fixed to gesture, body language, posture and expression; there is a general trend that indicates that the eyes of figures are looking less and less at the viewer and more frequently at their peers on the canvas. In addition to eyes, the body is beginning to express a semiotic that will eventually dominate painting for centuries.

Painters are taking liberties in expressing their bodies. Giotto nearly revolutionizes painting when in his *Baptism of Christ* (Figure 28) he paints Christ's hair as wet, heavy and slick against his right shoulder, exactly as wet hair would be; the others stand on the shore, their hair wavy and full of volume, i.e., dry. Equally revolutionary is Giotto's depictions of the infant Christ sprouting a childish band of hair in *Nativity*, in the Arena chapel, and the filling out of that hair in *Adoration of the Magi* in the same location.<sup>3</sup> Richard Viladesau sums it up when he states that Giotto "portrays Christ's humanity but does so in a usually convincing way, after the manner of sculpture, and not solely as a theological statement."<sup>4</sup> In addition to his superb attention to detail, Giotto further emphasizes the subsidiary actors, which many didn't do. His people interact with one another, as in his *Betrayal of Christ* (Figure 36) and *The Massacre of the Innocents* (Figure 29), rather than on the central character.<sup>5</sup> Giotto paints real bodies in scenes "without" theology, and it is for this reason that his "modern" paintings will be mentioned in the same breath as *istoria*.

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<sup>3</sup> Derbes, Anne and Mark Sandona. "Giotto Past and Present: An Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Giotto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Viladesau, Richard. *The Beauty of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, From the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 139.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 139.

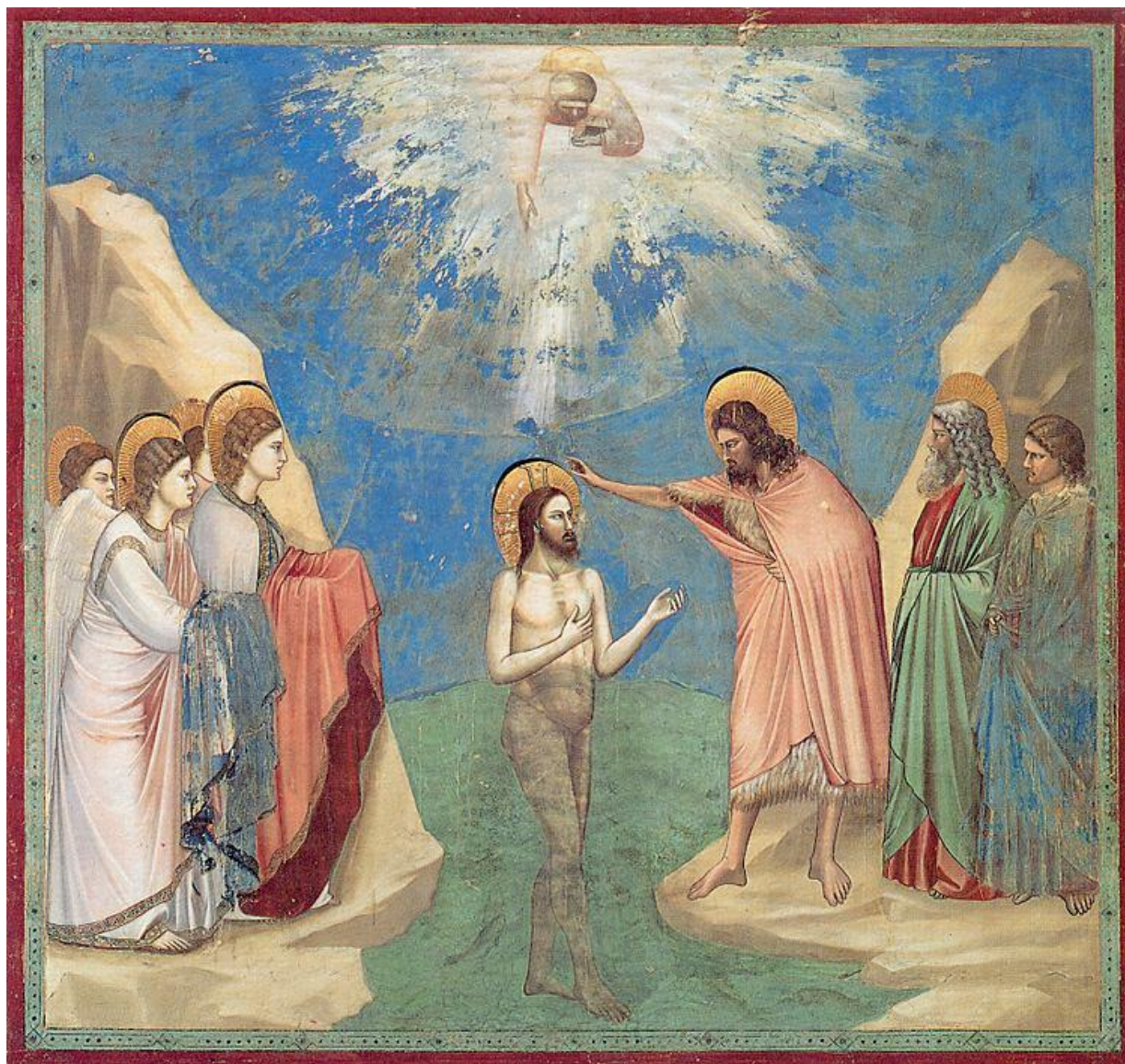


Figure 28. Giotto. *Baptism of Christ*. Arena chapel. 1304-6.

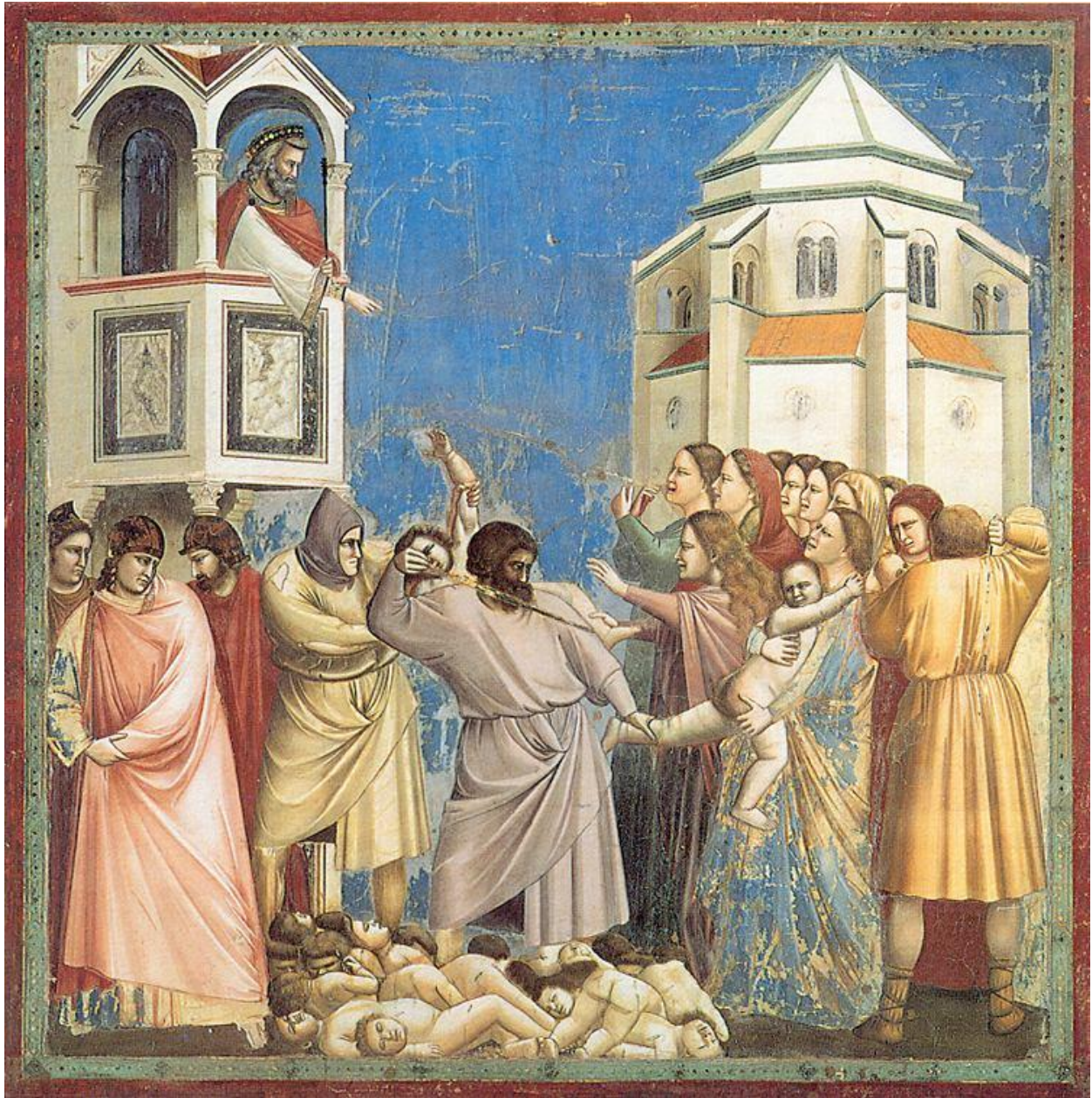


Figure 29. Giotto. *The Massacre of the Innocents*. Arena Chapel, 1304-6. Fresco.

With the concept of *istoria* in mind, philosopher Leon Battista Alberti writes that Giotto “expresses with his face and gesture a clear indication of a disturbed soul in such a way that there

are different movements and positions in each one.”<sup>6</sup> Though Giotto is supposed to bring painting back to nature, and loosen the tongue of painting, his paintings *are* strictly coded.

Writes Barasch: “He infused gestures that appear to be ‘conventional’ with the spirit of life, of an immediate, often urgent, psychological reality. On the other hand, he often imparted the quality of emotional restraint, usually characteristic of conventional gesticulation, to movements representing natural reactions, expressing agitated minds and turbulent experiences. In his style Giotto tended to level the difference between the two modes.”<sup>7</sup> Giotto uses social conventions, but makes free use of them. The content of his naturalism is that bodies begin to express coded behavior but in an uncoded fashion.<sup>8</sup>

During these crucial centuries, late Medieval painters, Giotto foremost among them, are relying less and less on accepted traditions of viewing, such as the conception that the picture space is a window that opens unto God. The claim that painting is now a window upon nature, was, of course, said centuries after Giotto, and he surely would not have agreed with the statement. Yet what exactly is this *nature* for Alberti that he retroactively attributes to the Florentine? And if the painting was of nature, what is its relationship to bodies? Painter, writer and philosopher, Alberti speaks for generations of painters when in his *Della Pittura* (1435), the first treatise on painting in the Western world, he writes that “The greatest work of the painter is not a colossus, but an *istoria*. *Istoria* gives greater renown to the intellect than any colossus.”<sup>9</sup> To claim that Giotto is at once the founder of “modern” painting, and to place the brilliance of that “modernism” in *istoria*

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<sup>6</sup> Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*, Volume 1966, Part 2, ed. and translated by John Spencer (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> Barasch, *Giotto and the Language of Gesture*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Viladesau, *The Beauty of the Cross*, p. 142.

<sup>9</sup> Alberti, *Della Pittura*, p. 72.

is not to simply claim that Giotto's bodies were realistic.<sup>10</sup> Rather, it is to claim that something formally is occurring in Giotto's picture spaces in addition to realistic bodies. *Istoria* is that addition, and while *istoria* on first glance seems to be about gesture and figure, the primary import of this concept remains embedded within the logic of immanence.

### *Istoria*

The concept of *istoria* dominated the theoretical conception of the pictorial space in which Michelangelo began producing art. Two hundred years after the appearance of Alberti's *Della Pittura*, La Font de Saint Yenne in his *Reflections on the Present State of Painting* (1774) still declared history painting—one of the genres of *istoria*—to be the most important aspect of painting.<sup>11</sup> Because of his theorization of *istoria*, and the dependent concepts of figure, body and composition, Barasch writes that Alberti is the “founder” of modern art theory. It will not be until the canvases of Cubism in the early twentieth century that Alberti's theories are sufficiently challenged.<sup>12</sup> What, then, is *istoria*?

First given renown by Alberti, *istoria* (Latin for story or narrative) was a property of the picture plane intended first to give a reality effect to the plane, and second, allow something (a soul) to emerge from the painted figures. *Istoria* relies heavily on a formal characteristic within the painting (line, shape, color, body) which in turn produces the *istoria* that the painting emits. As a rule, *istoria* cannot be isolated apart from its reliance with bodies or figures, though it is distinct from it. It is this quasi-independence, this short-circuit of representational fidelity, which places *istoria* at perhaps the first appearance of expression in Western painting. *Istoria* needs to be

<sup>10</sup> The description of Giotto's work as “modern” was used by Renaissance biographer Giorgio Vasari in his famous *Lives*; see the previous chapter for more on the “modern” qualities of Giotto's work.

<sup>11</sup> Wilde, Carolyn and Paul Smith. *A Companion to Art Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Barasch, Moshe. “Time in the Visual Arts,” in *The Language of Art: Studies in Interpretation* (NY: New York University Press, 1997), p. 245.



located in two places: in a theory of perception and composition. As I will be arguing, the figure remains the deep source of Western painting.<sup>13</sup> This is entirely different from claiming that the hyper-realism of the Renaissance figure—which it often wasn't—in communion with its humanism, would solidify painting as the art of mimicry, and so therefore we can attribute this fact to its rise in prominence in the fine arts. Of course, the discovery of the human body in its divine and anatomical greatness sparked the trend to realistic painting. Yet here we are speaking of another property of the figure: *not* its value as agent and symbol of what painting can be, where it is and where it is going, but specific properties of the body that force it center stage in the birth of the canvas. The figure is crucial not in terms of what it represents, but in how it alters the course of representational practices.

Alberti's *Della Pittura* begins with the basics. A painting is a plane of material reality. Populating that plane are figures, which are made up of points. A point is a figure that cannot be divided up into parts.<sup>14</sup> Composed of straight and curved lines, figures cannot have depth on the plane. Figures are mathematical and organic. Figures appear large or small on the plane depending on their distance in the appearance, and Alberti will use the term *plane* to describe the limbs of a figure, for there exists many internal planes inside the main picture space. The picture space has a mathematical foundation akin to the square pattern of floor tiles (this is Book I of *Della Pittura*), and remains subservient to quantification, measurability and uniformity. Most importantly, the latter is the cluster of singular, indivisible points that the abstract grid is composed of. Borrowing a phrase from Deleuze to indicate a space that is quantified and

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the role of the figure in Renaissance painting, see *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, edited by Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Classical Myths in Italian Renaissance Painting*, by Luba Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Alberti, *Della Pittura*, p. 43.

measured, one could call this space striated.<sup>15</sup> Perspective, which allows for the semblance of distance, is based upon a centric point, and the surrounding light sources (rays), and angles, become subservient to this point, constantly aware of its presence.<sup>16</sup> One can already sense a hyper-compositional consciousness to the picture plane. Perspective required of painting a certain obsession—i.e., that all its parts agree. Consistency and agreement was its most basic proposition. For instance, an angle of a building in the top right corner must agree with an angle in the bottom left; agreement is mathematically based. Disagreement is not only distortion, it is fragmentation of the plane of nature.

Serving as the abstract grid, the striated space of the canvas receives another layer, that of the volumes of human bodies. Predictably, the body is broken into shapes. Alberti has no pretence as to what a body is on the canvas. It is not real, not a child of God, and not symbolic—a body is nothing but line, volume, shape and color; in contrast, the *istoria* is merely a product, an expressive vapor emanating from the comingling of bodies. Any movement attributed to those bodies comes as a result of these and other material elements.<sup>17</sup> Even grace and beauty, two of the great transcendent ideals of Renaissance Neoplatonism, is for Alberti a brute fact of the planes:

That grace in bodies which we call beauty is born from the composition of the planes. A face which has its planes here large and there small, here raised and there depressed—similar to the faces of old women—would be most ugly in appearance. Those faces which have the planes joined in such a way that they take shades and lights agreeably and

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<sup>15</sup> See Deleuze's *A Thousand Plateaus*, especially the chapter titled "Nomadology."

<sup>16</sup> Alberti, *Della Pittura*, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Which is not to say the immaterial does not exist in the painting. In the opening lines of Book I, Alberti clearly states that, "No one would deny that the painter has nothing to do with things that are not visible. The painter is concerned solely with representing what can be seen," p. 43.

pleasantly, and have no harshness of the relief angles, these we should certainly say are beautiful and delicate faces.<sup>18</sup>

Beauty is not participated in the manner of Plato's *Symposium*. The concept of beauty is born of grace in bodies, and bodies are composed of the composition of planes. Beauty is a matter of physics, of harshness in the jaw, angles of the eyes. Beauty is not a transcendent principle, not an essence, not a property of the subject—beauty is born of a specific material organization. The many planes that construct the body Alberti refers to as members, and in his attempt to explain the proper way to depict a live body, he begins with the example of a dead body. He argues that the members of the dead “should be dead to the very nails,” while those of the living “should be alive in the smallest part.” Because “the body is said to live when it has certain voluntary movements...the painter, wishing to express life in things, will make every part in motion—but in motion he will keep loveliness and grace. The most graceful movements and the most lively are those which move upwards in the air.”<sup>19</sup> Life, such as in his expression “to live,” must be immanent to the entire body, and movement, preferably upwards, is the best expression of that force. Something about the weight of gravity dulls the life of bodies on the canvas, and only when they defeat gravity, or at least gesture against it, can we find life's fullest expression. The *Antony series* obeys this qualification rigorously.

Alberti repeats himself often: “The greatest work of the painter is the *istoria*. Bodies are part of the *istoria*, members are parts of the bodies, planes are parts of the members”<sup>20</sup>; “Bodies ought to harmonize together in the *istoria* in both size and function.”<sup>21</sup> *Istoria* composed of bodies (see Raphael's *School of Athens* for a great example of bodies and *istoria*). Members are parts of

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<sup>18</sup> *Della Pittura*, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 74.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 75.

bodies; planes are parts of members; points construct large or small planes. The points populate a geometrically organized canvas. Each must inform the next, and each must follow strict rules of composition, grace, harmony, beauty and form. All the bodies ought to move according to the *istoria*.<sup>22</sup> However, two problems in the critical reception of the concept remain. First, while much of the critical attention paid to *istoria* has been in terms of its relationship to narrative, *istoria* is not simply a descriptive term for narrative paintings; it is rather an active principle of construction.<sup>23</sup> Second, most the attention paid to the formal organization of the canvas has been in terms of perspective. No doubt Alberti's own writings support the perspective that the laws of perspective are the most foundational to painting. He is adamant that the laws of perspective are absolute and not to be broken. On this account, *istoria* is labeled as the content of the painting. Yet seldom is *istoria* mentioned as an equal force in the formal construction of the canvas. In fact, two laws populate the canvas as two layers that must communicate with each other in specific ways: perspective and *istoria*.

Under the influence of *istoria*, pictorial space is dominated by a principle internal to itself. This central element to which pictorial space defers, and to which all elements must agree, is slowly becoming one of the principle elements of the new pictorial style: i.e., that it contains within its frame all the elements needed to make its point. The push towards immanence—self-contained relationality—is profound for its time. According to Greenstein, Alberti's conception of *istoria*, though unintentional, signaled a decisive break against previous understandings. The concept of *istoria* can first be traced to the sixth century and Gregory the Great's defense of pictures during the iconoclast controversies. Along with iconophile John of Damascus, Gregory claims that the

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<sup>22</sup> *Della Pittura*, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> See *Renaissance & Mannerism* (NY: Sterling Publishing Co., 2008) by Diane Bodart for a brief discussion of its compositional elements. See also *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), by Patricia Fortini Brown. Glenn Pierce has a nice study of *istoria* in his *Manzoni and the Aesthetics of the Lombard Seicento: Art Assimilated into the Narrative of I promessi sposi* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1998).

picture's ability to educate by signifying history outweighed its ability to corrupt worship.<sup>24</sup> This ability of a picture to educate would have an ontological significance for the pictorial space. Under this conception, the picture becomes an illustration, and its role as commentator is analogous to Luther's position on art. This is another way of saying that the picture gains in meaning the more it is tied to a text. Alberti, however, would liberate painting from its textual reliance through the concept of *istoria*; or, more precisely, because *istoria* required the gesturing figure, it was the figure that liberated painting.

