The Testimonial Gesture:

Temporality and Mediation in Representations of John the Baptist

by

Samuel Sackeroff

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2009

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Art History)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

August, 2011

ABSTRACT

In Leonardo da Vinci's *John the Baptist* (1513-1516), the figure of the Baptist is shown from the waist up, his form lit evenly against an opaque black background. Gazing expectantly at the viewer, the Baptist raises his right hand to point toward a referent located just beyond the painting's frame, absent from the compositional space. Unavailable for direct inspection, this referent is accessible only by way of the Baptist's mediating presence. Following his ostensive cue, we move toward the absent referent, investing in his presence as a credible ground for such movement, returning to his figure and finger to assure ourselves that our viewing is not in vain.

In this thesis I will argue that the willingness to invest in the mediating presence of Leonardo's Baptist is paradigmatic of what I will call the "testimonial mode of viewing," a practice which became condensed in the Baptist's extended index finger, a durable structural feature which I call the "testimonial gesture." Providing a three-stage typology of representations of the Baptist, tracing the migration of his figure from the margins of mid to late 14th-century icons into the center of early 16th-century panel paintings, I will suggest that the testimonial mode of viewing emerged as a means of preserving the presence of the iconic referent in the face of what Hans Belting has called the "crisis of the image," a rupture which threatened to displace the referent by relocating it either in the minds of artists or in context-bound periods. Challenging the model of rupture, I will argue that the testimonial mode of viewing constituted a nascent resource to which viewers appealed when confronted by the prospect of rupture in both devotional and secular circumstances in order to preserve the presence of the referent.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For my father, present and absent

Introduction: The Hermeneutic Leap

> That is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.[1]
>
> <div align="right">-John, 1:30-1:33</div>

> It is before someone that the witness testifies to the reality of some scene of which he was part of the audience, perhaps as actor or victim, yet, in the moment of testifying, he is in the position of third-person observer with regard to the protagonists of the action. This dialogical structure immediately makes clear the dimension of trust involved. He does not limit himself to saying "I was there," he adds, "believe me."[2]
>
> <div align="right">-Paul Ricoeur, Memory History, Forgetting</div>

Above all, Leonardo da Vinci's *Saint John the Baptist* (1513-1516) [Fig. 3] asks to be believed. Standing alone against a black background, adorned modestly with an animal-skin cloak and a reed-fashioned cross, the Baptist turns his gaze expectantly toward the viewer and points with his right hand beyond the painting's frame toward its referent, the prophesied Christ. Absent from the composition and unavailable for direct inspection, the painting's referent can be accessed only by way of the mediating presence of the Baptist himself. As we follow his raised arm and outstretched index finger toward the referent, we prepare ourselves for what can only be described as a leap of faith. However, this is not a leap out of the painting but rather a leap into it. For as we move toward the referent beyond the frame, we necessarily confirm our belief in the painting's own credibility as a ground for such movement, validating what one commentator has called the "that-ness" of its status as a referring object.[3] Indeed, the Baptist's left hand, which serves as an ironic double of the right, pointing not beyond the frame but rather toward the Baptist himself, anticipates precisely this validation, acknowledging the painting itself as the ultimate site of referential appeal.

This leap is familiar to historians. As Paul Ricoeur notes in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, it characterizes one of the central aporias of the historiographical operation as such: the ability to render present an absent past through the mediation of testimony. Whether a letter found in a tattered trunk, an artifact recovered in an archaeological dig, or an eyewitness report delivered in

---

[1] Authorized King James Version Bible with Apocrypha, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[2] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 164.

[3] Robert Zwijnenberg, "Presence and Absence: On Leonardo da Vinci's *Saint John the Baptist*" in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art In and Out of History*, ed. Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 126.

person, testimonies encountered in the here and now are the sole means by which the anterior referents of the past are made available for interpretation by historians. Even when skeptical of their details—their accuracy, their authorship, their dating—historians are nevertheless bound by the peculiarities of their discipline to approach these testimonies on a scale of belief as offering more or less "faithful" accounts of the pasts to which they refer—pasts which would otherwise remain lost.[4]

This leap is most familiar, however, to historians of art. As Michael Anne Holly has argued, the play between presence and absence so characteristic of history as a discipline is nowhere more evident than in the sculptures, sketches, paintings and prints that form the basis of art historical practice. "The very materiality of the objects with which we deal presents historians of art with an interpretive paradox absent in other historical inquiries," Holly writes, "for works of art are at the same time lost and found, past and present."[5] Unlike other areas of historical inquiry in which testimonies serve to re-construct pasts from which the testimonies are distinguishable—of nations, trade routes, industries, etc.—the pasts which art historical inquiry re-construct are expected to reside in the testimonies themselves as formal qualities to be encountered by art historians during the interpretive process. It can be said that, at this minimal level, all art historical interpretation implicitly affirms Alois Riegl's claim that "no obsolete worldview, once overcome, vanishes immediately from the face of the earth" but rather "continues to reverberate for centuries in outer form."[6] Like Leonardo's *Baptist*, the objects of study with which historians of art deal point ultimately to themselves as the loci of their historical referents.

With this in mind, I might revise my initial description of Leonardo's *Baptist*, which now seems to be less concerned with the dogmatic leaps of disciples than with the hermeneutic leaps of (art) historians. In the following pages I will suggest that the precision with which Leonardo's *Baptist* addresses the play between presence and absence so characteristic of the aporetics of testimony is due to the painting's position at the end of a sequence of representations of the Baptist in which a distinctly testimonial mode of viewing emerged and was refined. Providing a typology of these representations, following the Baptist's figure as it migrates from the margins of 14th-century devotional icons to the center of 16th-century panel paintings, I will argue that this testimonial mode of viewing emerged as a means of mitigating the transition from what Hans Belting has called the "era of the icon" to the "era of the artwork."

---

[4] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 464
[5] Michael Ann Holly, "Mourning and Method," in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (Dec. 2002), p 661.
[6] Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, trans. Jacqueline E. Jung (New York: Zone Books, 2004), p. 56.

For Belting, the era of the icon was defined by the inherence of the referent in the icon itself. Visited by pilgrims and petitioned by supplicants, the icon was seen as the very locus of the pictured divinity. However, during the 15th century religious, social and technological events brought about the rupture described by Belting as the "crisis of the image." The era of the artwork followed, and with it the proliferation of objects from which the referent was displaced. Belting explains, "The new presence *of* the work succeeds the former presence of the sacred *in* the work. But what could this presence mean? It is the presence of an idea that is made visible in the work: the idea of art, as the artist had it in mind."[7] The crisis of the image heralds for Belting the end of the pre-modern practice of icon viewing, with its insistence on God's divinity manifested as a presence *in* the work, and the beginning of the modern practice of art viewing, with its insistence on the artist's idea recognized in the presence *of* the work. Whereas the iconic referent was an element intrinsic to the icon, materially located in chapels and churches, the artistic referent is an element extrinsic to the artwork, conceptually located in the minds of artists.

Challenging the rupture model on which Belting's analysis is based—a model that has long dominated Italian Renaissance scholarship[8]—I will argue that the testimonial mode of viewing exemplified by Leonardo's *Baptist* intervened to mitigate precisely this rupture. Just as the divide between the era of the icon and the era of the artwork began to open during the 15th century threatening to displace the referent, representations of the Baptist began to proliferate as a genre distinct from the icons on the margins of which they had previously been confined. I will suggest that, as this proliferation continued and the genre became more distinct, the testimonial mode of viewing emerged using the very resources of this threatened displacement to preserve crucial aspects of the practice of icon viewing, ensuring above all the preservation of the referent's intrinsic presence.

In the first chapter I will offer a survey of recent studies of the icon, treating these not only as analyses of the practice of icon viewing but also as indications of broader investments in rupture as a methodological principle in contemporary art history. Having established the conditions in which icon viewing took place and the conventions which icon viewing obeyed, I will identify two opposed but complementary strains in icon scholarship, both of which locate icon viewing on the far side of a rupture similar to Belting's "crisis." The first, which I will call the "modern" strain, celebrates this rupture as the marker of our triumph over superstition. The

[7] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 459.
[8] For a survey of the role rupture has played in discussions of both chronology and genre in recent icon scholarship, see Fredrika Jacobs, "Rethinking the Divide: Cult Images and the Cult of Images" in *Renaissance Theory*, ed. James Elkins and Robert Williams (New York: Routledge, 2008).

second, which I will call the "anti-modern" strain, laments this rupture as the marker of our lost immersion in the world. In contradistinction to these I will situate my own argument within a third "non-modern" strain which rejects the legitimacy of rupture as a methodological principle altogether.[9]

In the second chapter I will turn to representations of the Baptist, which I will consider sequentially as belonging to a three-stage typology. The first stage will include representations from the mid to late 14th century in which the Baptist plays a relatively minor role, confined to the margins of conventional icons. The second stage will include representations from the 15th century in which the Baptist plays a moderate role, moving toward the center of less conventional altarpieces. The third stage will include representations from the early 16th century in which the Baptist plays a major role, occupying the center of panel paintings. With each successive stage, the testimonial mode of viewing becomes more refined as the Baptist's figure proceeds in its migration, condensing its properties into its most durable structural feature, the extended index finger pointed beyond the frame, which I will call the "testimonial gesture."

In the third chapter I will describe certain contemporaneous developments in Italian humanism which I will claim inherited the testimonial mode of viewing, putting it to work as part of more general efforts to negotiate a host of newly complex relationships with an antique past the potency of which relied on its being simultaneously present and absent. I will devote particular attention to Leon Battista Alberti's theorization of the "*historia*" genre in his treatise *On Painting* (1435), specifically his discussion of the genre's central figure, the *ammonitore* or "commentator," the purpose of which, Alberti explains, is to mediate the viewing of the genre's antique scenes by "telling the spectators what is going on" and "beckoning them with his hand to look."[10] I will offer Alberti's *ammonitore* as evidence of not only the successful migration of the Baptist's testimonial gesture from the devotional realm of the icon to the secular realm of the *historia*, but also, as I will argue in a brief epilogue, of the persistence of testimonial viewing as the practice most important to the humanities today.

Before beginning, two caveats are in order. First: due to the pervasiveness of the rupture model as both an implicit and explicit foundation for historical thinking in the academy, the following pages may cause concern for some readers who might judge the argument as lacking elements of conventional scholarship, foregoing particular considerations of contexts in favor of general considerations of structures. While these concerns are certainly valid, I will suggest that

---

[9] I borrow the terms "modern," "anti-modern," and "non-modern" from Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[10] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 77.

their validity is attributable to the temporal and political assumptions of the rupture model itself. As such, I ask the reader's patience and urge him or her to regard these omissions as intentional, motivated by the interventionist nature of the argument. As the following pages will demonstrate, the testimonial mode of viewing requires that we adopt a posture of receptive credulity in order for the structures of works of art to transcend the strictures of fractured time, enabling them to serve as material witnesses encountered in the present of historical events lost to the past, a posture which I too will ask that readers occasionally adopt. Second: in an effort to reflect this posture of receptive credulity, I have left the relationships between chapters and subsections somewhat loose. While these conform to a single argument, the reader will at times notice a degree of disjuncture, being asked to move briskly from contemporary theory to formal analysis to biblical exegesis. Since works of art often occasion this pace when they are encountered, I trust the reader will consider it appropriate that this pace should be maintained when they are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE: REFERENTIAL PRESENCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

1-1: The Presence of the Iconic Referent

More than any other class of devotional image in the West, the icon insisted on the inseparability of the divinity to which it referred and its own status as a material object. Perceived as "matter imbued with *charis*, or divine grace" icons functioned within what Bissera V. Pentcheva has described as complex synaesthetic networks, their gold and silver adornments reflecting the light of candles and their lacquered surfaces reverberating the sounds of worship, rendering their divine referent sensibly present to the viewers whose spaces they shared.[11] These synaesthetic networks in turn belonged within larger, liturgical networks, which in turn reinforced the icon's claim to referential presence. The more powerfully icons were able to make their divine referents present to viewers, the more valuable they became within medieval and early modern economies of salvation.[12] Monasteries, churches and chapels depended on the ability of icons to draw pilgrims from surrounding areas both in order to further doctrinal initiatives, providing a larger and more mobile audience to whom they could preach, and to bring in revenue, providing an annual influx of new and often affluent customers to whom they could sell mementos, accessories and indulgences. All of this required that the icon and its referent remain physically present as material objects available to both supplicants and proprietors.[13]

The devout explained the presence of the iconic referent by deferring to a number of origin-myths, all of which strove to establish a direct relationship between the icon as object and

---

[11] Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Dec., 2006), p. 631. Although Pentcheva's discussion concerns Byzantine icons specifically, the synaesthetic aspect of icon viewing on which iconic presence depended was associated with icons more broadly. As Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood have argued, the synaesthetic emphasis on both the physical fragility of Byzantine icons and the precious materials out of which they were fashioned were, along with other aspects of Byzantine icon viewing, imported into the West during the late 14th century as a part of broader attempts to compensate for emergent event-based models of image production and reception. See Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 71-72.

[12] Richard C. Trexler notes the proportional growth of the "miraculous" power of icons and their value as objects of ownership to local churches in "Being and Non-Being: Parameters of the Miraculous in the Traditional Religious Image" in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf (Rome: The Biblioca Hertziana and the Accademia di Danimarca, 2004), p. 16.

[13] On the role of icons in the medieval and early modern economies of salvation, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 99-135. As Joseph Leo Koerner argues in *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004) and "The Icon and Iconoclash" in *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), Reformation reactions to the icon's implication in these economies also fortified the physical presence of the iconic referent by visiting their retaliations on the icons themselves. On the influence of Eucharistic doctrines of "real presence" on devotional image viewing, see Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), particularly chapter five, section two, "*Latria* or *Idolatria*: Christian Theories of Sacred Figuration," p. 203-220.

the pictured divinity. The most potent of these involved moments of indexical transfer, exemplified by 7th-century Byzantine accounts of the *Mandylion* of Syria and 13th-century European accounts of the Veronica or *vera icona* of Rome. A cloth image from the Syrian town of Edessa, the *Mandylion* was one of the earliest "true images" of Christ.[14] Petitioned by the missionary Thaddaeus on behalf of the Syrian king Agbar, who had fallen ill and sought divine aid, Christ is said to have consented to have his portrait painted by the missionary since he was unable to travel to Syria himself. After unsuccessful attempts to portray his image, Christ picked up a nearby piece of fabric to wash his face, impressing his features directly on the cloth. The cloth, accompanied by a letter written by Christ authenticating the portrait and expressing his regret at not being able to attend to the king personally, were then taken by Thaddaeus to the Syrian king. As the portrait entered the city it shattered heathen idols in its wake, toppling them from their columns and leaving its own impression on the tiles below, and when it was presented to Agbar, the King was miraculously healed.[15] Many elements of the early accounts of the *Mandylion* were absorbed by later accounts of the Veronica. Also a cloth image, it was said to have been the headdress of a woman from Jerusalem which Christ used to wipe his sweat-soaked and bloodied face while processing toward the Cavalry, leaving the imprint of his features behind as stains on the fabric.[16] Like the *Mandylion*, the Veronica was sought by an ill-stricken monarch, in this case the Roman emperor Tiberius, who, when presented with the icon, was, like the Syrian king, miraculously healed.[17]

Both the *Mandylion* and Veronica myths rely on moments of indexical transfer in which the icon comes into direct material contact with Christ to secure the icon's status as a "true image" endowed with miraculous properties. As Louis Marin notes, these portraits did not operate as mimetic approximations of Christ, but rather as legitimate instances of his presence:

> [W]hat the story of the Icon of Edessa and that of the Veronica announce…is the end of the mimetic image in two senses of the term: imitation is here perfectly accomplished in an absolute representation since it presents its object miraculously and without mediation. But the sending of the portrait, instead of Jesus himself, puts an end to all mimesis and the desire which it involves of

---

[14] For a survey of the theological and philosophical development and application of the concept of the "true image," see Mosche Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 63-86. As Barasch explains, early theological discussion of the possibility the "true portrait" begins with the abstract theory of allegorical resemblance put forward by Philo of Alexandria and concludes with Proclus' concrete theory of material likeness, precursor of the principle of indexical transfer found in the *Mandylion* and Veronica myths.
[15] Belting, p. 209-215.
[16] Freedberg, 207.
[17] Belting, p. 220.

recognizing the image by the name, of identifying by homonymy the visual with the verbal.[18]

As Marin explains, the *Mandylion* and the Veronica admit no distance between their own object status and Christ, the index of whose features they bear. It is in this sense that they served not as mimetic representations, signifying the likeness of Christ who would per force remain semiotically absent, but as absolute re-presentations, manifesting the being of Christ who, through indexical transfer, they rendered materially present.

Another, albeit less potent group of origin-myths to which the devout deferred when explaining the presence of the iconic referent featured the apostle Luke.[19] Unlike the myths of the *Mandylion* and Veronica, these relied not the moment of indexical transfer but on the assurance of divine authorship. Also emerging during the 7th-century in the Byzantine East, this group recounted scenes in which the Virgin, often holding the Christ Child in her left hand and pointing to him with her right, appeared to the apostle whom she exhorted to paint her portrait, which he composed in the now conventional half-length form of the *Hodegetria* (Latin for "Indicator of the Way").[20] The half-length form in fact developed from earlier *en buste* imperial portraits associated with ruler cults, which so effectively captured their sitters that tributes were routinely paid to the portraits themselves rather than to the emperors they depicted.[21] Like these earlier imperial portraits, the half-length devotional icons were able to render their referent materially present. However, in their case this ability was attributed to the divine authorship of the apostle, whose brush was often described as being angelically guided, allowing to him to produce a miraculous image of his sitters fit for veneration.

In addition to affirming the referent's material presence, these myths also affirmed the referent's temporal presence. The icons resulting from the moment of indexical transfer recounted in the myths of the *Mandylion* and Veronica and the divine authorship recounted in the myth of the *Hodegetria* were described in Greek as *a-cheiro-poiēton*, or "not made by hands" and in Latin as *non manufactum,* or "not hand-made."[22] Both terms served what must ultimately be considered a temporal function, providing a means of suppressing the problematic instant of willed

---

[18] Louis Marin, "The Figurability of the Visual: The Veronica or the Question of the Portrait at Port-Royal," trans. Marie Maclean in *New Literary History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Probings: Art, Criticism, Genre (Spring, 1991), p. 289.

[19] For discussion of St. Luke and the *Hodegetria* half-length mode, see Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (December, 1975), p. 487-518.

[20] David and Tamara Talbot Rice, *Icons and Their History* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1974), p. 4.

[21] For a discussion of the relationship between the half-length icon and imperial portraits, see Belting, p. 102-109, and Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco, 1984), p. 40-41.

[22] Belting, p. 49.

manufacture. For icons to fulfill their devotional obligation, they had to foster an unbroken temporal continuity between the divinity to which the referred and the devout by which they were viewed—a continuity that would be shattered were they seen as the subjective or arbitrary products of autonomous individuals occupying one instant among many. Indeed, each myth-group suppressed particular aspects of willed manufacture. In the *Mandylion* and Veronica myths, its instant-oriented aspects were suppressed through the self-effacing character of the moment of indexical transfer, the instantaneous properties of which were nullified by the subsequent equivalence of Christ and cloth. In the *Hodegetria* myths, its subject-oriented aspects were suppressed through the self-effacing character of the apostle's authorship, the autonomy of which was nullified by the divine appearance of the Virgin and Child, their exhortation to be painted, and the accounts of angelic assistance.[23]

The ability of these myths to suppress particular aspects of willed manufacture, specifically the discontinuity of instants to which these aspects threatened to give rise, allowed the iconic referent to be not only materially present in the viewer's space, but also temporally present in the viewer's time. By being affiliated with either myth-group, whether claiming to actually be the *Mandylion,* Veronica, or *Hodegetria* themselves, or more modestly posing as an accurate replication of one of these prototypes, icons were able to suspend questions of manufacture and with them the threat of time's fracturing, allowing the fabric of history to fold onto itself with the icons threading together the centuries, bringing their divine referents with them into both the material and temporal presence of the viewer.[24]

Although regularly qualified and occasionally refined, there has been little essential variation among accounts of the referential conventions icons obeyed. The presence of the iconic referent has long been accepted in art historical scholarship, with both its historical and theoretical currency remaining remarkably consistent. Considerable variation can, however, be found in the roles icons have played in this literature. This variation derives for the most part from the different ways in which icons and the referential presence they facilitate(d) have been located chronologically vis-à-vis the historians engaged in their analysis, and is comprised of three strains: the modern, the anti-modern, and the non-modern. As I will demonstrate in the remaining sections of this chapter, the chronological location of the icon by each strain serves a broader purpose, allowing art historians belonging to those strains a means of articulating their

---

[23] Victor Ieronim Stoichita notes the paradoxical status of authorship in myths of the *Hodegetria*, which became increasingly apparent as notions of individual authorship preoccupied artists and viewers to ever-greater degrees during the 15th and 16th centuries in his *A Short History of the Shadow*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), p. 89-91.

[24] I discuss the nuances of the temporal presence of the iconic referent and the temporal complexities of the relationship between prototype and replication more thoroughly in section 4 of this chapter.

commitment to the temporal frameworks that define the methodologies they employ. These strains and the temporal frameworks to which they are committed can be best described by addressing the degree to which each invests in rupture as a methodological principle.

