The images: can we picture to ourselves, when we hear of a plurality of images, not a collection of discrete individual images but an abundance unsurveyable and without internal differentiation? Just as one hears in so many languages of the waters: die Wässer, les eaux. . . . In the flux of experience it may be no more possible to isolate a singular “image” than it is to isolate a singular “water.” The waters, according to Roberto Calasso in his meditation on Hindu mythology, Ka, symbolize the glittering flow of inner images, the ceaseless proliferation of specters and simulacra, that constitutes consciousness.¹

Nevertheless, in the most prevalent theories of images developed by theology, by classical epistemology, by the academies of art, premodern and modern alike, and by anthropology, the image is paradigmatically still, framed, and graspable. The image stands alone, outside time. Whereas in experience, which is a flow of images in time, every image is in the process of becoming another image, for percepts, memories, and dreams are images generated and coordinated by the body. According to Henri Bergson, perception is nothing other than an aggregate of images “referred to” one particular image, the body.² The body itself is an image insofar as it receives movement, and in

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turn produces movement. For an embodied subject, the body is a privileged image, for it is an image that is apprehended from within. The body filters the stream of images. There is no way to still the flow of perception and fix any particular image. And yet the fiction of a temporally simple, isolated image remains the basis for most image theories. The framed image is the usable image.

Plato posited images in the mind that corresponded to the perfect ideas in heaven. He stabilized the mental image in order to compare it, unfavorably, to an ideal form. The stable mental image is stamped into the history of Western thought. But that image is an artifact of philosophical discourse. Powerful is the fiction that consciousness orients itself by a repertoire of stored pictures constantly replenished by new perceptions. John Locke described the mind as a dark cabinet stocked with pictures:

The understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without: would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all objects of sight, and the ideas of them.

One imagines a pile of dusty canvases, portraits by Peter Lely, perhaps, or weak exercises in the Bolognese manner.

The history of art has a role to play in this story, for the philosophical fiction of the stable interior image has been reinforced by the material images made by artists. The fabrication of paintings outside the body is a clumsy repetition, even a parody, of the selection that the body has already performed. The work of art is a massive reduction from the infinite to the merely multiple, from the multiple to the merely singular. The painting, the statue, the theatrical tableau, the photograph, even the poetic image are motionless cross-sections of experience that show us what internal images are supposedly like. Thinking about images has run in that direction: the fabricated image, in the world, serves as the model for the generated image, in the body. The fabricated image is easier to understand, for it was made outside the body, with hands and tools. The internal image is more mysterious. It is not made but generated; it has no origins but is emergent; its boundaries are blurred. In order to render it usable for philosophy and for everyday talk, the internal image had to be given edges and flatness. This readied it for use as a signifier,
that is, as an artifact that will not work unless it can be copied, and recognized as a copy.

The fabricated picture has been such an effective model that the term “image” has come generally to designate a suspended, stilled state. The image interrupts flow and gathers dispersed attention. So, for example, in poetics one speaks of a pause in the flow of words, a suspension of a narrative dynamic in favor of description, or of the evocation of a single arresting object, as an “image.”

Image, constellation, crystallization, Dialektik im Stillstand—all these terms designate a subtraction and an elimination of alternatives. They are ways of gathering together the chaos of thought and language into clusters of meaning. Such momentary gatherings seem to offer chances for new beginnings, newly oriented. The “pregnant” moment is a simplification of time producing an “image effect.” That effect is structured by the example of the image fabricated with hands and tools.

The stable image is the basis of the theological dialectic of iconophilia and iconophobia. Some images have been expected to refer to a distant or absent object, a god, perhaps; others have been expected to convey information about that object. Skepticism elicits more sophisticated pictorial technologies and more elaborate origin-myths. Some people trust in iconic testimony, others less so. The cycle was supposedly broken in Western modernity by the institution of the artwork, a pictorial sign that does not claim to deliver a desired object, but rather merely generates meaning in an open-ended way. But the artwork, whose effects unfold over time, requires the stable image as its foil. The artwork defines itself against the momentary impact offered by the image. The artwork, even if material, shares with the experiential or perceptual image limitlessness and emergence, that is, everything the fabricated image is meant to tame. The interdependence of the image and the artwork structures art historical research on the European Middle Ages and Renaissance, providing the dominant criterion of periodization. The dialectical binarism is also perpetuated in the contemporary methodological dispute between, in the English-speaking world, visual culture and art history or, in the German-speaking world, Bildwissenschaft and Kunstgeschichte.