Classically, *istoria* was tied not just to any event, but a biblical event.<sup>25</sup> Because of the moral import of the biblical scene, mundane scenes would not receive the label of expressing an *istoria* unless they were clearly allegorical of a Biblical story. Prior to Alberti, *istoria* (*historia*) had embedded within it the sense of a theo-moralistic truth. The usage he inherited was “out of the late medieval tradition that linked *historia* with pictorial representation. . . . Alberti used the word *historia* as a metonymic synonym for a pictorial work of art that depicted a narrative scene.”<sup>26</sup> But Alberti introduces one theoretical element that will alter the course of aesthetics—gesture. Alberti makes gesture the cornerstone of his theory of art. Alberti does not invent a theory of expression nor does he invent the importance of gesture in painting. Giotto already accomplished the latter. Alberti's contribution is descriptive and constructive: he theorizes what gesture is doing for the maturation of pictorial space (*istoria*), and further, how one can actively construct an *istoria*. In doing so, Alberti draws upon Greek rhetoric, especially Quintilian's *Instituto Oratoria* and the thoughts of Cicero, to refine his understanding of *istoria*. Figuring prominently in Alberti's use of their ideas is the concept of *figura*. According to Greenstein, there were two

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<sup>24</sup> Greenstein, Jack. *Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 39.

uses of the term for the classical rhetorical tradition: 1) *figura* designated the “outward form” (Aristotle); 2) and for Quintilian, *figura* mitigated between speech and the speaking body, aiming for its ideal a flow between body and speech in such a way as to rouse the audience to maximum intensity. Alberti’s conception of *istoria* combines the empiricism of Aristotle’s material form with Quintilian’s emphasis on the triad of body/speech/affect to such a degree that he is now equating painting itself with the figure.

Alberti accomplishes this fact not just by understanding *istoria* in terms of bodies and gesture, but of finding *istoria* across a variety of non-biblical sources.<sup>27</sup> This movement of *istoria* out of a strict biblical context allows Alberti to claim that it is a function of the picture, not what the picture represents. In so doing, *istoria* becomes dependent on an immanence of artistic form, on the material realities of the surface, especially gesturing bodies. Given this emphasis, Modern compositional theory is born in that for Alberti *istoria* is achieved only through compositional techniques. *Istoria* not only becomes a trait of the canvas, but, more importantly, infuses the picture space with the sense of the mobile and migratory. Painting is on its way to becoming its own liberal art, and so we shouldn’t be surprised that he presents the concept of *istoria* in Book II of his treatise, the same book that begins with how painting compares, and is distinct from, poetry, music, and religion.

It would be too easy to claim that what we are witnessing is the birth of a painting’s secular meaning, for even though the *istoria* is the soul of a painting, it is hardly like the transcendent movement within icons. Shouldn’t we just say that the *istoria* is another name for a painting’s meaning, its signification? To retroactively assign the semiotic term of “meaning” to this

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 39-41.

organization is to veil the active, transcendental principle of such meaning. As the condition of possibility of meaning, the transcendental is first a property of the painted surface, strictly concerning the materialism of the canvas, and it would be unjust to apply twentieth century trends in semiotics to Renaissance theories of perception. We are not dealing here with signs and signification. Rather, the discussion is *what justifies the correspondence of elements* in such a manner that an expressive entity can be said to be at once an expression of a set of elements and yet distinct from said elements. By correspondence we mean the ability of the elements on the surface to agree with one another.

### **A Quick Note on Space: The Smooth and the Striated**

In their collaborative work, Deleuze and Guattari employ the terms smooth and striated space to denote properties of material fields, and/or spaces in which matter is active.<sup>28</sup> Here, we will employ such terms to better understand the pictorial space. The concepts are especially relevant to *A Thousand Plateaus*, where it is their stated goal to seek out the expression of what they call a rhizome. Equal part metaphor and metonym, the rhizome is a figure of connectivity, and in their introduction they discern the principles of the rhizome: connection and heterogeneity.

While such terms often lie in opposition to each other, the theories of multiplicity put forward in the text understand connection across materiality to be a requirement of heterogeneity. But what exactly are they speaking about? In a sense, everything—it is the image of a transcendental empiricism. We should understand their investigations across various disciplines—from music to art to animals to nature—as a theoretical performance of Deleuze’s earlier work, *Difference and*

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<sup>28</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis), see their chapter titled “Nomadology.”

*Repetition*.<sup>29</sup> In the latter, being itself is generative of difference, which is in turn repeated in temporality.

The general thrust of the investigations in *A Thousand Plateaus* are transcendental, and so they are after answering a few simple questions: How do connections happen? Why? How can diverse elements be related? Given change, how to account for stability? The plateaus of *A Thousand Plateaus* are precisely this: not amorphous forces of materiality, but relatively stable actualizations of a ceaseless, energy emitting ontological force: Nature, the virtual. A tension inhabits the entirety of Deleuze's work, and especially this collaboration with Guattari. The tension is between structure and expression, the coded and uncoded, the state and the nomads. Their concern to account for the unpredictable does place them squarely in post-structuralist discourses, and yet they will locate the genesis of the creative in the coded just as much as they will locate the coded as a defeat of the creative. In other words, structures are not oppressive,<sup>30</sup> and, in what defines his thought over against many of his French contemporaries, structures (read metaphysics) are necessarily open; machinic assemblages are routes of escape as much as agents of capture. It is in this context of the semiotic between structure and expression that we can understand the difference between smooth and striated space. Further, this difference exposes one of the foundational principles of the Renaissance canvas.

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<sup>29</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> For a more nuanced treatment of Deleuze's complex treatment of structuralism see Roland Boque's *Deleuze and Guattari* (Routledge, London, 1989).



According to Deleuze and Guattari, smooth space is intensive and directional, and materials on it signal forces and serve as symptoms for them.<sup>31</sup> Points are subordinate to the trajectory of forces. Striated space is extensive, dimensional, geometrical and metric. Striated space deals in points, and forms are relegated to their relationship to an abstract point system, the grid or centric point. Striated space is optical and epistemological in that one has a reference system to measure for distance and accuracy. Striated space is metric and homogeneous. Striated space corresponds to Alberti's mathematical grid underlying perceptual laws, which in turn governs how figures are constructed so as to give the semblance of reality. Striated space has a metaphysical hierarchy—forms are relegated by an immanent principle, and this principle, as varied as it is, gives birth to properties. This principle acts like gravity in that all things move toward it, just as properties surround an essence. Striated space requires strict composition and formal organization. In contrast, smooth space is heterogeneous, a space of contact, vectorial, projective or topological. Smooth space is connective, yet it organizes as powerfully as striated space. "Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is haptic rather than optical perception."<sup>32</sup> In terms of painting, if the striated is the transcendental, and must be forgotten (painted over), then it can technically never be seen. The striated is the structural transcendental. The most basic element to perspectival painting is that which cannot ever be sensed. However, what it does allow is optical perception. It lays the foundation for a painted reality, but in itself it is merely the ground. Perspective can never be touched. Yet smooth space, as the space of the affect of figures and the perceiver's affect, relies on striated space for its principle of organization. Figures must follow the laws of perspective to appear real. The real is what gives the figures their emotive content.

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<sup>31</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pgs 536 and thereafter.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 459.

Pictorial perception of *istoria*, strictly speaking, occurs only inside this double premise—transcendental structure and affect-expression. The emotive figures ensure an emotive response, and haptic perception is the name Deleuze and Guattari give to this modality of looking that is also a touching. Smooth space, as one engendering affect and connection, is the space of figures on the canvas, and Alberti's concept of *istoria* utilizes the same principles of connectivity as smooth space. Smooth space and striated space do not work in opposition, but in collaboration.

### **Affectus and the Commentator**

Though neither Alberti nor any other fifteenth century author clearly states what an *istoria* actually is, it is clear that it expresses the soul or passion of a figure.<sup>33</sup> There is body, gesture, will and soul. The will expresses itself in the figure in the form of gesture, and this will, when under “moral” guidance, expresses a soul. A soul has many movements. Alberti will call the movements of the soul “affections,” and he lists as these affections grief, joy, fear and desire. In addition to the movements of the soul, there are exclusive movements of the body, though both are expressed bodily.<sup>34</sup> One is reminded of the letters of St. Antony and his emphasis on natural, unnatural and evil movements. The first are of first creation, and the soul must will it, the second are the movements of warfare in the body, such as when too much food or sexual energy causes the blood to rise, and the third are those of the evil spirits removing us from a life of purity.<sup>35</sup> While the two conceptions of movements do not align in terms of content, they do formally in terms of movements of the body produced by the soul and movements of the body produced by the body itself. Interestingly, Alberti makes an addition to Antony's otherwise unspecified

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<sup>33</sup> Barasch, *The Language of Art*, p. 245.

<sup>34</sup> *Della Pittura* 78.

<sup>35</sup> See the discussion of the three types of movement in chapter four.

natural movements, adding joy and fear alongside desire, while also treating the body less spiritually in that he considers movements of the body as concerned solely with change of place.

Because painting's language is not of words, as Alberti will say of poetry, the visual arts have to rely on a different medium in which to express its soul. To accomplish this, the painter must employ a figure on a flat surface, and the artist must move the figure in such a way as to produce affect in the viewer. Alberti did not have to worry about how this affect traveled from the canvas to the viewer, for his theory of perception supposed it, a fact uncommon to modern aesthetic theory given that it is the heir to Kant's disinterested sublime. Alberti writes: "It happens in nature that nothing more than herself is found capable of things like herself; we weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving."<sup>36</sup> Alberti did not have to argue around the issues of real vs. copy, representation vs. presence, nor figure vs. body. Old metaphysical schemas provided the golden thread between the painted body and the viewing body. First, as Greenstein observes: "The viewer would feel, or at least recognize, these emotions because, according to a Ciceronian dictum, nature provided every animate creature with the desire and capacity to share the feelings of its likes."<sup>37</sup> On this account, desire aroused desire through an innate transference mechanism. Second, borrowing from Quintilian's rhetorical method, the audience could only have their souls moved if the orator had his moving first, in an authentic manner, and so affect had to travel from a central point outwards to the audience. A certain amount of corporeal correspondence had to occur, and yet, Alberti must have known that the posture of an orator cannot resemble what dynamic bodies in painting looked like. Third, Alberti adapts an Augustinian notion of the moral sense. In the *City of God*, Augustine argues

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<sup>36</sup> *Della Pittura*, p. 77.

<sup>37</sup> Greenstein, *Mantegna*, p. 46.

that the soul is the seat of the rational will, and that, according to Greenstein, “affections or the movements of the soul are nothing other than the response of the rational will to the sensible perception of a given set of circumstances.”<sup>38</sup> Crucial is the term rational. The import of Augustine’s ideas center on the discipline of the will; nothing is haphazard in an affect entering our bodies, and in terms of automatism (affect entering us without our will’s authority), Augustine solves this issue with morality. Each reaction of the viewer contains the germ of a moral sense, whether our response is pain or piety. Granting to affect an independent status, judgment occurs on the side of the rational choice one makes when receiving affect. When we are moved, there is a hidden rationality of the will that has directed us to this or that response. When we are moved to hatred, and or when we are moved to joy from an immoral scene, this exhibits not the corruption of affect, for all it can do is be emitted and enter us, but of a disciplined will.

This triad of will, response and morality established, Alberti organizes them in terms of the figure. He will do this by assuming that the *istoria* can move the soul because it is moral. Moreover, akin to the potency of rational discipline in Augustine, Alberti will populate the pictorial *istoria* with varying (moral) actions: some figures delight in the action, while others are horrified at the given scene. So as to not get lost in the clamor of competing gestures, Alberti councils the would-be painter of *istoria* to provide the picture with a commentator. In case the viewer cannot discern the correct way to view the scene, the commentator can provide clues. Aesthetics, it seems for Alberti, is too unruly to let it speak for itself, for one cannot count on a rational discipline to gauge our reactions. Acting as its own form of reception, or as a way to control the representational process, the commentator is the central actor in the pictorial drama,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 51.

formally and theo-psychologically organizing the space. Louis Marin, in *On Representation*, speaks of processes of representation in visibility and/or metafigures of reception.<sup>39</sup> Marin takes as his cue two notions: the frame as a device of representation and the central actor or commentator in *istoria*. Each in its own way governs the process of representation. As we shall see later, the frame is the condition of possibility of pictorial visibility.<sup>40</sup> However, here the central figure's role in governing visibility is more elusive, and much more interesting considering the central figures of the *Antony series*.

Alberti believes that inside the *istoria* there should reside a commentator that “admonishes and points out to us what is happening there [in the story].” This metafigure of representation teaches what is being taught. It points to the central element, in case as viewers we are confused, and with its gestures we can discern the true action of the painting. Just as the central point in linear perspective dominated the hyper-organization of the striated grid, the metafigure brings with it an analogous device, that of acting as the recapitulation of the scene itself, and in such a manner that the entire picture is written in their gestures. Secondly, there are witnesses, and these figures populate the canvases with a dizzying amount of diversity. The witnesses whorl around the central actor in a formal gravity, acting as the stage (not the actors), for one actor is most important, the commentator. In fact, the diversity of the witnesses inform the singularity of the commentator. Witnesses are appendages and outgrowths to the central element. Raphael's *The School of Athens*, 1509, (Figure 30) beautifully displays the interplay between witnesses and the commentator. Central to the picture is two figures, Plato and Aristotle, and together they constitute the commentator.

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<sup>39</sup> Marin, Louis. *On Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 321.

<sup>40</sup> See section “*Istoria* as a Principle of Composition.”



Figure 30. Raphael. *School of Athens*, 1510-15. Rome, Vatican City.

As expected, the striated and the smooth converge on the central figures, as the central point of perspective in which all subsidiary lines converge rests between the two great masters.

Surrounding them, circling them in almost a celestial manner, gesturing bodies display the various modalities of the affect of philosophy. It is a clamor of pedagogical beings, their bodies roused by philosophical thought; paradoxically, only a few witnesses actual gaze at the teachers.

Most of the bodies, as in Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, reside in self-contained clusters arguing amongst themselves. As if to round out the space, Plato points up, arguably to his theory of

forms, and Aristotle, the apprentice of Plato, points forward, perhaps in an attempt to understand Plato or designate his more materialist ontology.

If we apply this tension of metafigure and witness to the *Antony series*, we find that Antony is no doubt the metafigure of representation. Antony's figure organizes the picture space, creating formal gravity around his body upon which the witnesses act. But what are the witnesses? What is his figure trying to organize in terms of representation? Could the witnesses be the demons?

The *Antony series* is a profound body of work spanning numerous centuries that could be understood as a collective meditation on immanence's relation to the body. The figure of Antony in the series established a collective center, and aided in the construction of an extension of that center across the surface. This extension, as the by-product of his front and central posture, produced the semblance of flatness, or what one may call a transcendental immanence of the picture plane. Given this confrontational posture, what role, if any, does the close-up have? And, to answer our first question, how to understand the witness as itself just another formal mark on the canvas that corresponds to the other marks?

### **The Close-up**

Commonly it is the face of the figure that reveals the body's true torment, as if the face is the zone of discipline, wherein whatever it is the body undergoes, the true marker of interiority (i.e., subjectivity) is the face. In the genre of portraiture, the face is the seat of dignity, composure, and calm, and the placid aristocratic face is never to be confused with the scarred face of the warrior, for each face speaks for the body and its world the same way Rembrandt's faces, arguably the best portraitist in history, speak of the insecurities of seventeenth century Dutch privilege. The

face is the seat of the body's tyranny, where the entire body goes to be coded, to reference itself in a condensed manner and to communicate all its complexity through the cheeks, eyes, forehead, nose, jaw, temples and lips.

It is in this vein that Deleuze and Guattari give the face two properties: loci of resonance and despot.<sup>41</sup> Faciality in general is marked by a double process of signification. First, as loci of resonance, it speaks of an entire system of communication. Faciality is a process of selection wherein the intensities of the body conform to a singular motor system. The face acts as the wall of the signifier allowing the abstract energy of the body to find coherent expression. Deleuze and Guattari call it a "frame or screen."<sup>42</sup> Analogous to the way concepts make the plane of immanence comprehensible, acting like a screen thrown over pure differential chaos, the face is the screen thrown over the body, making subjectivity as a mark of interiority possible. Because of this, the face is the body's despot precisely because it wishes to speak for the body, to usurp the body's energies. Further, the face, because it represents interiority, is also the image of desire, and we shall get to this point of desire later on.

As we might expect, the face is just another mask for power, and it—strangely one might add—will be referred to by Deleuze and Guattari as Christ: "The face is not universal...The face is Christ."<sup>43</sup> Though perhaps it is not too strange considering that religion in general was for Deleuze often an agent that destroyed immanence by introducing the transcendent. As the process through which the universal generates itself, the face is Christic because Christ was himself a form of the universal, an embodiment of the universal; i.e., a universal body.

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<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 186.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 186.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 196.



Christology is the name for a body of theological meditation that establishes this fact. Because it goes to the property of the universal to be communicable and a stable form of identity, it masks the difference that underlies actualities. However, “on the brighter side,” Deleuze and Guattari note that painting has exploited this universalization towards increasing art’s expressive capabilities, its “unbridled freedom”—a statement that must be understood alongside claims from another text that Christianity liberated painting from a strict adherence to forms.<sup>44</sup> It was the concept of Christ, and not Christianity in general, that for Deleuze in a few instances actually increased the power of immanence. The “brighter side” of Christianity’s concept of the Christ is that because of the crucifixion/incarnation complex internal to Christian thought it became not only possible but encouraged to facialize the entire body. Deleuze and Guattari even cite Giotto’s scene of the stigmatization as one of the prime examples through which is achieved the facialization of the body of the saint.<sup>45</sup> Christological aesthetics is the facialization of the body. Yet to make such a claim is to import specific properties of the face that don’t belong to the body.

One might expect that Antony’s face would be depicted as serene and placid, perhaps symbolic of his ascetic discipline; his face calm like his soul amidst the demons, composed in the martyr’s fight to show composure, strength and victory before defeat. But this is not the case—his face is just as often as gnarled as his limbs (see Grunewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* and Parenzano’s *Temptation of Saint Antony*), and on more than a few occasions he is clearly fearing for his life.

Assuming that the face is a special locus of power, one could propose two answers to the

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<sup>44</sup> See Deleuze’s *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), especially the short chapter titled “Note on Figuration in Past Painting.”

<sup>45</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* reads: “. . .the stigmata effect the facialization of the body of the saint, in the image of the body of Christ; but the rays carrying the stigmata to the saint are also the strings Francis uses to pull the divine kite. It was under the sign of the cross that people learned to steer the face and processes of facialization in all directions,” p. 198.

problem. First, everything about Antony's body is undergoing torture, even his soul, and this would justify a contorted face. Such a line would undercut the "silent center" theory of ascetic discipline, or Deleuze and Guattari's facial despot, which believes that the monk's center is also Christ's center, with both remaining unaffected by the onslaught.<sup>46</sup> The face does matter as a regulated zone of the body's interior, but because that interior zone is being crucified, the expressions of torture move outward to the sacred zone of faciality. Second, it could be that what is occurring is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari suspect—the facialization of the body—which would understand the logic of the face to remain intact (that is express the body better than the body), except for the fact that the face has been stretched across the body's exterior (in which case the body becomes closer to a body). If these were the case, it would explain the frequent use of the close-up technique in the *Antony series*. The close-up of his figure is a stand-in for his face, a body completely deterritorialized in terms of ethical zones; the face is no longer the gravity of good when evil has attacked his members and limbs. To the contrary of Levinas' prescription that the face is the call to ethical transcendence, the face of Antony becomes just another part of his body, no more special than a foot or an arm. The viewer, staring directly at the body-face of Antony, cannot help but be reminded of the absolute inability to fully transcend the body. Further, we must remember all this is possible because of what the crucifixion justifies.