1-2: The Modern Strain

The earliest and most influential strain in icon scholarship is the modern strain. Before turning to case studies paradigmatic of this strain, I must first describe its basic properties. The most important among these is a commitment to the *saeculum* (Latin for "aeon" or "age"), the two constituents of which are the secular temporal order and the secular political order. As Charles Taylor explains, the secular temporal order is made up of a succession of discrete temporal units, whether they be seconds, minutes, eras or epochs, which follow one another horizontally, extending infinitely in a linear fashion. To exist exclusively in secular time is to admit no violation of this linearity. Although the units can be distinguished quantitatively they cannot be distinguished qualitatively, since all fall within a span that is itself infinite, lacking both a beginning (origin) and end (telos) capable of grounding qualitative relationships between any of the particular units, which Walter Benjamin called "empty homogenous time."[25] As Taylor explains, if taken to its limit, all discussions of historical events taking place within the secular temporal order will be restricted to quantitative statements regarding the transitive positions those events occupy along the order's horizontal line, observing that "if A is before B and B before C, then A is before C," or "if A is long before B, and B is long before C, then A is very long before C."[26] Most often, however, the secular temporal order is manifested more mildly in the succession of hours that make up what Taylor calls the "ordinary" or "clock" time in which much of our day-to-day lives take place.

The secular temporal order supports and is supported by the secular political order. Indeed, it is on the succession of discrete temporal units that the model of revolutionary action peculiar to the secular political order relies. This model of action requires an autonomous subject or group of subjects who regard their temporal position as utterly dissimilar to both that by which they are immediately preceded, from the influence of which they hope to extricate themselves, and that by which they will be immediately followed, the arrival of which they hope to bring about. Furthermore, it is on behalf of the interests that preoccupy us in the "ordinary" or "clock" time of our day-to-day lives that this revolutionary action is pursued. As Hannah Arendt has

---

[25] Water Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 263; cited by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), p. 54.
[26] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 54.

argued in her discussions of Karl Marx, whose writing on icons will serve as my second case study, the majority of revolutionary action is in fact concerned not with securing access to the material resources necessary for our liberation from the metabolic cycles of production and consumption so characteristic of day-to-day labor, but rather with using these resources to assure the most uninhibited conditions in which these cycles can be perpetuated, a contradiction which Arendt registers by describing Marx's revolutionary subject as "*animal laborans*."[27] However, as Arendt notes, this contradiction is not attributable to any particular failing in Marx's thinking, but rather to the temporal framework on which his thinking relies.

It is to these two constituents of the *saeculum*—that is, the secular temporal order and the secular political order—that scholarship belonging to the modern strain remains ultimately committed. Indeed, the very designation "modern" presupposes these constituents. In addition to presuming a discrete "pre-modern" temporal position in contradistinction to which it defines itself, it also describes the breaks between these temporal positions in revolutionary terms, with the moderns standing victorious over their conquered predecessors. As Bruno Latour observes:

> When the word 'modern,' 'modernization,' or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where there are winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns. 'Modern' is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished. [28]

Given the icon's ability to suspend time's fracturing and relevance of autonomous individuals by suppressing the instant- and subject-oriented aspects of willed manufacture, it is unsurprising that scholars belonging to the modern strain should seek to distance themselves from icons and icon veneration. In each of the three case studies I offer as paradigmatic of this strain—Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), Karl Marx's *Capital, Vol. 1* (1867) and Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981)—this distance is achieved by resorting to one of the strain's primary conceits—that of rupture.

Rupture is asserted most forcefully in Burckhardt's text, dividing the pre-modern Middle Ages from the modern Renaissance. On far side of this rupture lies pre-modern subjectivity:

---

[27] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 104-105. Arendt continues, "Marx's attitude toward labor, and that is toward the very center of his thought, has never ceased to be equivocal. While it was an 'eternal necessity imposed by nature' and the most human and productive of man's activities, the revolution, according to Marx, has not the task of emancipating the laboring classes but of emancipating man from labor; only when labor is abolished can the 'realm of freedom' supplant the 'realm of necessity.' For 'the realm of freedom begins only where labor determined through want and external utility ceases,' where 'the rule of immediate physical needs' ends. Such a fundamental and flagrant contradiction rarely occurs in second-rate writers; in the work of the great authors they lead into the very center of their work."

[28] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 10.

immature, un-individuated, and absorbed in the superstitious religious practice of icon viewing. On its near side lies modern subjectivity; mature, individuated, and concerned with the rational secular practice of art viewing. It is this rupture, to which Burckhardt refers as "the discovery of the world and of man,"[29] that marks both the arrival and triumph of modernity as such:

> In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness—that which was turned within as that which was turned without—lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish presuppositions, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation—only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air: an *objective* treatment and consideration of the state and of all things of this world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual *individual* and recognized himself as such [Burckhardt's emphasis].[30]

Remarkable in this passage is the clarity with which Burckhardt demonstrates the role rupture itself plays as the guarantor of modernity. It is by epistemologically breaking with the pre-modern era and tearing off the "common veil woven of faith, illusion and childish presuppositions" that modern man establishes himself as an individual subject capable of objective scrutiny.[31]

One of the primary purposes of historical scholarship in the modern strain is the reassertion of this rupture and of the modern subjectivity it bestows on themselves and their readers. This is evident in Burckhardt's description of the modern world as "this" world—that is, that to which he and his readers also belong. A more resounding example is found in Burckhardt's introduction to his chapter on Renaissance morality and religion, in which he insists on maintaining distance between himself as a historian and his objects of study. "What follows," Burckhardt writes, "is no judgment, but rather a string of marginal notes, suggested by a study of the Italian Renaissance extending over some years."[32] It is this insistence on distance and deferral of judgment that causes Hayden White to regard Burckhardt's scholastic position as essentially

---

[29] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 185-229.

[30] Ibid, p. 271.

[31] The continued centrality of Burckhardt's text as a paradigmatic example of the rupture model in art history generally and in Italian Renaissance art history particularly was recently noted by Ethan Matt Kavaler during a seminar which included as participants Stephen Campbell, Michael Cole, James Elkins, Claire Farago, Fredrika Jacobs and Robert Williams, the proceedings of which have been published in *Renaissance Theory*, ed. James Elkins and Robert Williams (New York: Routledge, 2008). Kavaler observes: "Although there is a strain in northern Renaissance studies that emphasizes ties with the Middle Ages, another one of those problematic periods, most of us who study the Renaissance have an idea of Italy as central…Italian culture is usually considered to have initiated many of the traditions of the modern world, and that is one of the reasons why the substitution of 'early Modern' for 'Renaissance' doesn't really revise the situation; 'early Modern' denotes even more forcefully the earliest stages of modernity. This alternate expression continues the tradition of Burckhardt, with Renaissance Italy as the birthplace of the modern world. That's really a heritage that we have not successfully come to terms with" (199).

[32]Ibid, p. 271.

ironic. "He *apprehended* the world of historical objects as a literal 'satura,' stew or medley, fragments of objects detached from their original contexts or whose contexts are unknowable," White writes, "capable of being put together in a number of ways, of figuring a host of different possible and equally valid meanings." White continues:

> The *story* he told was Ironic, with its aphoristic style, anecdotes, witticisms, and throwaway… The *plot* structure of this story was Ironic; that is to say, 'the point of it all' was that there is no 'point' toward which things in general tend, no epiphanies of law, no ultimate reconciliations, no transcendence.[33]

By maintaining an ironic distance between himself and the historical fragments he arbitrarily configures and re-configures, Burckhardt epitomizes the modern strain's resort to rupture— between the pre-modern and the modern, the subject and object, the historian and his objects of study—as a conceit capable of achieving the more particular distance between scholars belonging to the modern strain and those aspects of icon viewing most threatening to the temporal and political constituents of the *saeculum* to which they are committed.

While Burckhardt includes icon viewing within his more general account of pre-modern practices, Marx accords icons more dedicated attention. Like Burckhardt, he describes a rupture between pre-modernity and modernity. However, unlike Burckhardt, he is concerned less with establishing this rupture than with critiquing those elements of modernity that jeopardize the secular temporal order to which the methodological principle of rupture belongs. Most glaring among these is modernity's own species of icon—or, to adopt Marx's own vocabulary, of idol— the commodity fetish. The commodity fetish is objectionable not simply because it provokes false consciousness, but because it does so by reversing the transitive relationship between labor-value and exchange-value, frustrating the linearity of the secular temporal order. Although labor-value precedes exchange-value in time, a product of the effort expended in the manufacture of objects themselves, the commodity fetish privileges exchange-value, a product of the social circumstances of markets in which those objects are traded. By privileging exchange value, the commodity fetish frustrates the linearity of the secular temporal order, imperiling the modern subjectivity that it bestows. It is the ability of the commodity fetish to frustrate the secular temporal order and imperil modern subjectivity that causes Marx to liken it to a pre-modern icon-idol:

> The form of wood for instance is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless it continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it

---

[33] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 250-251.

> stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more
> wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.[34]

Most significant in this passage is Marx's attitude toward the agency of the commodity fetish. At the moment when the manufactured object (table) becomes a commodity (icon-idol), it is endowed with the ability to "evolve out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas," assuming for itself the role of active agent in the world. From a Marxist perspective this is objectionable precisely because it allows the commodity fetish to usurp its producer temporally, claiming its traffic in markets as the source not only of economic worth, but of action as such.

It is in this sense that the Marxist historian can be deemed an iconoclast. By critiquing processes of commodity exchange, he or she seeks to restrict the agency of the idolized commodity-fetish by re-establishing the temporal precedence of labor-value. As W. J. T. Mitchell explains, from the Marxist perspective "the idolater has 'forgotten' something—his own act of projection—and thus he must be cured by memory and historical consciousness." Mitchell continues, "the iconoclast sees himself at a historical distance from the idolater, working from a more 'advanced' or 'developed' stage in human evolution, therefore in a position to provide a euhemeristic, historicizing interpretation of myths taken literally by the idolater."[35] As this description implies, in the final analysis it is the linear succession of discrete temporal units and the modern subjectivity this linear succession allows that Marxist iconoclastic critiques strive to uphold. By reminding the idolater of the precedence of labor-value the Marxist iconoclast-critic, like Burckhardt and all other scholars belonging to the modern strain, reasserts the ruptures on which the secular temporal order that grounds his or her modern subjectivity relies.

A more recent example of the modern strain is found in the work of Jean Baudrillard. Like Marx, Baudrillard is more concerned with the upholding rather than establishing the secular temporal order that the icon frustrates. Indeed, the first chapter of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* can be read as a post-revolutionary reprisal of Marx's discussion of the commodity fetish. For Baudrillard, the icon upsets the linearity of the secular temporal order by occasioning what he describes as the "*precession of the simulacra.*"[36] The precession of the simulacra occurs when there ceases to be any qualitative difference between prototype and replication, sign and signified, reality and its simulation. By insisting on the inseparability of the divinity to which it refers and its own status as a material object, the icon threatens these relationships, confusing the latter with the former in each pair, begging the question:

---

[34] Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 163-164.

[35] W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Rhetoric of Iconoclasm: Marxism, Ideology, and Fetishism" in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 176.

[36] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 1.

> [W]hat becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra? Does it remain the supreme power that is simply incarnated in images as a visible theology? Or does it volatize itself in the simulacra that, alone, deploy their power and pomp of fascination—the visible machinery of icons substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God?[37]

As in Marx's description of the commodity fetish, it is the icon's ability to frustrate the linearity of the secular temporal order—that is, its ability to occasion the phenomenon of "precession" as such—to which Baudrillard takes objection. However, unlike Marx, Baudrillard suggests that, even if it were upheld, the secular temporal order would no longer pay the political dividends it once had. Although the "order of history, science, and museums, our order" still persists, "it no longer masters anything."[38] Once the transitive relationships between prototype and replication, sign and signified, reality and its simulation have been confused they cannot be re-instated. Indeed, it is one of the more stubborn cruelties of the *saeculum* that there can be no going back. Although the secular temporal order remains binding in Baudrillard's work, its frustration still registered as an affront, it has lost the ability to assure the benefits of modern subjectivity that it had once bestowed. Stripped of his or her capacity for autonomous action and consigned to the end of history, Baudrillard's iconoclast-critic is without political will, a passive witness to the onset of an apocalyptic "hell of simulation."[39] For these reasons, Baudrillard marks the post-revolutionary limit of the modern strain.[40]

1-3: The Anti-Modern Strain

The anti-modern strain acknowledges the limits of the modern strain and struggles to provide a rejoinder. Aware that the secular temporal order no longer pays the political dividends it once had, unable as it is to underwrite the autonomous action of modern subjects, scholars belonging to the anti-modern strain look to icons and the referential presence they facilitate(d) for an alternative. As the two case studies I will offer as paradigmatic of this strain—David Freedberg's *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (1989) and Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (1990)—demonstrate, the anti-modern accounts of the icon are nostalgic in character. Stricken by a sense of lost immersion in the world, their authors look to the pre-modern practice of icon viewing for

---

[37] Ibid, p. 4.
[38] Ibid, p. 10.
[39] Ibid, p. 18.
[40] While Baudrillard marks the post-revolutionary limit of the modern strain, by no means does he mark its end. Additional examples include Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

an immediacy of experience from which they have become alienated and to which they hope to return.

However, while it may claim to be opposed to the modern strain, the anti-modern strain in fact serves as the modern strain's complement. As Bruno Latour has observed, although anti-modernism objects to many aspects of the modern strain, it nevertheless retrains the secular temporal order on which the whole of that strain relies. This is evident in both the revolutionary oppositionalism of the prefix "anti" and the stringent historicism of its fashionable euphemism, "post." In his description of anti-modernism, Latour describes the degree to which the secular temporal order is (paradoxically) retained:

> Disappointed rationalists, its adepts indeed sense that modernism is done for, but they continue to accept its way of dividing up time; thus they can divide up eras only in terms of successive revolutions. They feel that they come 'after' the moderns, but with the disagreeable sentiment that there is no more 'after'. 'No future': this is the slogan added to the moderns' motto 'No past.' What remains? Disconnected instants and groundless denunciations, since the post-moderns no longer believe in the reasons that would allow them to denounce and to become indignant.[41]

It is in the anti-modern strain's nostalgia for the pre-modern practice of icon viewing that the secular temporal order so crucial to the modern strain is clung to most strongly. By looking back to pre-modernity as an alternative to modern alienation, scholars belonging to the anti-modern strain reassert the very ruptures at the heart of the modern strain which they had hoped to refute. As Latour explains, for all their attempts to counter the modern strain, "the anti-moderns even accept the chief oddity of the moderns, the idea of a time that passes irreversibly and annuls the entire past in its wake."[42]

In his study, Freedberg offers a profound and elegant defense of the referential presence that pre-modern icons facilitate(d), which he accesses through the interpretive framework of "response." For Freedberg, response is a heuristic resource routinely overlooked by modern art historians given its tendency to accept referential presence. Concentrated in our pre-critical behavior, response is credulous toward images, willing to submit to their referential claims. Introducing his study, Freedberg notifies us that "we shall spend some time on responses predicated on the perception that what is represented on an image is actually present, or present in it," before continuing:

> But perhaps with such responses, it is not that the bodies are present; it is *as though* they were present. When we think, as Photinus did, that the Virgin is in

---

[41] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p.46.

[42] Ibid, p. 47. Latour later emphasizes the modernity of the anti-modern's nostalgia, declaring, "the idea of an identical repetition of the past and that of a radical rupture with any past are two symmetrical results of a single conception of time" (76).

> the image…are we only thinking metaphorically? Or metonymically? If that were the case, then the kinds of responses outlined in this book provide proof of the constructive power of metaphorical and metonymic thought, and of the way in which all perception elides representation with reality…[43]

Telling in this passage is Freedberg's movement from the actual presence of the referent (the perception that what is represented on an image is actually present, or present in it) to the ostensible presence of the referent (*as though* what is represented is present on or in the image) and finally to a self-conscious post-critical willingness to invest in the ostensible presence of the referent (the elision of representation with reality). It is this post-critical willingness to elide representation with reality, to accept the ostensible presence of the referent in the image itself, which Freedberg offers as a rejoinder to the hell of simulation that marks the limit of the modern strain.

As compelling as Freedberg's rejoinder may be, its nascent affinity with the secular temporal order of the modern strain is belied by the nostalgia with which he regards referential presence. While the majority of his discussion of response suggests a continuity that would defy rupture, his conclusion locates the referential presence icons facilitate(d) on the far side of the now familiar epochal schism. Art history's neglect of the heuristic value of response is registered as a product of its modernity, to be remedied by renouncing the discipline as such and reverting to pre-modernity:

> Much of our sophisticated talk about art is simply an evasion. We take refuge in such talk when, say, we discourse about formal qualities, or when we rigorously historicize the work, because we are afraid to come to terms with our responses—or, at the very least, with a significant part of them. We have lost touch with them, so we repress them and do not study the kinds of material I have presented—or, if we do, we fail to draw out their full implications.[44]

If any doubt remains that the "sophistication" of which Freedberg speaks is that of a distinctly "modern" art history, this is dispelled by the prescriptive declaration that "we have, in a sense, to try to lose our education (at the same time acknowledging that we never can) and become 'primitive'."[45] By hoping to refute the modern strain with an attempted return to a credulous pre-modernity, Freedberg reasserts the ruptures of the secular temporal order on which the modern strain relies. Instead of a theory of response premised on pan-epochal continuity, we are given a nostalgic account of prelapsarian viewing.

Perhaps it is to be expected that nostalgia for the pre-modern practice of icon viewing should be felt most acutely in the work of the anti-modern strain's most diligent historian of the

---

[43] Freedberg, p. 30.
[44] Ibid, p. 429-430.
[45] Ibid, p. 430.

icon's referential presence. In his study, Belting contrasts the sacred presence of the iconic image with the semiotic absence of Reformation theology. Whereas the iconic images of the Middle Ages manifested the divine in their very materiality, ensuring their referent's presence, the sermons of the Reformation maintained a separation between the word being preached and the divinity being venerated, ensuring their referent's absence. For Belting, the absence of the referent ushered in by the Reformation's endorsement of Word over Image (and, for Belting, perpetuated by contemporary art history) marks not only the rupture between the era of the icon and the era of the artwork described above, but also the modern subject's lost immersion in the world:

> The eye no longer discovers evidence for the presence of God in images or in the physical world; God reveals himself only through his word…The word does not depict or show anything but is a sign of the covenant. God's distance prohibits his presence in a painted representation, sensually comprehended. The modern subject, estranged from the world, sees the world as severed into the purely factual and the hidden signification of metaphor But the old image rejected reduction into metaphor; rather, it laid claim to being evidence of God's presence revealed to the eyes and the senses.[46]

It is the modern subject's lost immersion in the world—his or her "estrangement" from pre-modern referential presence—that causes the rupture between the era of the icon and the era of the artwork to be registered by Belting as a "crisis," and it is this crisis that motivates Belting's scholastic interest in the "old image" of the era "before" art.

While Freedberg lapses into the nostalgia of the anti-modern strain, Belting premises the whole of his account on its backward gaze. His history of the icon is commemorative, delivered as a eulogy to a group of readers who, it is expected, will share sympathetically in the mourning of a bygone age. The eulogistic sentiment is most palpable in the study's conclusion, in which Belting writes:

> It is here that the history described in this book comes to an end… As we look back, the image, with which this book has dealt, stands out more distinctly. With the new distance, our perception of the old situation has sharpened. The sources that inform us of the theory and practice of images are themselves witnesses to a new state of things. The meaning of *art* now had to be explained, since there were (apart from the texts of antiquity) no justifications, nor could there be… It now is no longer enough to tell the stories of images, as was done in this book as well. Images find their place in the temple of art and their true time in the history of art. A picture is no longer to be understood in terms of its theme, but as a contribution to the development of art.[47]

---

[46] Belting, p. 15.
[47] Ibid, 459.

In the articulate and forlorn rhetoric of nostalgia, the study is described as a temporary reprieve from the oppressions of the day to which the reader is forced to return having arrived at its last pages. We "look back" on the era before art from this side of the rupture-crisis, our modernity confirmed less by our ideas of art than by the temporal frameworks to which art belongs, the "true time" of the secular temporal order onto which art's development is transitively mapped. Like Freedberg, Belting begins his study by struggling to provide a rejoinder to the modern strain's apocalyptic endgame and succeeds only in affirming a "new distance," inadvertently reasserting the methodological principle of rupture on which the modern strain relies.[48] Instead of Baudrillard's hell of simulation we have a purgatory of nostalgia.

