

# SENSES OF SIGHT

TOWARDS A MULTISENSORIAL APPROACH OF THE IMAGE

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF VICTOR I. STOICHITA

«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

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*Edited by*

Henri de Riedmatten, Nicolas Galley

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*Inside front cover:* Pedro Stoichita, Victor, 2012, scratchboard, 23 cm x 19,5 cm,  
after a photo by Joaquin Berchez

*Inside back cover:* Pedro Stoichita, Ana, 2013, scratchboard, 17,5cm x 23 cm,  
after a photo by Joaquin Berchez

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Rossella Corcione

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# INTRODUCTION

“What is the meaning of this appeal to the sense of smell in the context of the description? An immediate answer contains a thinly veiled compliment to the painter’s skill so great – we are made to understand – that it succeeds in suggesting an olfactory sensation by visual means [...]. A second answer more closely connected to the issues of *ekphrasis* rhetorics, is suggested by the following sentence: ‘But listen carefully; for along with my description of the garden the fragrance of the apples also will come to you.’ Such an incitement looks rather like a program. What is at stake this time, is the talent of the orator; he is put forward as the rare capacity of transmitting, by the means of word and sound, the most ineffable of all sensations, the sensation of fragrance and perfume.

A first playful but necessary question (‘How to smell a painting?’), will necessarily draw an ambivalent answer, depending on one’s point of view: One might ‘feel/smell’ a painting by ‘seeing’ it or by ‘listening’ carefully to its skillfully elaborated description. However, one thing is certain – the smell that may emanate from the one or the other way of proceeding will be neither the smell of turpentine nor the smell of oil!”

This quote extracted from Victor I. Stoichita’s article “How to Taste a Painting” and originally intended to explicit the different modalities of the viewer’s experience of painting may be considered as emblematic of his plural and polysemous methodology. The following anthology of essays in honor of Victor gathered under the title *Senses of Sights: Towards a Multisensorial Approach of the Image* intends to pay tribute to the interdisciplinary, trans-historical and trans-cultural aspects of his researches in art history. This book aims to underline Victor’s diverse educational and professional path that started in Romania and ran through Italy, France, Germany to finally reach Switzerland.

This *Grand Tour* contributed to the rich palette of his numerous interests and writings. Its diversity is purposely reflected in this publication. The varied contributions of his friends and colleagues result from these multiple geographical and methodological origins. They attest to the opened and all-embracing perspective constituting the backbone of Victor's critical pattern. This multifaceted collection of texts written by authors coming from the Far East to the West is here published in English for editorial coherence.

Territoriality and topography are among the notions questioned in the following articles. From Italy to the moon, from Renaissance to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from Romania to Spain, borders and frontiers are transgressed. These infringements nurture the idea of otherness manifested through the concept of identity, the topic of the double and the image of the other. Reflection upon the medium is also at stake investigating not only painting but also textile, urbanism, sculpture, gardens, etc. All sensory faculties are requested to participate in what could be called a rhetoric feast of the senses celebrating sight, gaze, voyeurism, visual perception, and their absence.

We would like to gratefully thank the late Dr. Ambros Boner and the Boner Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur, the Rectorate of the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), the Chair of Early Modern Art History of the University of Zurich. Our gratitude also goes to the editorial team of L'Erma di Bretschneider, in particular Elena Montani and Rossella Corcione. Our thanks once again to all contributors who made this project possible as well as to Lilian Daum, Marie Gyger and Patricia Bently who assisted us with great support.

From the very start, this publication has enjoyed the unconditional support of Anna Maria. Pedro honored us with two magnificent portraits which constitute the alpha and omega of the book.

For our professor

HENRI DE RIEDMATTEN, NICOLAS GALLEY  
JEAN-FRANÇOIS CORPATAUX, VALENTIN NUSSBAUM

## STEPHEN J. CAMPBELL

### *Cloud-poiesis: Perception, Allegory, Seeing the Other*

#### I.

Late in 2011 an art historian's observation about an overlooked detail in a late medieval fresco drew an uncharacteristic degree of attention in the international news. The "face of Satan," according to news reports, had been discovered by the art historian Chiara Frugoni in a fresco by "Giotto" in the basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.<sup>1</sup> Frugoni's observation concerned the unmistakable appearance of a profile face in *The Death and Apotheosis of St. Francis* in a patch of cloud just below the ascending soul of the saint (Figs. 1–2). The scholar posited that the cloudy profile might be no more than a visual conceit, a kind of *scherzo* by the artist (often but still controversially identified as Giotto<sup>2</sup>); yet she went on to describe the motif as "a powerful portrait, with a hooked nose, sunken eyes and two dark horns."<sup>3</sup> Such a bizarre intrusion could be accounted for, she suggested, through the belief that demons haunted the upper air, and were believed to thwart the ascent of souls to heaven. Scriptural and patristic sources indeed support the possibility that the artist here rendered one of the "powers of the air," referred to by St. Paul in Ephesians 2:2 ("in