The binarism that has structured modern art is not image/artwork so much as artwork/replica. Modern technologies of replication as well as modern artworks that invite their own replication seem to mock the traditional artwork’s pretense to singularity. But the mechanically produced replica—the multiple—is in fact no more a threat to the artwork than is the singular image. The set of multiples does not achieve a true plurality because it defines itself against that singularity. The One and the multiple, according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, stand in a predicative relation to another.
Only the category of multiplicity (multiplicité) can preserve relations of difference without referring inevitably back to an original totality; “dépassant le multiple non moins que l’Un, dépassant la relation prédicative de l’Un et du multiple.” The distinction between the mechanically replicated and the singular image is mutually sustaining.

A possible way out of the twin binarisms that have structured historical work on early modern and modern art—on the one hand, cult image and artwork; and on the other, artwork and replica—is to insist on comparing the fabricated image (painting, photograph) not to a referent in the world, but rather to the generated image on the inside of the body. Inside/outside—a pair designating the images on either side of the membrane of the body—maps neither onto a metaphysics of the image, nor onto a semiotics of the image. Inside/outside is a more unsteady binarism than image/artwork, or artwork/replica, because one of the terms—the interior image—cannot be grasped intellectually at all. It is an entity without limits, without form, and without number. And yet this entity inside the body is the source and model of all the fabricated images outside the body. The generated images gave us an idea in the first place of what a painted or staged picture might be.

The painting or the sculpture will feed back into the flow of bodily images in the form of a perception or a memory. But the current runs in the first instance from body to picture.

Let us abandon for now such questions about the ontology of the image, and the ambition of predicting the destiny of the image, and instead think historically.

The nature of images is plural, and yet theories and histories of art strongly encourage us to forget that nature. Some paintings, however, striving against the very discourses that sustain them socially, leave clues that can set in motion an anamnesia.

Before modern cultures of art, the picture was always found within a collectivity. One never saw an image on its own, without context, support, or satellites. Consider a painted Catalan retable dedicated to St. Andrew, from the first decades of the fifteenth century (see fig. 1). This large structure was once mounted behind and above an altarpiece, as a backdrop to the performance of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The central image is St. Andrew, enthroned. Most of the smaller scenes around and below him are episodes from the saint’s life. The retable as a whole is an image that governs and co-

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6 New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection, inv. no. 06.1211.1-9.
ordinates the images it corrals. The retable is like the cross-section of a great building that houses the saint, surrounds him with the stories that are his attributes, and brackets him between the Madonna and Child, above, and the Resurrected Christ, below. But the parts also interpret the whole, for the hagiographical narratives bring to life the relics stored in the altar and advertised by the retable. An analogous example might be the storiated façade of a Romanesque church. Here the institutional legitimacy of the Church, the eschatological predictions of theology, and the narratives that knit the church into local history are displayed billboard-fashion on a façade, in sculpture, just as the images that made the case for the Roman Emperor were once displayed on the face of the Triumphal Arch. The scenes of courtly romance on the panels of a French ivory casket of the fourteenth century are not only physically supported by the entire casket, but are also semantically stabilized by the casket (see fig. 2). For the casket, which in its entirety is itself an im-

Fig. 1. Master of Roussillon, Retable of St. Andrew, ca. 1420-1430. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection.
age, symbolizes the principles of entrapment and secrecy that drive the closed
dynamic of ritualized love. The whole and the part are in equilibrium.

The plural image, both the generated and the fabricated version, is not
an image that escapes structure. To begin with, experience, the matrix of
the image, is itself already structured. The plurality of images generated out
of experience is organized by and in the body. Perception is an aggregate of
images referred to one particular image, the body. Every image presupposes
an aggregate behind it, even if that framing structure is masked. The image
derives its meaning from its place in the system.