1-4: The Non-Modern Strain

A successful rejoinder to the modern strain has come only recently, put forward by scholars who reject the methodological legitimacy of rupture altogether. Before turning to case studies paradigmatic of this strain, I must first describe its basic properties. The most important among these is a commitment to the *kairos* (Greek for "now"), the two constituents of which are the kairotic temporal order and the kairotic political order. As Charles Taylor explains, unlike the secular temporal order which is made up of a succession of discrete temporal units which follow each other horizontally, extending infinitely in a linear fashion, the kairotic temporal order is made up of a "lower" secular time over which stand multiple "higher" kairotic times, whether they be anniversaries, commemorations, festivals or prophecies, which encroach on the lower time vertically causing it to contract in a non-linear fashion.[49] Although lower and higher times can be distinguished quantitatively, their transitive positions mapped like any other, their significance lies in their being distinguished qualitatively, with higher times intervening in the flow of lower time from above, breaching secular ruptures through what Benjamin called "divine

---

[48] It is important to note that Belting challenges the methodological principle of rupture in his earlier work, *The End of the History of Art?*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), where he states "we must abandon the notion of a single, unidirectional process" (94), only to reaffirm its legitimacy in his later works, *Likeness and Presence* and *The Invisible Masterpiece*, trans. Helen Atkins (London: Reaktion Books, 2001). However, this seeming inconsistency is itself indicative of the contradictory relationship between the anti-modern and modern strains.

[49] Taylor, p. 54. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on The Letter to the* Romans, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Agamben describes the Pauline distinction between *chronos*, the secular time that spans from the creation to the messianic event, and *kairos*, the contracted "time of the now" of the messianic event itself, which he associates explicitly with Benjamin's notion of "*Jetztzeit*" or "now time" (p. 142-143).

violence," allowing particular pasts and futures to bear immanently on our present.[50] As Taylor explains, discussions of historical events taking place in kairotic time will extend to qualitative statements regarding the bearing those events have on the present of the historian, "de-homogenizing" time by "gathering" around the historian those pasts and futures which meaningfully organize his or her experience.[51]

The kairotic temporal order supports and is supported by the kairotic political order. It is on the encroachment of higher times on lower time that the messianic model of action peculiar to the kairotic political order relies. This model of action requires a non-autonomous subject or group of subjects who regard their temporal position as fundamentally encroached upon by those by which they are preceded, whose practices remain nascent sources of meaning in their world(s), and those by which they will be followed, whose immanent coming they resolutely anticipate. An inversion of revolutionary action, messianic action involves a radical receptivity toward these higher times during the kairotic moments of their encroachment. As Benjamin explains, one of the richest sites of this receptivity to kairotic encroachment is the image. "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" writes Benjamin, "…for every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."[52] Most significant in this passage is the kairotic relationship between past and present. The past that "flashes up" and is "seized" belongs not to the secular temporal order, located on the far side of rupture, but rather to the kairotic temporal order, encroaching on what Benjamin elsewhere calls the "now-time" [*Jetztzeit*] of the receptive present which "recognizes" it as "one of its own concerns."[53] Indeed, it is the secular temporal order itself that is interrupted by this seizure, without which the image of the past would succumb to its succession of temporal units, "disappearing irretrievably." For Benjamin, it is the ability of the image of the past to interrupt the secular temporal order that gives it its radical potential. The image of the past provides a higher kairotic time that can intervene in lower secular

---

[50] Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," trans. Edmund Jephcott in *Selected Writings*, *Vol. 1 (1913-1926)*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael E. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003). In Benjamin's essay, divine violence is contrasted with mythic violence, which Eric L. Santner in *Creaturely Life: Rilke; Benjamin; Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) describes as "the repetition compulsions of political power, of the rise and fall of empires, states, rules and ideologies, the homogeneous time of an endless chain of succession in which one sovereign power-structure finds its momentary place in the sun of world history" (p. 65).

[51] Taylor, p. 714.

[52] Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Edmund Jephcott in *Selected Writings Vol. 4 (1938-1940)* (ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael E. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 390-391.

[53] Walter Benjamin, "Allegory and Trauerspiel," *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, (London: Verso, 2009), p. 183.

time, providing those who remain receptive to its encroachment on their present a means of "wrest[ing] tradition away from conformism"[54] and an alternative array of models and practices with which they might organize their experience.

It is to these two constituents of the *kairos*—that is, the kairotic temporal order and the kairotic political order—that scholarship belonging to the non-modern strain remains ultimately committed. Like scholars belonging to the anti-modern strain, scholars belonging to the non-modern strain seek to oppose the modern strain. However, unlike the anti-moderns, the non-moderns do so successfully, not by claiming to come "after" or returning to an era "before" modernity, but by rejecting the methodological principle of rupture on which such periodizing depends.[55] Since the non-moderns can come neither after nor before the moderns, lest they reassert modernity's ruptures, they must claim a continuity that binds us to our pasts and futures which has endured unbroken through modernity. For Latour, this is the continuity of "mediation" residing in the chains of mediating agents (objects, people, texts) which hold together the fabric of our world(s), admitting transmission and translation across space and time. It is by attending to these chains of mediating agents and remaining receptive to the kairotic breaches of secular time which they provide that we can transcend the apocalyptic endgame of the modern strain and begin to grasp the not-quite-forgotten truth that we have never been modern. "If we simply restore this mediating role to all agents," Latour writes, "exactly the same world composed of exactly the same entities cease being modern and become what it has never ceased to be—that is, non-modern."[56] In each of the case studies I offer as paradigmatic of the non-modern strain—Georges Didi-Huberman's "Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism" (2003), Latour's own "What is Iconoclash? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars" (2002) and Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood's *Anachronic Renaissance* (2010)—the mediating role of agents is restored by approaching images as messianic sites of kairotic encroachment.

Of the three case studies paradigmatic of the non-modern strain, Didi-Huberman describes the kairotic encroachment occasioned by images most forcefully. Discussing a small fresco by Fra Angelico in the Florentine convent of San Marco, Didi-Huberman berates the art historians of the modern and anti-modern strains for confining the image to its 15th-century context. Given its anomalous form, a collection of abstract speckles and drips, the fresco had been

---

[54] Ibid, p. 391.
[55] Latour addresses the possible problem rupture poses to non-moderns, asking "but how can we retrace our steps? Isn't the modern world marked by the arrow of time? Doesn't it consume the past? Doesn't it break definitively with the past? Doesn't the very cause of the current prostration come precisely from a "post" modern era that would inevitably succeed the preceding one, which, in a series of catastrophic upheavals, itself succeeded the pre-modern eras? Hasn't history already ended?" (*We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 67).
[56] Ibid, p. 78.

overlooked by those scholars due to its failure to readily conform to their historicist methods, offering neither precedents nor contemporary accounts with which it might be fixed in time, leaving it vulnerable to any manner of "anachronisms." As Didi-Huberman explains, it is this un-fixedness that allows the fresco to serve as an analog for the kairotic potential of all images. Once historicist methodologies have been abandoned, images become messianic gateways through which sundry pasts and futures might anachronistically rush, benefits we reap by undergoing the "dispossession of the gaze"[57] characteristic of the radical state of receptivity that defines the kairotic "now" of the encounter.

It is this radical state of receptivity that Didi-Huberman describes when he states that "we are before the image as *before the law*,"[58] alluding obliquely to the Pauline notion of the messianic *ho nyn kairos* or "time of the now" which both precedes and establishes all lawmaking.[59] Rebutting the modern strain's call for autonomous subjectivity, Didi-Huberman suggests that it is only once we have been dispossessed of our gaze and (at least partially) submitted to the image as sovereign lawgiver that we can receive its kairotic encroachment and participate in its anachronistic potential. Acknowledging the interruption of the secular order caused by this dispossession and submission, Didi-Huberman describes the moment of our encounter with the image as a *more-than-present*. "To gain access to the stratified multiple times, to the survivals, to the *longues durées* of the more-than-past of memory" he writes, "we need a *more-than-present* of an act of reminiscence: a shock, a tearing of the" veil, an irruption or appearance of time."[60] This *more-than-present* is nothing less than the messianic moment described by Benjamin during which we recognize and seize the image of past as one of our own concerns, receiving its higher times as they encroach during the kairotic "now." As Latour explains in his own work on icons, it is also the moment at which we restore to the image its role as mediator.

Whereas the modern and anti-modern strains limited the agency of the icon, whether through iconoclast-critique or forlorn nostalgia, Latour's brand of non-modernism invests the icon with a surplus of agency by regarding it as representative not of a pre-critical worldview but of the mediation that always has and always will bind us to our world(s). This is achieved in part

---

[57] Georges Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism," trans. Peter Mason in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and Out of History*, ed. Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 33.

[58] Ibid, p. 31.

[59] Agamben describes the distinction made in Paul's letters between *chronos*, the secular time that spans from the creation to the messianic event, and *ho nyn kairos*, the contracted "time of the now" of the messianic event itself, which he associates with Benjamin's notion of the "*Jetztzeit*" or "now time" (p.63 and 142-143).

[60] Didi-Huberman, p. 41.

by re-interpreting the notion of the *acheiropoiete* or image not made by hands discussed briefly above. Instead of suspending the instant- and subject-oriented aspects of willed manufacture, Latour foregrounds these aspects not as threats to the divine status of the image, but as contributors to its mediating power:

> But what if hands were actually indispensible to reaching truth, to producing objectivity, to fabricating divinities? What would happen if, when saying that some image is human-made, you were *increasing* instead of decreasing its claim to truth? That would be the closure of the critical mood, the end of anti-fetishism. We could say, contrary to critical urge, that the more human-work is shown, the *better* is their grasp of reality, of sanctity, of worship. That the more images, mediations, intermediaries, icons are multiplied and overtly fabricated, explicitly and publicly constructed, the more respect we have for their capacities to welcome, to gather, to recollect truth and sanctity ("religere" is one of the several etymologies for religion).[61]

For Latour, it is the very fabricated-ness of the icon that allows it to reach beyond itself in both space and time to the public, social world(s) in which it exists. Indeed, we might say it is by emphasizing the fabricated-ness of the icon to such a degree, locating it so firmly in the public and the social, that the icon is able to exceed the instant- and the subject-oriented aspects of willed manufacture, rendering it inextricable from the network of mediators to which it belongs and which it welcomes, gathers and collects for reception by the viewer.

Latour refines his discussion of fabrication in his retelling of the biblical parable of the iconoclast Abraham's confrontation with his father, the idol-worshiper Terah. Upon returning to his idol-workshop, which he had briefly entrusted to his son, and finding it destroyed, Terah turns to Abraham and asks, "Why does your ear not listen to what your mouth says?" Latour expands this ambiguous question posed by the idolater to the iconoclast into a defense of not only the icon, but of the mediator as such. Adopting the voice of the idolater, Latour asks Abraham, father of the Western faiths:

> If you start to break the idols, my son, with what mediations will you welcome, collect, assemble, and gather your divinities? Are you sure you understand the dictates of your God? What sort of folly are you going to enter if you begin to believe that I, your father, *naively* believe in those idols I have made with my own hands, cooked in my own oven, sculpted with my own tools? Do you really believe I ignore their origin? Do you really believe that this lowly origin *weakens* their claims to reality? Is your critical mind so *very naïve*?[62]

This passage can be read as Latour's rejoinder to both the modern and anti-modern strains alike. By posing his question to Abraham as to a modern critic, he opens a kairotic "now" in which the

---

[61] Bruno Latour, "What is Iconoclash? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?" in *Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 16.
[62] Ibid, p. 24.

practice of icon viewing can encroach upon the present, intervening in the secular temporal order. Moreover, he does so not by casting icon viewing as a pre-modern practice to which we are returning—the naivety is not Terah's—but as a nascent argument against the critical mind that has endured continuously from the question's first articulation to Latour's own retelling. In this passage Latour pulls on the chains of mediation in order to gather the times of icon viewing, Old-Testament iconoclasm, and 20th-century deconstructionist theory into his own present, marshaling each of these as well as the phenomenon of mediation itself in his refutation of the modern and anti-modern strains.

In their recent collaborations, Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood have expanded Latour's discussion of mediation into a comprehensive art historical approach. Foregrounding the fabricated-ness of images, they describe mediation as a stretching across time and space achieved through referential replication. For Nagel and Wood, images derive their meaning from their ability to claim a referential bond with a more esteemed prototype that they replicate. This referential bond is claimed by a particular image's insistence on its own mediality, that is, on those formal features of its composition that associate it with its prototype. A privileged example of the prototype-replication bond constituted by mediation can be found in the icon's relationship with its prototype, which I have alluded to briefly above in my discussion of the *Mandylion,* Veronica, and *Hodegetria*. Icons served as replications which referred back to their prototypes not as naïve copies but as fabricated mediations. As Nagel and Wood argue, this is most evident in the practices of icon maintenance, which sought not to preserve the object itself but, through over-painting repair and stylistic updating, to maintain its medial similarity to other replications of its prototype, not to say the prototype itself. The desire was not to convince viewers of the icon's status as a copy of the prototype, but to convince them of the icon's claim to be a suitable mediator, achieving the "functional presentness" of the prototype.[63] However, like Latour, Nagel and Wood avoid the anti-modern's nostalgia by stressing the fact that the phenomenon of mediation is not a pre-modern practice, but a condition of the image's very claim to meaning. "The simple and straightforward image that delivered the real never actually existed," they write. "It was only ever visible from a vantage point inside a later image, which worried about its own crafted and mediated nature."[64]

Like Latour, Nagel and Wood describe mediation as a network of chains. Each image is bound to its prototype and all images sharing that prototype by "chains of substitution" which extend backward and forward diachronically from prototype to replications affirming the validity

---

[63] Nagel and Wood, p. 79.
[64] Ibid, p. 28.

of each link. In an earlier theorization of these chains influenced by Whitney Davis's prior discussion of the durability of "chains of replication", Wood writes "the substitutional paradigm is basically the belief that a chain is as good as its strongest link."[65] For Nagel and Wood, it is this belief in the validity of the image as a link in the chain of substitution that allows the image to breach the ruptures of the secular temporal order and occupy multiple temporal positions:

> The image or building took up its multiple residencies in time presenting itself as a token of a type, a type associated with an origin, perhaps mythical or only dimly perceived, an origin enforcing a general categorical continuity across a sequence of tokens. Under such a model of the temporal life of artifacts, one token or replica effectively substituted for another; classes of artifacts were grasped as chains of substitutable replicas stretching out across time and space.[66]

By assuming their positions within these substitutional chains, images were able to reach backward and forward typologically, an ability to which we will return shortly, breaching the secular ruptures of the modern strain, carrying the temporalities of their prototypes and fellow replications of those prototypes with them into the kairotic "now" of the viewer. Although Nagel and Wood's substitutional articulation of mediation may seem to represent a less radical iteration of the non-modern insights of Didi-Huberman and Latour, appearing to surrender the breadth and immanence of those earlier insights to the institutionalization required by a comprehensive art historical approach, it can on the contrary be seen as representing a *more* radical iteration of those insights. For Nagel and Wood, the contraction of time described by Didi-Huberman as "anachronism" is not a unique or unusual result arrived at only once historicist methodologies have been abandoned, but rather the necessary foundation of the image's claim to meaning as such. "Within the substitutional mode, anachronism was neither an aberration nor a mere rhetorical device, but a structural condition of artifacts."[67]

It is within the non-modern strain that I will situate my own argument regarding representations of the Baptist. However, instead offering yet another rejoinder to the modern strain, seeking to breach the ruptures lining the *saeculum* by positing an additional kairotic model of interpretation, I will suggest that, as the figure of the Baptist migrated from the margins of 14th-century icons to the center of 16th-century panel paintings, the phenomenon of rupture was itself

---

[65] Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 40. Nagel and Wood's discussions of replication and substitution owe much to the work of Whitney Davis in his *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard W. Quinn (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). While Davis introduces much of the rhetoric employed by Nagel and Wood, I have chosen the latter as examples of the non-modern strain because of their application of this rhetoric to the Renaissance and the methodological principle of rupture with which the Renaissance is associated.
[66] Nagel and Wood, p. 29.
[67] Ibid, p. 46.

incorporated into a testimonial mode of viewing which wavered productively between *kairos* and *saeculum*. As the practice of icon viewing gave way, threatening to displace the referent on the far side of Belting's crisis, this testimonial mode of viewing emerged requiring viewers to resolve in very the act of viewing the problematic of rupture and reference—presence and absence—which that crisis posed. In the remaining chapters I will argue that, when encountering representations of the Baptist in which the icon's referential claims waned as the Baptist's increased, viewers were encouraged to extend skills they had acquired in the devotional realm of the icon to the secular realm of the *historia*, effectively mitigating the transition from icon to artwork by preserving the intrinsic presence of the referent as a feature of testimony.

CHAPTER TWO: A TYPOLOGY OF THE BAPTIST

2-1: From Margin to Mediator (Stage 1)

Representations of the Baptist underwent profound compositional developments during the decades leading to and following from Belting's rupture-crisis, which I described in the introduction as a figural migration comprised of three typological stages, beginning from the margins of conventional icons, moving toward the center of less conventional altarpieces, arriving finally at the center panel paintings. Heeding Henri Focillon's recommendation that questions of mobility in images be considered questions of form,[68] I will discuss this migration in formal terms arguing that, with each successive move toward what David Rosand has called the "iconic field"[69] of the increasingly vacant compositional center, the figure of the Baptist assumed a larger share of the referential responsibilities formerly met by the icon itself, satisfying these not by approximating the icon's presence, but rather by pointing to its absence.

The first typological stage includes such conventional late 14th and early 15th-century devotional images as Gherardo Starnina's *Madonna and Child between St. John the Baptist and St. Nicholas of Bari*, (1400-1410) [Fig. 1], Sandro di Pietro's *Madonna and Child with Saints* (1406-1481) and Sassetta's *Madonna of the Snow Altarpiece* (1423-1426), each of which evince an undiminished ability to facilitate the referential presence expected of the icon. In these works, the figure of the Baptist occupies a marginal position, confined to the lower left corner of the compositional space. This marginality is pictured most emphatically in Starnina's icon, the earliest of the three examples.[70] Here the Baptist is portrayed in diminutive scale on the lower left of the composition's immediate foreground, which he shares with an unidentified contemporary cleric stationed on the opposite side. Draped in his animal-skin cloak, he clutches his cross in his left hand while pointing prophetically with his right over his shoulder toward the Madonna and

---

[68] Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art,* trans. Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler (New York: Zone Books, 1992). Describing the formal quality of spatial and temporal mobility in images, Focillon writes, "Whether constructed of masonry, carved in marble, cast in bronze, fixed beneath varnish, engraved on copper or on wood, a work of art is motionless only in appearance. It seems to be set fast-arrested, as are the moments of time gone by. But in reality it is born of change, and it leads to other changes… This mobility of form, however, this ability to engender so great a diversity of shapes, is even more remarkable when examined in the light of certain narrower limits. The most rigorous rules, apparently intended to impoverish and to standardize formal material, are precisely those which, with an almost fantastic wealth of variations and of metamorphoses, best illuminate its superb vitality." (41)

[69] David Rosand, 'Divinitá di cosa dipinta': Pictorial structure and the legibility of the altarpiece" in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, Ed. Peter Humphrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 155.

[70] For a discussion of the provenance and iconographical conventions of Starnina's icon, see Ann T. Lurie, "In Search of a Valencian Madonna by Starnina" in *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 76, No. 10, Dec., 1989, p. 334-373.

Child enthroned behind. Occupying the composition's center, approximately three times the size of the Baptist and shown in the conventional *Hodegetria* form, these figures dominate the composition, successfully commanding devotional attention. Flanking the Madonna and Child are two pairs of saints bearing gifts, lining either side of the composition's middle-ground. Arrayed in an arch above the Madonna and Child in the composition's background are seven angels with wings splayed outward, their attentions turned toward the iconic center.

Although the scene is densely populated, the Baptist is distinguished from the surrounding figures by his failure to direct attention toward the Madonna and Child. Instead, his gaze is averted, cast to the left beyond the frame. This averting of the gaze, which also occurs in Sassetta's altarpiece to which we will return shortly, secures the Baptist's marginal status by aligning his figure with the material border of the image, situating him at both a physical and conceptual remove from the composition's devotional focus. However, this marginality is not without its ambiguities. The Baptist's location in the immediate foreground assumes greater weight given the way in which that space is situated within the temporal architecture of the composition as a whole. On the same plane as the cleric, the Baptist participates in his contemporaneity, being compositionally introduced into his historical moment and, we can assume, into that of the viewers by whom that moment was shared. These figures are separated from a second temporal plane shared by the Madonna and Child the four saints, to one of whom the Christ Child extends an arm to receive the proffered gift, signaling their contemporaneousness. The angels suspended in the arch above these figures constitute yet a third temporal plane, observing the scene as if from a time beyond time. By being located in the most "present" of these temporal planes, co-substantial with the material frame of the image and contemporaneous with the historical moment of the cleric, the Baptist can be said to contest his own marginality. The more his gaze is averted and his figure pressed against the frame, the more ambiguous his marginal status becomes as he draws greater attention to himself as a second a potential site of devotional focus.