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<sup>1</sup> For example "Assisi, scoperto dopo ottocento anni volto di un demone nell'affresco di Giotto." *Corriere della Sera*. 5/11/2011. "Smirking face of the Devil discovered in Giotto fresco." *Daily Telegraph*. 6/11/2011. The discovery is published by Frugoni, C. "Playing with Clouds." *The Burlington Magazine*. 153, (2011): 518–520.

<sup>2</sup> On the "Giotto problem" the skeptical (anti-Giotto) formulation is that of Smart, A. *The Assisi Problem and the Art of Giotto*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1971. On the case for Giotto, see Bellosi, L. "Giotto e la Basilica Superiore di Assisi." *Giotto: Bilancio critico di sessant'anni di studi e ricerche*. Ed. Tartuferi, A. Florence: Giunti, 2000, 33–55. Carl Strehlke's review of recent Giotto scholarship, *Art Bulletin*. 154 (2012): 461–6, affirms the case for the attribution of the *Life of St. Francis* to the Florentine artist and his workshop.

<sup>3</sup> Frugoni quoted in *Daily Telegraph*, 6/11/2011. Frugoni 2011 (see note 1): 519, the description runs "a vigorous depiction of a head in profile, and [the artist] possibly added a couple of dark horns."



1. Giotto (?), *The Death and Apotheosis of St. Francis*, c.1300, fresco, 270 x 230 cm, Assisi, San Francesco, Upper Church. Credit: Eric Lessing/Art Resource.

quibus aliquando ambulastis secundum sæculum mundi huius, secundum principem potestatis aeris huius, spiritus, qui nunc operatur in filios diffidentiaē”), or by the early church fathers and subsequent authorities. Tertullian, notably, had written in his *Apology* (22) of demons dwelling in the air, “by being near the stars, and by dealing with the clouds, they are able to know the threatening of the skies, so that they promise also the rains, which they also feel.”<sup>4</sup> At

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<sup>4</sup> On air and cloud as demonic medium, with reference to the demonological writings of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine Michael Psellus, see Cole, “Demonic Arts and the Origin of

the same time, it is at best debatable that the cloudy profile bears as explicitly diabolical features as has been claimed: a team of scholars published a rejoinder in the March 2012 issue of *Kunstchronik*, arguing on iconographical grounds that the image bears little relation to contemporary depictions of devils, especially in the work of Giotto.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the apparition resembles a kind of airy spirit or



2. Giotto (?), *The Death and Apotheosis of St. Francis*, detail.

wind god, such as appears in Giotto's mosaic known as the *Navicella* at St. Peter's. Having held out an additional possibility – that the almost hidden motif was a self-referential gesture by the artist, an assertion of the wondrous fictive powers of pictorial artifice – they concluded with the proposal that the visual conceit worked as a perceptual challenge to the cycle's viewers, a lesson in the problematic relation between seeing and knowing, hence reinforcing an official theological and programmatic dimension.

As they note, the appearance of the motif in a scene of spiritual vision is hardly casual. The ascent of St. Francis's soul is not an objective historical event: it was the privileged visionary experience of a few individuals, several of whom were not present at the saint's death: in the Assisi murals Fra Agostino and Bishop Guido of Arezzo witness the apotheosis remotely, the former looking in from the adjacent scene on the wall. St. Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior* (XIV.6) described the ascent of St. Francis appearing as a vision to another friar not at the site at the moment of his death: "And one of his Brethren and disciples saw that blessed soul, under the likeness of a star of shining brightness, borne on a dazzling white cloudlet over many waters and taken up in a straight course into the heavens, as though refulgent with the radiant whiteness of his exalted sanctity and filled with the bounty of heavenly wisdom

the Medium." *The Art Bulletin*. 84 (2002): 621–40. The text by Psellus did not circulate in Latin before the late fifteenth century and is unlikely to have a bearing on the Assisi fresco.