The crucifixion justifies an absolute bodily drama.

Antony's body is often isolated and the framing is close-up. Though the finest example of isolation and the close-up is no doubt Schongauer's *The Temptation of St. Antony*, this example merely takes to its logical conclusion the purpose of the *Antony series*: display his body across

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<sup>46</sup> Antony's face channels and solidifies the martyr's prayer for calm in times of horrific pain. Ignatius' "Letter to the Romans" specifically asks for dismemberment, but it is always buttressed with "attaining to Christ," and one might suspect this attainment to begin during the sacrifice.

the entirety of the surface; make his body subservient to the laws of immanence; highlight the minor movements that the ascetic encounters through gesture; render these movements in terms of an externality that is really another form of consumption—the ascetic body must keep nothing out, for in order to attain to the universal form (Christ) he must be courageous enough to ingest or allow all forms to attach themselves to him. Temptation must be courted and desire must infuse all the limbs. Schongauer’s copperplate engraving frames the entire body up close and center.<sup>47</sup> When in *Cinema I* Deleuze claims that “*the affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face*,” he was referring to a property of the close-up face to act as a recording device in which, as we have noted, the body sacrifices (one could say martyrs) itself in its movement toward the face. As a screen through which bodily events surface to visibility, the face, as a metonym for immanence, is a property of resonance, just as immanence describes the quality of an action rather than a being or entity. What resonate are the forms on the face (the face resonates in-itself), but it only resonates in-itself because it speaks for a prior whole, the body. Deleuze uses the analogy of the clock in film that is presented in close-up several times. A clock has two features: it has the hands, acting as an intensive series towards a dramatic point. But the hands only function with the immobile surface of the clock’s face, the second feature. The latter acts as the “plate of inscription,” or a “reflected unity” for the minor movements of the body. Taken together, these two features of the clock constitute the affection-image. Moreover, the crucial link between affect and face can be found in the fact that when the movement of the body is translated to the face, the transition is really between extension and expression. A body that is extended is now compressed onto a surface-face, creating for the first instance an

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<sup>47</sup> The image builds off of many affective traditions in Western art, especially Giotto’s stigmatization, crucifixion imagery and the martyr’s sacrifice. Such traditions have affective punch not only because of the religious history and worship that accompanies their traditions, but because of the manner in which they are executed. Schongauer’s Antony is just one of the latest expressions of this type of affective picture, and the specific affective properties of the picture are here deployed through a close-up of the body.

expressive tendency.<sup>48</sup> Why not simply say that the face represents the body? Why must one insert the concept of expression? For the simple reason that the face quite literally removes the body—a process of abstraction; we designate here the term abstraction to be the uncoupling of representation from meaning. One cannot learn anything, cannot think, when given just a face. A face needs context to explore its meaning; the face needs a crowd, just as the portrait needs a date. But, when you are given just a face, it cannot simply represent, only express in a manner without reference. The close-up of the face *represents* nothing. The face expresses, and it does so exclusively through gesture, color and shape. Rembrandt's *Self Portrait with Turned up Collar*, 1659 (Figure 31), as with most of his faces, depict such minor insecurities and faults that they seem to be invisible; and what adds to the drama of his faces is that they are virtual extensions of his figures—dirty, musty, ochre-colored folded cloths of flesh from head to foot. Rembrandt's bodies are faces.

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<sup>48</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema I*, p. 96.



Figure 31. Rembrandt. *Self-Portrait with Beret and Turned up Collar*, 1659.

Through the confluence of face, body and gesture in the *Antony series* one is led to the following conclusion: Antony's body is a screen because it is a face, or, it is a face because his body acts as a screen for the communication of events. When it is all face, it is not an abstract entity, but the process of abstraction itself. An earlier investigation into gestures has revealed that bodily gestures are also faces, for they too bring our attention to specific zones, and they too speak for the body. Degas is the master of focusing on the extreme appendage, retaining the body's athletic feat all the while washing the scene in joyous color, the latter echoing the joy of the movement (see Figure 32).

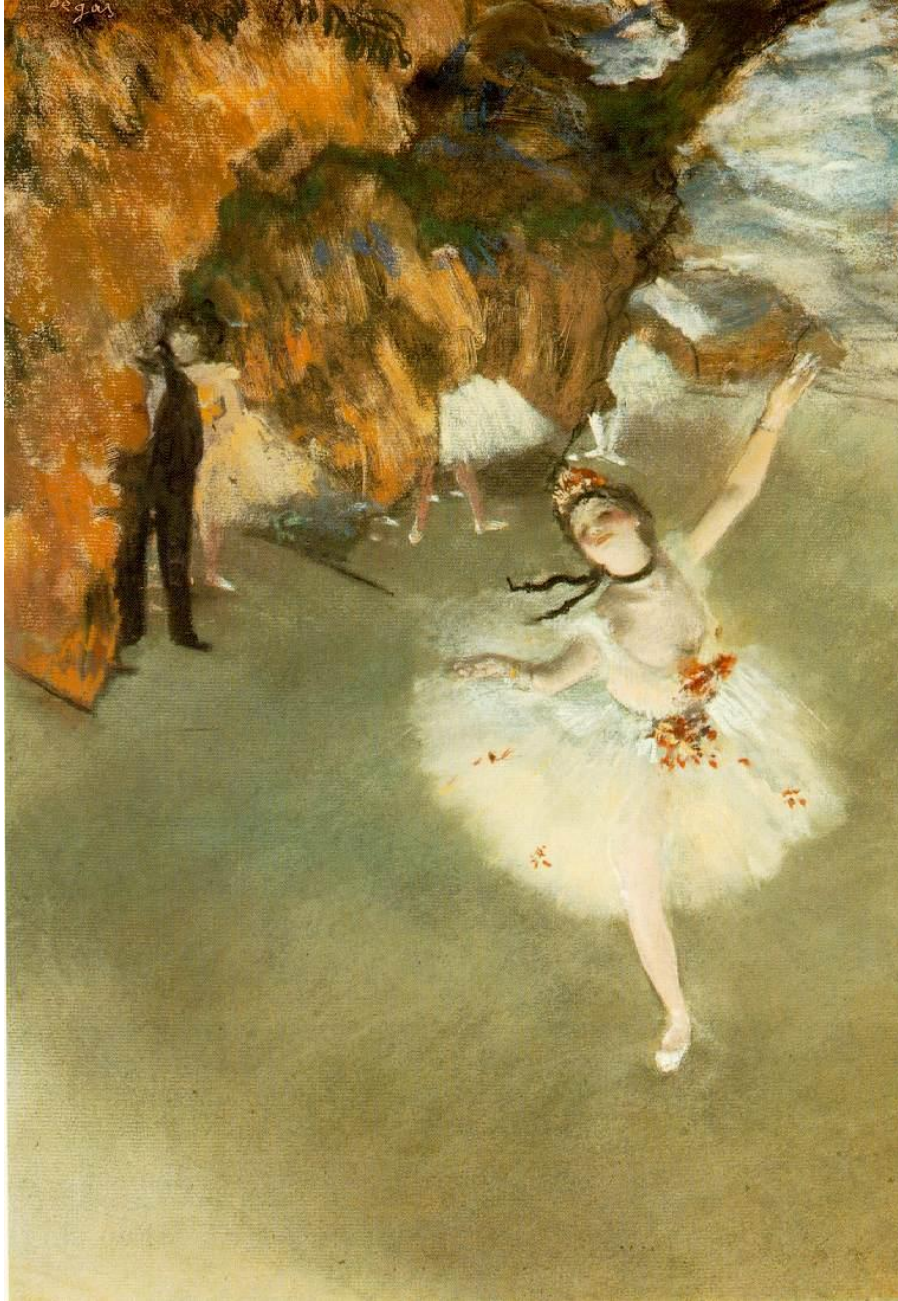


Figure 32. Edgar Degas. *The Star, Dancer on Stage*. 1878.

But the difference between gesture and close-up of the face is that gestures move across the body, being defined by this migration, while the close-up in any form compresses that body. In the *Antony series*, the specific relationship between close-up and gesture was as close as it can get. It was a close-up of a gesturing body, an affect-body/affection-image, a power-body (we use

this last term because this moment of Antony is about being overcome with power). As one might expect, the final outcome of this process is the redemption of the screen. In other words, that which gains in affect from this exchange is not the body, the face, nor Antony nor any other figure—the screen wins, becomes established and is granted more affective, immanent power. Antony's extension is the establishment of the screen. But is the close-up of the body the main contributor to a painting's self-sufficiency? What about the frame?

Marin claims that two features in the visual arts organize representation: the frame and the commentator in *istoria*. The former remains no doubt the most obvious, and so therefore the most theorized. Because of its irreplaceable role for producing and displaying visual art, the frame receives the most attention as the main force in creating the conditions of possibility of comprehending art; or, in other words, without the frame we would no more “think” about artworks than we do sections of our walls. The frame is indicative of an artist's intentionality, meaning, vision, and so on. Through its mono-tonal border, the frame creates the effect of wholeness. It is for this reason that the frame has become such a topic of discussion in post-structuralist circles, where it is understood to create an artificial, self-enclosed semiotic. There are a few problems with this general theory: first, it places the burden of framing outside the picture, as an addition or a supplement to vision. The frame is merely a performative, designating a special zone telling the viewers how to act, and where to act. The thrust of such an accusation is that all systems of meaning are human generated, and further, specific discourses (or coded systems of meaning) are only intelligible with relatively stable boundaries. The frame makes what is unintelligible intelligible, and as Poussin will say, the frame keeps the sensations outside



the frame from interfering with what is inside the frame. As to what the unintelligible could be is to ask what is outside thought, which is precisely the question that cannot be thought.

The second problem: nothing immanent to the materiality of the picture is given enough agency to act as a self-framing device. Can we imagine something immanent to the picture that does not need the framing device of the frame? Something that frames itself? The figure, especially how it has been deployed and with what philosophical resources it assumes, has come the closest to answering this question. We do not know when the frame first appeared in art history, but we do know it is practically coterminous with pictorial works. Yet for much of art history, many of the objects cannot be said to “carry” their meaning with them. Such objects, whether of cultural, liturgical or spiritual value, were understood as part of a larger context and could not be divorced from that context without losing their efficacy. But something happened roughly around the time of the Renaissance, both before and after, that gave pictures the ability to move freely, from one hand to the next. Pictures were now being commissioned and traded across households, government officials and into various cultural contexts.

This is what one may call *the birth of the canvas*—a mobile pictorial unit. The movement of the picture is a testament to its immanent properties. Because the frame has always existed, one simply cannot attribute the frame as the main cause of a picture’s independent nature, for that came later in history. Another element inside the picture is framing the work of art. This does not amount to saying that the picture, because it is mobile, is not embedded with culturally distinct modes of perception residing outside the picture; each age has its own methods of perception. The problem with understanding the question properly is that perception, because of

contemporary theory, has become an operation of framing, and framing has been conceived as artificial at best, and violent more commonly. However, to the contrary, framing is not a matter of perception, it is a process of organization. What is being underscored here is that its mobility during this historical period is inextricably linked with its figural obsession; its immanence is tied to the painted body. It is this confluence of items that is suspect and under investigation. In short: *the figure guarantees the integrity of the picture without the frame*. Something about the body, something that we give to the picture because of our own embodiment creates that wholeness of the surface (immanence) that is said to be a product of the frame. To answer this question, we need to see what the figure actually means for the Renaissance artist.

### **The Avant Garde Figure**

Observe real bodies, counsils Alberti, but do not just copy. Cover up nature's ugliness, add beauty here and there, or simply find a crowd, select the best parts of each person, then put those parts together to achieve a most beautiful body. Selection, modification, alteration and intensification of nature—these were as much the priorities of Renaissance artists as reality, fidelity to appearance and imitation of nature.<sup>49</sup> Book III of Alberti's *Della Pittura* confronts the issue of selection directly: "It will please him [the painter] not only to make all the parts true to his model but also to add beauty there"<sup>50</sup>; "So great is the force of anything drawn from nature. For this reason always take from nature that which you wish to paint, and always choose the

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<sup>49</sup> See also Da Vinci's *Notebooks*, p. 175. It is interesting to note that Alfred Barr, the founding curator for the Museum of Modern art, described the Modern art canvas in similar terms, i.e., as arrangements, composites, adjustments. Though Barr is leading the reader towards Cubist modifications of reality, the experiment that founded Modern painting begun with similar, minor revolutions. See Barr's *What is Modern Painting?* (NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966).

<sup>50</sup> *Della Pittura*, p. 92.

most beautiful.”<sup>51</sup> A perfect body is elsewhere—it must be put together, compressed into one. Certain parts are amplified, others lessened or ignored.

Not just idealism, but ascetic logic at work no doubt—a real figure exists elsewhere. Figures broken down into parts; gestures must be put together from various sources, yet made to comply all the more convincingly on the surface. Not just the idealism of beauty either. What authorizes the selection, borrowing and modification is the fact that a figure can *still* communicate when its forms are alien to each other, i.e., when the painter selects the best traits from a crowd. What is it about our bodies that allows perception to see not a discordance in the various parts, but a unified whole? What is the logic behind even attempting to select body parts and put them together with the hopes of producing a greater one? What type of body is this? The universal body that authorizes the pilfering of members is not the ideal type, but the public body in which the parts are taken; this public body goes by another name—incarnated materialism. The justification is ontological and not aesthetic, though at some level it is both. Why materialism? Because first, the public body is amorphous, and second, because it is the shared substrate. The two reasons inform each other—amorphous because shared. Something about an understanding of the body’s material properties allow this conjunction to be successful. The answer is that all bodies lie inside another: an anonymous body then, a shared artful materialism incarnated by virtue of its ability to add to life in its very deformation. The difference between matter and materialism is analogous to humanity before Christ and humanity after. Christ was a new figure that became the virtual extension of all previous forms (his status as recapitulated body), so that the new thinkers could make sense of his claims of new life. Christ is another name for an embodied materialism—the new *face* of (Stoic) nature—one which contains the potential of its redemption.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 94. See also Julian Bell’s *What is Painting?*, p. 17.

Further, the catalogue of ideal types has no limit. Painting will continue to attempt to paint the final figure, beauty itself, but because of its ontological foundation it will never succeed. There is always a new form of repetition, and it can never reach the figure because the figure is not the form figure but the form-giving figure, Christ as logos/screen. Moreover, the figure is not devalued because it can be repeated. The opposite is the case: it is more valuable in virtue of its repetition. Painting eternally contains a neurosis; it must create new forms of life at all cost. The virtue of the figural repetition gathers its identity not from the painting, but from what the painting presupposes.

### **Da Vinci: Ontology, Figure and the Social Body**

The painting presupposes two notions: nature has implanted within it the seeds of its own overcoming (a certain ontological understanding), and the task of the artist in painting the figure is to engender this overcoming (its avant garde property). Regarding the first notion, classical conceptions of nature's essential activity and infinite, form-giving properties are no doubt at work here.<sup>52</sup> Of course, an artist cannot "overcome" nature, but only perfect it, add to it, modify it, as we have seen with how to create the most beautiful figure. Art historian Erwin Panofsky notes that,

On the one hand, nature could be overcome by the freely creative "phantasy" capable of altering appearances above and beyond the possibilities of natural variation and even of bringing forth completely novel creatures such as centaurs and chimeras. On the other hand, and more importantly, nature could be overcome by the artistic intellect, which—not so much by "inventing" as by selecting and improving—can, and accordingly should, make visible a beauty never completely realized in actuality.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Pierre Hadot's *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Panofsky, Erwin. *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), p. 48.

Da Vinci, to whom this analysis will now turn, will go so far as to claim that painting is the offspring of nature itself.<sup>54</sup> The artist sees his task and the task of nature as inextricable—novel creatures—yet they are but repetitions of a Christological type. Painters do not copy nature, but see themselves as the *principle* of nature.<sup>55</sup>

Second, in order to carry out this task the artist must share the same attributes of the Christ. As we saw earlier in the case of the early Christological thinkers, the figure of Christ was prophetic in history, and he came to earth in the form of the prophets in order to set mankind on the righteous path.<sup>56</sup> His final appearance in Jerusalem, leading to his crucifixion, was the recapitulation of all previous forms. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origin and Athanasius—all held theories of Christ's morphological potential in history. In his descension, Christ formed himself appropriately to all of humanity's forms, adopting the most effective visual form to complete his task, and the task was not small—inhabit a specific body, then push humanity forward by educating their senses (*pushing* is its avant garde tendency).<sup>57</sup> With the help of Stoic sensibilities, late antique asceticism brought this message to its logical conclusion with an emphasis on self-education through morphing one's own sensate condition. The monastic body was understood as an avant garde body by its viewers because of its power to alter other bodies, inspire, arouse piety, whether it was through beauty, spectacle, wonder, etc.; the affect is the same either way. Whereas before the term ideal type was used to describe artistic figures and the way ideal forms take part in ideal types via a vis Neoplatonism, such as Michelangelo's *David*, it also needs to be complimented by its active role, a role that bridges the iconic tradition and the art that came

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<sup>54</sup> Da Vinci, Leonardo. *Leonardo Da Vinci's Note-Books*, ed. by Edward McCurdy (New York: Empire State Book Company, 1935), p. 160.

<sup>55</sup> Bell, *What is Painting?*, p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> See chapter 2, especially the discussion of Irenaeus and the Christ in stages.

<sup>57</sup> Andreas Huyssen sums up the history of the avant garde in his *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986), pgs. 4-6.

thereafter. This role is affectus, testified by the *istoria* and employed by various instantiations of the “one” body, the “one” body being the body we can never escape, the Christic body. Christic because Christ is the metonym for an entire ontology.

The figure in art is also an avant garde body. Because the artist is ultimately responsible for creating the sensible conditions of the painted figure, they must undergo a proper “ontological” training. Reminiscent of Baudelaire’s treatment of Constantin Guys in his “Painter of Modern Life,” Da Vinci recommends that the mind of the painter,

...should be like a mirror which always takes the colour of the thing that it reflects and which is filled by as any images as there are things placed before it. Knowing therefore that you cannot be a good master unless you have a universal power of representing by your art all the varieties of the forms which nature produces,—which indeed you will not know how to do unless you see them and retain them in your mind.<sup>58</sup>

Like the catalogue of forms residing eternally in the divine mind, the painter must have them as a virtual storehouse in his mind; they must be immanent in the mind so as to be deployable by the hand.<sup>59</sup> The mind of the painter must internalize all the varieties of forms, lines and colors, and when the moment comes, all the images are recapitulated in the forms he lays down on the canvas. Da Vinci says as much: “painting embraces and contains within itself all the things which nature produces or which result from the fortuitous actions of men, and in short whatever can be comprehended by the eyes.”<sup>60</sup> By default, the painter contains them first. Giving form to the formless, the artist makes visible the invisible—just as Christ was a *making visible* in his near

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<sup>58</sup> Da Vinci, *Notebooks*, p. 163.

<sup>59</sup> Capra, Fritjof. *The Science of Leonardo* (U.S.: Doubleday, 2007); Kemp, Martin. *Leonardo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Charles D. O'Malley and J. B. de C. M. Saunders. *Leonardo on the Human Body: The Anatomical, Physiological, and Embryological Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci*. (NY: Henry Schuman, 1952); Martindale, Andrew. *The Rise of the Artist* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972).

<sup>60</sup> Da Vinci, *Notebooks*, p. 167.

point status. Nowhere is this process described as representation or imitation: beauty is about selection, modification, and recapitulation.