The ambiguity of the Baptist's marginality is inherent to his function as a mediator of the act of viewing. The Baptist derives this function from the gospels in which he bore witness to the coming of Christ.[71] In di Pietro's icon, the Baptist holds a scroll bearing the words "ecce a" or "behold," a fragment of the phrase from John 1:29 "ecce agnus dei" or "behold the Lamb of God"

---

[71] Kathleen Corrigan, "The Witness of John the Baptist on an Early Byzantine Icon in Kiev" in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 42 (1988), p. 1-11. Corrigan notes that, although the figure of the Baptist was routinely represented prior to the 6th century, early representations portrayed him not as the mediating witness of Christ but as the administrator of the baptismal rite (5).

seen in Sassetta's altarpiece.[72] This often repeated phrase establishes the mediatory function the Baptist will perform in the image, declaring his status as both biblical herald and compositional intermediary. Indeed, we might say that the Baptist performs in the visual register a mediatory function similar to that which the Madonna performs in the supplicatory register, acting as an intercessor appealed to not in the act of prayer, but in the act of viewing. The Baptist-Madonna symmetry is further implied by the manner in which each figure gestures toward a referent other than themselves: the Madonna toward the Christ Child and the Baptist toward the pair. Just as the Madonna's intercessional capacity renders her a site of devotional focus during the act of prayer, so too does the Baptist's intercessional capacity render him a site of devotional focus during the act of viewing.[73]

However, insofar as the Baptist shares in the Madonna's intercessional capacity, so too does he risk jeopardizing her integrity as one of the icon's two central figures, becoming himself an object of veneration. To this end the inclusion of the scroll can also be read as means of repressing the Baptist-Madonna symmetry, for in the same instant that it declares the Baptist's function as mediator, so too does it declare his function as *merely* a mediator. By associating the Baptist with text, the scroll reduces him to a semiotic level at which he is forced to play signifier to the Madonna and Child's signified. Indeed, in the two examples featuring the scroll—di Pietro's icon and Sassetta's altarpiece—the Baptist appears relatively docile. In the former, he assumes his customary position in the lower left of the compositional space with the ranks of his fellow saints, pointing toward the Madonna and Child enthroned in the center. Any excessive attention paid to him is checked by the ribbon of text bisecting his body, which is turned toward the viewer and angled in such a way as to lead readers from the left of the composition toward the right—that is, from the Baptist on the margin toward the Madonna and Child at the center. In the latter, the scroll serves a similar purpose. Also bisecting the body of the Baptist, who is seen kneeling with his gaze averted to the altarpiece's left, the scroll comes to an end as it meets the gilded frame superimposed on the panel dividing it into its triptych format. It is in Sassetta's altarpiece that the ambiguities arising from the Baptist's marginality are most successfully repressed. Here the Baptist's scroll, averted gaze and alignment with the border of the image

---

[72] Belting, 113.

[73] As Pentcheva has argued, it was not uncommon in the Byzantine tradition for viewers to see the Madonna coupled with saints and apostles by whom her intercessional function was shared, at times appearing on the reverse sides of icons as a pair complementing the figure of Christ. Although Pentcheva notes that the Madonna most often shared compositional space with John the Theologian, it is important for our purposes that she privileges the apostle's "gesturing hand" as the most immediate and resilient indicator of his shared status as intercessor. See Bissera V. Pentcheva, "Imagined Images: Visions of Salvation and Intercession in a Double-Sided Icon from Poganovo" in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 54 (2000), p. 139-153.

ensure that devotional attention is directed unambiguously toward the composition's center. As long as this centrality is sustained, the Baptist remains a marginal mediator.

It is unsurprising that the Baptist's ambiguous marginality should be so fraught with tension, given the strict compositional dictates devotional images often obeyed. The vast majority of devotional images invested the compositional center itself with the properties of the icon. A product of long-standing compositional protocols which insisted on fixing the icon equidistant from either edge of the surface on which it was painted, this space became invested with a residual divinity the violation of which constituted a transgression in viewing. In his discussion of these protocols, Rosand describes the compositional center of the image as its "iconic field":

> What we might call the iconic imperative of the altarpiece enforces the centrality of focus; the lateral forces of the field operate centripetally, with reference to the center. Such visual dynamics determine the relationship of worshipper to image. In viewing such a field, lateral scansion is rendered irrelevant, except as a way toward the center. The iconic field insists upon direct confrontation—with a divine center. All eyes are, literally, on the deity (or his surrogate), the functional core of the image.)[74]

As Rosand explains, the entire compositional program of the devotional image was obliged to reinforce this iconic field, directing attention toward the compositional center. The margins on either side of the image were to play only a supporting role, "operating centripetally with reference to the center." Should these margins distract from the center, they would risk the ability of the image to fulfill its "iconic imperative," jeopardizing the viewer's experience of salvation that only a "direct confrontation" with its "divine center" could bestow.

As I suggested above, if the Baptist in di Pietro's icon and Sassetta's altarpiece remains a merely marginal mediator, directing devotional attention toward the deities residing in the iconic field of the compositional center, he does so only by way of a certain repression. The relegation to the border, the averted gaze, the semiotic scroll—these elements limit the likelihood that the Baptist will upset the confrontation with the image by intruding as second potential site of devotional focus. Although di Pietro and Sassetta's images may accomplish this more successfully than Starnina's, the Baptist's marginality continues to be a source of ambiguity in the image. We can account for this continued ambiguity by attributing to the Baptist a role as necessary as it is compromising to the efficient operation of the iconic field. Given the Baptist's relationship to the frame, it is reasonable to expect that his figure somehow supports the iconic field, serving as what Jacques Derrida has famously called its *parergon*. Parsed, the term means "beside" (*para*) "work" (*ergon*), and as we know is borrowed from Immanuel Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, in which it is used to describe the four "General Remarks"

---

[74] Rosand, p. 144-145.

appended to the text, which dealt with peripheral aspects of religion considered to exceed the limits of the work itself, including the effects and means of grace, miracles and mysteries.[75] Derrida extends its application to all varieties of marginalia or framing which are "cut"[76] from a more central site of attention but which cannot be reduced to mere excess:

> A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done [*fait*], the fact [*le fait*], the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory, that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board [*au bord, á bord*]. It is first of all the on (the) bo(a)rd(er) [*Il est d'abord l'á-bord*].[77]

As Derrida explains, the parergon is that element of the margin or frame that encroaches upon the work. "On the border," it is appended to the work as a supplement or addition, while also being "on board," a participant in the work's operation. This ambiguous status as both appendix and participant is a product of the parergon's supporting role. A component of the work's infrastructure, it reveals an unacknowledged "lack" or "*sans*" (without) in the work for which it compensates, making its inclusion both equivocal and obligatory.[78]

The parergonal status of the Baptist is suggested by his capacity to both intrude upon the center, threatening to become a second potential site of devotional focus, and to repress such intrusion by acting as a marginal mediator, directing the viewer's attention toward the center. Unlike the other figures portrayed, the Baptist alone engages in this consideration of the act of devotional viewing. If the principal concern of the other figures is *what* the viewer sees, the principal concern of the Baptist is the *how* the viewer sees. With this in mind, we might say that the Baptist retains a parergonal claim to a practical aspect of iconic presence ancillary to that claimed by the iconic field. While the Madonna and Child in the composition's center claim the metaphysical aspect of iconic presence associated with the icon as a manifestation of the divine, the Baptist on the composition's margin claims the practical aspect of iconic presence associated with the icon as a functional object. Borrowing from Harry Berger Jr., I that the first of these corresponds to the "symbolic" order of icon viewing, whereby the icon is "linked" to the "other-worldly (supernatural, transcendent) figure it represents,"[79] and the second to the "observational"

---

[75] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 55.

[76] Derrida's use of this term refers to Kant's aesthetic theory of the "pure cut" which removes objects of aesthetic contemplation from worldly interest, making them available to judgments of taste rather than judgments of reason.

[77] Ibid, p. 54.

[78] Ibid, p. 61.

[79] Harry Berger Jr., "The System of Early Modern Painting" in *Representations*, No. 62 (Spring, 1998), p. 33.

order of icon viewing, whereby the icon is the center of a system of "rules, codes, regulations" with which viewers comply.[80] With this in mind, the Baptist can be regarded as not only a mediating figure, directing attention toward the iconic field at the composition's center, but also as a figure for mediation, acting as a cipher for what Pierre Bourdieu has called the "universalizing mediation" of the habitus, the complex of practices that invest meaning in or "frame" all actions, including devotional viewing.[81] However, since the three examples considered in this section predate Belting's crisis, each belonging to an era in which the conventions of icon viewing were not yet in jeopardy, the figure of the Baptist and the practical aspect of icon viewing with which his figure is associated retain the mark of the parergon. Not yet a subject of explicit concern, they continue to participate tacitly in the work of the icon, mediating viewing from its margins.

Although the Baptist remains a marginal mediator in the first typological stage, affixed to the physical and conceptual frame of the image, his parergonal status will persist even in later stages as he moves increasingly toward the compositional center. Indeed, one property of the parergon which will be of particular importance in my discussion of later Baptist imagery is its ability not only to retain an association with various aspects of the ergon from which it is cut, but to do so even when removed from the ergon in time and space. As Derrida explains, this ability is a result of the double-nature of the cut that shears the parergon not only from the work, but also from the contexts to which the work would be otherwise bound:

> *Parerga* have a thickness, a surface which separates them not only (as Kant would have it) from the integral inside, from the body proper of the *ergon*, but also from the outside, from the wall on which the painting is hung, from the space in which the statue or column is erected, then, step by step, from the whole field of historical, economic, political inscription in which drive to signature is produced…[82]

Like the frame of a painting that stands at a certain remove from both the canvas which it encloses and the wall on which it hangs, the parergon stands at a certain remove from both the work and its contexts. As we will see in works belonging to the second and third typological stages, by being subjected to this double-cut, the figure of the Baptist as parergon is afforded a degree of mobility allowing it to move independently across all manner of boundaries (temporal, spatial, compositional, generic), while retaining its association with the ergon. In the remaining

[80] Ibid, p. 35. Berger cites the distinction made by Jonathan Crary in his *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) between *spectare* ("to look at") and *observare* ("to conform one's action, to comply with").

[81] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 79.

[82] Ibid, p. 61.

sections of this chapter, this parergonal mobility will carry his figure and the practices with which it is associated toward the compositional center of less conventional 15th-century altarpieces and finally into the compositional center of a new genre of 16th-century panel paintings.

2-2: From Margin to Mediator (Stage 2)

The second typological stage includes such less conventional late 15th and early 16th-century altarpieces as Francesco Pesellino's *Madonna and Child with Saints Zenobius, John the Baptist, Anthony Abbott and Francis of Assisi* (1450), Giovani Antonio Boltraffio's *Casio Madonna Altarpiece* (1500) [Fig. 2] and Parmigianino's *Vision of St. Jerome* (1526-27), each of which evince a diminished ability to facilitate the iconic presence expected of the icon. In these works, the figure of the Baptist abdicates the marginal position it had occupied decades earlier and moves toward the center of the compositional space. In both Pesellino and Boltraffio's altarpieces, he remains to the left of the image, but is no longer fastened to its border. Instead, he has moved in, and is now flanked on his right by additional figures who effectively free him from his former marginality. Although it cannot be said that the Baptist himself occupies the iconic field in either composition, he does in each image encroach visibly upon it, albeit with some hesitation. In Pesellino's altarpiece, he stands to the immediate left of the Madonna and Child, his index extended finger portrayed in such a way as to suggest his touching the Christ Child, causing the boundary between reference and presence to become less distinct. Similarly, in Boltraffio's altarpiece, while the Baptist himself remains stationed on the left, his scroll-bound cross breaks into the center, its apex marking the composition's median. This movement toward the center is most dramatic, however, in Parmigianino's later altarpiece. Here the Baptist abandons all marginal pretense, thrusting boldly from the left into the iconic field. Half-kneeling in his animal-skin cloak, he extends his muscular right arm across the center of the image, pointing toward the Madonna and Child enthroned above with his now intemperately embellished finger. If the Baptist encroached upon the center with a degree of hesitation in Boltraffio and Parmigianino's earlier altarpieces, brushing up against it with the tip of a finger or the edge of a cross, in Parmigianino's he has migrated bodily into it, assuming an unabashed corporeal residence.

In addition to abdicating the marginal position he had occupied earlier, the Baptist has, in each of these second-stage images, ceased averting his gaze. In Pesellino's altarpiece it is only the Baptist and Christ Child who peer out from the picture surface to lock eyes with the viewer, sharing between them the claim to ocular privilege with the gazes of the surrounding figures fracturing idiosyncratically in other directions. Similarly, in Boltraffio's altarpiece the Baptist

joins the Madonna and Child in visually appealing to the viewer causing his scroll's semiotic glancing blow to ricochet back toward himself. As before it is Parmigianino's altarpiece that provides the most dramatic example of this shift. Here, as in Pesellino's altarpiece, it is the Baptist and Christ Child who look out at us. However, while in that earlier altarpiece these gazes complemented one another, dividing the viewer's attention between them, here the Baptist's gaze appears to eclipse that of the Child. With his brow lowered and his body arched, he looks at us with an intensity that the Child's coquettish posture noticeably lacks. Although he continues to point toward the divine pair, turning his shoulders deferentially toward their devotional scene, these features seem residual—traces of an earlier marginality that has been internalized as accessories of his own charismatic figure. If in Pesellino and Boltraffio's altarpieces the Baptist acts as a zealous co-participant assisting in the iconic work of the image, in Parmigianino's altarpiece he seems to be its sole proponent. This impression is amplified by the rendering of the sleeping figure of Saint Jerome, whose metaphysical vision the image nominally portrays. Reclining in the lower right-hand corner, he is shown reduced excessively in scale with his forearm draped across his eyes, traits which serve both to forego any contribution he might have made to the image and to throw into relief the figure of the Baptist, confirming him as the uncontested mediator of viewing, gazing intently at us from the composition's center.

Like his figural migration toward the compositional center, the Baptist's outturned gaze affiliates him with the iconic imperative of the image. Indeed, one of the principal means by which icons secured their claims to presence was through a choreographed exchange of gazes. In his 1453 treatise *De visione Dei sive de icon liber* ("On the Vision of God"), Nicholas of Cusa describes this exchange as one taking place between the omnivoyant or all-seeing gaze of the icon and the subjected-and-subjecting gaze of the viewer. Writing to a group of monks at a Benedictine monastery in Tegernsee, to whom he had sent a *vera icona* which he instructed to be hung on the monastery's north wall, Cusanus takes as his point of departure the familiar sensation that the gaze of the icon appears to regard each viewer individually, following their unique movements as they circulate around the room. To this sensation Cusanus adds the reflection that, because each individual will claim to have experienced the undivided attention of this gaze, the icon must simultaneously regard the collection of individuals as a group, a paradox which for Cusanus defines divinity as such:

> And because the icon's gaze regards you equally everywhere and does not leave you wherever you may go, a contemplation will arise in you, and you will be stirred saying "Lord, in this image of you I now behold your providence by a certain sensible experience. For if you do not abandon me, the vilest of all, you will never abandon anyone. Indeed, you are present to all and to each, just as being, without which they cannot exist, is present to all and to each. For thus you,

> who are the absolute being of all, are present to all as if you had concern for no
> other…[83]

This exchange of gazes was one of the hallmarks of icon viewing, responsible for what Myer Schapiro elsewhere describes as the latent or potential "intentness" which icons possessed as devotional images, capable of visually addressing their offers of salvation to viewers personally, in a manner comparable to that of the first and second person singular pronouns "I" and "you."[84] The Baptist's partaking in this exchange, in some cases becoming, as we have seen, its primary instigator, suggests the degree to which he is increasingly affiliated with the iconic imperative in these second-stage images, his mediating function both literally and figuratively taking center stage.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the Baptist should share in this exchange of gazes, given Cusanus' emphasis on the mediatory role of the icon. Discussing the 15th-century treatise, Joseph Leo Koerner notes that Cusanus stresses the necessity of using a material object (the icon) as a means of rendering divinity accessible to thought, giving particular emphasis to Cusanus' declaration that, "in the effort to transport you to divine things by human means" he "must use some kind of similitude."[85] This ascension from the human to the divine by way of the mediatory step of iconic similitude is, for Koerner, Cusanus' most unique and valuable contribution:

> What is new about the argument of *The Vision of God*, and what makes Cusan
> such a pivotal figure in the rise of modern self-consciousness is the way the self
> begins to color the object of devotion, acquiring the attributes of the God it
> claims to worship. It is after all human viewers who, believing they are being
> seen by the icon, invest it with a fictive gaze that can trope for the vision of God.
> Cusanus reverses the relation between human and divine, endowing the viewer
> with that sight-giving power formerly invested in the God pictured in the
> image.[86]

As Koerner explains, the Cusan exchange of gazes is not reducible to the earlier polarizing models with which icon viewing was formerly understood, with viewer and icon existing as discrete entities passing glances back and forth. Instead, the Cusan exchange re-imagines the icon

---

[83] Nicholas of, "On the Vision of God" (De visione Dei) in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 239.

[84] Myer Schapiro, *Words, Script, and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language* (New York: George Braziller, 1996). Schapiro contrasts the forward-facing gaze of the icon to the profile gaze of the narrative painting, writing, "the profile face is detached from the viewer and belongs with the body in action (or in an intransitive state) in a space shared with other profiles on the surface of the image. It is, broadly speaking, like the grammatical form of the third person, the impersonal "he" or "she" with its concordantly inflected verb; while the face turned outward is credited with intentness, a latent or potential glance directed to the observer, and corresponds to the role of the "I" in speech, with its complementary "you" (74).

[85] Nicholas of Cusa, p. 235.

[86] Ibid, p. 131.

as an "object of mediation"[87] around which viewer and deity revolve, each investing the other reciprocally with the "sight-giving power" constitutive of devotional viewing, co-participants in a practice at once finite and infinite, human and divine. We might extend Koerner's interpretation of the Cusan exchange to my discussion of second-stage Baptist imagery, with which the treatise is roughly contemporaneous. Like the Cusan text, these images establish icon viewing as an undertaking neither exclusively mortal nor exclusively divine. In them, the association of the Baptist with the practical aspect of icon viewing familiar from first-stage images is expanded beyond the mere directing of attention toward the iconic field. Eclipsing the metaphysical aspect of iconic presence associated with the Madonna and Child, he emerges as an explicitly practical means by which the divine referent of iconic viewing is made available for encounter. Gazing at us from his increasingly centralized position in the compositional space, the Baptist has become by the end of the second typological stage a figure of mediation, his own charismatic figure invested with the ability to facilitate iconic presence.

As I suggested above, the Baptist's increasing assumption of referential responsibility during the second typological stage can be seen as reactionary, occurring in proportion to the icon's decreasing ability to meet its own referential obligations. It is at this point that I would like to begin reintroducing Belting's crisis, the most dramatic effects of which occur during the decades comprising the second stage. Although much of Belting's account presents the Reformation as the prime instigator of the rupture between the era of the icon and the era of art, Belting finally regards this episode as belonging to a broader and more nebulous shift in early modern comportment toward images, the driving forces of which were the twin discoveries of objective experimentation and subjective invention first articulated, as we have seen, by Burckhardt. Belting describes these discoveries as introducing into the image two new poles of reference—the imitative and the imaginative:

> The image formerly had been assigned a special reality and taken literally as a visible manifestation of the sacred person. Now the image was, in the first place, made subject to the general laws of nature, including optics, and so was assigned wholly to the realm of sense perception. Now the same laws were to apply to the image as to the natural perception of the outside world. It became a simulated window in which either a saint or a family member would appeal in a portrait. In addition, the new image was handed over to artists, who were expected to create it from their "fantasy." Seen in this light, a work was an artist's idea or invention, which also provided the standard for evaluation. With this double reference to

---

[87] Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 130.

imitation (of nature) and imagination (of the artist), the new image required an understanding of art.[88]

Both the imitative and the imaginative poles of reference can be readily identified in my three second-stage examples. Illustrations might include the use of recessional perspective in Pesellino, of atmospheric depth in Boltraffio, and of figural foreshortening in Parmigianino as instances of an experimental interest in imitative optics. Similarly, we might mention each image's manipulation of the enthronement motif as instances of an inventive interest in imaginative form.[89]

For Belting, the introduction of the imitative and imaginative poles of reference precipitated the waning of the icon's ability to facilitate referential presence. Whereas the iconic referent was regarded as present to the viewer, co-substantial with the materiality of the icon, the imitative and imaginative referents are located elsewhere, either in the natural world or in the mind of the artist. By looking to either of these referential poles, viewers risked evacuating the image of any intrinsic worth, displacing the referent from the object itself. It is this displacement of the referent that Belting's crisis describes. However, while Belting understands this referential displacement by appealing to the methodological principle of rupture, viewing it as evidence of an insurmountable schism between the pre-modern era of the icon and the modern era of the artwork, my discussion of the first and second typological stages of Baptist imagery suggests an alternative explanatory approach. Instead of accepting the principle of rupture, foreclosing the possibility of referential presence and consigning ourselves to either Baudrillard's hell of simulation or Belting's purgatory of nostalgia, we can observe in the Baptist's figural migration toward the center a new constellation of practices emerging from the very locus of rupture itself, appropriating its premises as a means of preserving that presence. Inheriting the referential obligations of the increasingly compromised icon as properties of his own mediating presence, the Baptist can be seen as anticipating the problem of rupture plaguing the modern and anti-modern strains, offering to those capable of receiving the good news a nascent solution to the problem of fractured time. The very functionality of the Baptist as a solution to both the historical and methodological facets of the problem, that is, the problem as it *was* posed to viewers

---

[88] Belting, 471.