<sup>5</sup> Bogen, S. et al. "Nicht in jedem Detail muss gleich der Teufel stecken: Ein neuer Blick in Giottos Wolken." *Kunstchronik*. 65, 3 (2012): 141–7.

and grace.”<sup>6</sup> The artist has included this additional witness by the saint’s deathbed.<sup>7</sup> A friar seated by the head of the deceased Francis looks heavenward at the ascending manifestation of the saint. His profile, curiously, is doubled in orientation and echoed in its features by the face in the clouds. There is at least the suggestion here that both the clypeus and the cloud-image form part of his visual experience. Something, moreover, is being insinuated about the relationship between vision and the visionary, between ordinary or natural human perception and a divinely-enabled form of visual understanding.<sup>8</sup> The domain of the natural may appear here as a haunted, fallen sphere of matter, where demonic presences (malignant or otherwise) abide and sometimes show themselves. Alternatively, nature is the horizon of human understanding, where – in the absence of divine revelation – everything is only known in terms of the self and its limits. Thus, unlike the angel-born *clypeus*, which is a “true” manifestation, the cloud-face is false – either because it is a demonic illusion, or – as I am inclined to think – the illusion of a presence resulting from a human predisposition to perceive form where none exists, through the projection of desires, fears, or other dispositions operating in the act of seeing. The psychological model of perception was available in Aristotle’s text *On Dreams*, which circulated as part of the *Parva Naturalia*:

Let it be established that we are easily deceived concerning our perceptions when in the grip of emotions, and that different people are deceived when they are in different emotions, for example the coward when in fear and the amorous person when in love, such that from some small resemblance it seems to the one that he sees his enemies and to the other that he sees his lover. In addition, the

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<sup>6</sup> “Unus autem ex fratribus et discipulis eis vidit animam illam beatam, sub specie stellae praefulgidae a candida subvectam nubecula super aquas multas in caelum recto tramite sursum ferri tanquam sublimis sanctitatis candor praenitidam et caelestis sapientiae simul et gratiae ubertate repletam.” Text and translation from Smart 1971 (see note 2): 284.

<sup>7</sup> Noted additionally by Frugoni 2011 (see note 1): 518. A similar witness, more conspicuous in his gesture and reaction, appears in Giotto’s treatment of the same subject in the Bardi Chapel at S. Croce in Florence, which is modeled on the Assisi fresco.

<sup>8</sup> On which, of course, the exemplary study is Stoichita, V. I. *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*. London: Reaktion Books, 1995. The present essay in particular seeks to recognize the value of Stoichita’s scholarship in providing an alternative to strictly iconographic modes of investigation in its address to phenomenological and meta-representational questions.

more impassioned someone is, the more it appears this way to someone from a smaller similarity. In the same way, everyone is easily deceived when in anger and when subject to any sort of desire, and the more so the more they are so impassioned. Wherefore, to those in a feverish state, and from a small similarity of the lines arranged on the walls, animals sometimes appear.<sup>9</sup>

With the Assisi fresco, we are within a generation of Petrarch and the amatory psychology of the *Rime sparse*, where in Rima 129, “Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte,” the poet relates his lovelorn propensity to discern the face of Laura in rocks, trees and clouds:

Ove porge ombra un pino alto od un colle talor m’arresto, e pur nel primo sasso disegno co la mente il suo bel viso (28–30).

And:

I’ l’ò piú volte (or chi fia che mi ’l creda?) ne l’acqua chiara et sopra l’erba verde veduto viva, et nel tronchon d’un faggio e ’n bianca nube, sí fatta che Leda avria ben detto che sua figlia perde, come stella che ’l sol copre col raggio (40–45).<sup>10</sup>

Yet it appears that the visual tradition was ahead of the poetic one, that pictorial representation, as it moved in the late 1200s towards an optical rendering of the world in terms of measurable space and volume – and even before it gave any significant place to the cast shadow – might have acknowledged at least once the fallibility of vision, its susceptibility to the ambiguity of appearance over reality, to fantasmic illusions whether self-made or emanating from forces or beings outside the self. It is finally undecidable whether the friar in the Assisi fresco is the author of what he sees, or whether he is the subject of a visual encounter with an Other.

The recent exchanges about the Assisi fresco have the effect of pushing back by more than a century an effect hitherto associated with fifteenth century painting, the appearance of so-called “chance images” in clouds and rocks with which Andrea Mantegna has pre-

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<sup>9</sup> Aristotle. *De insomniis*. 460b. The text has been discussed in regard to Alberti’s theory of “accidental images” by Parronchi, A. “Sul ‘Della Statua’ albertiano.” *Paragone*. 9 (1959): 3–29.