As a bit of practical advice, Da Vinci believes that a painter needs to spend time outside studying people, watching them gesture, lean on benches, laugh, cry, smile, fear, embrace and fight. He recommends watching the dumb, as they are more animated than intellectuals and need to use their bodies to communicate their thoughts. But more is at work than merely the painter watching, remembering, then putting that memory onto the canvas. If that was the case, then painting could hardly be considered an offspring of nature. It is in the act of painting, through the medium of line, that the painter deploys a pedagogy of the senses.<sup>61</sup> Further, the painter must employ a discipline on himself in order produce beauty—the painter who has clumsy hands will paint clumsy figures, and an ugly person paints ugly figures.<sup>62</sup> Painting required an ascetic discipline, and for all the language of the painter as a divine being, he differs from divinity in one remarkable way—his purity in exposition is vulnerable; his art needs an art of its own. The classical difference between the bodies of men and the bodies of Gods, brought to our attention by Vernant, is once again rehashed: the vital force that inhabits man is liable to exhaustion, imperfection and vice, and is therefore in need of constant replenishment.

Of the representation of bodies, Da Vinci writes:

When you wish to represent a man speaking to a number of people, consider the matter of which he has to treat and adapt his action to the subject. Thus, if he speaks persuasively, let his action be appropriate to it. If the matter in hand be to set forth an argument, let the speaker, with the fingers of the right hand hold one finger of the left hand, having the two smaller ones closed; and his face alert, and turned towards the

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<sup>61</sup> See the section on Christology, especially Athanasius and history. See also Julian Bell's *What is Painting?*, p. 20.

<sup>62</sup> Zwijnenberg, Robert. "Ogni pittore dipinge se'-on Leonardo da Vinci's *Saint John the Baptist*," in *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003).p. 54.

people with mouth a little open, to look as though he spoke; and if he is sitting let him appear as though about to rise, with his head forward. If you represent him standing make him leaning slightly forward with body and head towards the people.<sup>63</sup>

There exists a rationality to man inherent in his movement. Movements are not without intelligibility. In the process of observation, the social body is cut by the artist's gaze, and analogous to the Renaissance practice of dissection, that body is reconstructed on the canvas. Da Vinci's notebooks are filled with near-obsessive relations between the body's parts<sup>64</sup>; the face is dissected in any number of ways, lines drawn from organ to organ across gaps of white flesh, from the nose to the ears, the ears to the forehead, the forehead to the lips, the lips to the eyes, and so on. Da Vinci is clear that all his anatomical studies, ratios and mathematics of the body are for the purposes of being able to better paint the body, and so that the spectator may easily view "the purpose in their minds."

The borrowing of types from the social body requires precise observation and surgical precision. It is about the specific cutting out of those forms from the social body: limbs, members, faces, feet, stomachs and elbows, pointed gestures and expressions. The social body, at once unified humanity and community of gestures, can be pilfered by the artist because there resides inside this community the materials of a body that will, in turn, carry that community forward through the creation of a new body—hence its alignment with the Stoic concept of nature as the thing that carries inside itself, immanent to itself, the potential of its own reproduction. Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations*, refers to the force inherent in naturally occurring things as present

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<sup>63</sup> *Da Vinci's Notebooks*, Entry# 594.

<sup>64</sup> "The space between the parting of the lips the mouth and the base of the nose is one-seventh of the face. The space from the mouth to the bottom of the chin -c d- is the fourth part of the face and equal to the width of the mouth. The space from the chin to the base of the nose -e f- is the third part of the face and equal to the length of the nose and to the forehead. The distance from the middle of the nose to the bottom of the chin-g h- is half the length of the face." *Da Vinci's Notebooks*. Volume1, "Proportions and Movements of the Human Figure," Entry# 310. Proportions of the head and face (310-318).



in those things and remaining there.<sup>65</sup> An artist, therefore, must guide his hand by the process of nature's force, not its products, for nature cannot be found in the objects, just the force that actualizes the objects. Aurelius, like the Christological thinkers following him, understands nature itself under the image of an interconnected body ("the world as a living being" composed of interconnected parts and "we all move in Christ"), and will also, like its Christological offspring, define this nature by a forward progress. The crucial purpose of the artist is to align themselves with the logos, and direct nature as nature itself does. Easily confused with Christian political theory, perhaps beginning with Augustine, which understands the community of the faithful to be the body of the church, the social body under discussion here is not to be mistaken for a community of believers. In many ways, the social body is the elusive image of Renaissance pictorial ontology. One need only describe it to get a sense of its importance: it is the place artists go for their materials; every figure must reference it; it is never exhausted; one must go there for beauty as well as ugliness; the artist must learn from it; it is an interconnected system of non-fragmented parts, of whose intentional putting together by the artist supersedes its normal power; it is filled with incorporeal acts that express an incorporeal will, yet the artist must capture the acts through the gestures of the bodies; only the acts of utmost intensity ought to be selected, and one must not judge intensity solely in terms of dynamism of movement; it is at once incredibly mundane while incorrigibly mystical, highly striated in terms of social expression yet its bodies allow themselves to be disfigured (deformation); and finally, like the bodies it creates, it is itself a living organism woven by the fabric of gesture.

It is because of this certain anxiety—of not being able to capture *at once* the immensity of social expression—that variety and diversity is greatly appreciated by Alberti and Da Vinci.

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<sup>65</sup> Aurelius, *Meditations*, p. 78.

Multiplicity in poses, objects, gender and age, is another aspect of a successful *istoria*. In fact, the innate multiplicity of *istoria* prefigures Da Vinci's concern for diversity.<sup>66</sup> Alberti praises Giotto's work for its diversity of gestures, and the gesture's ability to reveal the many souls in the painting.<sup>67</sup>

Da Vinci is acute in his observation of the human body: "So the limbs of the youths should have few muscles and veins, and have a soft surface and be rounded and pleasing in colour."<sup>68</sup>

Children have slender joints; old men are sinewy; and if a man rests on his right leg, be sure to have the left one bent slightly. Grace is the end result of proportionality and expressivity.

Anatomy is always useful, but he counsels to be sure to clothe your skeletons in flesh. Extended limbs are more graceful than non-extended limbs. Movement is key, and Da Vinci concedes that there is no rule or pattern to follow—make it pleasing to the eye, make the body expressive, gesturing, active, extended, proportional, realistic and wild. Bodies must not only, however, resonate internally with proportionality (members/limbs) and expressivity (qualities) but they must also resonate with other bodies. One may ask, why not use the term "interact"? Because we are primarily dealing with aesthetic objects—figures—not real bodies. Further, any interaction that we attribute to the bodies comes as a result of the painter's ability to mark the canvas in such a way that interaction is a second-order attribute of the bodies. Resonance is primarily a feature of sensation, form, color and texture. Resonance is a feature of the canvas; interaction is what we see between figures when this is forgotten. Resonance is a transcendental, an agreement across sensate forms.

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<sup>66</sup> Geronimus, Dennis and Piero di Cosimo. *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 82.

<sup>67</sup> *Della Pittura*, 78.

<sup>68</sup> Da Vinci, *Notebooks*, p. 181.

Drama infuses the *istoria* like a specter, drawing in the viewer's senses to the soul being expressed. Often, all the passions in the painting converge on a single passion. Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, 1495-98 (Figure 33) expresses the singular passion, with the subsidiary passions supporting the true Passion.



Figure 33. Da Vinci. *Last Supper*, 1495-98.

Twelve gesturing bodies are put into four groups, with two groups on each side of Christ. While only the far right group is sufficient unto itself, the other three groups are clearly gesticulating towards the central point of the canvas (the “silent” commentator), which is not by chance the central vanishing point. As all the lines of perspective converge on Christ, so too do the actions of the disciples. Technically speaking, the *istoria* of the *Last Supper* is when Christ reveals that he will be betrayed by one of the apostles. The movement of the bodies are restless to uncover the malevolent force, and so dedicate their posture inwards toward the center of the canvas with

pointed fingers, aching necks and arching backs. In other words, the bodies resonate inside the *istoria*, requiring a hyper-vigilance of gesture and movement. In the modern era, Andy Warhol famously took up the imagery of the last supper towards the end of his life, completing many series, crops, colorings and material processes to reworking Da Vinci's mural. In one of his large reproductions, *Detail of the Last Supper*, 1986, (Figure 34) Warhol prints the entire image in black and white, and over top the black and white background he produces large rectangular strips of color vertically across the groups of figures. Warhol uses five strips of color left to right—blue, red, orange, purple, yellow—and each strip conforms to a cluster of bodies.



Figure 34. Andy Warhol. *Detail of the Last Supper*, 1986.

Because of the detail enhancing effect of the color, the groups emerge more colorfully than they did before, and, it must be said, they appear with increased vitality, as if he is asking us to look

closer at the color-bodies, or bodies of color. Warhol's bodies become cartoonish and violent in their hyper detailing. Their gestures come alive as seemingly unprovoked and unnecessary, and the *istoria* has been translated into fields of color, into the most basic element of pictorial representation.

As Warhol continues to work with the image, it becomes clear that what he is interested in is the central figure, Jesus, and it is this passive image of Jesus before his final meal that will appear on a set of ten punching bags, a work he would create with fellow NY street artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. In the punching bag series, it seems that the violence inherent in the gesturing apostles has come to the surface—the repeated face of Christ on the hanging bags is scarred, scribbled upon, and clearly defaced even as the word “judge” is scrawled all over the series. The close-up face of Christ speaks for, expresses the apostle's energy. Warhol would again deconstruct the iconic with color in the Marilyn series, drawing our attention to the divine color scheme—gold, reds, etc—by inverting them and replacing them with the quick capitalist colors of bright blue, transparent red and comic-book yellow. Then Warhol juxtaposes an outline of Da Vinci's Jesus with a body builder in two series.

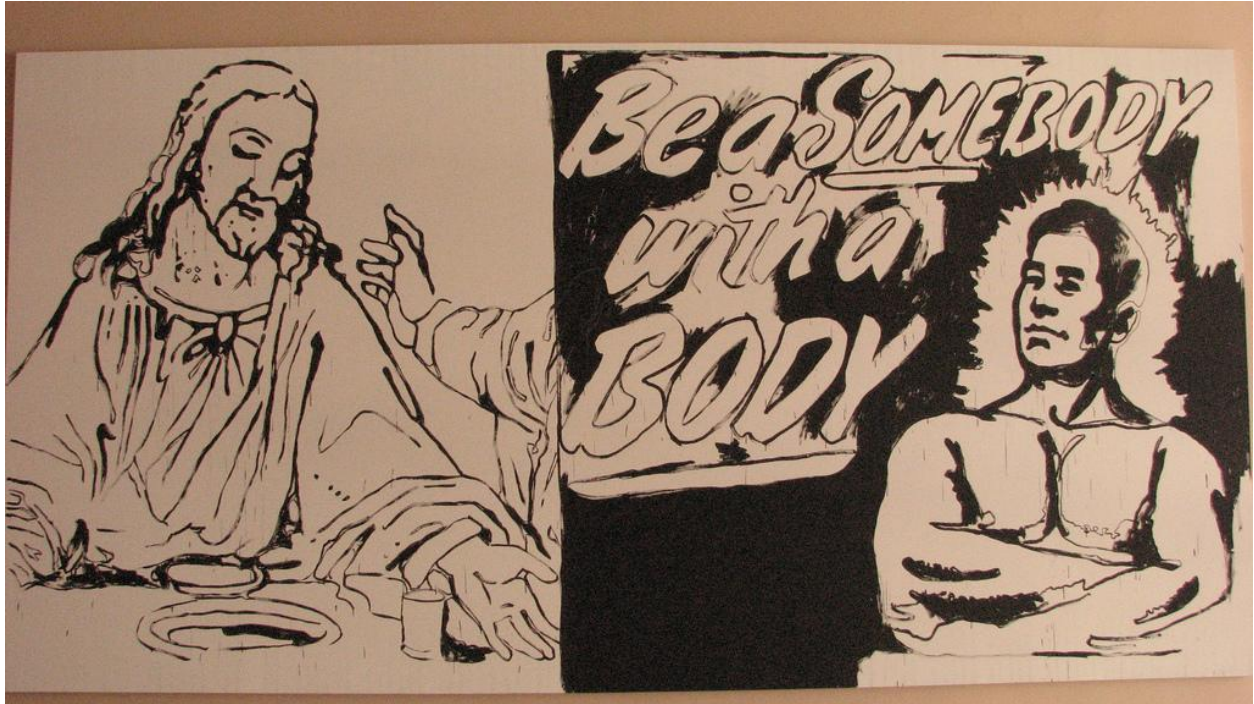


Figure 35. Andy Warhol. *Be Somebody with a Body*, 1985.

In *Be Somebody with a Body*, 1985 (Figure 35) Warhol places the image of a body builder to the right of Jesus, the same image taken from Da Vinci's *Last Supper*. A caption right above the muscled man reads "Be Somebody with a Body," and the bodybuilder stands tall, looking at Jesus askew, almost crowned with a glowing white halo. To the left is Jesus, the same placid face and hands, as if he cannot say anything to the bold statements coming from the other side of the canvas. Has Warhol hit upon a well known criticism of Christ—his radical passivity—but couched it in terms of his lack of a body? This would be strange, considering that the image Warhol has selected depicts the moment at which he becomes other bodies (the last supper).

Warhol presents no theory, no consistent rendering of the figures, but his musings are relevant on a number of levels. In this moment of making betrayal known, which is the *istoria* of the mural, Warhol focuses on the silent figure in the scene, the same figure which causes the activity of

other bodies. Color brings to attention the gestural *istoria*, but color neutralizes the gestures in favor of a color washing over the clusters of figures. Warhol further explores what this figure does alone, and his use of the image in a block screen, featuring Christ's head outlined in yellow, forces us to contemplate the agent of unrest without the unrest. Warhol has successfully understood that classical gestures can be functions of composition and theological determinations, and further, the best way to be faithful to these gestures is to neutralize them in the bright coloration.

Giotto's *The Betrayal of Judas* (Figure 36) in the Arena Chapel, dating from around 1304-1306, depicts a much earlier form of interacting bodies caught in a passionate moment. Here, the central interaction between Judas and Christ in the form of a kiss frames the dramatic moment of the scene. They look squarely into each other's eyes with a placid resolution.



Figure 36. Giotto. *Betrayal of Christ*, Arena Chapel, 1304-6.

Giotto reinvents the scene, however, when he paints Judas' golden cloak as swallowing Christ, perhaps as a sign to seal the betrayal. Yet paradoxically, against the Byzantine iconic tradition Giotto's uses this color of gold for Judas, not Christ. One way to understand this use of color would be to underscore Judas' role, and hence of betrayal itself, as the agent of the incarnation; as if to say Jesus is already in the process of becoming divine. And rising pointedly above the chaotic scramble are golden staffs and clubs, items which resemble an extended crown above



Christ's head, given that they all descend in a circular gravitational manner towards his bright golden halo. Surrounding the intimate betrayal are the witnesses or subsidiary actors to the scene, soldiers, St. Peter holding a knife and other disciples, and it is these figures of violent gesture that allows for the scene to be interpreted as one of upheaval, for one would not know the gravity of the situation by focusing on the two central figures. The vitality given to the canvas through these gestures is a signature mark of Giotto, and one need only glance at Duccio di Buoninsegna's *The Betrayal by Judas* (Figure 37), of roughly the same era, to see how Giotto's scene is less a symbolism in theology and more an actual scene from daily life.



Figure 37. Duccio di Buoninsegna's *The Betrayal by Judas*. 1308-1311. Tempera on wood panel.

Duccio's bodies stand as if they could be a group of philosophers discussing the newest interpretations of Philo, while for Giotto the scene radiates a profound shift in energy, beginning in the silent center then expanding outward to the subsidiary actions. The body language of Giotto's Jesus is one of knowing capitulation, and this silent point amidst the other gesture bodies speaks of the act of martyrdom.

While *istoria* is often translated as narrative, understanding it in temporal terms is misleading.<sup>69</sup> Medieval art was fond of multiple scenes inside a single frame. For Alberti, *istoria* is less a term for a picture's ability to tell a story and more a spatial rule of composition. In fact, Da Vinci fails to mention the flow of temporality as a property of narrativity, but "uses *narrative painting* for the stopped-action historical, biblical, or mythological scene. Everything that he says about such works is predicated, in fact, on the *absence* of temporal flow."<sup>70</sup> *Istoria* is a fact of the absence of narrative.

### ***Istoria* as Principle of Composition**

*Istoria* guides the organization of pictorial space. It ensures a consistent surface, solidifies communication across that surface, and organizes the diverse elements into a coherent expression that is intelligible, dramatic and affective. *Istoria* utilizes the body and/or bodies for this consistency, because it is the gestures of the body that communicate across medium that is the canvas. Such affect is the quality of line, color, form, shape, texture—the bodies create virtual lines across the canvas, turning the striated space of perspective into a corporeal place of gesture. Many characters are used for the composition of the *istoria*. *Istoria* releases the affects within the bodies on the canvas, which in turn releases ours—body and canvas, nervous system and color field stimulate each other.

*Istoria* is built upon a mathematical grid of points, a surface or striated space. When Alberti in Book I of *Della Pittura* defines the "window" of the picture plane in terms of rays, centric points, planes and lines, he is working within a mathematical epistemology. Though we have

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<sup>69</sup> For more on narrative, *istoria* and Da Vinci, see Marie-Laure Ryan's *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press), p. 158 and thereafter.

<sup>70</sup>Steiner, Wendy. In "Pictorial Narrativity," in Ryan's *Narrative Across Media*, p. 158.

said earlier that it is *istoria* that creates a zone of consistency across the canvas, we must not confuse consistency with homogeneity. Consistency refers to a specific property on the canvas. At its most brute level, consistency is a fact of agreement of things placed on the surface. The crux of the matter is having to decide whether this is merely perceptual (the viewers attribute consistency to a discordant set of elements on the painted surface) or actual (consistency is the property of material forms). The former point places the burden of connection on the eye and the ability for it to make connections with the help of a thought process, while the latter thesis could perhaps force us to conclude that sensate division is artificial, and consistency natural. And what about the role of the artwork's frame in organizing this consistency, for isn't it really the frame that tells viewers of art to concentrate solely in one space at a time, and not to try to consider anything outside that frame as essential to the painting? Isn't consistency a product of the framing device, whereupon given strict boundaries by the artist we infer that everything inside the frame is of the artist's intention, thereby forcing the viewer to perform the hermeneutical task of putting those elements together? Where does a work of art begin? Who says so? Why? These are relevant questions, questions to which mid to late-twentieth century European art movements dedicated themselves—Minimalism, conceptual art, performance art, land art, Pop art, and Dada, among others, not to mention theorists, philosophers, critics and theologians. In art history, the debate surrounding composition first took hold around the time of the Minimalist movement, for it was the Minimalists who were one of the early groups to challenge the conception of the frame.

For decades the Modern work of art was predominately assumed to be on a canvas and framed.<sup>71</sup> In the 1960's the Minimalists began to ask what is it the frame did, what it was, and how it worked. Quickly, it became obvious that the frame could not be separated from the canvas, as if somehow painting had relied on this device for centuries without ever becoming self-reflective about this device. Michael Fried's essay of 1967, "Art and Objecthood" situates the debate succinctly. Fried lists what he thinks are the literalist's "case against painting"; Fried uses the term literalist art rather than Minimalism. The Minimalist case against the canvas rests on two ideas: painting's relational nature and the inescapability of pictorial illusion.<sup>72</sup> Presumably, Minimalism attempts to do away with both these elements. Though Fried will go on to criticize Minimalism for being theatrical, his initial discussion of composition is the backbone of his argument, and it is these ideas that will be used here.

Fried uses Donald Judd's writings for the counter argument in favor of Minimalism. What is remarkable about Judd's writings is that while they are critical of the painting, they define the fundamentals of painting clearly. Critical of the canvas, Judd writes that "when you start relating parts, in the first place, you're assuming you have a vague whole—the rectangle of the canvas—and definite parts, which is all screwed up, because you should have a definite *whole* and maybe no parts, or very few."<sup>73</sup> According to Fried's reading of Judd, the parts inside the painting subordinate themselves to the rectangular shape of their support, the canvas, in such a radical fashion that division or absolute discord is impossible. A unified painting is inevitable regardless of what is on it. It is through the frame that a painting is born, comes alive—one could say it becomes a body. The rectangular frame creates the semblance of wholeness.