[89] Discussing the Renaissance altarpiece, Burckhardt succinctly articulates the rupture between the icon and the artwork, giving special emphasis to Boltraffio's *Casio Madonna Altarpiece*. Remarking on the transmission of the compositional conventions of *sacra conversazione* scenes into the fifteenth century, Burckhardt describes the altarpiece's uniformity as an ideal showcase in which the innovations of individual artists could be displayed. For Burckhardt, these scenes became centers in which new kinds of individual "expressivity" could be investigated, including not only the expressive postures and faces of individual deities and saints, but also the expressive authorial choices made individual artists, both of which he argues provide evidence of "a completely secular idealism." See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Peter Humphrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 97.

engaging devotionally and as it *is* posed those engaging interpretively, suggests the degree to which it had, by the second stage, emerged as a mediating presence.

2-3: From Margin to Mediator (Stage 3)

The third typological stage includes such 16th-century panel paintings as Raphael's *Saint John the Baptist in the Desert* (1517) and Leonardo's two portraits, the seated *Saint John the Baptist* (1510-1515) and the half-length *Saint John the Baptist* (1513-1516), each of which feature the Baptist as a solitary figure residing in the center of the compositional space, the sole vestige of the referential presence facilitated by images belonging to earlier stages. In these works, the figure of the Baptist has completed his migration into the iconic field, now vacated by the icon and pictured as either an uninhabited desert-scape or a pathos-laden void. As in images belonging to earlier stages, the Baptist serves a mediating function, retaining his parergonal status, appearing to point toward the familiar iconic referent located somewhere to his right. However, unlike earlier images there is no iconic referent to be found. Instead, there is a compositional clearing registering the icon's absence. In Raphael's painting, we notice a break in the wall of vegetation and stone before which the Baptist sits. Located at the extreme right of the image, it is toward this break that the Baptist points, leading our attention expectantly toward an expanse of empty space receding into the distance. Not only does the compositional location of this break recall the absent icon, the break's dimensions suggest the removal of an icon-sized object from the pictorial space, suggesting a degree of self-awareness regarding the painting's position in the late stages of the typological sequence we have been tracing.[90] In Leonardo's seated portrait, this break is replaced by a blackened passage, also located at the extreme right of the image and also retaining the dimensions of an icon-sized cavity. The absence of the icon felt most forcefully in Leonardo's half-length portrait, with which this essay began. Here the Baptist is featured against an unremittingly opaque background painted entirely in black. Pointing over his right shoulder toward a gap in the composition analogous to that seen in the seated portraits, his figure is illuminated by an unspecified light emanating from the left.

In each painting, the Baptist retains aspects of his earlier parergonal status. In the seated portraits, his location to the left of the compositional breaks recalls his earlier location to the left of the iconic field, an impression made all the more acute by the ersatz quality of the backgrounds before which his figure sits, insufficient settings for the narrativizing necessary to make him a

---

[90] Victor Ieronim Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

independently cohesive and satisfying subject of the work. In Leonardo's half-length portrait, this parergonal status is also conveyed by the manner in which the Baptist is lit. The right side of his figure—that which is nearest to the vacancy left by the absent icon—is draped in shadows which seem to pull him into the receding deep space while the left side of his figure—that which is nearest to both the frames of the first and second-stage images as well as, given the angle of the Baptist's shoulders and torso, to the frame of the painting itself—is bathed in a light which seems to pour into the compositional space from a source just beyond the left foreground of the image, a virtually synonymous with the left and bottom struts of the frame itself. However, in the absence of the icon to which it had been affixed, the parergonal figure of the Baptist becomes the sole focus of the composition as margin becomes center, frame becomes work and "para" becomes "ergon."

As one might expect, the emphasis placed on the persistence of the Baptist's parergonal status in spite of his location in the center of the composition fundamentally alters not only the conditions of viewing but also the very manner in which the image is offered as a source of meaning, an alteration addressed explicitly through the motif of the cross. In Raphael's painting, the cross enters the picture from the right. Positioned some distance from foreground, it seems to occupy not the space of the Baptist but rather that of the compositional break left by the absent icon, matching its scale and accented by its palette. Similarly, in Leonardo's seated portrait the Baptist holds the cross loosely by its base, allowing it to slope to the right, entering the blackened passage over the Baptist's shoulder. This affinity between the cross and the compositional break left by the absent icon is most clearly demonstrated in Leonardo's half-length portrait. Here, not only does the cross occupy the void left by the compositional break, the intersection of its two pieces marks that void's center. Indeed, so consistently is this affinity between the cross and the compositional break asserted that the one would be forgiven for regarding the cross as that referent to which the Baptist bereft of the icon now points. However, the cross cannot carry the referential weight of the icon. As Belting himself notes, in Christian iconography the cross served a semiotic function inverse to that of the icon. Whereas the icon manifested referential presence, the cross signified referential absence. "Unlike the image [icon or portrait]," writes Belting, "the cross is a sign and thus not to be identified with what it symbolizes." Like the Baptist himself, the cross can be said to be a parergon, "divert[ing] attention from itself as an object to the intended meaning."[91] Given the semiotic function of the cross, the consequence of its inclusion in place of the icon are twofold: First, its inclusion insists that the removal of the icon be confronted not only as a compositional absence, a vacancy in the formal organization of the image, but also as a

---

[91] Belting, p. 158.

heuristic absence, a vacancy in the interpretive infrastructure productive of meaning in the image; Second, its inclusion causes the Baptist himself to assume a new interpretive status relative to the cross, which serves as a second-order parergon paradoxically investing the Baptist's first-order parergon with a referential weight distinct from yet comparable to that of the icon, the absence of which the cross marks.

It is with this investment that the figure of the Baptist realizes most fully what I have been describing as his mediating presence. Unable to approximate the iconic presence familiar from first and second stage images, which the rupture-crisis caused by the introduction of the imitative and imaginative poles of reference have compromised beyond recoverability, and unwilling to forsake the referential obligations of the icon in which it had formerly participated, the figure of the Baptist in these third-stage images facilitates a mode of viewing which preserves aspects of that presence by pointing explicitly to the icon's absence, calling viewers to invest in his own figure as a site of a referential presence predicated solely on mediation. Given the degree to which these images draw on the obligations and failings of their predecessors, it seems that it is not until the third typological stage that this mediating presence is fully articulated, offered to viewers as part of a distinct and explicitly self-aware practice. Following George Kubler, I regard these third-stage images generally and the Baptist's mediating in particular as "solutions" offered to the "problem" of rupture-crisis posed by the introduction of the imitative and imaginative poles of reference. Such an approach would reconfigure the three typological stages as a "chain of linked solutions" and extend the role of mediation beyond the Baptist's mediation of our access to the absent iconic referent to the third-stage image's mediation of our access to first and second stage images, reaching all the way back to the pre-crisis icons, traversing the rupture-crisis and mitigating the transition between Belting's two eras. What would otherwise remain a series of discrete chronological periods separated by rupture becomes a continuum of typological stages joined to one another by referential mediation.

The radical potential of such a reconfiguration should not be underestimated. By affording third-stage images the status of solutions to problems posed throughout earlier typological stages, we can glimpse an alternative to the methodological principle of rupture as such—an alternative, moreover, which we as viewers seem to receive kairotically from the images themselves. Kubler provides a lexicon for articulating this reception, arguing that linked solutions extend indefinitely, comprising "sequences" that are "still open to further elaboration."[92] That being said, we as non-modern viewers contending with the shortcomings of the modern and

---

[92] George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 30.

anti-modern strains might look to the mediating presence realized by the figure of the Baptist in third-stage images as offering a solution not only to the 15th-century problem of rupture-crisis, but also to our own problem of fractured time—a solution which would be yet a "further elaboration" in an open sequence. Indeed, as Kubler suggests, insofar as our encounters with these images affect us as rich interpretive experiences, they do so precisely because they occupy other positions within a shared sequence, "the present interpretation of any past event" being "only another stage in the perpetuation of the original impulse."[93]

If moderns and anti-moderns locate the emergence of modern subjectivity in the 15th-century rupture-crisis, the effects of which continue to reverberate in the Western tradition, non-moderns might locate a rejoinder to modern subjectivity in the mediating presence realized in third-stage images of the Baptist, the effects of which we must assume also continue to reverberate in our tradition. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will expand my discussion of the Baptist's mediating presence and begin delineating some channels of its continued reverberation. In order to emphasize its availability for our reception, I will describe it as both a structural feature refined in the images, which I will call the testimonial gesture, and as a practice emerging from the images, which I will call the testimonial mode of viewing. As we shall see, both the testimonial gesture and the testimonial mode of viewing will prove remarkably durable solutions, capable of preserving referential presence not only in the realm of the 15th-century image, but also in the adjacent realms of early modern Italian humanism and the contemporary humanities.

2-4: The Testimonial Gesture

The mediating presence realized in images belonging to the third typological stage relies on the Baptist remaining charged with the referential obligations established in earlier stages of his figural migration despite the compositional and heuristic absence of the iconic referent as such. The most conspicuous repository of this charge is undoubtedly the Baptist's extended index finger.[94] In each of the third-stage examples, it is the extended index finger that binds the figure

---

[93] Ibid, p. 18.

[94] The Baptist's right arm and hand was an important relic during the late 15th century. According to an account provided by Guillaume Caoursin, Vice-Chancellor of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, in his *De translatione sacrae dextrae* (1496), the arm was removed from the saint's grave near Sebaste and transported to Antioch by St. Luke, where it stayed for over three centuries until it was presented to Emperor Constantine VII, a proponent of the cult of the Baptist who had it enshrined in the church of St. John in Petra, where it stayed until falling into Turkish hands in 1453. The relic was recovered by the Order in 1480, and soon became a topic of contention, with different sources attesting to its being located in the Hospitaller's church in Barcelona, the church of St. Martin in Groningen, the Grand Master's chapel in

of the Baptist most strongly to its earlier position on the margins of conventional icons and its attendant task of directing devotional attention toward the iconic field, pointing over his left shoulder to the Mother and Child residing in the compositional center. Indeed, there is no better example of how closely the extended index finger binds the figure of the Baptist to these referential obligations than Parmigianino's altarpiece which, as we have seen, marks not only the limit of the second typological stage but also the height of the index finger's embellishment. Like the Baptist's outturned gaze, the index finger can be said to be reactionary, its embellishment occurring in proportion to the compromising of the icon, the referential claims of the former increasing as those of the latter waned. However, unlike the outturned gaze, I will argue that the index finger serves an explicitly testimonial function, becoming integral to viewing only in the absence of the icon, a gesture bearing witness structurally to the referential obligations of its past.

The mobility that allowed gestures to cross the boundaries dividing genres, media and epochs while retaining residual charges from earlier typological stages has been most eloquently described by Aby Warburg. Discussing the re-appearance of nymph-like figures from antiquity in the paintings and frescoes of the Florentine Renaissance, Warburg introduced and refined his theory of the *Pathosformel* or "pathos formula." For Warburg, the windblown hair and flowing garments of these figures preserved vestiges of a pathetic intensity common in Antiquity but extinguished in the Middle Ages, their re-appearance in works by Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Pisanello constituting not simply a borrowing of form but a tapping of the pathetic charge these flourishes retained.[95] However, these charges did not persist unchanged. Rather, as E. H. Gombrich has noted, antique gestures possessed for Warburg a "latent energy"[96] which made them available for "dynamic inversion"[97] by their Renaissance successors who would re-

---

Rhodes to name only the most prominent examples. For an account of the history and significance of the relic, see Timothy B. Smith, "Up In Arms: The Knights of Rhodes, the Cult of Relics, and the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in Siena Cathedral" in *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Sally J. Cornelison and Scott B. Montgomery (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), p. 213-238.

[95] In an uncommonly concise discussion of the excavation of the *Laocoön* group, Warburg emphasizes the affective charge that antique gestures retained for their Renaissance inheritors: "And in 1488 when a small replica of the *Laocoön* group was found during nocturnal excavation work in Rome, the discoverers, even before they recognized the mythological subject, were fired with spontaneous artistic enthusiasm by the striking expressiveness of the suffering figures and by '*certi gesti mirabili*' (certain wonderful gestures). This was the Vulgar Latin of emotive gesture: an international, indeed a universal that went straight to the hearts of all those who chafed at medieval expressive constraints." Aby Warburg, "Dürer and Italian Antiquity," trans. David Britt in *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, ed. Kurt W. Forster (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), p. 598.

[96] E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 248.

[97] Ibid, p. 248.

appropriate the "unconscious inherited dispositions"[98] lying dormant in the formal arrangement of a lock or fold, activating this latent energy and channeling it according to their own interpretive needs.

Georges Didi-Huberman argues that it is precisely the pathetic dimension of the *Pathosformel* that allows the gesture's mobility through space and time. Benefitting from the rhetorical flexibility of "movement" as such, alluding to both its physical (to move through) and emotional (to be moved by) connotations, Didi-Huberman argues that Warburg introduced to the lexicon of art historical scholarship an approach sensitive to the "symptomatic" quality of the image encounter, a heuristic resource capable of freeing both artist and historian from the strictures of fractured time. "[T]he *Pathosformel,*" Didi-Huberman writes, "gave art history access to a fundamental anthropological dimension—that of the *symptom*. Here the *symptom* is understood as *movement in bodies*, a movement that fascinated Warburg not only because he considered it 'passionate agitation' but because he judged it an 'external prompting.'"[99] Although Didi-Huberman stresses that the Warburgian symptom should in no way be considered pathological, he does go to some length to ensure that it not lose the quality of an "external prompting," encroaching on and interrupting the normal course of things with an unexpected and often violent eruption of symptomatic pathos.

The referential obligations of the Baptist's index finger are registered pathetically, as a symptom in the Warburgian sense. Indeed, the rupture-crisis precipitating its embellishment during the second typological stage insists that its claims to reference be experienced as an "external prompting," encroaching on viewers from the crisis-rupture's reverse side. In this sense, the obligatory aspect of the index finger is dual, encompassing not only the index finger's relationship to its parergonal past, but also extending to the viewer's relationship to the image. In each of my third-stage examples, the viewer is confronted by an image replete with referential intent but shorn of the referent as such, encouraging him or her to respond to its pathetic or symptomatic aspects alone. We might say that the extended index finger serves as a heuristic semiconductor or point of energetic transfer, transmitting the charge of referential obligation embedded typologically in its form to the viewer as an obligation to accept its referential claims

---

[98] Ibid, p. 241.
[99] Georges Didi-Huberman, "Knowledge: Movement (The Man Who Spoke to Butterflies)" in Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 15.

as what Erwin Panofsky would call the image's "primary" or "natural" subject matter, received exclusively on formal grounds.[100]

However, insofar as the Baptist's index finger transmits the charge of referential obligation from image to viewer, it does only to the degree that its form has ceased being mere form, its mediating capacity further affirmed by its undergoing what Hans-Georg Gadamer describes as a "transformation into structure."[101] For Gadamer, the transformation into structure occurs when the practical aspects or "play" characterizing our engagement with texts, paintings or sculptures becomes durable, achieving a degree of permanence as inheritable properties of those texts, paintings or sculptures which, in the process, are changed from idiosyncratic works of artifice to world-bestowing works of art:

> I call this change, in which human play comes to its true consummation in being art, *transformation into structure*. Only through this change does play achieve ideality, so that it can be intended and understood as play. Only now does it emerge as detached from the representing activity of the players and consist in the pure appearance (Erscheinung) of what they are playing. As such, the play— even the unforeseen elements of improvisation—is in principle repeatable and hence permanent. It has the character of a work, of an ergon and not only of energia. In this sense, I call it a structure (Gebilde).[102]

As Gadamer explains, once transformed into structure, the practical aspect or play characteristic of our engagement with artworks is freed from any representative function, appearing to its audience as a meaningful whole in terms of which the surrounding array of other practices constituting our world can be understood.[103] Significantly for my discussion, Gadamer argues that the world-bestowing capacity of artworks is attributable to what he calls the structure's "total

---

[100] Panofsky includes gestures within the formal, pre-iconographic category of "primary" or "natural" subject matter, which is followed by the category of "secondary" or "conventional" subject matter and finally by the category of "intrinsic meaning" or "content." As Panofsky explains, primary or natural subject matter is "apprehended by identifying *pure forms*, that is, certain configurations of line and colour, or certain peculiarly shaped lumps of bonze or stone, as representations of natural *objects* such as human beings, animals, plants, houses, tools and so forth; by identifying their mutual relations as *events*; and by perceiving such *expressional* qualities as the mournful character of a pose or gesture, or the homelike and peaceful atmosphere of an interior. The world of *pure forms* thus recognized as carriers of *primary* or *natural* meanings may be called artistic *motifs*. An enumeration of these motifs would be a *pre-iconographical* description of the work of art." Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Icon Editions, 1972), p. 5.

[101] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2004), p. 110.

[102] Ibid, p. 110.

[103] Ibid, p. 117. A useful discussion of the transformation into structure can also be found in William Schweiker, "Beyond Imitation: Mimetic Praxis in Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Derrida" in *The Journal of Religion,* Vol. 68, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), p. 24-25.

mediation" through which thematic comprehensions of a given medium are "superseded" (aufhebt), freeing the structure of the medium to present itself as a mediating agent.[104]

Sympathetic with Warburg, Gadamer privileges the gesture as one of the most potent instances of the total mediation resulting from the transformation into structure. For Gadamer, the gesture poses a unique hermeneutic challenge to interpreters. The product of an arrested signifying motion, the gesture vacillates between the presence and absence of intentional meaning, throwing interpreters into a unique hermeneutic situation in which the total mediation of the structure stands as the exclusive site of interpretive appeal. Gadamer explains:

> What a gesture expresses is "there" in the gesture itself. A gesture is something wholly corporeal and wholly spiritual at one and the same time. The gesture reveals no inner meaning behind itself. The whole being of the gesture lies in what it says. At the same time every gesture is opaque in an enigmatic fashion. It is a mystery that holds back as much as it reveals. For what the gesture reveals is the being of meaning rather than the knowledge of meaning.[105]

It is the gesture's vacillation between presence and absence that allows the total mediation of structure to become apparent. Like Warburg, Gadamer describes the gesture as operating on a pathetic rather than conceptual basis, revealing the "being" of meaning rather than the "knowing" of meaning. Just as the arresting of the signifying motion causes the gesture to be both present and absent, "there" as a source of intentional meaning which nevertheless remains "opaque" to its interpreters, so too does the durability of hermeneutic play transformed into structure cause the source of the meaning to gradually become gradually obscured through the course of time, resulting in that meaning's being wholly condensed into the mediating structure itself. However, belying his position as a non-modern scholar, Gadamer argues that instead of being an obstacle to interpretation, the vacillation between presence and absence characteristic of structures and conspicuous in gestures accords interpretation its profundity, freeing it from mere subjectivity. He continues:

> Every gesture is human, but not every gesture is exclusively the gesture of a human being. Indeed, no gesture is merely the expression of an individual person. Like language, the gesture always reflects a world of meaning to which it belongs. And the gestures that the artist is able to bring out in his work, the gestures that allow us to interpret the world, are never simply human gestures alone.[106]

We can elucidate Gadamer's cryptic statement that human gestures are "never simply human gestures alone" by reintroducing my earlier distinction between the horizontal *saeculum* and the vertical *kairos*. Although gestures are the product of the *saeculum*'s horizontal succession of

---

[104] Ibid, p. 118.
[105] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Image and Gesture," trans. Nicholas Walker in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 79.
[106] Ibid, p. 79.

temporal units, a succession which allows the arresting of the signifying motion, they also reflect the kairos' vertical interruption of that succession by serving as mediating agents capable of making absent meaning present. Gadamer himself employs the horizontal-vertical distinction in a later essay, in which he describes mediating structures as "e-minent" ("standing-above").[107] Contrasting the eminent poetic text that has undergone the transformation into structure to non-eminent ordinary speech that hasn't, Gadamer writes, "A poetic text is not like a sentence in the ongoing flux of speech, but rather it is like something whole which lifts itself up out of the stream of speech that is flowing past." He continues, "the most homely, realistic verbal gesture which one encounters in a literary work is, in this sense, "elevated" language."[108] The ability of eminent structures—gestures among them—to elevate themselves vertically above the horizontal flow lifts them from the subjective realm of the simply human *saeculum* into the intersubjective realm of the more-than-human *kairos*.

It is precisely the combination of Warburgian pathos and Gadamerian eminence that allowed the Baptist's mediating presence to be condensed into the durable structural feature of his extended index finger. Indeed, the increased investment of referential weight in the Baptist produced by his unique typographical lineage suggests that his extended index finger be regarded as one of more dramatic instances of the pathos and eminence of the gesture as such. This is further encouraged when we consider what I will call the testimonial function of the Baptist's index finger. While during the first and second typological stages the Baptist pointed toward the Madonna and Child enthroned in the iconic field, his status as mediator confirmed proximally by these figures, during the third typological stage he points toward their absence, his status as mediator confirmed by his typological lineage alone. It is at this point that the Baptist's mediating presence becomes testimonial. As I will demonstrate in the following section, the phenomenon of testimony also relies on the combination of pathos and eminence characteristic of the gesture in order to render present an absent past. Insofar as the Baptist's extended index finger points to the absent icon while preserving the referent through the Baptist's own mediating presence, it constitutes a testimonial gesture, bearing witness structurally to the referential obligations of its past.