<sup>10</sup> *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems. The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*. Ed. Durling, R. M. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976, 265–7.



3. Andrea Mantegna, *St. Sebastian*, c.1460, oil on panel, 68 x 30 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

eminently been associated.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the authors, in their weighing of interpretative options, regard this precociously early instance at Assisi as capable of sustaining several of the critical approaches that have emerged in the interpretation of Mantegna's "images made by chance," such as the famous cloud-horseman in his *St. Sebastian* of circa 1460 (Fig. 3).

Nothing is known about why, or where, or even when this painting was made: a recurring hypothesis links the image of the saint, who was invoked as a protector against plague, to an outbreak of the disease in Northern Italy in 1457. While Millard Meiss pronounced the cloud-image to be a "sort of visual pun" without iconographical significance, for others the motif has signaled that the painting is a communication in a learned code that needs to be cracked, and where

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<sup>11</sup> As Frugoni states, "Until now it was thought that the first painter to use clouds in this way was Andrea Mantegna, with a painting of St Sebastian from 1460, in which high up in the sky there's a cloud from which a knight on horseback emerges. Now we know that Giotto was the first [to use this technique]." On these "chance-images" or "potential-images" in Renaissance art, see Janson, H. W. "The 'Image Made by Chance' in Renaissance Thought." *De artibus opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*. Ed. Meiss, M. New York: New York University Press, 1961, 254–26. Gamboni, D. *Potential Images. Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art*. London: Reaktion Books, 2002, esp. 27–37. *Une image peut en cacher une autre – Arcimboldo, Dali, Raetz*. Exh. cat. ed. Martin, J. H. Paris: Grand Palais. Galeries Nationales, 2009. It might be worth making a distinction here between "double images" – undisputable cases of one thing (cloud, tree, rock) taking on the appearance of something else, and the large corpus of more ambiguous cases ("potential images") referred to by Gamboni and in the exhibition catalogue. On clouds and angelic manifestations see Kleinbub, C. "At the Boundaries of Sight: The Italian Renaissance Cloud *putto*." *Renaissance Theories of Vision*. Eds. Hendricks, J. et al. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, 117–33.

the identity of the cloud-horseman is the key.<sup>12</sup> Although practically featureless, the figure is regularly identified by iconographers with demonic or pagan entities connected with plague, against which the image of the saint serves as an apotropaic purpose.<sup>13</sup> Others prefer to see the cloud-image as a figure of the transitory and the workings of time, and thus as to be conceptually aligned with the broken sculptures and remains of pagan architecture; indeed, a later image of the saint by Mantegna bears an explicit moralizing tag: *nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus*.<sup>14</sup> For me the most productive approach – one which can encompass both of those just outlined – is one that addresses the analogous *poiesis* in artistic image-making and in see-

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<sup>12</sup> Meiss, M. *Andrea Mantegna as Illuminator. An Episode in Renaissance Art, Humanism, and Diplomacy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957, 62.

<sup>13</sup> Battisti, E. "Mantegna e la letteratura classica." *Arte, pensiero o cultura a Mantova nel primo Rinascimento in rapporto con la Toscana e con il Veneto. Atti del VI Convegno internazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento*. Florence: Sansoni, 1965, 50. identifies the figure of Theodorich with the plague demon Sareptauro and the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:8). In a number of articles by Levi d'Ancona, M. "Il 'S. Sebastiano' di Vienna: Mantegna e Filarete." *Arte Lombarda*, 18 (1973): 70–4. And "An Image Not Made by Chance: The Vienna St. Sebastian by Mantegna." *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*. Eds. Lavin, I. and Plummer, J. New York, 1977. And "Il S. Sebastiano di Vienna del Mantegna." *Commentari*. 28 (1977): 73–91. The horseman is identified with the melancholy and pernicious planet god Saturn, bringer of plague. For a richly textured version of the "puzzle-image" account, which allows for a range of possibilities, see Hauser, A. "Andrea Mantegnas 'Wolkenreiter.' Manifestation von kunstloser Natur oder Ursprung von vexierbildhafter Kunst?" *Die Unvermeidlichkeit der Bilder*. Eds. Graevenitz, G. von et al. Tübingen: G. Narr, 2001, 147–172. Hauser sees the image as a triumph of painting over sculpture and of Christianity over paganism, of spirit over body; the cloud horseman would thus correspond to the ecstatic flight of the soul of Sebastian – who hear triumphs over paganism and death – and in ways that anticipate the ecstatic bondage of Michelangelo's slaves (162–4).