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<sup>71</sup> With of course the exception of Dada, though Dada would only retroactively become the deep source of postmodern art after Pop art revived some of its processes, and non-processes, of making art, such as the ready-made object.

<sup>72</sup> Fried, Michael. "Art and Objecthood." First printed in *Artforum*, June (1967), p. 117.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted by Fried on p. 117 of "Art and Objecthood."

As a piece of the “metalanguage” of pictorial representation, the frame makes representation possible. The frame induces a change in the spectator’s gaze. Louis Marin notes this fact, claiming that “the frame is a necessary ornament of the picture; the painting needs it. It is a requirement of the painting, and not of its painter: it signals the *real* functional autonomy, and the possible *aesthetic* autonomy, of the mechanism of representation.”<sup>74</sup> Marin uses a remarkable 1639 letter by Poussin where the latter begs the recipient of a painting to put a frame around it immediately, lest the eye be “not dispersed beyond the limits of the picture by receiving impressions of objects which, seen pell-mell with the painted objects, confuse the light.”<sup>75</sup> For Poussin, the frame acts as a gathering device for sensation, telling the eye that what is inside the frame is of importance, while the impressions gathered outside, such as those of the wall, are unimportant to the work of art. Poussin makes a distinction between *aspect* and *prospect* to argue his case of differing impressions. The impressions differ in terms of function. *Aspect* is viewing by habit, normal perception; the gaze does not come into play. *Prospective* viewing requests that we attentively view the piece in light of what it presents. What it presents is the potential for a concept/comprehension, what Marin terms its “theory in itself.” The impressions inside the frame activate thought, but not for the obvious reasons. Not because thinking can only become thought in a focused, confined manner. Quite the contrary, thought arises inside/on the painting because thought is forced to digest the contrary parts within the frame. Thought arises not with the leveling of difference but inside the effort to manage it. According to Marin, pictorial representation transforms the “*infinite* difference of the perceived world” into the “*absolute*

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<sup>74</sup> Marin, Louis. *On Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 325. See also Mark C. Taylor’s chapter on Sandback in *About Religion: Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Jacques Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>75</sup> From *On Representation*, quoted by Marin, p. 322.

differentiation” of pictorial space.<sup>76</sup> What the frame establishes is an absolute, albeit localized, zone of difference. This specific property does not pre-exist the canvas, it is a product of it.

Moreover, as the quote above highlights, one fact firmly entrenches the frame inside the act of representation—the painting is a requirement of the painting, not the painter. Do not all paintings have edges, whereas the frame merely makes this edge more decorative? One could reply affirmatively and negatively. First, of course every painting has an edge, a point at which art stops, so yes, the frame merely makes it easier for the viewer to understand the artist’s gaze, and yes, the painter needs an edge to control the beginning and end of the artistic process. Second, negatively, the painting is not a complete object, but a slice of vision of an artistic life. The art is the life of the painter, and the painting is a necessarily incomplete snapshot of a process always in motion. In this manner, the frame is not an institution, not an artificial, semiotic system. It is a contrivance for consumers of art, and a requirement for art to be collected and sold, but a painter does not need a frame, only employs it out of convenience; we need it.

But there is plenty of art that doesn’t employ a frame. For Judd, as for many mixed media and three dimensional artists working after the glory days of the American Abstract Expressionists, the rectangular form needs rethinking; hence Judd’s thoughts on the limits of rectangular painting. Post-structuralist theory is at this time gaining intellectual credence, (influenced by French phenomenology), a tradition which can only be understood as a loose critical trajectory that understood the frame as an artificial structure designed to create a meaning-system (the canvas). Jacques Derrida’s main work on aesthetics follows this path, as does Jean Luc Marion,

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<sup>76</sup> Marin, *On Representation*, p. 325.

Jean-Louis Chretien, among others.<sup>77</sup> What Judd and the Minimalists desire is a work of art unlike the rectangular form, an art *without* an internal relation (correspondence), art without parts (consistency), just a single object and a single presence (see Figure 38 below).



Figure 38. Donald Judd. *Untitled*, 2003.

For Judd, the simplicity of the Minimalist object—the steel box, for example—itsself can achieve this absolute plainness, for this object requires no canvas, and its reflective surface denies the viewer any pretense to interiority (i.e., metaphysics).

<sup>77</sup> Derrida's main work on aesthetics is *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987). See also Jean-Luc Marion's *The Crossing of the Visible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), and Jean Louis Chretien's *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art* (NY: Fordham University Press, 2004).



Fried's essay can be put into the discourse of the death of painting, or what Clement Greenberg in his 1948 essay as "The Crisis of the Easel Picture." Fried is trying to make his case for painting against the onslaught of Minimalist criticism. This interrogation of the *how* painting is presented, whether it is causing painting's death or symptomatic of it, is what led artists and critics to reevaluate what painting pre-supposed. The title of Greenberg's early essay correctly summarizes the era as a "crisis." Paradoxically, what Judd refers to as relational painting (what *painting as a whole is* for Judd: Renaissance, Abstraction, etc), which is composed of parts, Greenberg refers to as "sheer monotony" and "uniformity," language which leads one to think that Modern painting, for Greenberg, has no parts; or at least has no parts the way Judd understands them.<sup>78</sup> In contrast to Judd, Greenberg characterized the Modern canvas as an "all-over," "sheer sensation," "sheer texture," "an accumulation of repetitions," "decentralized," "uniform," "polyphonic" and nearly "antiaesthetic" surface (see Figure 39 below). Greenberg is thinking of the canvases of Mark Tobey, Jackson Pollock, Rudolf Ray and Janet Sobel, among others.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Greenberg, Clement. "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 157.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 156.



Figure 39. Jackson Pollock. *Lavender Mist*, 1950.

The result, Greenburg declares, “became an evenly and tightly textured rectangle of paint that tended to muffle contrasts and threatened—but only threatened—to reduce the picture space to a relatively undifferentiated surface.”<sup>80</sup> According to Greenberg, this new space is the result of decades of evolutions in art since the canvases of Manet. Foremost among those evolutions leading to Modern abstraction is the disfiguration of the figure, and one need only list the numerous examples of Modern art narratives that understand abstraction to begin with Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, 1907 (Figure 40), a work of art that translated the beauty of the female nude into the broken-plane bodies of prostitutes.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 154.



Figure 40. Pablo Picasso. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)*, 1911-1912.

The figure, one might say, has become broken down into simple planes of color; Cubist technique triumphs classical content, and color dominates form. The female bodies have literally been spread onto the canvas, and modern abstraction was born. As with the facialization of the body in the *Antony series*, the canvas, as a unit of immanence, is the prime beneficiary of this logic.

More important than any one style was a technique—they way modern artists applied color. It was the finely differentiated tonal values of their color that led to a “relatively undifferentiated surface”; prior to this surface was the Renaissance semblance of illusion, the latter having held all previous art under its spell. According to Greenberg, it was not until color was applied in such fashion could perspectival depth be abolished and the affect of “sheer sensation” could replace illusion.

Uniformity is color field painting, abstract painting and a style of painting whose colors and shapes and lines bear no resemblance to nature, only color, sensation and affect. Greenburg is, however, speaking more specifically about Modern abstraction. Greenburg’s analysis revolves more around sensation and the transcendental of the Modern canvas; its flat, monotonous and democratic nature. The transcendental of the new painting surface is non-hierarchical and indistinct according to Greenburg, unlike the striated space of Renaissance perspective. In many ways, Fried’s analysis takes place *after* Greenberg’s. Fried’s relational painting is really a product of the uniformity of sensation; that is, this type of pure relation, which is not the relation between bodies (*istoria*), but merely the communication of marks on a surface. Fried understands the parts of the painting to be marks, not bodies, with these marks betraying a semblance of unity and consistency given truly by the frame. Their analyses can be combined, however, in that the new composition occurring on the monotonous, Modern surface is one between color-parts, and we must understand these not so much as fragmented parts but as elements of sensation inside a given field intended to express.

## **Conclusion**

As the second case study to explore the role of the immanence and the ascetic body in the visual arts, the notion of *istoria* has been shown to rely on a logic of the body found in the ascetic tradition. That logic concerns the ability of the body to effect the space around it, as well as the concept of the part vs. whole reminiscent of Athanasius' concerns in *On the Incarnation and Life of Antony*. This is not to say that *istoria* is a direct result of the *Antony series* or early Renaissance painters' use of the ascetic body. Rather, affinities and trajectories have been located within the formal definition of *istoria* that correspond to the same logic of the body found in ascetic, christological and theological texts. If we found in Giotto and the *Antony series* plausible reasons to suggest that an autonomy of the work of art is beginning to take hold in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, one which relies on the painted figure, then the analysis here extends the thesis with the claim that a properly executed *istoria* on the canvas also takes a step toward autonomy and internal resonance through the use of the gesturing body.

Put in theoretical terms, the debate about the wholeness of the singular body (which Judd says is only achieved with the Minimalist object) and the fragmented nature of the relational or part-by-part body is the same as the one we have been discussing with *istoria*. Does *istoria* reveal the body as inherently relational, or does its practice allow us to glimpse another body, a social body? If the body is relational, what would a figure look like on the canvas that attempts to express a body without relation? What is the figurative equivalent of the pure object of Judd? Or is that impossible and the very reason why Judd uses steel and not a human body to express this quality?

But could it be that the parts organize the frame, and that undue attention has been given to the frame for creating the autonomous work of art? If so, what type of parts could have this power to

concentrate attention on themselves in such a way as to construct an immanent field of materiality? In fact, we have already answered this question—the power of the close-up body brings with it its own field of immanence. *The figure guarantees the integrity of the picture without the frame.* Though Modern abstraction required a disfiguration, it could not do away with the figure. If there was a semblance of unity to the canvas we must also attribute this factor, first, to the continued presence of the figure beneath abstraction, a presence that brings with it properties of extension, affect, and, more subtly, a repetition of another body. For it is the relation between the repeated body (sensation) and the archi-body (the screen) that allows the canvas to be populated by force. Wherever we find processes of disfiguration, we find the concomitant expressions of force. To say that a Modern work of art has a power or a force is to say it expresses without reference, and it is for this reason that the ascetic body, Christological body, or any other variation are abstract bodies, for they are all expressions of another body. *Istoria* was one such concept in the history of aesthetics that put this abstraction into an equation with the body, understanding something to arise from a configuration of gesturing bodies (a soul), yet this soul is more of an expressive corporeal residing in the formal composition of the canvas than it is the remnant of metaphysics.

## Chapter 7

## Conclusion: Body and Concept

“Here note that when we say that all things are in God [that means that] just as he is indistinct in his nature and nevertheless most distinct from all things, so in him all things in a most distinct way are also at the same time indistinct.”

Meister Eckhart, Latin Sermon IV

“The philosophical concept does not refer to the lived, by way of compensation, but consists, through its own creation, in setting up an event that surveys the whole of the lived no less than every state of affairs.”

Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

### **Between Body and Concept**

The first section of this dissertation (chapters 2-5) is a strategic genealogy of the construction of the concept of Christ through late ancient thinkers, while the second section explores the theory that the first section locates. This genealogy was intended to distill a logic of the body found to be operative in Christianity, though this logic is not exclusive to Christianity nor necessarily religious in nature. In theoretical terms stripped of its religious content, that logic was, firstly, the ability of the body to become transparent to externality in such a way that the body has life

immanently within it, and secondly, the ability of this immanent body to in turn effect externality. The immanent body was the name given to the type of body inscribed with/by cosmological forces, understood in such a way that when it moved, creation itself moved (Athanasius). This type of body becoming transparent to externality marks many of the subjective or bodily articulations found in contemporary theory. The ascetics in their journey had as their goal what Brakke calls a return to an “original undifferentiated unity,”<sup>1</sup> and while the focus here has been on asceticism, numerous examples of what I have termed the immanent body can be found in continental philosophy, cultural studies, and the visual arts. Bataille’s transgressive body opening onto the infinite is one example, as is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra (“I am the meaning of the earth”) and Deleuze’s counter actualized body. Other names mark this phenomenon. Simone Weil terms it affliction, while according to Amy Hollywood, Simone de Beauvoir was constantly tempted by the “desire to be everything,” which defined the mystical for Beauvoir.<sup>2</sup> The type of body being inscribed by an ontological All is the socio-political foundation of performance art, which had begun to be traced out by Eleanor Heartney using Christian categories, as was done here.

In Christianity, this body is found in the mystical tradition, with such voices of Teresa of Avila, St. Francis, Bernard of Clairvaux, or Meister Eckhart, among others. In most of these cases, it was “God” who was understood to be enfolded into the body at the point of the subject’s transparency in the face of externality, whether you understand this externality as force, nature or God. This is because God was the All, all existence and creation itself. In the opening epigraph, Eckhart describes this transparent moment when the soul unites with God. As a distinct being, when the soul enters God, who is indistinct, the soul collapses and unites with God and becomes,

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<sup>1</sup> Brakke, *The Making*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, p. 142.



if only for an instant, “indistinct,” in virtue of being encompassed by indistinction. The soul achieves a state of “nothing,” yet it is a nothing which is everything (an All), since it is identified with God. Though Eckhart uses the term soul to describe this moment, the body can be understood in this fashion as well. Eckhart is fully aware that the strict definitions of terms, as that between body and soul, are mere semantics. Speaking of the artificial distinction in the trinity, for instance, it is admitted that everything that is written about it “is in no way really so or true.”<sup>3</sup> *Everyman is a liar*, Eckhart admits, citing the Psalms, and expressing the fact that distinctions between the material and spiritual body are mere linguistic necessities: the incarnation complicates distinctions.

Within the language of becoming-All, described in the experiences of men and women, one cannot simply sidestep the sexual politics of what it *means* to be a mystic. In other words, is this type of mysticism—of becoming the All—already a gendered practice? Could it be the case that the genre of mysticism traced out in this text—if it deserves the title of *genre*—has been what is historically considered feminine? First used by Tertullian to discipline the “independent virgins of Carthage,”<sup>4</sup> a complex and sophisticated history accompanies the phrase “brides of Christ,” which was often applied after the women’s mystical movement of the thirteenth century to the souls of men (and women) who desired union with Christ.<sup>5</sup> Without question, the spiritual seekers of the desert can be considered brides of Christ; but to be a bride of Christ is just one articulation within the discourse of mysticism where problems of gender surface.

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<sup>3</sup> Eckhart, Meister. Latin Sermon IV in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Elliot, Dyan. *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> See Peter Brown’s *Body and Society* for its ascetic context and questions of female virginity. For a more detailed study of its later manifestations, see Katherine M Faull, ed., *Masculinity, Senses and Spirit* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011).

According to Amy Hollywood, Beauvoir and Irigaray agree that “mysticism is the sole place within the history of the West where women have achieved full and autonomous subjectivity”<sup>6</sup>; which does not mean that their “full” subjectivity has been achieved because they practiced a form of mysticism analogous to their more masculine counterparts. Blending medieval and modern writers through her musing on what it means to be a mystic, according to Hollywood mysticism was for Beauvoir “about the human desire to be everything, a desire shared by both men and women. Lacan will argue, on the contrary, that the desire to be everything—and the illusion that one is everything—are marks of masculine subjectivity.”<sup>7</sup> To be on the side of the “not All” is for Lacan the true subject position of mysticism, described as split, lacking, or wounded. However, the notion of a “transparency” of the subject or the desire to become everything, which Hollywood finds operative in female mystics as well as twentieth century writers, is precisely the type of *imitatio Christi* mysticism that has been analyzed here, and it is not limited to male or female practice. Moreover, the masculinity or femininity of this mystical language is, as Hollywood rightly observes, “loosely tied to bodily differences; to say that the site of mysticism is feminine does not mean that men cannot go there.”<sup>8</sup> While no claim has been made in this text as to the gendered quality of mystical experience, what often gets overlooked in the language of becoming-All is the counter movement of this act, for in the act of becoming-All one therefore has the power to have effect within the All.

One of the problems scholarship has had in understanding this “experience” was how the question of *the what of “God”* was never theorized specifically. Neither apophasis nor cataphasis were found to be sufficient to explain how it was that the body—a body—could come to embody

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<sup>6</sup> Hollywood, Amy. *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 118.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 119.

creation, speak for it or “move” it. If one refuses to interrogate the question of God in this literature then one has merely assumed that, indeed, it *was* an experience of God—a line of interrogation leaving little room for interrogation. God was simply present in the body of the subject, and to go further in describing this phenomenon often takes one into apophasis (words and signification fail at this limit) or cataphasis (perhaps akin to Avila’s rich bodily descriptions of mystical union). One could choose between theology and literature. God was not a precise term of analysis in this dissertation for the following reasons.

On the one hand, the concept occludes secular or atheistic conceptions of the body which speak of this experience in the same manner as the mystics. As an object of analysis, God does not help us make sense of, for instance, Walt Whitman’s line in *Song of Myself*, where he writes, “I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love / If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.” Whitman’s prose poems are filled with such statements of identification with the outside. Whitman’s becoming of the dirt to the shared “atomic soul” of the earth, does not speak of God entering him, and yet, in his language the notion of the earth flowing through his body is repeated over and over again. This desire of bodily transparency marks, if anything does, the late American poet’s conception of nature.

On the other hand, because the Christian God is often understood to be commensurate with life, embodying life, directing it (albeit virtually removed from it), then one ought rather to conceptualize the concept of life within Christianity. Rather than take the incarnation as an act of faith, the question then becomes, how did God become enfolded within life in a material fashion in such a way that God was understood to be immanent to it? It was through the concept of Christ that God was able to be thought as commensurate with life. The concept of Christ makes

the incarnation of God possible; it is not the case, as is commonly assumed, that God makes the incarnation of possible through Christ.

The first section of this text was therefore titled the “Construction of Christ.” There are many different Christs in late antiquity—Gnostic Christs, heterodox Christs, and many other eccentric Christs—just as there are many different Christianities. The Christ that this text sought to bring to the surface was not necessarily a Christ according to one thinker, but a Christ that would eventually enable the logic of the immanent body to come to fruition in asceticism. Ascetic practice, therefore, is one of the great flowerings of high christology, a fact countering the claim that the high christology developing out of Paul’s letters has had little bearing on Christian life, the former being merely a disembodied philosophical enterprise. The strategic genealogy was strategic because it was not focused merely on *a* concept of Christ, but on the way or manner in which *the Christ concept*—the conceptual persona of Christ—authorized a practice and hermeneutic of the immanent body. Each thinker presented here is therefore an exposition of a philosophical operation, and each operation is but one step in the construction of conceptual persona—Christ—who was to have unforeseen consequences on bodies throughout Christian and non-Christian history.

The “way” or “manner” in which a body could be thought to contain life was precisely the question this text set out to answer, and the conceptual persona of Christ was for christology a crucial theoretical architecture allowing this process to occur. In terms of bringing Deleuze’s thought into Christian late antiquity, a place we rarely find it, at the outset it was Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of conceptual personae framing the initial inquiry. This has been a heterodox reading of Deleuze, and should not be understood as a simple appropriation of his ideas, but

closer to an inspired reading of history based on a method—that of finding the influence of a persona in philosophy and theology. The concept of counter-actualization has been made a main attribute of the conceptual persona, a connection Deleuze does not make in his own or collaborative work.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this text takes Deleuze’s notions of immanence into late ancient Christianity, and charges that it is the latter that perhaps contains the resources for a concept of immanence as profound as the ones Deleuze locates in Plotinus, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Duns Scotus. True to Deleuze, the power of a philosophy of immanence must be judged by the type of bodies it creates, and the modalities of life those bodies construct. If this text has done anything, it has illustrated how within Christianity certain figures are articulated and certain strands of thought can be found to be amenable to a philosophy of immanence. In this manner, there is no doubt here a constructive critique at work towards the various Death of God theologies which have spoken at length of immanence as the solution to the loss of transcendence.