The degree to which the testimonial gesture draws on its own typological past to realize the Baptist's mediating presence is nowhere more apparent than in Leonardo's two portraits, undoubtedly the most mature examples of the third stage. As I have noted, in the seated portrait,

---

[107] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Eminent Text and Its Truth" in *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring, 1980), p. 5.
[108] Ibid, p. 6.

the Baptist's right hand displays its extended index finger, which points toward the void left by the absent icon. Outlined against the Baptist's chest and marking the absolute center of the canvas, it dominates the composition and commands the viewer's attention. However, for all its emphatic centrality, the extended index finger of the Baptist's right hand is made to share its gestural primacy. Following its cues, viewers are led to right toward the void, encountering in this lateral passage the Baptist's sloping cross which then directs our eye down toward the Baptist's left hand. Here we find the extended index finger of the right hand doubled by that of the left. Accented amidst a patch of shadow, the index finger of his left hand points downward, opening an ostensive circuit which leads from the Baptist to the right toward the void of the absent icon before cycling back once more, rendering the prior move inconclusive and causing the viewer to return to the Baptist once more, appealing to the mediating presence fostered by his typological past and condensed in his testimonial gesture for referential reassurance. In Leonardo's half-length portrait this circuit is completed and made an explicit compositional theme. Here viewing is choreographed so as to lead our eye via the Baptist's right hand from the his figure toward the void over his shoulder before cycling back via his left hand to the Baptist's chest. This circuitous choreography becomes the subject of several visual puns, including the Baptist's mass of curling hair, falling on either side of his ovoid face, and his serpentine cloak, winding around his neck, torso and forearm, all of which articulate the interpretive course taken by the viewer from Baptist to void and back.

Insofar as the circuit formed by the extended index fingers of the Baptist's left and right hands encourages the viewer to acknowledge his or her appeal to the structure of the painting as the ultimate site of referential appeal, so too does it encourage viewers to adopt a viewing practice capable of receiving from the image an account of its previous typological stages which, although absent from the scene of viewing as such, are made present through the mediating presence of the Baptist. In this sense, the circuit constitutes a hermeneutic circle. Martin Heidegger famously described the hermeneutic circle as that ontological horizon into which we are thrown and within which we perform the interpretive movements constitutive of understanding. Just as, when interpreting a given text, we must move in a circular manner from part to whole to part, or, from its details to an overall reading and then back to the details as the source of that reading, when we interpret a given practice we too must move in a circular manner from that practice to a thematic account of it and then back to the practice as the ground on which our understanding of that

account stands, prompting Heidegger to describe the circle as "non-vicious," being a source of knowledge rather than its obstacle.[109]

It is on the basis of this circularity that Heidegger will argue that interpretation cannot lay bare practices that would require interpreters to break from the circle and regard its contents objectively from the outside, but is limited to "*pointing-out*" [*Aufzeigen*] the tendency of practices to withdraw from our interpretive grasp. As he explains in his later writings, by pointing to this withdrawal, interpreters allow practices to appear while preserving their validity as grounds of understanding. Drawn toward this withdrawal, caught in what Heidegger calls the "draft" generated by the hermeneutic circle's centripetal movement, interpreters can only gesture toward the ontological source of meaning, pointing first to its elusive ground, then to their own pointing as evidence of that ground:

> To the extent that man *is* in this draft, he *points* toward what withdraws. *As* he is pointing that way, man *is* the pointer. Man here is not first of all man, and then also occasionally someone who points. No. Drawn into what withdraws, drawn toward it and thus pointing into the withdrawal, man first *is* man. His essential being lies in being such a pointer.[110]

As this passage suggests, not only does the circuit formed by the index fingers of the Baptist's left and right hands epitomize the hermeneutic circle, the testimonial gesture itself epitomizes the pointing toward withdrawal constitutive of the limit and ground of the interpretive act. Following the Baptist's ostensive circuit, we cycle from presence (the Baptist) to absence (the void left by the iconic referent as well as the typological past of Baptist imagery) then back to presence (the mediation figured by the Baptist and condensed in the testimonial gesture).

---

[109] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 195. Hubert Dreyfus provides the following synopsis of Heidegger's account of the hermeneutic circle, noting several of its most important methodological implications: "In general, the so-called hermeneutic circle refers to the fact that in interpreting a text one must move back and forth between an overall interpretation and the details that a given reading lets stand out as significant. Since the new details can modify the overall interpretation, which can in turn reveal new details as significant, the circle is supposed to lead to a richer and richer understanding of the text. As introduced by Heidegger even in Division I [of *Being and Time*], however, the phenomenological-hermeneutic circle involves a stronger methodological claim: (1) Since we must begin our analysis from within the practices we seek to interpret, our choice of phenomena to interpret is already guided by our traditional understanding of being. (2) Since it deals with what is difficult to notice, this traditional understanding may well have passed over what is crucial, so we cannot take the traditional understanding at face value. (3) Thus we must be prepared to revise radically the traditional account of objects, subjects, language, space, truth, reality, time, and so on, on the basis of the phenomena revealed by our interpretation." See Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), p. 36. Additional explication of Heidegger's account of the hermeneutic circle can be found in William Blattner, *Heidegger's Being and Time: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 22, and Mark A. Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 157-158.

[110] Martin Heidegger, "What Calls for Thinking?" trans. Max Niemeyer Verlag in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Foster Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1977), p. 374-375.

In the following section, I will describe the willingness of viewers to follow the Baptist's ostensive circuit, cycling from presence to absence to presence, as belonging to a testimonial mode of viewing, a practice born of the need to preserve the presence of the referent in the face of the rupture-crisis and made inheritable in the durable structural feature of the testimonial gesture.

2-5: The Testimonial Mode of Viewing

As I have noted in the introduction, testimony is characterized by a central aporia: the ability to render present an absent past. Among the most eloquent and penetrating descriptions of the aporetics of testimony is that provided by Ricoeur in his *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Borrowing from Aristotle's discussion of memory in *De memoria et reminiscentia* (*On Memory and Reminiscence*), Ricoeur begins his discussion by asserting the paradoxical status of remembered entities, posing Aristotle's question, "how it is possible that though the affection [the presentation] alone is present, and the [related] fact absent, the latter—that which is not present— is remembered."[111] Like Aristotle, Ricoeur distinguishes two ways in which remembered entities become present. The first of these, which Ricoeur calls "simple evocation," concerns those remembered entities which become present spontaneously as subjective affects, products of the phenomenon of *mneme* (memory). For Aristotle, the affective presence of *mneme* consists of two parts: the *phantasma* (the affect as sense perception), and the *eikon* (the affect as likeness or copy). The second of these, which Ricoeur calls "effort to recall," concerns those remembered entities that become present only through the external prompting of mnemonic tokens which begin willed movements back to subjective affects, products of the phenomenon of *anamnesis* (recollection). Although Ricoeur acknowledges Aristotle's distinction between *mneme* and *anamnesis* as essential, he suggests that, due to the common root of each in the affects of subjects, any discussion of memory equipped with these terms alone will be incomplete, unable to accommodate the vast majority of remembered entities for which no original affects can be found.[112] The most important reserve of these is the intersubjective field of history, and it is here that Aristotle's initial question becomes most complex.

---

[111] Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* (*On Memory and Reminiscence*) trans. J. I. Beare in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 609.

[112] Aristotle insists on the affective root of *anamnesis*, writing, "That the affection is corporeal, i.e. that recollection is a searching for an 'image' in a corporeal substrate, is proved by the fact that in some persons, when, despite the most strenuous application of thought, they have been unable to recollect, it [viz. the effort at recollection] excites a feeling of discomfort, which even though they abandon the effort at recollection, persists in them none the less " (616). In an earlier essay to which I will refer again, Ricoeur opposes to the corporeal affects grounding *mneme* and *anamnesis* in Aristotle's discussion of memory a hermeneutic pathos more akin to Aristotle's discussion of tragedy. For Ricoeur, the best example of this

For Ricoeur, history constitutes an exaggerated form of *anamnesis*. Not only does history begin with an external prompting like all forms of recollection, it does so in the face of two obstacles which preclude any arrival at the subjective affects which for Aristotle had grounded traditional *anamnesis*: the spans of time across which histories extend and the intersubjective spaces in which histories are shared. As Ricoeur explains, each of these foreclose the possibility of moving backward from mnemonic token to subjective affect by imposing a radical absence, concealing the object of recollection behind either the impenetrable fog of time or the opaque psyche of the other. History is able to pursue its recollective course in spite of these obstacles only by way of what Ricoeur describes as the mediating function of testimony.

As Ricoeur explains, testimony is characterized by its ability to mediate between the recollected entities or events that are themselves absent from the annunciative scene, and the audiences in the presence of which accounts of those entities or events are delivered, either by a witness or text. It is this mediating role unique to testimonial accounts that causes Ricoeur to declare that, "testimony takes us with one bound to the formal conditions of 'things of the past' (*praeterita*), the conditions of possibility of the actual process of the historiographical operation."[113] This process, Ricoeur argues, rests on a foundation not of affect, which for reasons I have noted cannot ground historical recollection, but of faith, which extends both to the recollected entity or event of which we expect "a faithful account," and to the claims of the witnesses or texts which asks us to "believe" their claims to have "really been there."[114] For Ricoeur, it this foundation of faith, sedimented in the institutions of history, that enables testimony to render recollected entities and events present.[115]

---

pathos is to be found in the Book of Job: "What did Job 'see'? Behemoth and Leviathan? The orders of creation? No. His questions about justice are undoubtedly left without an answer. But by repenting, though not of sin, for he is righteous, but by repenting for his supposition that existence does not make sense, Job presupposes an unsuspected meaning which cannot be transcribed by speech or *logos* a human being may have at his disposal. This meaning has no other expression than the new quality which penitence confers on suffering. Hence it is not unrelated to what Aristotle speaks of as the tragic *pathos* that purifies the spectator of fear and pity." Here, pathos is distinguished from affect in that it constitutes a source of meaning without, however, rising to the level of proof, a qualification consistent with Warburg's theorization of the *Pathosformel*. See Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 70, No. 1/2 (Jan.-Apr., 1977), p. 12-13.

[113] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 161.

[114] Ibid, p. 161-166.

[115] As Ricoeur explains, the critical endeavor to expose false testimonies also relies on a foundation of faith when proceeding from accounts of historical entities or events regarded as less reliable to accounts of historical entities or events regarded as more reliable: "To memory is tied an ambition, a claim—that of being faithful to the past…To put it bluntly, we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare that we remember it. False testimonies…can be unmasked only by a critical agency that can do nothing better than to oppose those accounts reputed to be more reliable to the testimony under suspicion" (21).

Ricoeur enriches his discussion of testimony's reliance on the foundation of faith by comparing historical testimony to prophetic revelation, both of which, he argues, are the products of an inspired double authorship. The fundamental instance of this double authorship in the Western tradition is the prophetic revelation delivered by Moses to the tribes of Israel. As Ricoeur explains, when narrating the Pentateuch, Moses "presents himself not as speaking in his own name, but in the name of another, in the name of Yahweh. So here the idea of revelation appears as identified with the idea of a double author of speech and writing. Revelation is the speech of another behind the speech of the prophet."[116] Although the fundamental instance of this double authorship is located in the scriptures, Ricoeur expands this instance analogically into a mode of discourse more primordial than that of theology, offering historical testimony as a further example of discourse in which statements are subtended by double authorship. Like prophets delivering revelations, witnesses and texts delivering testimonies do not speak in their own name but rather in the names of the past entities and events to which they refer which, like Yahweh, serve as anterior second authors speaking behind and lending legitimacy to the testimonies themselves.

For Ricoeur, both prophetic revelations and historical testimonies become matters of faith insofar as their anterior second authors remain unavailable for direct inspection, requiring audiences to accept their apparently unreasonable claims without objectively verifiable evidence, focusing the burden of proof on the mediating witness alone.[117] As the most dramatic example of this, Ricoeur offers the figure of the martyr:

> When this proof becomes the price of life itself, the witness changes names. He becomes a martyr. In Greek, though, μαρτυς means witness, I am well aware that any argument from martyrdom is suspect. A cause that has martyrs is not necessarily a just cause. But martyrdom precisely is not an argument and still less a proof. It is a test, a limit situation. A person becomes a martyr because first of all he is a witness.[118]

---

[116] Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 3.

[117] Interestingly, Ricoeur describes the unavailability of these anterior second authors and the resulting mediation as results of a "scission" (33), a term which alludes to the Kantian notion of the "pure cut" discussed briefly above. The allusion is intentional, and Ricoeur goes on to articulate the intimate relationship between Kantian aesthetics and historical testimony: "At the moment of accounting for the aesthetic production of genius, [Kant] invokes that power of imagination 'to present' (*Darstellung*) those ideas of reason for which we have no concept. By means of such representation, the imagination 'occasions much thought' (*viel zu denken*) without however any definite thought, i.e., any concept, being capable of being adequate to it; it consequently cannot be completely encompassed and made intelligible in language.' …Historical testimony has the same structure and the same function. It, too, is a 'presentation' of what for reflection remains only an idea: namely, the idea of letting go wherein we affirm an order exempt from that servitude from which finite existence cannot deliver itself" (36-37).

[118] Ibid, p. 34.

As Ricoeur explains, it is precisely because martyrdom does not constitute an argument but rather a test that it serves as the most concise example of the unique evidentiary burden born by the mediating witness. Unable to provide objectively verifiable evidence, he or she ceases "testifying that…" and begins "testifying to…."[119] Ricoeur recommends the latter phrase as a means of better understanding the way in which testimonies, shorn from their anterior second authors, focus the burden of proof on the actions and, in the most dramatic cases, lives of the mediating witness-martyrs by whom they are delivered. While Ricoeur alludes only briefly to examples, mentioning Socrates and Jesus as possible test cases, I offer John the Baptist as among the most representative instance of the evidentiary burden born by the witness-martyr as mediator.

According to the chronology provided in the Gospel of Luke, John the Baptist appeared during the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (20 CE) in the valleys and desert of Judea, southeast of Jerusalem along banks of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Born to sacerdotal parents Zacharias and Elisabeth, the Baptist is generally considered to have refined his brand of apocalyptic asceticism among the Essenes of Qumran before retreating to the surrounding wilderness where he delivered the majority of his sermons and baptisms, including that which he is said to have performed on Christ in the waters of Bethany, beyond the Jordan.[120] Before turning to the complex relationship between the Baptist and Christ, we can already notice in the performance of the baptismal rite and the penitent diet of locusts and honey what Ricoeur described as the focusing of the burden of evidentiary proof born on the actions of the witness. Indeed, 1st-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus suggests that the imprisonment and eventual martyrdom of the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas (4-39 CE) was the result of the tetrarch's objection to precisely the way in which these actions claimed to consolidate the source of divine judgment.[121] Offended by the Baptist's objecting to his affair with Herodias, wife of his half-brother (also named Herod), and alarmed by the popular support the Baptist received in the surrounding territories, Herod had the Baptist imprisoned and later executed.[122] While the

---

[119] Ibid, p. 34.

[120] For discussions of the Baptist's relationship to the Essenes of Qumran, see Howard M. Teeple, "Quamran and the Origin of the Fourth Gospel" in *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 4, Fasc. 1 (Oct., 1960), p. 6-25 and John A. T. Robinson, "The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community: Testing a Hypothesis" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Jul., 1957), p. 175-191.

[121] Unlike accounts of the Baptist recorded in the Gospels, Josephus notes that the baptismal rite was considered to be redemptive of the body and not the soul. According to Josephus, the Baptist preached that the redemption of the soul was secured only by "proper behavior." See Josephus Flavius, *Josephus: The Essential Writings*, trans. and ed. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988), p. 267.

[122] Accounts differ regarding the circumstances of the Baptist's execution. Josephus's account states that Herod summarily ordered the Baptist's death amidst fears of a rebellion. The Gospel of Mark (6:17-6:28) describes Herod as hesitant. According to the Gospel, Herod made an oath to Salome, daughter of Herodias, having been impressed by her ability to entertain the courts as a dancer. The oath guaranteed Salome one

emphasis on the Baptist's performance of the baptismal rite and penitent diet are typical of Ricoeur's description of the focusing of the burden of evidentiary proof on the actions and life of the witness-martyr, it is in the Baptist's relationship to Christ that his exemplarity in this regard is made most explicit.

The Baptist's role as witness is most accurately reflected by his epithets "forerunner" and "precursor," both of which refer to his preparatory function preceding and testifying to the coming of Christ. Although several passages in each of the four of the Gospels describe the Baptist's role as witness, two passages from the Gospel of John articulate the structural conditions of this role particularly well. The first, spoken by Christ, indicates both the unique status of the Baptist as witness and the double authorship underwriting his prophetic revelation: "If I bear witness myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness to the truth."[123] While these lines are dense with parabolic meaning, one of their more striking aspects is Christ's insistence on his own insufficiency as witness. One reason for this may be Christ's status as god-man, which nullifies the anteriority of the second author Yahweh which, as we have seen, is such a crucial component of the witness-martyr's discourse. This view is supported by the passage's final line, in which Christ specifies the distance between the Baptist and Yahweh as elemental to his ability to serve successfully as witness. The second, spoken by the Baptist and adopted as one of this paper's epigraphs, indicates the way in which the burden of evidentiary proof becomes focused on the witness-martyr: "That is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me."[124] Remarkable in these lines is the paradoxical status of the Baptist's testimony, which is described as both preceding Christ ("that is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man") and following Christ ("which is preferred before me: for he was before me.") Another instance of the hermeneutic circularity described above, we as readers cycle from the presence of the Baptist's testimony ("After me") to the absence of the messianic figure of Christ ("a man which is preferred before me") before returning once more to the presence of the Baptist's testimony ("for he was before me"). As was the case when viewing third-stage representations of the Baptist, the cycle ends with the Baptist assuming a mediating presence, his figure baring the burden of evidentiary proof.

It is this cycling from presence to absence to presence encouraged both by the third-stage images of the Baptist and by the Gospels' descriptions of his role as witness-martyr that

---

wish or half the kingdom. When Salome demanded the head of the Baptist be delivered to her in a charger, Herod obliged her only reluctantly.

[123] John1 5:31-5:33.
[124] John 1:30-1:33.

characterizes what I call the testimonial mode of viewing. As in all forms of testimony, the Baptist as mediator is in both cases charged with the task of rendering the absent present. In my third-stage examples, it is not only the absent iconic referent that the Baptist renders present, but also, as we have seen, the referential obligations of those earlier typological stages from which his mediating presence emerged. In this regard, third-stage images of the Baptist can be said to epitomize one of the most complex facets of the Baptist's unique testimonial function. In addition to bearing witness narratively, proclaiming his appearance, the Baptist also bares witness structurally, serving as what in biblical exegesis is often described as a *typos* of Christ, prefiguring his appearance.[125] This suggests that the association of the Baptist's testimonial function with the typological thinking I have been describing was itself a nascent resource, received and refined by the testimonial gesture, preserved and perpetuated by testimonial mode viewing.[126]

In the next chapter I will argue that, while exemplified by third-stage images of the Baptist, the testimonial mode of viewing extended beyond the devotional realm, becoming one of the most crucial components of the secular genre of the *historia*. I will argue that it was in the *historia* that the problems of fractured time posed by the rupture-crisis were most successfully addressed. Focusing on the theorization of genre provided by Leon Battista Alberti, I will claim that viewers not only extended the willingness to cycle between presence and absence that they had developed in their confrontations which images of the Baptist, but that this extension occurred by way of the durable structural feature of the testimonial gesture, a variation of which Alberti describes as the defining attribute of the genre's *ammonitore* figure. Locating both the

---

[125] Northrop Frye describes the organization of the Old and New Testaments as corresponding to a type-antitype pairs, with Old Testament parables and figures serving as the counterparts of their New Testament equivalents, which are often interpreted as complementing or fulfilling their predecessors. As Frye explains, biblical typology relied on a complex rhetoric of pre-figuration, with "*typos*," "forma," and "figura" often being considered synonymous: "Everything that happens in the Old Testament is a 'type' or adumbration of something that happens in the New testament, and the whole subject is therefore called typology, though it is typology in a special sense. Paul speaks in Romans 5:14 of Adam as a *typos* of Christ; the vulgate renders *typos* here as 'forma,' but the AV's 'figure' reflects the fact that 'figura' had come to be the standard Latin equivalent of *typos*. What happens in the New Testament constitutes an 'antitype,' a realized form something foreshadowed in the Old Testament. See Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2007), p. 106.

[126] Christopher S. Wood alludes briefly to the Baptist's implication in typological thinking, citing Saul A. Kripke's discussion of the unique status of the baptismal event (57). Kripke suggests that, although temporally fixed, the baptismal event is typologically preserved through time, being replicated anew with each utterance of a subject's name: "An initial 'baptism' takes place. Here the objet may be names by ostension, or the reference of the name may be fixed by description. When the name is 'passed from link to link,' the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learn how to use it the sane reference as the man from whom he heard it." See Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 96.

historia and the *ammonitore* within the broader textures of Italian humanism, I will offer an alternative to Burckhardt's influential account of the Renaissance as a period in which the veil of faith was dropped, arguing instead that the humanists' relationship to the artifacts, grammar and rhetoric of antiquity relied on the testimonial mode of viewing, preserving rather than dispelling the referential conventions of icon viewing in a series of cultural institutions which, I will claim, persist as among the most important foundations of the contemporary humanities.