<sup>14</sup> Caldwell, J. G. "Mantegna's Saint Sebastians: *Stabilitas* in a pagan world." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. 36 (1973): 373–7. Pfisterer, U. "Künstlerische potestas audendi und licentia im Quattrocento: Benozzo Gozzoli, Andrea Mantegna, Bertoldo di Giovanni." *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*. 31 (1996): 109–47, esp. 130–4. connects the painting with passages in the *Against Symmachus* of Prudentius which denounce the idolatry of the goddess Victory (who appears in a relief on the temple in Mantegna's painting) and on the perishability of images of the gods. In my essay "Mantegna e l'agiografica umanistica." *Mantegna e Roma. L'artista davanti all'antico*. Eds. Calvano, T. et al. Rome: Bolzoni, 2010, 421–51. I characterized the "moralizing" presentation of the saint's agony (emphasized by Mantegna) in terms of a crisis in humanist hagiographical writing, where the graphic violence of martyrdom stories in compilations like *The Golden Legend* had to be reconciled, and not without difficulty, with classical ideals of exemplary virtue.

ing itself: such an approach could be called, taking a term from Victor Stoichita, “meta-pictorial.” A meta-pictorial approach would connect the cloud-motif with the image-forming capacity of the human mind, as conceptualized in pre-modern faculty psychology, by Alberti in *De Statua* with regard to the origins of sculpture in primitive artist’s perception of “inchoate similitudes” in rocks and clods of earth, and in the texts by Petrarch and Aristotle referred to above.<sup>15</sup> Leonardo da Vinci included the richest development of the theme in his notebooks, where he advised painters to stimulate their mind to new inventions by looking “nelle machie de muri, o nella cenere del fuoco, o nuvoli, o fanghi, o altri simili lochi.”<sup>16</sup> Yet to Vasari by mid-century the practice appeared eccentric or pathological, characteristic of a disorderly and marginal figure like Piero di Cosimo.

Iconographical method, implacable in its pursuit of all-encompassing “solutions,” is seldom self-conscious with regard its own projective desires. The pursuit of solutions might seem to be challenged, and pointedly, by representations of vaporous images in a state of dissolution. If it is recognized that the much earlier cloud motif at Assisi could be read – possibly by different viewers – both as a demonic manifestation *and* as an accident occurring in ordinary human perception, it raises questions about how unequivocal we can afford to be in understanding Mantegna’s image, where the cloudy form might be pointing towards a constitutive or structural ambivalence. It could be said that both occurrences of cloud-images, in “Giotto” and Mantegna, are not only meta-pictorial but meta-iconographic, that they pose a question to the beholder: not simply, “what does a figure in the clouds mean?” but also: “what does it mean to see a figure in the clouds?”

That possibility is only strengthened by the fact that this “chance image,” supposedly to be understood as “made by nature” is in fact imitated or copied from an actual work of sculpture – a 10<sup>th</sup> cen-

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<sup>15</sup> Janson 1961 (see note 11): 264–5. Bolland, A. *Mantegna Studies*. Doctoral dissertation (unpublished), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1992, 276–315. Pfisterer 1996 (see note 14) also addresses the meta-artistic dimension. Gamboni 2002 (see note 11): 28–9. Campbell, S. J. *The Cabinet of Eros. Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d’Este*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 159–60. Helke, G. “The Artist as Martyr. Mantegna’s Vienna St. Sebastian.” *Andrea Mantegna Impronta del Genio*. Eds. Signorini, R. et al. 2 vols. Florence: Olschki, 2010, vol. 1, 221–73.

<sup>16</sup> *Treatise on Painting by Leonardo da Vinci*. Ed. McMahon A. P. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956, 76.