Irenaeus, Tertullian and Athanasius—these are not philosophers of immanence. In fact, historical theology has deemed them philosophers of transcendence, thinkers of orthodox transcendence, for whom correct thinking was required and for whom unorthodox thinking should be met with charges of heresy (Irenaeus invented the idea of heresy against his “right” thinking). Such figures would hardly seem worthy of a Deleuzian reading. However, this is a fact that, in my opinion, requires a Deleuzian reading all the more. But more is meant by a Deleuzian reading than just the application of Deleuze’s ideas to ancient material, which this text certainly does not do. The project undertaken here is analogous to Deleuze’s “reversal of Platonism,” in which he claims that the reversal accomplishes much more than “the abolition of the world of essences *and* of the

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<sup>9</sup> See the discussion of counter-actualization and Deleuze at the end of Chapter 5.

world of appearances.”<sup>10</sup> Deleuze’s reading is not a reversal of Platonism nor a rejection of Plato since Deleuze is aware that Plato’s text, the *Sophist*, is quite aware of the problem. Deleuze cites Plato himself as discovering the reversal of Platonism.

Rather, one must seek out the motivation of the Platonic ideas, which Deleuze understood as a will to select and to choose. The motivation of Platonic philosophy is not to divide a genus into a species, but to distinguish between the pretenders and those who really participate in the Ideas. Whereas it befalls those who participate (the copy) to affirm the Idea, since those who participate resemble the Idea, the real danger to Platonism is thus not between the copy and the original (as this relation is well established), but between the copy and the simulacrum.<sup>11</sup> A true threat to Platonism, the simulacra must be contained by the method of selection because it sidesteps the hierarchical relation of Idea, participation and participator. Under the Platonic system, the only real is the Idea, and the world of materiality, and the senses, are degraded as both a copy and apparent. Contrary to deferring power to a transcendent Idea, the simulacrum is defined by *becoming*—a becoming mad, a becoming unlimited; in short, the event of singularity. Simulacra are entities whose existence need not pass through the Idea, and the justification of their existence relies on the fact that existence passes through them, not that the One or the Idea authorizes them. They are becoming-other, becoming itself, not participation. If the copy, of say a horse, relies on its existence because it passes through an idea, the opposite is the case for simulacra. Their modality of connection is horizontal rather than vertical, rhizomic rather than hierarchical. Many Deleuzian ideas come together here: (i) becoming is always an event, (ii) simulacra are events, (iii) events are defined by multiplicities enfolded within them, (iv) bodies

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<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. “The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy,” in *The Logic of Sense* (trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (1990: Columbia University Press, New York), p. 250.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 262.

are events like other forms of life ,(v) the whole of creation (difference itself) is enfolded in these body events (which unify difference), (vi) concepts must attempt to manage difference while refusing to master it, but, more importantly, difference itself must be brought out of the concept. A body, especially the ascetic body, exhibits these traits. We have not reversed christology, but attempted to find an inspiration lodged within its confines, a inspiration towards immanence working on bodies and against the orders of the church, an inspiration seeking life in nature, in bodily discipline, in athletic feats, in the beauty of the body as much as its disfiguration.

To make such a statement is not to reopen a theory/practice divide in such a way that practice (of the body) is an *a priori* of philosophical systems. Rather, it is to claim that certain characteristics of the concept of Christ are repetitions of phenomenon occurring in life, and on bodies. This was accomplished through a focus on the philosophical implications of the crucified body (Irenaeus), the shared phenomenality of flesh (Tertullian), and the manner in which movement immanently enfolds the body (Athanasius).

There is no gulf between body and concept. One cannot theorize the body except through a concept, which goes for all understanding; Kant said as much in his *First Critique*. On the other hand, one cannot create a concept that is not conditioned by the body. The materiality of our life cannot but condition the concepts we create. The interesting question is not to give primacy to body or concept, but to find each in the other, to find how the concepts we create contain traces of the body and how the bodies we have are created in turn by concepts.<sup>12</sup> Not all concepts have the same power to alter our bodies, and all our bodies are not equally affected by concepts. The focus here has been on a concept and a system and their relation to a practice. Asceticism was a

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<sup>12</sup> The case study in art took this analysis in a slightly different path by asking how a specifically painted body affected the history of art.

clearly defined bodily practice, and if it was focused on to the exclusion of many other bodily practices, it was merely a pragmatic concern. The strategic genealogy presented here concentrated on how the concept of Christ, including all its theoretical architecture, would find itself implicated in the ascetic project, while also claiming that the concept of Christ, as found in the conceptual persona of Christ, was a repetition of a logic of the body. The *logic of the body*, requiring the concept of immanence to make sense of it, is not religious in nature. It is in this manner that this project is a reversal of christology. Christology's motivation was to insinuate Christ at the center of life and thought. There is no lack of texts from either biblical studies or historical theology to delineate how the concept of Christ was made. However, a reversal of christology is to find *Christ the concept* in the material conditions of life, to investigate how concepts are born of the movements of the body, to discern how ontology repeats the phenomenon of lived bodies.

### **The Portrait**

The purpose of the project has not been to merely restate Irenaeus' notion of recapitulation, nor to lay out Tertullian's conception of flesh, nor to summarize Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*. The hermeneutic in which the texts and analyses were conducted were undoubtedly from a contemporary perspective, and in this manner, this strategic genealogy responds to contemporary trends in continental thought—the relation of bodies to thought, the genesis of a concept, embodied materialism, immanence studies, and the problematic relation of Christianity to contemporary continental philosophy. As stated at the outset of the second chapter, numerous appropriations of the Christ concept are made in continental philosophy, yet each appropriation is precisely that, an appropriation. What these studies lack is history, an ancient idea of



immanence that must be thought alongside a contemporary one, and the fact that Christ does not begin with Jesus, nor Paul, but is constructed with philosophical tools and procedures. Christ may be, in the end, a figure of immanence, but immanence must be constructed like any other philosophical notion. If immanence has been privileged here, it is only because the trait of the immanent body was its revolution in bodily practice. Moreover, conceptualizing christology in terms of immanence or transcendence would undercut the very thesis put forward in this conclusion, namely, that Christ deserves a new title. Simply saying that Christ is pure immanence or pure transcendence ignores the profound addition to philosophical thought that this figure introduces. Moreover, focusing on Christ in this manner may allow us to better understand how transcendence and immanence are themselves expressions of forces the body can both undergo *and* produce. Has not the concept of Christ, via the philosophy of the incarnation, made the opposition of terms problematic in the first place?

Below, I will briefly summarize the role each thinker played in the construction of Christ, how this Christ was deployed as an agent of immanence, and lastly, how this concept would contribute to the ascetic understanding of the body. What the final Christ looks like, to which the construction of Christ builds, is a Christ that embodies creation (the All) in an immanent fashion. In order to paint the picture that is Christ, the strategic genealogy employed ought to be understood in terms constructing a canvas, laying the foundational color, then slowly building up contrasts, color and detail. Irenaeus is the craftsman of the frame in which will be painted the portrait of Christ.

Since it is the assumption here that the concept of immanence has played a major role in Western political as well as philosophical history, and further, a concept shapes a body through the

deployment of immanence, this text began with Irenaeus and the construction of Christ as a figure of immanence. Immanence should be defined by its classical Aristotelian usage, as the *quality of an action beginning and ending inside an agent*. When we speak of God being in and/or on the body, God is the name of a certain quality, or intensity, inhabiting the body, albeit virtually; perhaps the same way beauty inhabits a moving body without being directly attached to that body. A body becomes an immanent body when it is understood to have the All within it, in an immanent fashion. It therefore can act immanently in the All as an agent within the All because the All is enfolded upon it. Recapitulation will establish these properties for Christ.

### **Irenaeus**

Irenaeus plays an important role in the construction of Christ in that it is through his notion of recapitulation that Christ is understood to take on immanent characteristics. Recapitulation established the idea that Christ sums up history. Recapitulation stretched Christ out, as it were, temporally and materially. Irenaeus cites Romans 5: 12-21 frequently in support of his idea, “Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” The curse that bestowed sin upon humanity is now put into question.

Recapitulation obeys a unique logic: one tree cancels out another—the crucifixion overrules the tree of sin, and makes a life without sin possible again. Athanasius, centuries later, reiterates this logic precisely. Irenaeus writes: “For He would not have been one truly possessing flesh and blood, by which He redeemed us, unless He had summed up in Himself the ancient formation of Adam.” Recapitulation is this “summing up.” Irenaeus establishes the fact that Christ is the end

of the law, however his major insight comes in the form of a question: “How could Christ be the end of the Law unless he were also its beginning?” Irenaeus answers by citing the opening verses of John’s gospel, explaining that Christ’s status as co-creator justifies the fact that he is the end of the law, since with co-creation he is also its beginning. It wasn’t enough for Irenaeus to refine the idea of recapitulation, he also had to “put” this concept at the beginning as well as the end.

What is getting witnessed here is the inverse of Christ as recapitulated being (the end) in the form of Christ in the beginning (logos). In fact, an incarnated revealed eschatology, such as we find in asceticism, requires co-creationist logos christology to be thought along with recapitulation. Christ is the end only by virtue of being the beginning. He can enter Life at the end because he is the image-principle of its creation, which makes him easier to enter, and he is the beginning because he “was” the end. The second half of this formula is no doubt inspired by the crucifixion. Eckhart, in his attempt to keep God unified at these extremes, warns against calling the beginning and end two different causes, writing that “This is because existence, that is, God, is within every being, every form and end.”<sup>13</sup> Though from the standpoint of faith God may have made Christ, philosophically it is Christ that makes *this* God possible. Christ, not God, pulls all the weight of Christian immanence. Between causality (beginning) and teleology (end) there is the third term, immanence, which is defined as the ability to find Christ immanently in all aspects of creation. The overall importance this conceptualization of Christ has for asceticism is the way Christ is virtualized (conceptual persona) and in this virtualization is guaranteed ontological virility. Because of the virtuality of Christ, he can never be exhausted, yet he can be repeated. The immanence of Christ in life is established as a saving power through his virtuality. Most importantly, Irenaeus establishes a precedent for the power of an act to embody all of life,

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<sup>13</sup> Eckhart, Sermon IV, p. 210.

an act though which, enfolded therein, life's faults are corrected. It is this last point, borrowed in part from the Stoics, which will become crucial in understanding the body language of ascetics as implicated in a larger cosmological fabric.

In a larger context, the areas where this chapter responds to contemporary concerns in philosophy is, first, its constructive engagement with bringing Deleuze's ideas to late antiquity, the instituting of theological immanence (Death of God theologies), the role of the body in thought, and lastly, the relevance of christological contributions to postmodern studies.

### **Tertullian**

If Irenaeus constructed the frame to this portrait by laying out an immanent Christ, Tertullian would begin to lay out the foundational color and texture. Tertullian would accomplish this via his notion of flesh, and through a methodology in which the concept of flesh exerts a gravitational pull on the architecture of this thinking. Irenaeus established Christ as the conceptual persona occupying the central position of logos christology, and he stretched the Christ canvas over the philosophical landscape by placing Christ at all the crucial points required for a robust ontology: co-creation, immanence, telos (near, end and far point)<sup>14</sup> Tertullian would say outright what Irenaeus almost said—Christ is the “fabric of life.” This expressive phrase follows from Irenaeus. By this phrase Tertullian meant that Christ's incarnation signified much more than his assumption of a body, but that his body ought to be understood to be enfolded into material life. Material life was not limited to bodies, but to “abject” and “accursed” materiality, such as the fluid of the womb, dirt and blood. Christ embodied the form of the accursed so that the curse would be no longer. Building upon Irenaeus' concept of recapitulation wherein Christ

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 2 for the technical definitions of these terms.

is said to have assumed all of humanity, “summing” it up in his body, Tertullian established Christ as a fabric of life through which All is bound: the concept of Christ reorganized the manner in which to view God and humanity, allowing them to be thought together. Using the term “flesh” to designate this fabric of life, Tertullian indicates the ubiquity of flesh to be symptomatic of what the incarnation means, that is, Christ’s ubiquity is not just virtual, as it appeared to be in Irenaeus. To be able to find flesh everywhere, to be in it and to *think through it* in theological terms—this is the ubiquity of the flesh. Flesh’s all encompassing embrace of life is but one result of the conceptual persona of Christ, since it is the function of persona to guide concepts, screen, direct and give them behavior.

By calling attention to the tranfigurative power of flesh, Tertullian inaugurates a discussion of process materiality continuing to this day. Tertullian’s appeal to the processes embedded within flesh calls forth a logic of implication and explication in which *the health of the ground is the health of the organism*. In other words, appeals to the “ground” in philosophy serve one main function, to vitalize the organism witnessed, or born, by the ground. Born in the year 160 and dying in the year 225, Tertullian lived during a tumultuous period in the history of the Roman Empire. His life saw the persecutions of Marcus Aurelius, lasting from 161-180, which produced the famous martyrdom of Polycarp, and the persecution of Septimus Severus, lasting from 202-210, which saw the martyrdom of Perpetua. Tertullian’s tactic was not just to glorify the body and compare it to the crucifixion, but to construct an immanentist and transcendental materialism under the name of flesh. Below is a remarkable passage from *De Carne Christi* employing the logic of ground and organism: “No material substance is without the witness of its own original...What is flesh but earth in a special form?” The substance of the body has immanent to

it the substance of the earth. Therefore, to immanentize the earth in the body is a political and philosophical strategy of co-opting the forces already flowing through the body. What is remarkable is how Tertullian is trying confront a biopolitical violence with an affirmative biophilosophy, or what could be termed a bioreligiosity. His affirmations of the immanence of God in flesh, but also of the immanence of our flesh in God, has not only made sense of the phenomenon of martyrdom, but affirmed it. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," Tertullian famously wrote. The concept of spilt blood, and broken flesh, assumed extremely important political and aesthetic registers for the early Christians. This is because flesh speaks of many things at once: Christ assumed flesh, flesh is immanent to humans, the breaking of flesh was the means toward sanctity, yet it was the breaking of flesh in martyrdom that was a political, and grotesque, act of resistance to empire. Tertullian's concept of flesh is therefore a constructive response to an alteration in biopolitics. The martyr's body is therefore the form of representation responding to biopolitics, and Tertullian's materialism is the supporting discourse.

The portrait of Christ has, therefore, received its texture in the form of flesh. However, what was lacking in Tertullian that Athanasius exploits is the precise movement of the organism vis-à-vis the ground. Athanasius is the third and final major thinker to be engaged. Athanasius' *On the Incarnation* provided the logic in which to think how a body can actually effect the whole, while his *Life of Antony* is an illustration of the logic. The overall logic of the whole/part argument as it relates to ontological movement in *On the Incarnation* can be summed up as follows: creation is moved in the advent of Christ. God moves creation, including his own nature, when a pre-existing part splinters (or is begotten) from the whole in the hopes of bringing the parts back together again. Borrowing from Stoic conceptions of *tonos* (tension), Christ corrects the fallen

tension in the cosmos and aligns creation through his incarnation. Christ will therefore be understood by Athanasius to have immanent power in the world, i.e., his ability to effect the whole of creation is not only unlimited, but immediate and immanent. Athanasius relies on both Irenaeus and Tertullian to make this possible—he relies on Irenaeus for recapitulation substitutes (one tree cancels out another, one body replaces another, Christ replaces Adam) and Tertullian for a materially infused conception of Christ.

### **Athanasius**

In the *Life of Antony*, and in the surrounding literature, the power given to the part is translated into two properties. On the one hand, ascetic bodies and their acts are understood to have effects outside their bodies. Ascetic bodies cleared the devils from the desert, making it possible for others to rise to heaven. The “work” of the ascetic was always private in practice but public in effect. On the other hand, the physics of the body itself was conceptualized in terms of the whole/part and how the discipline of the body’s parts was seen as the effective control of the body as a whole; hence the focus in Antony’s letters and the *vitae* on the parts of the body. Bringing a state of control to the hand, for instance, spoke of a body with perfect tension. It was in this manner how the ascetic body was athletic, i.e., harmonious, controlled, disciplined and rational.

Both types of perception—of the ascetic body in general and of its parts—employ the same logic of the immanent body, and taken together constitute the fact of the ascetic body to have power and effect outside itself. In order for this power to be attributed to the body, the work of Irenaeus

and Tertullian had to be utilized. Irenaeus established the possibility that one could think of the Christ body as a quasi-transcendental universal category, what has been called the recapitulated body. In the conceptualization of this crucified and resurrected body, there was written on it the original sin (Adam) and the cleansing of that sin (Christ as second Adam), as well as the human body in general. Christ became, in a minimalist fashion, a figure of univocity. This is the earliest theorization of cosmological movement found more decidedly in Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*. This figure was of a minimalist univocity because Irenaeus was more adept in the ontological idiom. Tertullian would continue this line of thought by virtualizing Christ into the idiom of flesh and matter. Now, movement ought to be conceptualized in terms of a body enfolded into an enchanted matter—which *is* the incarnation—in which that body is ours and that of the matter is the incarnated matter that Christ divinized. Movement in this current context does not refer to physical movement. The rivers continued to flow and the mountains remained mountains. What is being referenced here is a mythopoetic space of immanent, virtual connectivity, wherein the body of the ascetic is mystically connected to life as a whole.

In fact, movement is the corollary to the mystical experience of being transparent to external forces (the All). Whereas the experience of being transparent is spoken of in the rather passive language of being filled, ecstasy, union, rapture, etc, the language of movement is the corollary of this transparency. Movement is what happens when the body transparent to the All in turn effects the All. Deleuze termed this process of adding to the creativity of life counter actualization, and it has been an assumption here, perhaps unstated, that ascetic bodies and performance artists are figures of creativity whose ability to reconfigure life remains unparalleled. Moreover, the ability to dialectically internalize and produce has historically been



the main property of the artistic avant garde, and herein lies the parallel to ascetics as body artists and performance artists—their ability to prophesy new forms of life through their bodies without the use of language. Valantasis writes of this intimate connection: “Asceticism may be defined as performances designed to inaugurate an alternative culture, to enable different social relations, and to create a new identity.”<sup>15</sup> Co-creation, one of the most controversial and sophisticated concepts in the late ancient corpus, here takes on a new meaning. While Christ was originally given the title of co-creator, once this Christ body was repeated and imitated with the ascetics this concept of co-creation was applied as well to the ascetic body; hence their avant garde property.

### **Art, Asceticism and the Avant Garde**

Of course, there is a vast difference between an ascetic supporting and altering the world through the language of embodying Christ and a performance artist doing the same through the language of a body inscribed by politics. The comparison, however, is more explicit when one compares martyrdom, in which is a major precursor to asceticism, with contemporary performance art. Yugoslavian artist Marina Abramovic typifies the performance artist. In her *Rhythm O*, of 1974, Abramovic stood silently in a room with a table on which sat 72 objects (Figure 41). Among them were a rose, a feather, honey, a whip, scissors, a scalpel, a gun and a single bullet. Abramovic allowed the audience to manipulate her body with the objects for six hours.

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<sup>15</sup> Valantasis, *The Making*, p. 8.



Figure 41. Marina Abramovic. *Rhythm 0*, 1974.

Needless to say, after being stripped down naked, cut by thorns, had the cuts patched up by other audience members, the performance had to finally be stopped when an audience member put a bullet into the gun and held it to her neck. Abramovic's body, given over to daily technologies, acted like a confessional booth for a culture's violent unconscious, and she made her point that it was not artists who were violent. More recently, Iraqi artist Waffa Bilal used a similar tactic for his 2007 piece titled *Domestic Tension* where he lived inside a gallery space with a paintball gun pointed at him in which online users could fire at him. By end of the month long ordeal, Bilal had been shot at over tens of thousands of times, and some hackers had programmed the gun to

fire automatically at him while others programmed the gun to shoot to the side. In both works of art, the body returns to the performative stage in a hyper display of what is already happening to the body. In the case of Bilal it was the virtuality of killing, which struck a personal note with Bilal whose brother had been killed by a war in which troops in Colorado were firing missiles in Iraq. Martyrs, monks and body artists employ the same logic of the body—internalization, inscription, embodiment and alteration—a logic embedded within the corporeal politics of late ancient Christianity.