CHAPTER THREE: ON RUPTURE AND REFERENCE

3:1 Humanism, History, *Historia*

While the rupture-crisis emerged in the devotional realm of the icon, it was in the secular realm of the *historia* that the problem of fractured time which it posed was most successfully addressed. This is due in large part to the way in which the genre served as a figurative space where Italian humanists could articulate the terms of their complex relationship with the antique past. As has been often noted, this relationship differed dramatically from our own, exhibiting a receptivity which, by the comparatively atrophic standards of current scholarship, appears in many ways strange. Arguably, this receptivity was nowhere more effectively demonstrated than in the attitude that the humanists adopted toward the artifacts of antiquity.

As Charles Mitchell argued in an influential essay, humanists were often willing to forego distinctions between the categories "original" and "forgery" on which modern and anti-modern scholars rely when fixing objects in time.[127] Although early modern antiquarians like the 16th-centuy bishop Antonio Agustin, to whom the illustrious title *arca universae antiquitatis* ("repository of all antiquarian knowledge") was given, took pride in their critical knowledge of antiquity, preferring to "see the original rather than the copy," this pride was balanced by an appreciation of the knowledge and sensitivity demonstrated by convincing fakes.[128] As Mitchell notes, Agustin took particular pleasure in the fraudulent coins of the Paduan Cavino, counterfeited to near perfection, and the spurious inscriptions of the Veronese Panvinio, which had fooled countless compilers. Agustin's delight in these forgeries was not idiosyncratic, but reflected a broader sentiment among antiquarian humanists that Mitchell describes as creative, not to say romantic:

> The sixteenth-century antiquary was a humanist in a new medium. His first task was to correct, elucidate and supplement the classical texts where they were deficient. He could restore something like the spelling of the words Cicero or Caesar had in mind when they dictated their works…. [H]e could also systematically illustrate the various departments, the *antiquitatis*, of ancient Greek and Roman life…. But at the same time the antiquary, like the literary humanist, was an original composer. He invented inscriptions to show his taste, and he could fake them too to exhibit his skill and his ability to rival the ancients.

---

[127] Charles Mitchell, "Archaeology and Romance in Renaissance Italy" in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London: Faber and Faber, 1960). Important contributions to the discussion of these categories in the early modern period have also been made by Anthony Grafton in his *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
[128] Ibid, p. 455.

> The more like the genuine article his products were, the greater credit they were to his scholarship.[129]

In Mitchell's description, the antiquarian humanist assumes the role of participant, adding freely to artifacts recovered and embellishing artifacts invented. However, this participatory stance was the product not of undue arrogance but rather of presumed contemporaneity. For, although made absent by the centuries that had passed since Cicero and Caesar, antiquarian humanists considered the antique worlds to which their objects of study belonged to be nevertheless available for dynamic kairotic reception in their present. Many shared the ambition of renowned antiquarian Cyriac of Ancona to overcome historical distance by resurrecting these worlds, "bring[ing] them from the dark tomb to light, to live once more among living men."[130] Products of this ambition, the forged originals so admired by Agustin and Cyriac were not seen as violations of scholastic decency, but as examples of scholastic receptivity.

Indeed, humanists often continued to regard forgeries as originals even when they had been exposed, perceiving their own imitations of antique precedents as legitimate instances of the models they copied. Among the most renowned examples of this is the reception of Michelangelo's sculpture of a sleeping Cupid, famously recounted by Giorgio Vasari:

> [The Cupid], when finished, was shown by means of Baldassarre del Milanese to Lorenzo di Pier Francesco as a beautiful thing, and he, having pronounced the same judgment, said to Michelangelo, "If you were to bury it under ground and then sent it to Rome treated in such a manner as to look old, I am certain it would pass for an antique, and you would thus obtain much more for it than by selling it here." It is said that Michelangelo handled [the Cupid] in such a manner as to make it appear an antique; nor is there any reason to marvel at that, seeing that he had genius to do it and even more. Others maintain that Milanese took it to Rome and buried it in a vineyard that he had there, and then sold it as an antique to Cardinal San Giorgio for two hundred ducats.[131]

David Quint has described Vasari's anecdote of Michelangelo's Cupid as revealing a propensity among humanists to think of all artifacts regardless of provenance as "forged," that is, as painstakingly made by hands.[132] However, this forged status did not temporally relativize these artifacts as one might expect. Instead, Quint argues, it allowed both forgeries and originals to be

---

[129] Ibid, p. 459.
[130] Ibid, p. 470.
[131] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, ed. Phillip Jacks (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 384.
[132] David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 4.

seen in relation to "typological" sources of meaning which were considered to be beyond time, and which fostered a degree of exchangeability between the two categories.[133]

It was to the continued availability of these typological sources of meaning that humanists attested when imitating the styles and forms of their antique predecessors, often regarding the convincing replication of these as warrant enough for the attribution of the descriptor "antique" to their counterfeit works. One of the most convincing replicators of these styles and forms was none other than the young Alberti, whose precocious play *Philodoxeos fabula* imitated the Latin of imperial Rome and the conventions of antique comedy so convincingly that, when an unauthorized version was circulated anonymously, it was taken to be a legitimately classical work, giving off what Alberti later called "a powerful scent of the ancient comic genre and a sort of deep antiquity."[134] Alberti seemed comfortable with his text retaining its claim to antique status, attaching a forward to a revised edition which attributed the work to confected antique author Lepidus, then letting it circulate freely among readers, fooling some who were thrilled at the recovery of yet another antique source, delighting others who were encouraged to join in the imitative enterprise.

The readiness with which early modern humanists admitted forgeries into the ranks of originals reflected the developments occurring in the humanists' conception of historical time. Spurred by an ever expanding range of travel, and an unprecedented awareness of the geographic and ethnological complexity exhibited by the landscapes and societies of Africa, Asia and the Americas, peripatetic scholars fashioned chronological systems capable of coping with the discrepancies this complexity posed for what seemed to many a restrictive and rigid temporal model derived from the Old Testament. As Anthony Grafton has noted, while these chronologies shared an unflinching demand for precision dating, each embossed folio, wall chart and pocket almanac construed these dates differently, causing the swath of history itself to seem fluid, subject to continuous revision, modification and amendment. As Grafton explains, this fluidity caused informed readers by the middle of the 15th century to see chronology "not as a fixed textbook discipline but as a challenging interdisciplinary study, one that swarmed with unsolved

---

[133] Quint offers Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* as another example of early modern humanism's submission of the time-bound categories of forgery and original to the timeless category of conventional and typological sources of meaning. Erasmus poses an alternative, Quint argues, between a historicist conception of time that separates the forgery from the original, and an allegorical conception of time that allows these categories to merge: "As long as Folly remains the original fiction of her human author, her oration and his text are limited to a corrosive satire that empties human life of significance. The positive, allegorical movement of the text toward the recovery of true meaning is accompanied by a gradual relinquishing of Folly's distinctive voice for a conventional language of piety and by the identification of Folly herself with a preexistent scriptural typology" (21).

[134] Cited by Anthony Grafton in *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 43.

problems."[135] Each of these unsolved problems presented chronologists with an opportunity to reshape the historical continuum to which they belonged, locating events, artifacts and themselves at various positions within a contested temporal matrix which, with each rearrangement, was thrown again into flux.

The developments occurring in the field of chronology were mirrored by those occurring in the field of etymology. Expanding Quint's discussion of typological sources of meaning, Marian Rothstein's describes the 16th-century vogue for etymological studies (from *etumos*, meaning "true" or "real") as evincing a fluid conception of historical time similar to that reflected in the unabashedly forged originals of the antiquarians and the continuously amended almanacs of the chronologists. This fluidity was expressed both explicitly, in etymological treatises such as Isidore of Seville's 6th-century work, *Etymologiarum sive originum*, which was wildly popular amongst 15th-century grammarians and derived the truth or "*etumon*" of entities from their names alone, and implicitly, in a variety of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, which described the transmission and preservation of secular power and learning from Greek and Roman sources to their contemporary manifestations.[136] Whether explicitly theorized or implicitly assumed, these contributions to the etymological field also presented a conception of historical time that was fluid, allowing relatively free exchange between the humanists and their antique forbears. Even extended historical lapses could be quite easily overcome as long as a text, sentence or even a single word remained through which etymologists could derive the formal principles of the sources that the trace obeyed. For, as Rothstein argues, these sources were regarded by humanists as "perpetually present," available for dynamic kairotic reception at any point in the historical continuum.[137]

The humanists' receptivity to typological sources of meaning exhibits many of the hermeneutic traits that I have identified as belonging to the testimonial mode of viewing. In each of the examples given, whether drawn from the fields of antiquarianism, chronology, or etymology, artifacts served a mediating function analogous to that served by the figure of the Baptist, allowing absent antique sources of meaning to be rendered present to scholars pouring over their forms. This initial resemblance becomes more compelling when we entertain the

---

[135] Anthony Grafton, "Dating History: The Renaissance & the Reformation of Chronology" in *Daedalus*, Vol. 132, No. 2, On Time (Spring, 2003), p. 79.

[136] Marian Rothstein, "Etymology, Genealogy, and the Immutability of Origins" in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Summer, 1990), p. 333.

[137] Ibid, p. 333-334. Rothstein also offers the following description of Renaissance invention which, like Quint's description of the forged status of artifacts, subsumes the time-bound production of objects beneath their timeless conventional and typological sources: "Generally speaking, for the Renaissance, an invention is the making known of something that already exists, the tapping of a previously untapped potential where the act of tapping is not more important than the independent pre-existence of the potential" (344).

possibility that, when turning to these artifacts and preparing to receive from their formal features a glimpse of the antique models according to which they were produced, the humanists were exercising the very practices acquired from second and third-stage Baptist imagery. Indeed, the Lucian aphorism *leonem ex unguibus aestimare* ("to reckon the lion from the claw"), so often cited by Vasari, Erasmus and others, may have served as an antique proxy for the testimonial gesture itself.[138] The testimonial gesture would, however, become the subject of dedicated attention when theorized by Alberti as one of the most crucial features of that genre charged with the explicit task of addressing what role the act of viewing would play in humanism's broader antiquarian project: the *historia*.

As Jack M. Greenstein has explained, the theorization of the *historia* provided by Alberti in his 1435 treatise was the product of a combination of elements from the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition and the Medieval Christian theological tradition. From the Greek ἵστωρ or Latin *histor*, meaning "skilled witness or judge," *historia* referred during early antiquity to the activity of one who investigated and testified to events which he himself had observed. In later antiquity, *historia* referred to the results of these investigations and testimonies, imbuing the word with a degree of ambiguity by refusing to distinguish between the events themselves and the witness's testimony, both of which being equally regarded as *historia*. As the production of *historia* became more ambitious, claiming both a wider temporal scope and a greater degree of veracity, the limits of the witness became more pronounced, causing historians like Thucydides to organize and collate many individual accounts according to inherited cultural models of emplotment and mythic types, giving the *historia* the distinctly narrative aspect to which Aristotle would attest in his *Poetics*, placing it alongside epic and drama as a distinctly literary form.[139]

When used by the Latin writers of pagan antiquity, the earlier emphasis on the witness as investigator was all but forgotten. Adopting neither its root word *histor* nor its active verb *historien* ("to inquire" or "to relate the results of inquiry"), these writers adopted an almost exclusively typological understanding of *historia*. Included as part of the grammar and rhetoric curricula that sought to train students in the effective reading and composing of texts, *historia* assumed what Greenstein calls an "informational" significance, perceived as referring to the

---

[138] This aphorism and its citation by Vasari and Erasmus is discussed by Robert Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 41-42.

[139] Jack M. Greenstein, *Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 15-18. Much of Greenstein's gloss of the antique understanding of the *historia* is culled from Gerald A. Press, "The Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity," Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1974. Press published a summary of his dissertation titled "History and the Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity" in *History and Theory*, Vol. 16 (1997), p. 280-196.

actuality of the events that had occurred. This informational significance was reflected by historians who, when amending earlier *historia*, would seek not to correct implausibilities in the sources themselves, but rather to "recount" these in "a more pleasing and memorable fashion" when composing their own *historia*, demonstrating a more inventive use of the typological conventions to which the sources belonged. It was through the manipulation of these typological conventions rather than the uncovering, correcting or exposing of sources that the Latin historian's contribution to historical accuracy of was made.[140]

The understanding of *historia* born of the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition was succeeded by that born of the Medieval Christian tradition. Here, *historia* were no longer concerned exclusively with retrospective accounts of events that had occurred in the past, but began to locate these events within a divine temporal framework that also included prospective accounts of events that would occur in the future. As Greenstein explains, the location of *historia* within this divine temporal framework allowed events far removed from one another to be considered relationally, interpretively joined through biblical hermeneutics and figurative analysis. In biblical hermeneutics, *historia* corresponded to the *sensus litteralis,* the primary or literal meaning of Scripture, and served as the basis for *sensus spiritualis*, its allegorical or spiritual significance. Figurative analysis, from the Latin *figura* or "type," would interpret the events of *historia* typologically as prefigurations of later events with which they shared some relation within the divine temporal framework. As Greenstein explains, figurative analysis negotiated between the events of the *historia* and the figurative types to which they were interpretively joined without sacrificing either particularity or abstraction. Indeed, the theological obligation of the figure was to facilitate a reciprocal relationship between typological abstractions and the particular events by which they were embodied.[141]

It was this figurative dimension that allowed the term *historia* to be applied not only to texts but also to other media, including painting. An etymology coined by 2nd-century grammarian Aulus Gellius and repeated by Isidore of Seville linked *historia* to a distinctly visual form of knowledge on the basis of the witness's having had to have seen those events to the

---

[140] Ibid, p. 20-21. Greenstein notes the distinction made by Latin historians between *historia*, which exhibited a strong narrative emphasis grounded in the inventive manipulation of typological convention, and *annals*, which purported to be merely annual recordings of facts stripped of all narrative and typological trappings. Greenstein cites Latin grammarian Sempronius Asellio's charge that annals were akin to fables in that they lacked the verisimilitude of *historia*, being able to list events but unable to locate these within a narrative arc that would relate what had caused these events to occur and what significance these events might have.
[141] Ibid, p. 25-28.

existence of which he testified.[142] It is this claim that Alberti would pursue on behalf of painting in his treatise, arguing that painting in general and the *historia* in particular be included among the ranks of the "liberal arts," capable not only of delighting the senses of viewers, but also of contributing to their intellectual understanding of and moral comportment in the world. As we will see in the following section, both contributions relied on the cultivation of a kairotic receptivity that found its most explicit articulation in the *ammonitore* figure, whose most distinguishing feature was a variation of the testimonial gesture.

3:2 Alberti's Aesthetics and the *Ammonitore*

Alberti's treatise, written in Latin in 1435, translated into Italian in 1436, and then reissued as a definitive Latin edition in 1440, drew from both the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition and the Medieval Christian theological tradition when theorizing *historia* as a genre of painting. The principle concern of the second of the treatise's three books, the first being devoted to a mathematical explication of linear perspective and the third to the preferred conduct of the painter, the *historia* was for Alberti "the great work of the painter," unequalled both in ambition and import.[143] Considered to be a participant in humanism's antiquarian project, Alberti insisted that *historia* portray notable scenes from classical myths or biblical verse. These were to be represented convincingly by figures arranged in groups of no more than ten, portrayed with correct anatomical proportions and in a geometrically rendered space capable of relating their relationships both to each other and to the setting in which they appear.

The emphasis placed by Alberti on the convincing representation of classical and biblical scenes constitutes an extension of that placed by the Greco-Roman tradition of the *historia* as the testimonial recounting of an event by a witness. Like the witness's testimony, Alberti intended *historia* to render the absent events or entities they portrayed present to the audiences by which they were viewed. Indeed, in the introduction to the second book of his treatise dedicated to the *historia*, Alberti describes this ability to render the absent present as one of painting's most potent traits:

> Painting possesses a truly divine power in that not only does it make the absent present (as they say of friendship), but it also represents the dead to the living many centuries later, so that they are recognized by spectators with pleasure and deep admiration for the artist.[144]

---

[142] Ibid, p. 26.
[143] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 71.
[144] Ibid, p. 60.

Alberti here describes painting as not only able to render the absent present, but to do so across considerable temporal intervals, a specification which placed painting in the tradition of the Greco-Roman *histor* as a witness to events or entities which audiences would not otherwise encounter, requiring the scenes portrayed be rendered with plausible figures occupying plausible spaces.

While the convincing portrayal of figures and spaces was crucial to Alberti's understanding of *historia*, the genre was by no means confined to the merely illustrative. In addition to techniques for the simulation of perspective space and anatomical features, Alberti also offers an extensive treatment of pictorial composition and its participation to the *historia*'s testimonial function. As Michael Baxandall has shown, much of Alberti's compositional theory was derived from humanist guides to the grammatical structures of classical Latin. Alberti's description of composition as the correct assembly of parts in relation to a whole in particular reflected similar models commonly found in these guides. As Alberti explains, "composition is the procedure in painting whereby the parts are composed together in the picture…Parts of the '*historia*' are the bodies, part of the body is the member, and part of the member is the surface."[145] Baxandall notes the resemblance between the four-stage hierarchy comprised of the *historia*, the body, the member and the surface described in this passage and that comprised of the period, clause, phrase, and word described in the humanists' grammatical guides.[146] While Baxandall limits himself to noting this resemblance, acknowledging the importance of Alberti's theory of composition as a uniquely humanist achievement but resisting granting it much significance beyond matters of style, recent work by Robert Williams suggests that the part-whole correspondence on which Alberti's theory of composition relied was more robust, and served as one the most distinctive features of humanist aesthetics.[147]

For Williams, early modern art theory and production was premised on the co-determination of individual images (parts) and the complex of other images to which they

---

[145] Ibid, p. 71.

[146] Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 130-131.

[147] Baxandall concludes his study by delineating two schools of humanistic art theory, each of which corresponded to a school of grammatical theory. The first was Alberti's school of *compositus* painting, which corresponded to the school of *compositus* writing, the main proponent of which was Italianized Cretan and Greek scholar George of Trebizond who articulated its principles in his *De rhetorica libri V*. The *compositus* school stressed compositional harmony between formal elements, and concerned itself with providing ruled for managing their arrangement. The second was the *dissolutus* school, which George of Trebizond felt was typified by Guarino da Verona, who was also responsible for a comparable school of grammar. Unlike the *compositus* school, the *dissolutus* school stressed compositional variety or *varietas*, paying little attention to compositional harmony (91-95, 138-139). Greenstein criticizes Baxandall's limiting his conversation to stylistic matters in his essay "On Alberti's 'Sign': Vision and Composition in Quattrocento Painting" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), p. 670.

belonged (wholes). It was this co-determination, theorized by Williams as the "systematicity of representation," that allowed early modern humanists to negotiate relationships between subject and object, internal and external, self and society by conceiving of these as reciprocal components in a more fundamental representational order. Williams describes this order as neither conceptual nor static, but rather as a sort of consistent pressure exerted by the system of representation itself in relation to which the significance of individual representations is intuitively determined. As new representations are introduced into this system, the ebb and flow of this pressure changes, allowing new significances to emerge. While the system itself remains absent and unavailable for articulation, it encountered in those individual representations experienced as meaningful, appropriate or in some sense important. Williams suggests that the rise of early modern aesthetic theory be considered the product of an increasing awareness of this systematicity, offering the theorists' attempts to provide general principles as attempts to reckon with the system itself.[148]

As one of the most potent examples of the systematicity of representation, Williams offers the *historia*. For Williams, the part-whole relationship constitutive of *historia* composition serves as among the most explicit expressions of the systematicity of early modern aesthetics, since it was in the *historia* that a variety of represented objects were arranged in service of a single unified theme. Williams cites Vasari's description of *historia*, translated here into Italian as *istoria*, as exemplary of the genre's role in early modern attempts to reckon with the systematicity of representation in general and part-whole relationships in particular:

> The *istoria* should be full of things differentiated one from another but always relevant to the matter at hand, which the artist is in the process of giving shape to. He must distinguish the gestures, attitudes, making the women with sweet and lovely airs, and also youths, but the old always grave aspect, and especially priests and persons of authority. But above all he must always take care that everything correspond to the work as a whole, so that when the picture is seen, one recognizes there a harmonious unity, in which the fierce emotions arouse terror and the pleasant effects a sweetness, and that immediately conveys the intention of the painter, and not the things of which he was not thinking.[149]

---

[148] Williams provides the following gloss of his theory of systematicity: "The order or structure or inner logic to which the idea of systematicity refers may reveal itself in many ways; it may be present in different superimposed ways even in within the same work of art. It is something we respond to intuitively when we experience particular works of art, manifest in our sense of 'rightness,' our feeling that a consistent principle of some kind governs the treatment of details, that the appearance of all the parts have been shaped, as it were, by a consistent sort of pressure. Such a feeling depends upon an awareness, however unconscious, of something having been withheld or suppressed: much as a self-evident visual abundance may seem to be what most affects us, what is *not* represented is also essential to our experience. What is absent is present, and the meaning of the whole resides as much on what we cannot see as what we can." See Robert Williams, "Italian Renaissance Art and Systematicity" in *Renaissance Theory*, ed. James Elkins and Robert Williams (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 169

[149] Cited by Robert Williams in *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne*, p. 99. It is significant that Vasari emphasizes authorial intentionality rather forcefully at the

As in Alberti's description, this passage establishes the convincing representation of the antique and biblical scenes portrayed in *historia* not only as an illustrative goal met by the illusionistic rendering of figures and spaces, but also as a compositional goal met by the co-determination of part and whole. For Williams, it was this co-determination, this systematicity, which served as both arbiter and guarantor of the plausibility of the represented scene. Returning to Alberti's discussion of the *historia*, we can see how the systematic co-determination of part and whole participated in the genre's testimonial function, and established in what sense the *historia* serves as a space uniquely given to the practice of the testimonial mode of viewing.