tury relief of Theodoric on the façade of San Zeno in Verona (and in fact constitutes one of very few examples of direct citation or artistic “borrowing” in Mantegna’s *oeuvre*). Cloud-figures and broken sculpture can both be seen as “inchoate images” which give rise to creative imagination and to acts of imitation. An analogy (even a near-identity) is disclosed between the *mimesis* of nature and the imitation of art.<sup>17</sup> The body of the saint himself proclaims its indebtedness to antique statuary, with a zeal of emulation more typical of the sculptors of the *quattrocento* than the painters. In fact, there is a creative tension in the image between the painter’s imitation of ancient exemplars and the heroic *imitatio Christi* of the martyr saint himself – which from a strictly devotional point of view prevails over the decayed relics (idols) of paganism, perishable signs of the workings of fortune, which not even the proud works of empire can withstand. On the one hand, these are *also* cherished antique fragments, of a kind that might be collected, owned and displayed – as indeed was ever more the case in the humanist households of Northern Italy, and in enterprising workshop academies like that of Mantegna’s teacher Francesco Squarcione.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, Mantegna’s painting could be thought of as positioned in a continuum of dispensations of the image that it itself performs: cloud-figure, ancient sculptural reliefs and statues, Christian devotional image of a saint.<sup>19</sup> While presented instantaneously, each is subject to a different temporality.<sup>20</sup> Mantegna juxtaposes cloud-figures that unravel before the eyes in an instant with durable stone effigies that decay imperceptibly over millennia: both are parergonal, as it were, to the “more-than-image” constituted by the impassable flesh of the martyr saint.<sup>21</sup> Prudentius, as Ulrich Pfisterer notes, had

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<sup>17</sup> Damisch, H. *Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*. 1972. Reprint. Transl. Lloyd, J. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 34.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Favaretto, I. “La raccolta di sculture antiche di Francesco Squarcione tra leggenda e realtà.” *Francesco Squarcione, “Pictorum Gymnasiarcha Singularis.”* Atti del convegno. Ed. De Nicolò Salmazo, A. Padua: Il Poligrafo, 1999, 233–45.

<sup>19</sup> Observed also by Hauser 2001 (see note 13): 153–5.

<sup>20</sup> Greenstein, J. *Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 59–85. Campbell 2010 (see note 14): 421–51.

<sup>21</sup> Bolland 1992 (see note 15): 284–303. On Mantegna’s hierarchical arrangement of levels of representation from crafted object to sacred “presence,” see Thürlemann, F. and Spiese McKee, C. “Fictionality in Mantegna’s San Zeno Altarpiece: Structures of Mimesis and the History of Painting.” *New Literary History*. 20 (1989): 747–61.

On “impassable flesh” see Camporesi, P. *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and*

compared the veneration of marble and bronze images that decay over time with the cult of insubstantial phantoms of the air: "Sed nec virtutes hominum Deus, aut animarum/, Spirituumve, vagae tenui sub imagine formae./ Absit ut umbra Deus tibi sit, geniusve locusve/ aut dues volitans aerias phantasma per auras."<sup>22</sup>

What is finally at stake, however, is less a text-based iconography – which tends to make of the painting no more than a moralizing diatribe against the idolatry of the eyes – than a meditation on the complex historicity and the culturally mediating role of images and artifacts. More profoundly, while pointing to the ubiquity or universality of images (in nature and culture), the emphasis on time introduces the principle of their differentiation – by historical origins, purposes, and effects. And it was Mantegna, perhaps more than any other early Renaissance artist, who was concerned throughout his works with multiple modes of being of the image: the *statuae* and "idols" of the ancients; Christian icons with their special relation to sacred archetypes; modern art with its constantly refined techniques of *mimesis* and imitation, and, here, images "made by nature" with human participation. Mantegna's practice of imitation is informed by an awareness of a complex legacy of artifacts, embodying different kinds of authority and significance, yet all exercising pressure on artists working in the present. Among his contemporaries and predecessors, Mantegna shows the most pronounced awareness that images are defined by different relationalities to other images, that pictures mediate earlier representations by borrowing from, or copying, or renewing and replacing them – but that his images and those of his contemporaries are situated within a new economy of aesthetic imitation: that, as a creative act, what painting transmits is not just the form of an earlier image, or its subject, but the preceding creative act of another.

This is not to call into question the sober Christian morality through which such an image must have engaged its original beholders, but to underscore that there are some more primary (and ambivalent) representational concerns at work here: Mantegna did not *need* to borrow the Theodorik relief in order to represent an ephemeral optical effect. The priority of the medieval sculpture to Nature's

*Mortification in Religion and Folklore*. Transl. Croft-Murray, T. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> *Contra orationem Symmachi*, I, 445–58, noted in Pfisterer 1996 (see note 14): 134.