### **Precedents for the Christ Concept**

The concept of Christ has been appropriated by numerous continental thinkers, either to support recent materialist theologies or ontologies of immanence, or merely to claim the Christ figure as *their* philosophical ancestor. In nearly all cases, the Christ has been conceptualized ahistorically, to which this analysis is directed as a critique of the idea that Christ is a readymade concept.<sup>16</sup>

Christ cannot be appealed to as an agent of immanence as if the ancient world understood him immediately in this fashion. The concept of Christ developed over time, and through many philosophical cycles. However, a few contemporary texts do stand out as especially relevant to this project, not in the sense that they have informed it or influenced it, but in the sense of being analogous. French phenomenologist Michel Henry and Francois Laruelle stand out as thinkers who have engaged with the concept of Christ in a more profound manner than the rest.

According to the Catholic Henry, Christ's truth comes in the form of his revelation, a revelation that is for Henry phenomenological. The title of Henry's text, *I am the Truth: Toward a*

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<sup>16</sup> John Milbank is perhaps the sole exception to this statement, as his historical work in theology exempts him from simplistic understandings of the role and function of Christ in antiquity.

*Philosophy of Christianity*, is indicative of what Christ *is* for Henry. Henry's understanding is that Christ speaks the Truth of the world, Truth being defined as "both what shows itself and the fact of self-showing."<sup>17</sup> Henry is not interested in the object of the showing, but in the fact of self showing, and Christ is the Truth because he reveals something transcendental about the way the world reveals itself. The figure of Christ and his revelation is for Henry a lesson in life's phenomenality, its emergence into being from the Life preceding it. Henry writes: "Before being living, he [Christ] is himself Life, the eternal coming-into-itself in which Life eternally engenders itself. It is to this self-engendering of Life, which he calls eternal Life—a Life that precedes and will eternally precede all the living—that Christ gives the name of Father."<sup>18</sup> Christ's truth is that he attests to the Father, and Christ's revelation that we all have our origin in the Father, and that Christ as well *comes* from the Father (which is to be distinguished from biological conceptions of human birth), is the Truth of Life for Henry. The insistence of a birth into/from Life is a strategy that, according to Henry, undoes modernity's insistence on birth as an anonymous and biological process.<sup>19</sup> Henry writes, "It is this worldly interpretation of birth that Christ's discourse about himself shatters into pieces."<sup>20</sup> Christ points to a Life outside this life, and to a birth from a Life not visible in this life.

This Life Christ gestures to is never concrete life, never material life showing itself, but the Life "which never shows itself in the world." Henry's example of Christ's status as eternal logos, existing before the birth of the world, testifies to a realm of Life outside phenomenal appearances. The Truth, as Life and Christ, is the illustration of the process of life's eternal

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<sup>17</sup> Henry, Michel. *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 72.

manifestation into and out of being. “To believe,” writes Henry, is to have fidelity in an “already visible” that cannot, on principle, make itself visible.<sup>21</sup> Jean Luc Marion’s valorization of the givenness of phenomenon itself (the fact that there is), as opposed to the content of the given, ought to be understood in the same register. For Henry, the nature of this invisible visibility is testified by Christ, who reveals himself to be traversed by Life yet not commensurate with it: “In this way he [Christ] experiences himself as traversed by this Life, as the site in which it experiences itself in him—who is himself merely the self-experience of this divine Life.”<sup>22</sup>

Though Henry’s analysis is phenomenological and not historical, he begins with a concept of a transcendental Christ (his phrase is “transcendental arch-son”) traversed by Life that was just being accepted in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. In other words, Henry’s claims of Christ as transcendental Life has historical precedents (such as in the work of Tertullian), in which a knowledge of this fact could only reinforce and provide more sophistication to his phenomenology.

Henry’s approach and deployment of the concept of Christ, however, is not without illumination. Henry does offer an original analysis as to how the Christ of philosophy differs from the Jesus of history, and he goes to great length providing philosophical procedures as to how this is attained. Problematic is that Henry appears to have found a fifth century orthodox Christ, albeit read through phenomenology, in the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John. Henry illustrates no sensitivity to the construction of the object he so eagerly desires. Furthermore, the insistence on Christ’s message as predominantly a philosophical theorem/revelation severely limits Henry’s ability to see in the Christ the worldly relevance of his teachings, or, more specifically, the relevance of the concept of Christ to the material world, since the revelation of Christ is that it is

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 88.

the invisible that is of value. Whereas for Henry Christ is a figure of the revelation of Life's phenomenality, in this text Christ is not a philosophical nor a phenomenological example. Christ is not a figure among figures, but a case study in the logic of immanence. Before all else, Christ is a concept. Christ does not reveal the ground of Life's auto-affection, as in Henry, but is a concept through which Life can be conceived (Tertullian). Christ is not a figure of revelation, as in Henry, but a simple concept in philosophy which enabled a certain practice of the body to emerge (Athanasius).

The second study deserving of note is Francois Laruelle's *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*. Laruelle is highly indebted to Henry's conceptualization of Life.<sup>23</sup> Laruelle's valorization of radical immanence (that which is always already and in which we are already in) reiterates Henry's task to find in the Christ figure a contemporary subject not based in Christianity, but from a certain reading of Christianity, a type of reading Laruelle calls cloning or a *dualysis*. Laruelle uses Christianity as a resource for thinking through a set of problems: transcendence vs. immanence, justice, politics, the Jewish question, etc. Laruelle does not care for the historical truths of Christianity, nor the figure of Jesus, nor actual Judaism, though he speaks of these figures often. Laruelle, like Henry, conducts what may be called a phenomenological reduction to immanence. Philosophy, according to Laruelle, is Greek in nature, and in its attempt to systematize the Real, to submit the real to principles, philosophy makes all things thinkable. Philosophy makes the world and all aspects of being consistent. The appeal to transcendence is part of philosophy since its origin. In the notion of transcendence, philosophy attempts to separate itself from the world.<sup>24</sup> Theology—what Laruelle terms theo-philosophy—does the

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<sup>23</sup> For the following analysis I am highly indebted to the lectures of John D. Caputo, who has completed the remarkable task of making Laruelle's text somewhat comprehensible.

<sup>24</sup> Laruelle, Francois. *Future Christ* (New York and London: Continuum, 2010), p. 45.

same. Immanence in the philosophical tradition is that which encompasses life, the very thing around us, enfolding us. But there is a problem here, according to Laruelle, and his solution is to invert the articulation of terms found in the theo-philosophical tradition. In fact and in truth for Laruelle, it is really transcendence that encompasses the world, trying to render it consistent, and immanence is that which separates. Immanence separates itself from the world, rendering the world inconsistent and non-totalizable, which is the type of “world” Laruelle desires. Immanence cannot be thought of in terms of totality, nor can it be thought from the perspective of philosophy.

Non-philosophy, which is Laruelle’s self-assigned name for his anti-philosophy, works in the interstices of making immanence actual to the human subjects already living within it.

Heidegger’s conceptualization of the history of philosophy as a withdrawal from its original insight into being is here analogous, especially in the sense that Laruelle is saying that immanence is what is going on inside the essence of Christianity, the only problem being that Christianity forgot it. The heretic is the name of this figure withdrawing itself from the “world” of philosophy. Gnosticism haunts Laruelle’s text, and he is advocating a type of Gnostic revolt, yet the future Christ revolts in favor of this world as opposed to another. Cloning is the name given to his strategy of reading Christian texts (which he does little of), and the future Christ is the figure who lives in radical immanence. Laruelle’s anthropomorphic conceptualization of the real as based in the human is implicit in his humanization of real, and yet his humanization of immanence remarkably speaks little of the body or the human.

What differentiates Laruelle’s study from the one presented here should be obvious. Laruelle makes claims as to the nature of the Real and finds historical Christianity irrelevant. Laruelle is

not interested in the body, nor theological texts. Laruelle is, however, involved in a pseudo-repetition of Christianity in such a way that Laruelle is repeating, or cloning, what he thinks is going on inside Christianity. And the figure of Christ for Laruelle is a figure of immanence, as it is here. The logic of the body as presented in late antiquity can be cast in similar terms, as a repetition of what is going on inside christology. Though Laruelle speaks generally of the human, he does not speak of the body. While Laruelle deduces that the sphere of immanence is where we already are, he does not take into account the creation of immanence. If the distillation of the logic of the body was found to be operative in late antiquity, it is because christology is a virtualization of the body of Jesus. One could deduce from Laruelle that philosophy and theology are based upon the human, since the human and its sphere of immanence is all there is, however even if this point could be conceded, the architecture of philosophy and theology would immediately be abandoned, because they are, quite simply, philosophy and theology. Laruelle's analysis focuses itself on immanence for immanence's sake, and he affirms it as if it were an object, while here immanence is a trait of a certain configuration of a body, and deserves no ontological privilege other than its association with figures of intensity, which have been privileged.

The immanence of life is the final word for Laruelle and Henry, whereas here a philosophy of immanence is not necessarily being espoused. This is an analytic of immanence, and traces its historical influence in theology and philosophy. Transcendence is not treated as a violation of immanence, but as an effect on a specific plane of immanence (the plane organized by Christ). Christ is not a figure of immanence, but Christ made possible the thought of immanence. To claim that Christ brought immanence is to countersign God's existence, and that through God's Word divine immanence was installed. The strategy here is markedly different. Christ did not



incarnate God, and God did not send Christ as his agent. Quite the contrary, the concept of Christ made the thought of an incarnate God possible. *Immanence is thinkable after Christ*, which is not the same as saying Christ brought immanence via God's incarnation. Immanence and transcendence, as the two prisms through which so much of the history of philosophy is recast, are in this particular instance relegated as effects of a persona. The conceptual persona has the last word here, not the immanence it creates. Another major difference between Laruelle and Henry's espousal of Christ as a figure of immanence is that they make claims to immanence as the Real, or as the true ground of being. According to said thinkers, immanence is the all embracing property of Life, whereas in this analysis no such claims are made. While for the Christian the immanence of God may be an absolute truth, here Christian immanence is merely a provincial concept of a historical period in the Western world, nothing more. Transcendence and immanence are understood as an effect of the conceptual persona. So as to not be mistaken, this study has primarily focused on immanence, and immanence does define the conceptual persona of Christ, but only in the sense that immanence is understood to be the quality of an action, and not an object of affirmation. Immanence is not a noun to be affirmed, nor the ground of being. Immanence is what defines christological thought through its affirmation of the enfolding of Christ in existence.

### **The Christ Screen and the Event**

One can imagine two points of criticism of this project coming from Deleuze and Guattari themselves. Firstly, Deleuze and Guattari remain adamant that, historically speaking, religion is not a friend of immanence. Deleuze and Guattari's problem with religion in their theorization of the instituting of a plane is that, once laid out, religion makes immanence immanent to

something else, especially the form of transcendence (God, Being, etc). Life is valued only insofar as it participates in, is an attribute of, or is in conjunction with a supra-Life principle. Deleuze and Guattari confidently assert their assessment of what religion does to immanence: “Whenever there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is religion.”<sup>25</sup> Though Deleuze in other texts find instances of religion as positive formations of immanence—Spinoza and Plotinus, for instance—his major critique of religion, and, it must be added, of other types of thinking as well, it is that religion makes *life* subservient to a supersensible principle or entity. Religion forces the intensities in life and in bodies to extinguish themselves as entities alive in their own right. Religion creates habitual life on the body, ritualized life, and the body, like the type of thought it reflects, loses its capacity to exhibit the full traits of a genuine vitalism. Secondly, the problem with Christianity’s plane of immanence is that it confuses *its* plane with *the* plane. In other words, it is the problem of totality and universality, a myopia of religious thought forming the basis of contemporary critiques of Hegel. Contemporary fundamentalism, in its Christian or Islamic variations, is an example of how religion confuses *its* plane with *the* plane. However, to suppose that one really is speaking of concrete universals and that one is alone privileged to the totality of the Whole is not just the problem of religion, but of philosophy as well. Deleuze and Guattari are well aware of this. Christianity, and a particular form of its discourse, christology, is without question guilty of these two charges. Christology in general does often affirm Christ so as to affirm God, and christology is just as totalizing in its conception of Christ as other philosophies. In fact, the basis of this project was trying to understand just how this sense of universalism and totality came to be, the answer being that the conceptual persona of Christ was the first step in this direction.

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<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 43.

As we have seen, however, Deleuze and Guattari's assumptions are not entirely correct. Christianity has generated bodies whose intensities populate its limbs with as much flagrancy as any other body mentioned in the Deleuzian corpus, and it has been shown how the concept of Christ itself can be conceived to be the product of a logic of the body that is indifferent to religion. The famed body without organs, as the benchmark for what a deterritorialized body looks like, can be found time and time again throughout Christian history, in theology and in practice. What remains to be done is therefore to conceptualize the how the Christ concept may not just be a middle term brokering between God and earth, but how something more profound is going on inside the creation of the concept. Could it be that the main purpose, and inspiration, behind the concept of Christ is to create intensity—new bodies—not transcendence? Could the conceptual persona of Christ be the *secret trajectory* inside christology, a trajectory which finds itself repeated in the various figures of intensity inside the tradition—the saints, martyrs, ascetics, artists, and the many figures who don't fit neatly into one category?

Without question, this text has not done justice to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, especially the latter. To fully investigate these terms within the present hermeneutic would require a second text. However, one claim that is getting put forward is what could be called a *dishonest reading* of these texts. A dishonest reading doesn't quite believe the reading. For instance, God is given full weight in these thinker's texts. Though they spend more time thinking about Christ, all three would undoubtedly agree that God is the most important object of reflection. Yet, at the same time, it is Christ that pulls the most philosophical weight. Though they would agree that Christ owes his existence to God, one would reply that their God is so colored by Christ that Christ is the prism through which God is conceived. Transcendence would remain empty, and therefore,

unthinkable, if God did not descend.<sup>26</sup> Though God may be the highest object of thought, it is through Christ (and the act of descending logos) that God and human are thinkable together. Just as Plato theorized participation from the perspective of the participating object, not the participated, and just as Neo-Platonism theorized participation from the perspective of the participated (the One), christology theorizes human and God from the perspective of the incarnated Christ.<sup>27</sup> What exactly does the Christ of christology contribute to the history of thought?

### **Future Study 1: God is a Designer—A New Expression of Immanence**

Deleuze locates three historical articulations of immanence: Plato/Neo-Platonism, Medieval scholasticism, and of course, Spinoza. Deleuze's analysis largely takes place by reading said thinkers through their usage of immanent causality vs. emanation and their employment of transcendence. Any philosophy bearing even a trace of transcendence is for Deleuze a crime against pure immanence. Neo-Platonism distinguishes itself from Platonism through its combination of immanent and emanative causality. Because Plotinus and other Neo-Platonists seek participation on the side of the participated, one necessarily locates the participated (the One) above the objects participating in it: "To participate is always to participate through what is given." What gives is an isolated One above all whose excess of being spills forth (emanation). What emanation and the immanent cause have in common is that both, remarkably, produce while remaining in themselves. However, the main difference lies in the positioning of the effect. On the one hand, for emanation, the effect "comes out of its cause, exists only in so coming out," wherein the effect cannot re-enter the One above beings. On the other hand, when it comes to

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<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> See Gilles Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, chapter titled "Immanence and the Historical Components of Expression."

immanent causality the effect is immanent in the cause: “The effect remains in its cause no less than the cause remains in itself.”<sup>28</sup>

At stake in causality is an equality of being, or univocity. Only immanent causality can proclaim to support an equality of being in the sense that the ultimate act of the One is not a cause above others, but is equally effected by the effect that it engenders. Negative theology, according to Deleuze, naturally aligns itself with emanation, though philosophies of emanation are combined with immanent causality (Stoicism). Neo-Platonism betrays immanent causality through its use of emanation. Medieval Neo-Platonist Johannes Scotus Erigena neatly combines these two types of causality through the dual notions of *complicare* and *explicare*.<sup>29</sup> According to Deleuze, “All things are present to God, who complicates them. God is present to all things, which explicate and implicate him. A co-presence of two correlative movements comes to be substituted for a series of successive subordinate emanations. For things remain in God while explicating and implicating him, no less than God remains in himself, in complicating them.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, God expresses himself in the world, and the world is an expression of God. Expression is the unity of the multiple, and the multiple is another name for the self-activity of a God who expresses himself. Meister Eckhart provides a similar map for understanding the relation of Unity to Multiplicity.

An expressionist tendency does exist in philosophy and theology, according to Deleuze, but it was never fully exploited. Deleuze admits that Christianity encouraged it through its experimentations with the Word and the concept of the logos. One such experimentation was Bonaventure’s *ideas in the mind of God*, which was taken up in the third chapter. Creation is the

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<sup>28</sup> Deleuze, *Expressionism*, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 175.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 175.

problem to which “ideas in the mind of God” is the solution. Ideas are placed in God as a way to conceptualize God’s design of the world (his design then at creation and now as principle and proof of God’s immanence), and yet we find the same problem repeated in Bonaventure and Erigena—minimal transcendence. Deleuze then turns to Spinoza, who fully exploits the expressionist tendencies Deleuze saw working in Neo-Platonism and the Middle Ages. Deleuze’s Spinozism has been well documented, but for our purposes here it suffices to only briefly state what Spinoza *thinks* that the others cannot. Immanence is the first principle for Spinoza, in which expression becomes unbound to any version of subordinationism, emanation or exemplary causality. Univocity finds its finest voice in Spinoza. God is not above being, but collapsed with being in the name of universal substance. God is the name of one substance, and everything that exists is but a modulation of that substance.

It cannot be denied that Deleuze’s early and mature works of philosophy have done more to define the terms of what a philosophy of immanence is than any other thinker. In the history of philosophy, Deleuze’s name will forever be allied with immanence, since he speaks for a generation of thinkers in an age of post-transcendent, post-structuralist philosophy. However, Deleuze’s analyses of immanence are vulnerable for their insistence on schematizing thinkers as thinking either from the vantage point of God/One (the participated) or from creation (multiplicity; beings, immanence). Though his own philosophy requires a sophisticated relation between the One and the Many, the virtual and the actual, many genres of thinking do not fall neatly into his schema. Christology is one such genre. While it is true that christology espouses a One above being, a pure transcendent unity, one must ask, *from what vantage point it does this?*, and secondly, *how can we recuperate this vantage point?* At stake is how philosophy is read, how it is interpreted. It is not enough to consider what a thinker says as most important.

Athanasius reiterates again and again the transcendence of God, yet he is known as a strict thinker of Christ. So, when recasting Athanasius' philosophy, what should one focus on? The strategy of this text has been forthright—the most important aspect of a philosophy need not be the facet claimed by that philosophy. Again, a dishonest reading. What is more important is the rehabilitation of ideas, and finding resources in a tradition that may not be obvious or explicit.

Deleuze schematizes philosophies in terms of transcendence or immanence, and anything employing an admixture of both is liable to a failure. For instance, a philosophy of transcendence has a weak form of immanence when it combines immanent causality with emanative causality; and a philosophy of immanence betrays pure immanence when it utilizes a form of minimal transcendence. Contemporary philosophers have been catalogued in this very schema, Deleuze included. Did Derrida's use of the quasi-transcendental or the undeconstructible bring him closer to Levinasian transcendence, or make him a neo-Kantian? The figure of Christ, and the philosophy of this persona, christology, deserve a positive denotation—not to resurrect Christianity but to inform once and future philosophies, to aid in the construction of new materialisms, new disciplines, new figures of political intensity. The *Christic cause* deserves a name alongside the immanent cause and emanative cause, in addition to Aristotle's four causes (material, formal, efficient, final). Christic causality is not a simple appropriation of classical articulations of causality, but a new organism defined by its own rules as set out by the thinkers wrestling with it. First and foremost, the Christic cause begins with a *thought on the act of God*, which is different than saying it begins with an act of God. To think Christ is always already to think God differently. In *Contra Eunomium*, Gregory of Nyssa expresses this fact when he writes that because of Logos, "The divine will became nature."<sup>31</sup> The logos was not independent of

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<sup>31</sup> Gr.Nyss.*Eun.*2.232. Cited by Pelikan in *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 105.