The co-determination of the part and the whole characteristic of the *historia*'s composition is also characteristic of the *histor*'s testimony. Just as the systematicity of representation underwrites any individual *historia*, becoming available for encounter only through the mediating presence of its composition, so too does the anteriority of the past underwrite the discourse of any individual *histor*, becoming available for encounter only through the mediating presence of his or her testimony. In both cases, the mediating presence of the part determines and is determined by the absence of the whole. Alberti seems to have been particularly sensitive to this, for in addition to providing an extensive treatment of composition derived from Greco-Roman grammar he also provides an important treatment of figuration derived from Medieval Christian theology. As we have seen, in that tradition figuration was understood as a means by which several events separated in time could be interpretively joined in a single figure dense with typological significance. This understanding of figuration was complemented by the understanding of *historia* as a visual form of knowledge in which viewing a *historia* and knowing its referent were not to be distinguished. These two strains of Medieval Christian theology meet in a third which, I will suggest, was not only one of the most important aspects of Alberti's

end of the passage. For Williams, the author in Vasari's writing was characterized not only by an ability to freely invent subjective form, but also by his or her capacity for and sensitivity to *disegno*, which for Williams was that faculty through which the systematicity of representation and the co-determination of part and whole were recognized. Williams begins by citing Vasari's discussion *disegno* in architecture, which "contains nothing of [the building's] material, but is such that we can see the same design in many different buildings; we perceive the same for and the parts of which it is composed, the site, the orders [and so forth, of different buildings] all similar as regards the lines and angles." From this passage, Williams concludes, "We are forced to imagine *disegno* as a single, vastly synthetic intuition the underlying unity of creation, presumably the product of a unique moment of insight in an artist's life—even if prepared for by long study and enhanced by subsequent reflection—which then informs and governs all his work. *Disegno* is a vision of the whole in nature in which the relation of all its parts is manifest, which fives us the capacity to recognize the unity of the whole in the part, the universal in the particular, the one in the many. It is not explicitly an understanding of causal relationships but of formal analogies: We might call it a formal or aesthetic conception of nature" (40-41). With this notion of *disegno* in mind, Vasari's emphasis on authorial intentionality becomes somewhat paradoxical, affirming the inventiveness of the author and the priority of the system of representation to equal degrees. Indeed, the relationship between the two would itself constitute an example of the co-determination of part and whole characteristic of the system.

discussion of *historia* as a pictorial genre capable of participating in humanism's antiquarian project, but also a direct variation of the testimonial gesture that emerged in second and third-stage images of the Baptist with which his treatise was roughly contemporaneous. This third strain is that of the *res gestae*.

Commonly translated from the classical Latin simply as "events," *res gestae* took on an array of more complex meanings during the 12th and 13th centuries. Consistent with the period's understanding of both *figura* and *historia*, *res gestae* became associated with the *historia*'s ability to make the absent present through viewing. As Greenstein notes, several etymologies associated the *res gestae* of *historia* with the gestures of figures, referring to these as that aspect of an event that was visible to observers. One such etymology claimed, "it [*historia*] derived from *isterion*, which is gesticulation [*gesticulatio*]; for in it deeds [*gesta*] are recorded. Another, coined by the 13th-century Cardinal Stephen Langton, stated that *isterion* meant "to see or to gesticulate; for it [*historia*] narrates only what is done and seen [*quae gesta sunt et visa*]."[150] In these etymologies, the *res gestae* or events narrated in *historia* are equated with the gestures of the figures whose actions *historia* depict. Indeed, it is implied that the events are themselves constituted by these gestures, since it is the gestures alone that are "done and seen." In his treatise, Alberti emphasizes this equivalence by theorizing the *ammonitore*, a distinct figure whose ostensive gesture served an explicitly mediating function, showing viewers both what the represented event was and how it ought to be received.

Often reduced to a choric figure, the ammonitore or commentator would be better described as the pictorial surrogate of the *histor* or witness as such. Indeed, it was precisely the ammonitore's capacity to serve as witness that made the figure so crucial to Alberti, who concludes his discussion of the *historia* with a description of its function in the genre. Having described the importance of the plausible portrayal of figures and spaces and the principles of composition, Alberti writes:

> Then, I like there to be someone in the 'historia' who tells the spectators what is going on, and either beckons them with his hand to look, or with ferocious expression and forbidding glance challenges them not to come near, as if he wished their business to be secret, or points to some danger or remarkable thing in the picture, or by his gestures invites you to laugh or weep with them.[151]

In the context of the treatise, this passage is significant in that the preceding theorization in its entirety is here localized in one figure whose explicit task it is to mediate the act of viewing. Initially, it implies that all the prescribing of thematic content, all the instruction in convincing

---

[150] Greenstein, p. 26.
[151] Alberti, p. 77-78.

representation, and all the emphasis on systematic composition would be imperiled lest this figure intercede to instruct viewers how and what to see. In this sense, the *ammonitore* figure serves as the *histor* or witness in two capacities. First, and most simply, he witnesses the classical and biblical scenes portrayed, relating that which is "going on" to the viewer. Second, and more complexly, he witnesses both the Greco-Roman tradition of the *histor* by establishing himself as its pictorial surrogate, and the Medieval Christian tradition of the *figura* by doing so through figural gesticulation. In both cases, the *ammonitore* condenses these traditions into its own figure, serving as a visibly present part facilitating mediated access to their necessarily absent wholes.

This is confirmed by Alberti's remarkable and routinely overlooked insistence that the viewing of *historia* required no knowledge of either the scenes represented, or the traditions conveyed. *Historia* were, for Alberti, manifestly public works that drew on resources more fundamental than those articulated in his own treatise, making them available to all viewers regardless of social class, political persuasion, or cultural education. "A 'historia' you can justifiably praise and admire," writes Alberti, "will be one that reveals itself to be so charming and attractive as to hold the eye of the learned and unlearned spectator for a long while with a certain sense of pleasure and emotion."[152] Given the genre's density in terms of both textural content and hermeneutic traditions, this passage may strike readers as anomalous, not to say contradictory, which perhaps accounts for the relative lack of scholarly attention it has received. It can, however, be made clearer in light of my earlier discussion of the testimonial mode of viewing and of the testimonial gesture.

Alberti describes the ammonitore figure as one who "beckons with his hand to look." Beyond an initial evocation of the testimonial gesture familiar from second and third-stage images, specifying an ostensive motion made by the hand as the principle feature of the ammonitore and reading as a near transcription of the injunction inscribed across the Baptist's scroll, this passage also demonstrates the condensation of the *ammonitore*'s mediating presence into that ostensive gesture itself, the very hallmark of the testimonial gesture as a structural feature. It is by beckoning "with his hand" that he introduces the viewer to the *historia*; it is by "pointing to some danger or remarkable thing" that he indicates what is deserving of the viewer's attention; and it is by "his gestures" that he infuses the represented events with pathos, facilitating their kairotic reception. Indeed, Alberti's description suggests that the *ammonitore*'s gesture is testimonial in the strongest sense, for not only is it is through this gesture that his testimony passes, rendering the *historia*'s absent referents present to viewers, but even more importantly it is through this gesture that the traditions on which the *historia* as a genre depends are brought to

---

[152] Ibid, p. 75.

bear, establishing the testimonial mode of viewing itself as a valid means of communing with the past.

Having emerged in the devotional realm of the icon as a means of preserving the presence of the iconic referent, the testimonial gesture now appears in the secular realm of the *historia* as a means of preserving the antique referent. The relationship between the two should not be understood in terms of direct causation, however, but rather of indirect variation. Developed as a solution to the problem of fractured time in a particular circumstance, the testimonial mode of viewing as hermeneutic practice and the testimonial gesture as durable structure persisted as nascent resources which could be harnessed when facing the challenges posed by rupture in a variety of circumstances, preserving the presence of the referent through the kairotic receptivity of mediation.

Epilogue: The *Nachleben* of the Testimonial Gesture

In the preceding pages, I have provided an account the testimonial mode of viewing; a practice which I argued was condensed into a durable structural feature which I called the testimonial gesture. Following the figural migration of John the Baptist as it moved through three distinct typological stages, from the margins of icons to the center of panel paintings, I claimed that the testimonial gesture itself became typologically dense, distilling a long-developing willingness on the part of viewers to accept the mediating presence of the gesture as a sufficient means of engaging with the increasingly absent iconic referent. I then claimed that this testimonial gesture served a similar function in the *historia* genre, participating in the early modern humanist's endeavor to render present absent antique referents. This claim was premised on the conviction that the testimonial gesture was, as a durable structural feature, itself mobile, able to migrate through time and space as a medium for the testimonial mode of viewing. By way of this brief epilogue, I would like to offer an anecdote which was originally recounted by Koerner, but which will no doubt strike many as familiar, as confirmation of this mobility.

In the midst of a lecture on 16th-century German artist Lucas Cranach, Koerner recounts striding from his podium toward the projected image of one of Cranach's altarpieces featuring the figure of Martin Luther. Preparing to comment on the work and convey to his students its position in the tradition of Reformation image-making and viewing, Koerner casually extends his index finger toward the hanging screen, casting his shadow across the projected image, only to find himself doubling the posture of the represented Luther:

> My students noted it first and pointed to the spot. As I gestured toward the cross, my hand cast a shadow on the projection precisely where Luther, also speaking from the right, stretches his fingers toward Christ. Suddenly everything appeared alike. Preacher and teacher, pulpit and podium, sermon and lecture, parishioners and undergraduates, windowless choir and darkened auditorium: all seemed part of the same mechanism…. True, the image's reference had changed. For Luther it stood for faith and religion, while for me it represented information and art. Yet the image itself, together with the apparatus of its use, remained eerily the same. It was to this likeness that my finger unwittingly pointed.[153]

While Koerner confines his discussion of the anecdote to the context of Reformation image-making and viewing, I would like to suggest that it is deserving of much broader consideration, for it describes what might be called, following Warburg, the *Nachleben* or "afterlife" of the

---

[153] Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, p. 10.

testimonial gesture, that is to say, its continued potency as a practice surviving in form.[154] Confronted with the problem of fractured time uniquely posed to the historian when faced with the task of conveying subject matter removed from both himself and his audience by many centuries, it is to the nascent resource of the testimonial gesture itself appearing in the spectral light of the projected image that Koerner appeals. Indeed, more than that of a priest, Koerner assumes the posture of the *histor*, standing before his students as witness, testifying to the traditions being conveyed to his audience. Most striking, however, is that this mediation is not confined to Koerner alone. His students also adopt this posture, "pointing to" the site of the doubling, serving as so many witnesses testifying to the occurrence of the event.

I submit Koerner's anecdote as confirmation of the mobility of the testimonial gesture. Not only has it migrated from past to present, manifesting itself in the contemporary moment in which the lecture was given, it has also migrated from the individual to group, manifesting itself in the actions of the students occupying the auditorium. In short, it has entered what Taylor calls the "intersubjective reference world" as a "common meaning." For Taylor, it is on the foundation of common meanings that all aspects of our common life depend:

> Common meanings are the basis of community. Inter-subjective meanings give people a common language to talk about social reality and a common understanding of certain norms, but only with common meanings does this common reference world contain significant common actions, celebrations, and feelings. These are objects in the world that everybody shares. This is what makes community.[155]

As the means by which the intersubjective referents of our social realities are made available for consideration, these common meanings serve what can be described as a testimonial function, tasked with rendering present through mediation the array of traditions, conventions, and norms on which our common action depends. Both the testimonial mode of viewing and the testimonial gesture would, it seems, be among the most crucial of these common meanings for, as we have seen, their explicit task is not only to render present that which is absent through mediation, but to do so in the company of an audience willing participate in such mediation.

---

[154] For accounts of Warburg's notion of *Nachleben*, see Kurt W. Foster, "Introduction" in *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, p. 1-76; Kurt W. Foster, "Aby Warburg's History of Art: Collective Memory and the Social Mediation of Images" in *Daedalus*, Vol. 105, No. 1, In Praise of Books (Winter, 1976), p. 169-176; Matthew Rampley, "From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg's Theory of Art" in *the Art Bulletin,* Vol. 79, No. 1 (Mar., 1997), p. 41-55; Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Surviving Image: Aby Warburg and Tylorian Anthropology" in *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2002), p. 61-69.

[155] Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 39.

Perhaps it is to be expected, then, that the specter of the testimonial gesture should be made manifest in an auditorium, its shadowy form projected reciprocally onto schoolteacher, student and screen, for it is in such settings that the absent is most consistently evoked and mediation most consistently sought. Indeed, the humanities can be said to be that domain in which the problems of fractured time are most often posed, for when endeavoring to make available those traditions, conventions and norms on which our common action depends, as the objects of either affirmation or critique, practitioners of the humanities strive above all to render present that which would otherwise remain absent. Their articles, essays and books are *per force* viewed in the testimonial mode, mediating access to these referents. Like Leonardo's *Baptist* with which this discussion began, it is finally to themselves that these texts and their authors point when reckoning with the past, every historian a *histor*, every student a witness.

FIGURES

Fig. 1. Figure 1 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Gherardo Starnina, *Madonna and Child between St. John the Baptist and St. Nicholas of Bari*, c. 1400-1410, tempera on panel, 90 x 50 cm, Accademia, Florence.

Fig. 2. Figure 2 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, *Casio Madonna Altarpiece*, c. 1500, oil on wood, 184 x 184 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 3. Figure 3 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Leonardo da Vinci, *Saint John the Baptist*, c. 1513-1516, oil on wood, 69 x 57 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on The Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* (*On Memory and Reminiscence*), trans. J. I. Beare in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 607-618.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Cheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Barasch, Mosche. *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

Baxandall, Michael. *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discover of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Belting, Hans. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

_____. *The End of the History of Art?*, trans. Christopher s. Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

_____. *The Invisible Masterpiece*, trans. Helen Atkins (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

Benjamin, Walter. "Allegory and Trauerspiel," *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), p. 153-230.

_____. *Illuminations*, trans. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, (London: Fontana, 1973).

_____. "Critique of Violence," trans. Edmund Jephcott in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1 (1913-1926)*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael E. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 236-253.

_____. "On the Concept of History," trans. Edmund Jephcott in *Selected Writings, Vol. 4 (1938-1940*), ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael E. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 389-401.

Berger Jr., Henry. "The System of Early Modern Painting" in *Representations*, No. 62 (Spring, 1998), p. 31-57.

Blattner, William. *Heidegger's Being and Time: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Burckhardt, Jacob. *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Peter Humphrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

———. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Classics, 1990).

Camille, Michael. *The Gothic Idol : Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002).

Corrigan, Kathleen. "The Witness of John the Baptist on an Early Byzantine Icon in Kiev" in *Dumbarton Oak Papers*, Vol. 42 (1998), p. 1-11.

Davis, Whitney. *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard W. Quinn (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

Derrida, Jacques. *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Dreyfus, Hubert. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

Didi-Huberman, Georges. "Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism," trans. Peter Mason in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art In and Out of History*, ed. Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 31-45.

———. "Knowledge: Movement (The Man Who Spoke to Butterflies)" in Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 7-21.

———. "The Surviving Image: Aby Warburg and Tylorian Anthropology" in *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2002), p. 61-69.

Flavius, Josephus. *Josephus: The Essential Writings*, trans. and ed. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988).

Freedberg, David. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

Frey, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*

Focillon, Henri. *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles B. Hohan and Georges Kubler (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

Foster, Kurt W. "Aby Warburg's History of Art: Collective Memory and the Social Mediation of Images" in *Daedalus*, Vol. 105, No. 1, In Praise of Books (Winter, 1976), p. 169-176.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Image and Gesture," trans. Nicholas Walker in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 74-83.

⸻. "The Eminent Text and Its Truth" in *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 14, No. 1. (Spring, 1980), p. 3-10.

⸻. *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2004).

Goffen, Rona. "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (December, 1975), p. 467-518.

Gombrich, E. H. *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Grafton, Anthony. "Dating History: The Renaissance the Reformation of Chronology" in *Daedalus*, Vol. 132, No. 2, On Time (Spring, 2003), p. 74-85.

⸻. *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⸻. *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Greenstein, Jack M. *Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⸻. "On Alberti's 'Sign': Vision and Composition in Quattrocento Painting*"* in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), p. 669-698.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

⸻. "What Calls for Thinking?" trans. Max Niemeyer Verlag in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Foster Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1977), p. 365-393.

Holly, Michael Ann. "Mourning and Method" in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 84, No. 4 (Dec., 2002), p. 660-669.

Jacobs, Fredrika. "Rethinking the Divide: Cult Images and the Cult of Images" in *Renaissance Theory*, ed. James Elkins and Robert Williams (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Koerner, Joseph Leo. "The Icon and Iconoclash" in *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 164-213.

⸻. *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

　　　　　. *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Kripke, Saul. A. *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

　　　　　. "What is Iconoclash? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?" in *Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 14-38.

Lurie, Ann T. "In Search of a Valencian Madonna by Starnina" in *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 76, No. 10, Dec., 1989, p. 334-373.

Marin, Louis. "The Figurability of the Visual: The Veronica or the Question of the Portrait at Port-Royal," trans. Marie Maclean in *New Literary History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Probings: Art, Criticism, Genre (Spring, 1991), p. 281-296.

Marx, Karl. *Capital, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990).

Mitchell, Charles. "Archaeology and Romance in Renaissance Italy" in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

Mitchell, W. J. T., "The Rhetoric of Iconoclasm: Marxism, Ideology and Fetishism" in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 160-209.

　　　　　. *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Nagel, Alexander and Wood, Christopher S., *The Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

Nicholas of Cusa. "On the Vision of God (De visione Dei)" in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 233-291.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Icon Editions, 1972).

Pentcheva, Bissera V. "Imagined Images: Visions of Salvation and Intercession in a Double-Sided Icon from Pognovo" in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 54 (2000), p. 139-159.

　　　　　. "The Performative Icon" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Dec., 2006), p. 631-665.

Quint, David. *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

Rice, David and Tamara Talbot Rice. *Icons and Their History* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1974).

Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

_____. "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 70, No. 1/2 (Jan.-Apr., 1977), p. 1-37.

Riegl, Alois. *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, trans. Jacqueline e. Jung (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

Ringbom, Sixten. *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco, 1984).

Robinson, A. T. "The Baptism of John and the Quamran community: Testing a Hypothesis" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Jul., 1957), p. 175-191.

Rosand, David. "'Divinitá di cosa dipinta': Pictorial structure and the legibility of the altarpiece" in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, ed. Peter Humphrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 143-164.

Rothstein, Marian. "Etymology, Genealogy and the Immutability of Origins" in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Summer, 1990), p. 332-347.

Santner, Eric L. *Creaturely Life: Rilke; Benjamin; Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Schapiro, Myer. *Words, Script and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language* (New York: George Braziller, 1998).

Schweiker, William. "Beyond Imitation: Mimetic Praxis in Gadamer, Ricoeur and Derrida" in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), p. 21-38.

Stoichita, Victor Ieronim. *A Short History of the Shadow*, trans. Anne Marie Glasheen (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

_____. *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Smith, Timothy, B. "Up in Arms: The Knights of Rhodes, the Cult of Relics and the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in Siena Cathedral" in *Image, Relics and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Sally J. Cornelison and Scott B. Montgomery (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), p. 213-238.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007).

_____. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 15-58.

Teeple, Howard M. "Quamran and the Origin of the Fourth Gospel" in *Novium Testamentum*, Vol. 4, Fasc. 1 (Oct., 1960), p. 6-25.

Trexler, Richard C. "Being and Non-Being: Parameters of the Miraculous in the Traditional Religious Image" in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Erik Thuna and Gerhard Wolf (Rome: The Biblica Hertziana and the Academia di Danimarca, 2005), p. 15-27.

Vasari, Giorgio. *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculpturs and Architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, ed. Phillip Jacks (New York: Random House, 2006).

Warburg, Aby. "Dürer and Italian Antiquity" in *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, ed. Kurt. W. Foster (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), p. 553-559.

White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

Williams, Robert. *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

_____. "Italian Renaissance Art and Systematicity" in *Renaissance Theory*, ed. James Elkins and Robert Williams (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 159-183.

Wood, Christopher S. *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Wrathall, Mark A. *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Zwijnenberg, Robert. "Presence and Absence: On Leonardo da Vinci's *Saint John the Baptist*" in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art In and Out of History*, ed. Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 112-132.