apparent mimetic powers amounts finally to the insinuation that works of art themselves have the capacity to organize perceptual events, especially those involving the random, the fleeting, and the formless.<sup>23</sup> Or, more broadly: that the work of art, in its staging of its relationality with a series of other images, also discloses the cognitive inevitability of understanding one thing in terms of another, in art or in nature, in seeing or in ascribing meaning to what is seen. "All things" wrote Alberti, concerning the rendering of 'accidents' in visible things 'are known through comparison.'<sup>24</sup> And this brings us to a further proposition: that the true force of images lies not in success of their mimesis of the visible world, in their fulfillment of perspectival principles laid down in Alberti, Ghiberti, or Filarete, but in their bringing about of an affective exchange with the beholder. A martyr's suffering body draws forth pathos, and so too – even if for entirely different reasons – do the shattered vestiges of a lost and desired past. Yet the passions of a beholder also affect his attachment to other qualities of a representation, to its forms and textures, to elements of *potential* figuration – inchoate forms that elicit wonder or disquiet. Some interpreters have gone further with the *St. Sebastian* and seen a monstrous face with gaping jaws in the crumbling brick over the head of the saint.<sup>25</sup> The figure for such form or texture is the cloud, or rock, or tree that half-resembles something else. "A pictorial image cannot be reduced to an icon whose texture...is a matter of indifference: as a painting, it carries a certain weight, an ongoing power to appeal to the senses that bears no comparison to the insubstantiality of a color film printed on a piece of sensitive paper that is in itself neutral and of little value (but that is nevertheless an integral part of the finished product). It is this texture that a particular tradition of thinking – a cultural system whose persistent influence is manifested by the principally iconographical trend of studies on art – strives systematically to obliterate or repress, pretending that all that images offer is the information that they convey – information that is measurable, analyzable, and, as such, something that can be *exchanged*."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> More readily demonstrated with regard to the communication by mystics of their visions, often described with familiar images or iconographies as points of reference. Stoichita 1995 (see note 8): 45–78.

<sup>24</sup> "Itaque comparationibus haec omnia discuntur." Alberti: *On Painting and On Sculpture*. Ed. Grayson, C. London: Phaidon, 1972, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Hauser 2001 (see note 13): 167.

<sup>26</sup> Damisch 2002 (see note 17): 26.

That such “double images” are symptomatic of the vagaries of seeing, and that seeing, or *perspectiva*, might itself be a creative or artistic operation rather than merely a susceptibility to appearance – is suggested by the next occurrence of a cloud-image in Mantegna’s work. Within a few years of painting the Vienna *St. Sebastian*, in the circle of sky visible in the famous *oculus* of the *Camera Picta*, Mantegna added a discreet but unmistakable face in profile to the billowing clouds behind an array of staring faces. The invention here is rightly regarded as a virtuosic demonstration of perspective, and a meta-pictorial figure for the effects of reciprocal seeing; apart from the fact that characters smile or stare ambiguously at the beholder, the word *oculus* itself means “eye.” The principal of waywardness in looking, where objective perception is always secondary to a perceiver’s own creative image-forming propensity – itself driven by affective investment – is underscored here in the rendering of another figment of vision.<sup>27</sup> To be noted also is the fact that the *oculus* is surrounded in the painted vault by an array of Roman Imperial portraits in feigned relief, and a series of mythological fables – labors of Hercules and his vengeful slaying of Nessus, the musician Arion saved from drowning by dolphins, the story of Orpheus and his death at the Maenads – the significance of which has been inconclusively debated. The collocation of cloud-images with the artist’s rendering of the *vestigiae* of pagan antiquity has already been observed in the *St. Sebastian*, and can be found elsewhere in his work.

Mantegna concluded his career with an epic series of nine canvasses, *Triumphs of Caesar*, which he worked on between 1485 and his death in 1506.<sup>28</sup> The *Triumphs*, as I have proposed elsewhere, is a politically charged work about the nature of Empire, and at the same time a reflection on antiquity as a distinctive complex or assemblage of bodies, images and artifacts.<sup>29</sup> A vast array of crafted objects – vases, jewelry, armor, weapons, candelabra, including different kinds of two and three-dimensional representation (painted banners with scenes of battle, architectural models, cult statues, memorial portraits, metal reliefs), is set before us here.

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<sup>27</sup> Campbell, S. J. “Mantegna’s Camera Picta: Visuality and Pathos.” *Art History*. 37 (2014): 314–334.

<sup>28</sup> Hope, C. “The Chronology of Mantegna’s Triumphs.” *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth*. 2 vols. Florence, 1985, vol. 2, 297–309.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell, S. J. “Mantegna’s Triumph: The Cultural Politics of Imitation *all’antica* at the Court of Mantua, 1490–1530.” *Artists at Court: Image Making and Identity 1000–1550*. Ed. Campbell, S. J. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004, 91–105.