God's nature, but "nature by God's will." This led Gregory of Nyssa to conclude that with God "there is no difference between will and action."<sup>32</sup> In other words, because of Christ as co-creator and artificer of God's will, God's will could be thought as coterminous with the moving of agents in the world (action). God could be thought of as immanent only because of Christ.

The new thought concerning the act of God establishes the main foundation of Christic immanence: one tree cancels out another, or the transcendent takes the form of the immanent, or one body represents All bodies. In so doing the landscape of thought is altered. Therefore, the Christic cause begins from the simple premise of recapitulation, first articulated by Paul, then given rigor by Irenaeus.

Yet the idea of a human body representing a microcosm of the whole, in which the All is enfolded in *and* on the body itself, but also in which the All is moved, begins with the birth of Western philosophy, and can be found in Pythagoreanism, the Eleatics and in the intellectual climate at the birth of Christianity. "One of the most widespread cosmological ideas at the beginning of the common era, entertained by both pagan and Christian philosophers alike, is that humanity represented the living harmony and synthesis of all the forces which make up the cosmos. A Child of earth and heaven, humanity is the living bridge between matter and spirit, a living, harmonic image of the entire universe."<sup>33</sup> For Plutarch, Apollo was the perfect example of a personification of celestial harmony, a muse whose "work" for the universe consisted of his prophesy, reason and ability to unify the cosmos through his acts.<sup>34</sup> Or according to Clement, man is a "universe in miniature" and an image of "the all-harmonious, melodious, holy

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<sup>32</sup> Gr.Nyss.*Eun.*2.228.

<sup>33</sup> Fideler, *Jesus Christ, Sun of God*, p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 63.



instrument of god.” It is any wonder then that Clement referred to Philo, the latter known to translate the logos doctrine into Judaism, as the “Pythagorean.”

If for the ancient world the purpose of the logos was to re-order the world, and if the purpose of the incarnation was to allow man the possibility of divinity, then the secret trajectory within Christological thought does lie within the transfer of cosmological power first from Logos, then to Christ, then to individual bodies. It is to mark this telos that this text has directed itself. If God is an expression of the Whole, then the becoming-divine of the human must contain the same attributes, the All. What we find in asceticism and other forms of bodily representation is the repetition of this logic as it applies to human bodies. Ascetic agency is attributed such divine power and social-political ontology because of the trace of the notion of the body as universe in miniature.

In what may be called a preliminary sketch of a potential new project, three features can be distilled from the Christ persona, which is the architecture of the Christic cause. By features we mean concepts, and by concepts we do not mean references of/to/about Christ, but what events in life (actualities) these concepts trace out on the Christ persona (virtuality).

### **Future Study 2: The Three Features of Christic Immanence**

The features delineated below are conceptual expressions of Christ, and express the idiosyncrasy of this persona, answering the question of uniqueness, and style, of the Christ plane of immanence.<sup>35</sup> The concepts populating the Christ plane of immanence are: (i) communication of events, (ii) consistency, (iii) deformation and gesturology. It will become clear, therefore, how

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<sup>35</sup> I am slightly modifying Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology here, however, the basic insight of “features of the conceptual persona” is retained. See their chapter titled, “Conceptual Personae” in *What is Philosophy?*

these features are a description of Christian ontology as much as prisms through which to view famous bodies in Christian history.

**(i) *Communication of Events***

If a plane of immanence is pre-philosophical, and if it's been argued here that the Christ persona acts as a plane of immanence, then what specific concepts occupy this plane, since it is the function of a plane of immanence to organize concepts? It was with Irenaeus when Christ was first stretched out, as it were, temporally and spatially in the form of a near (co-creation), immanent (immediate causality), and end point (telos). This act of stretching established a tentative univocal body upon which to direct christological thought. It established, as it were, a completeness and consistency of existence. This Christ persona made it possible to think *God as existence*, aiding in the early apologetic defense against plurality and polytheism. Jaroslav Pelikan observes that early Christian “universalism,” defined by a concept of God as not just the God of Israel but God of all humanity, relied on a christocentric premise.<sup>36</sup> Macrina and Gregory of Nyssa found in nature a “regularity and order” of “all things [ta panta],” an observation perhaps stemming from natural theology, yet the attribute of order and regularity (akin to Athanasius’ harmony) was applicable to the cosmos because of the co-creating Christ.

God could be thought to be in all things—the Whole and the Parts—because of the fact that Christ allotted to the diversity of created things the principle of their existence (arche), which is the “indissoluble attachment” linking them in their existence, as well as established the directionality of their existence (telos). The Cappadocians, like many other apologists, appealed

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<sup>36</sup> See the chapters titled “Cosmos as Contingent Creation,” “The Life of the Aeon to Come,” and “The Universe as Cosmos.”

to Irenaeus' notion of recapitulation to establish their brand of "universalism." According to Jaroslav, Gregory of Nyssa christocentric version of the universe implied recapitulation:

According to Gregory of Nyssa, the original creation of Adam, shaped from the dust of the earth but animated by the very breath of God, had communicated 'a single grace extending equally through all creation.' Now after the fall and the redemption, as he said later in the same treatise, Christ the crucified was 'binding all things to himself and making them one, and through himself bringing the diverse natures of existing things into one accord and harmony.' The metaphysical ground of this state of things was: 'The eyes of all creation are set on him and he is its center, and it finds its harmony in him.'<sup>37</sup>

The system was held together by recapitulation and co-creation working together. The importance of classical conceptions of causality for arguing this point cannot be underemphasized. The highly enigmatic articulation of Roman's 11:36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things," was often called forth to justify the becoming-All of God, as well as the unification of difference through Christ. For Basil, "from him" referred to the ground of being, "through him" to the continuance of being, and "to him" as that which all things are turned.<sup>38</sup> The concept of Christ makes the consistency of existence possible (that God can enter the whole and the part), though from the perspective of the Christian it is God acting through Christ rendering this possible, *not* Christ making this God possible

In the middle ages, Meister Eckhart reiterates the point of causality, but recasts the three points of temporality in terms of Trinitarian economy, as Augustine had done.<sup>39</sup> On a commentary on Romans 11:36 ("All things are from him, through him, and in him"), Eckhart writes, "Say then that 'all things' are 'from' the maker, 'through' the form, and 'in' the end." Eckhart critiques Aquinas for believing that such a view held back agency from "created things." According to Eckhart, Aquinas held a position that the three causes differed in degree when found in God and

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<sup>37</sup> Jaroslav, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 258.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 258.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 258.

created things. This is “crude” philosophy, Eckhart charges, for two reasons. First, for reasons of transparency—no being can be counted alongside God as a separate entity. And secondly, in a rather Spinozistic manner, “existence, that is, God, is within every being, every form and end, and conversely, every being, form and end is in existence itself. Indeed, every maker works through its existence, every form informs through its existence, and every end moves through its existence—through nothing else.”<sup>40</sup> God is ultimate ground. The language of action and agency, however, in the second sentence (*works, informs, moves*), is language of the ontological movement given to God by the thought of Christ. Christ made it possible to think of God as active in Life in this manner. Communication of events refers to the immanent activity of God and the interchangeability of causality (there is no real “number” of causes in God), in the case of Eckhart, but its roots are in the movement of Christ.

After Irenaeus, it became possible to use the conceptual persona to create concepts, God being one of those concepts. Christ is not a simple body that christology has as its object, but rather, the Christ concept is the genesis of a disciplinary thinking, christology.

Instituting a plane of immanence is one of the first acts of thinking. Deleuze and Guattari describe the first act of a philosopher in the following manner: “In short, the first philosophers are those who institute a plane of immanence like a sieve stretched over the chaos.”<sup>41</sup> Christ is a conceptual persona, who, to cite Deleuze, acts like a screen ordering thinking and giving movement to its concepts, though Deleuze will never cite the Christ persona. What the plane of immanence accomplishes for thought is that it makes chaos, or the unthought, consistent. A plane of immanence is not an object of thought, but what thought presupposes when it makes

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<sup>40</sup> Eckhart, Sermon IV, p. 210.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 43.

connections. Consistency and connectivity defines thought against chaos, the latter marking the limit of human logos. If the goal of philosophy is to give consistency to thought—to make it real—then the task of the “healthy” concept is to allow for the greatest amount of connectivity on a particular plane; as opposed to the “unhealthy” concept that remains in-itself, or attributes its power to a transcendent entity (an element above the field). In the history of philosophy, the healthy concepts succeed, those that end up becoming philosophies, such as Descartes’ cogito, Hegel’s absolute, Nietzsche’s overman, Derrida’s differance, etc.

For Deleuze and Guattari, “The concept is defined by the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed.”<sup>42</sup> In other words: the Part in its finite number of points must express the Whole with an infinite speed. Each concept, though occupying a limited amount of space, compensates for its limitation with movement and speed. The logic Deleuze and Guattari employ here is consistent with their metaphysics, aesthetics and ethics—the Part must express the Whole. Moreover, this logic is the definition of the event, and the concept becomes an event when it forces the thinker to take into account the “whole,” or All, when the concept is created—“The philosophical concept does not refer to the lived, by way of compensation, but consists, through its own creation, in setting up an event that surveys the whole of the lived no less than every state of affairs.”<sup>43</sup> The event is related to the immanent survey of a field without subject.<sup>44</sup> The concept is traced out over a plane of immanence, on whose flipside is Nature (since all concepts have their origin—not reference—in Life), and when this concept is constructed so as to survey the Whole, the concept births an

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 48.

event. It is in this sense that a successful pre-philosophical plane is *immanent*, i.e., the logic of connection trumps the logic of reference and identity.

Irenaeus, Tertullian and Athanasius are all thinkers for whom the concept of Christ surveys an immanent field, and/or for whom Christ is that immanent field. It is true of these thinkers what Deleuze and Guattari observe of the pre-Socratic Thales: “When Thales’ thought leaps out, it comes back as water.”<sup>45</sup> When Athanasius’ thought exercises itself, it finds Christ in the large and the small, the One and the Many. Leithart comments on this aspect of Athanasius’ christic metaphysics: “It is all about Christ. It is a Christic metaphysics. Even when Athanasius is exploring the nature of created reality, the cross and the Christ of the cross remain in the forefront of his mind.”<sup>46</sup> It is not that God is not important, but solely a matter of emphasis in the case of Athanasius. It is worth noting that God only appears once in the *Life of Antony*, and then only to tell Antony that he is going to be famous everywhere.<sup>47</sup> When Irenaeus speaks of the prophets that have come before Christ, they are but manifestations of a Christ that can slide in and out of history at his leisure. When Tertullian speaks of the abject fluid in the womb, he is really thinking of Christ. When Athanasius writes of Antony’s emaciated body under assault from the demons, it is but a reenactment of temptations that Christ already underwent. It is nearly impossible to find a concept in said thinkers that does not implicate, in a most ontologically grounding level, the Christ persona when faced toward thought, and human nature when faced toward Life. The Christ concept is a concept that “surveys.” Christ makes an event possible for bodies, and/or to think the body itself as point of infinite speed.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Liethart, *Athanasius*, p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> See Harpham’s *Ascetic Imperative*, p. 27.

Events are singular occurrences, actualizations of the Many in a One. Drawing together the relation between events and the screen, Deleuze writes: “Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes.”<sup>48</sup> In another sense, the screen is the event of philosophy, a pseudo-blanket that thought has placed between it and nature—a logos. The screen is the empty figure of thought, the prephilosophical personae and the character of that screen is defined by the conceptual persona which is the screen.<sup>49</sup> Just as a canvas is stretched over its framing rods, Irenaeus made Christ a screen when he stretched the concept of Christ over the three temporal points (near, immanence and far point). It was a precise philosophical procedure that would have lasting influence on the history of Christianity. This stretching made the concept of Christian immanence possible, i.e., it was possible to think of all being in terms of one Being. In *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius could not be more direct: “The Self-revealing of the Word is in every dimension—above, in creation; below, in the Incarnation; in the depth, in Hades; in the breadth, throughout the world. All things have been filled with the knowledge of God.”<sup>50</sup> And there is no shortage of passages in Christian theology reiterating this point. One can never escape Christ’s body, but only turn from it, ignore it, defile it, or, by contrast, move toward it, feel it.

## **(ii) Consistency**

The second property of the screen is ethical, existing to provide a plane of consistency upon which Christian thought can rest, where its prescribed actions can support each other toward an end goal—the repetition of a body in history. The opening pages of Antony’s *vitae* highlights the

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<sup>48</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 76.

<sup>49</sup> This distinction is similar to the difference between a plane of immanence and The absolute plane of immanence. “If we call such a plane-sieve Logos, the logos is far from being like simple “reason” (as when one says the world is rational). Reason is only a concept, and a very impoverished concept for defining the plane and the movements that pass through it.”

<sup>50</sup> *Life of Antony*, p. 44.

true purpose of the hagiographic text, “for Antony’s way of life provides monks with a sufficient picture for ascetic practice.”<sup>51</sup> Antony’s body is a repetition of the Christ body, and the ascetics soon to follow will be “pictures” constructed in the manner of Antony, just as the human is an image of the Word, and the Word the image of God. In order for these repetitions to occur, an architecture must be constructed so as to allow an ethics to be shared between bodies. An ethics of convergence is more relevant to Athanasius’ conception of *imitatio Christi* than a correspondence of truth with Christ’s body, as absolute correspondence short circuits the *homoousios*—to converge with Christ betrays his divine status. Convergence, as an art of a lost proximity to an *other body*, ensures at once the urgency in bodily construction (to become like Christ) and the failure to ever achieve that construction (one can never fully become Christ). Asceticism is an ethics, a “micro-physics” as Foucault calls it, not a morality, if we understand the former as an art of living with/in Christ’s immanence and the latter as providing prescriptive moralistic norms guiding behavior (Kant). The analysis presented here has clearly conceptualized asceticism as the former.

Living immanently induces a displaced perception and a double movement of the text: a monk feels demons in his stomach, but to repel their force moves his mind to the wounds of Christ. Demons confront Antony, but the sign of the cross repels them. Or of St. Simeon, “The vertebrae of his spine were dislocated through constant supplication, but he was fastened and held together by the love of Christ.”<sup>52</sup> In this image, we have a doubling of the crucifix, as spine, which is being held together by thoughts of a prior hanging, upon whose success at resurrection require a patient suffering. Simeon’s spine, like the cross, supports our suffering body. Deformation takes on a beauty due to its intensity, not its moralizing character. If in describing Christ we can utilize

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>52</sup> *The Syriac Life of Saint Simeon Stylites*, p. 129.



a “communication of idioms,” as James Carmody and Thomas Clarke term it, allowing us to speak at once of Christ’s humanity and divinity (resulting from the incarnation), then the reverse can take place. As Christ’s divine suffering proved his humanity, so too our suffering is divinized in our kinship with Christ.<sup>53</sup>

As a concept on a plane facing nature and thought, consistency bridges the gap between creation and salvation, materialism and ontology, phenomenology and eschatology—in short, a *physico-mystical solidarity*.<sup>54</sup> Athanasius again, “There is thus no inconsistency between creation and salvation; for the One Father has employed the same Agent for both works, effecting the salvation of the world through the same Word Who made it in the beginning.”<sup>55</sup>

This virtual folding of the bodily and the divine is the precise mark of rigorous Christological thought, and within its system is a relay, made possible by the consistency of Jesus’ crucified, corporeal nature; this phrase “made possible by” cannot be too heavily emphasized, for what it is calling our attention to are the ontological traits of the human body, traits exposed only in a specific construction. In the particular case of Antony, Athanasius invents an alter Christ not to degrade materiality but to recharge the immanence constructing our body—we *now know* that the body of Antony is an assemblage constructed from the conceptual persona of Christ.

### **(iii) Painting: Gesturology and Deformation**

A third feature of the plane is the deformation aesthetic found in ascetic literature, paintings and murals of ascetics, as well as the literature of martyrdom. The accounts of the martyrs are replete

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<sup>53</sup> Carmody, James M. and Thomas E. Clarke. *Word and Redeemer: Christology in the Fathers* (Glenrock, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1966) p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>55</sup> *On the Incarnation* 1.2.

with violent imagery of bodily tearing, dismemberment and deformation of the human body. Deformation occurs in multiple valences, and is, *one the one hand*, more pragmatically the expressive tendency behind the valorization of the crucifixion; on the other hand, deformation stems from a disfigurative moment of Christ becoming logos (multiplicity), and his body being deformed and dispersed in the manner of Stoic *spermatikoi*. Often, a deformation aesthetic allies itself with an expressive gesturology, which is what was found in the work of Italian painter Giotto, working in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Giotto was considered the father of the Renaissance.

The discovery of the gesture was a pivotal moment in the history of art. In expressing the uncoded gesture of the body, Giotto is credited with beginning a genre of painting—termed “modern” at the time—eventually leading to the perfection, beauty and interiority of the painted Renaissance figure. Giotto’s stigmatas of St. Francis embody the extreme limit during the time for the painted gesture. St. Francis’ body is overcome by the gesture of God entering it, and the body itself becomes a gesture of joyful suffering. One body one gesture, but many gestures on the body. As we saw, the phenomenon of the saint wracked by suffering found itself being expressed in the *Antony series*, which is a phrase employed here to denote a cluster of paintings unified by a central theme—the frontal focus of a singular ascetic body under onslaught by demonic forces.<sup>56</sup> With Martin Schongauer’s *Temptation of St. Antony* organizing the analysis, it was the formal property that became important in the revolution in art towards a single frame. Numerous art historians have argued that there is a direct line of influence beginning with Giotto and ending with Paul Cezanne, who died in 1906. The influence of Giotto, culminating in Cezanne’s cubism, concerned the autonomy of the work of art. In other words, the body of the

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<sup>56</sup> Though not all paintings depicted just the figure, as detailed in the discussion in chapter 5 on city background and the city.

stigmata, and later, through the *Antony series*, we are beginning witness the birth of the canvas as an autonomous unit, a unit that would find its final expression in Cubism. The artwork, with its immanent system of internal communication acted like a second body, an alter body, to the logic found on the Christ body. This reading enriches not only art history, but adds new texture to the influence of religion and theology in the visual arts during this period. The Renaissance notion of *istoria*, which was argued to be an outgrowth of an immanentist tendency in painting, adds more support to the claim that a formal thread connects Giotto, depictions of Antony, and Modern art.

Moreover, the frontal property of the body created a pictorial space of extended by immanent space whereby the pictorial space is linked together through the body. One reason this property was singled out, since many others did exist during this time, is because of the importance of *istoria* for generations of Renaissance painters, including its central theorization in painting's first treatise, Alberti's manual, and in Da Vinci's theoretical works. Controlling and organizing the space of the canvas through the body *istoria* unified the painting, allowing it to have the properties of autonomy and internal resonance.

## **Conclusion**

A new concept of immanence, one that is not merely the opposite of transcendence, is needed to account for the Christic cause and for the type of immanent bodies it has inspired in history. Christian scholarship has long theorized immanence in conjunction with transcendence, and much has been written on both topics, especially in the contemporary era. What has seldom been addressed in the literature, to which this text addressed itself, is (i) the relation between christology as an ancient discourse and the type of immanent causality it constructs; (ii) the manner in which this version of immanent causality has historically lent itself to the construction

of revolutionary figures of immanence; (iii) the logic employed according to which figures of immanence are said to enfold Life. Christianity has *not* invented the immanent body, since this body is found in art and philosophy, yet it has said the most about it. The logic found in christology influencing and influenced by the body *is not* the property of Christianity. But it is a trait of the body to which Christianity has devoted the most time to exploiting, in theory and in practice. Given that these bodies are often bodies of resistance, the implications of this study ought to be to help future philosophies create new forms of life, new bodies dedicated to altering the political and social landscape.



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