And in the sky, above the armor bearers, appears a ghostly face in the clouds. Once again, this has the status of a kind of primary image, a creative act somewhere between nature and the human. It could be read as a figure of the transitory, and in more than banal iconographical terms: even as the array of objects and images calls upon our powers of historically and aesthetically informed discrimination, the cloud-face redoubles the “leveling” effect of the conversion of culture into plunder. Liquidation of their significance presages their consumption and ultimate disappearance. But there is something more here – the cloud discloses a dimension of desire for vivification in vision itself. Like the face in the cloud, the skilled works of human beings seem to be turning into ghostly ephemera. In particular, armor seems to become animate, to become a simulacrum of the absent body: like ghostly vestiges of the dead, it is an *inanis imago*.<sup>30</sup>

## II.

In summary, it is strongly apparent that the cloud image in Mantegna’s work serves a kind of exegetical function – and I am thinking here of “visual exegesis” as Michel Weemans uses the term with regard to double-images in sixteenth century Netherlandish painting.<sup>31</sup> There is an even more specific exegetical dimension to the cloud-image that remains to be addressed: in the cases where it occurs most assertively in the art of Mantegna and a few others (there are numerous other more debatable instances<sup>32</sup>), it can be seen as drawing attention to the hermeneutical problem of the non-Christian Other – that is, of pagan art, ritual, and myth. In other words, it marks the posing of a question: what bearing do these traces of a non-Christian past – whether they are regarded as ruins, or idols, or objects of knowledge, or elite exchangeable commodities, or reprehensible fetishes of collectors – have on the present? Should they be “seen,”

<sup>30</sup> Ovid. *Fasti* IV. 465.

<sup>31</sup> Weemans, M. “Herri met de Bles’s Sleeping Peddler: an Exegetical and Anthropomorphic Landscape.” *Art Bulletin*. 88 (2006): 459–81. Also the contributions by Weemans and Gamboni to the exh. cat. ed. Martin 2009 (see note 11).

<sup>32</sup> Hauser 2001 (see note 13) expands the list of “potential images” in Mantegna’s art: for instance, the crumbling brickwork in the Vienna *St. Sebastian* suggests a monstrous face – but in each of these additional instances the identifiability of images seems more ambiguous.

for instance, in allegorical terms as standing for something else, or are they a set of partly legible traces that require decipherment with the assumption of “historical distance”? In Mantegna’s works, his assemblages of ruins and sculptures are both invested with *pathos* and speak a language of *pathos*.

Mantegna included a series of feigned mythological reliefs in the painted architecture of his first major altarpiece, completed for the abbey church of San Zeno in Verona around the same time as the Vienna *St. Sebastian*. Here, roundels depicting a centaur fighting a human warrior, a triton embraced by a naked nymph, scenes of battle – co-exist as fictive representation with the holy company to whom liturgy and devotion are directed. While the violence, sexuality and pathos of these *historiae* contrast with the detached, contemplative and static grouping of Christian saints around the Virgin and Child, there is no obvious sense of tension, no moralizing cues in the form of shattered sculpture to signify their fallen nature: at best, the second-tier status of the *fabulae* is manifest by their appearance as colorless representations, historically and ontologically superseded by the “real” figures.<sup>33</sup> The magnificent cloudscape visible beyond the temple appears to be free of “double images” – at the same time, Mantegna stresses the analogy of cloud and other substance: as with the *St. Sebastian*, there is a clear if paradoxical visual affinity between the sharp-edged, flinty clouds and the cloudy patterns in the colored marble of the architecture. The possibility of seeing one thing in terms of another – in all other sensory respects unlike it – is again being intimated.

The terms of such a relation – of Christianity to its pagan antecedents – had recently become controversial in Verona. The commendatory abbot Gregorio Correr, a humanist cleric who in his own writings had addressed the dilemma posed to Christian readers by the study of pagan authors, commissioned the altarpiece for San Zeno. His ultimate position, outlined in a celebrated letter to the learned Cecilia Gonzaga, was far more conciliatory than that of his successful rival for the bishopric of Verona, Ermolao Barbaro, who in 1455 dedicated his *Orationes contra Poetas* to the future Paul II (who would be an outspoken opponent of “studi di umanità.”) Barbaro had received a humanist training at the school of the great Guarino of Verona: a recent study of his *Ora-*

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<sup>33</sup> Thürlemann 1989 (see note 21): 753–56. See also Campbell, S. J. “Lo spazio di contemplazione. Mantegna e Gregorio Correr.” *Andrea Mantegna. Impronta del Genio*. Acts of the 2006 conference, 2 vols., Florence: Olschki, 2010, vol. 1, 163–81.