Neither the plurality of generated images nor the fabricated plural im-
age modeled on it is a multiplicity as understood by Deleuze and Guattari,
namely, as an endless differentiation without subordination or plan. Such a
multiplicity, if it is desired, must be contrived. Multiplicity is a utopian proj-
ect. And it is not enough, according to Deleuze and Guattari, to say “Vive le
multiple.” They insist that you have to create multiplicity: *il faut le faire*, you
have to make an effort, it is not natural.8 We are not dealing here with the

le faire*, non pas en ajoutant toujours une dimension supérieure, mais au contraire
le plus simplement, à force de sobriété, au niveau des dimensions dont on dispose,
toujours n – 1 (c’est seulement ainsi que l’un fait partie du multiple, en étant tou-
jours soustrait). Soustraire l’unique de la multiplicité à constituer; écrire à n – 1.
“body without organs.” The fabricated image, precisely because it is always seeking to render the generated image, and precisely because it involves tensions between plurality and unity, is a body with organs.

In late medieval and early Renaissance art a new tension emerged between the whole and the part, and between the containing structure and the individual contained image. In this period some images actually broke away from collectivity and asserted their independence, under the shelter of the theoretical and economic institution of the “artwork.” But even in these works the original nestedness of the image, its original incomprehensibility outside a collectivity, remains legible as a pattern of internal fault lines.

The tension between collectivities of images and the singular image cannot be grasped in terms provided by a distinction between cult image and artwork, nor can it be grasped by a distinction between referential images and poetic or freely signifying images. No more helpful is the distinction between singular images and replicas. Instead, it will make sense to think about the unsteady life of the image within collectivities as one of the ways that medieval and early modern cultures registered their awareness that the physical boundaries of the fabricated image do not correspond to anything real inside the body. The bounded singularity of the fabricated image cannot be reconciled with the true plurality of the generated images of perception or memory. And yet societies require bounded images. Where will they draw those boundaries? where does the frame fall?

To detect ambiguity in the relation between a collectivity of images and the single image nested inside it, to be uncertain about where the frame falls, or which frames are to be taken more seriously than others, is only to note that the institution of the artwork was a work in progress in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. The contract between the artwork and the world beyond the artwork was still being negotiated.

The image was “ready for use” as artwork only when its frame became superfluous to its meaning and ceased to be responsible for binding the picture together. The frame became a redundant marker of the work’s distinction from everything that was not-art when the work became sufficiently homogeneous that the frame could assume any form, or be replaced, or even eventually removed, without affecting whatever it was that the work was doing.

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Un tel système pourrait être nommé rhi-
zone.” The terminology clashes with the
terminology of the earlier text Anti-Oedipe
(see n. 5 above), for here le multiple means
la multiplicité, whereas there le multiple
referred to the replica. Note that Peter
Hallward, Out of This World: Deleuze and
the Philosophy of Creation (London: Verso,
2006) 15-18, argues that for Deleuze even
la multiplicité in the end is an “absolut-
eness of difference itself,” that is, a unity.

See the introduction by David Ganz and
Felix Thürlemann to the volume they
edited, Das Bild im Plural: Mehrteilige
Bildformen zwischen Mittelalter und Mod-
erne (Berlin: Reimer, 2010) 7-38.
A panel painting like the small round Pietà in the Louvre, a Parisian or Burgundian work, perhaps by Jean Malouel, and dating from around 1400, is not yet ready to do without a frame (see fig. 3). It appears tightly composed. But this painting is less securely woven together than it seems. The figures bend inward, centripetally, their bodies seeking the body and the wound of Christ. But the engaged frame and the concentric rings in the gold ground also compel the figures inward. The painting asks its own frame to give it a unity. This is still basically an assemblage of individual representations of characters: portraits of holy personages familiar from countless images of the Lamentation over the dead body of Christ, images linked to their referents by powerful presumptions of transmisssional fidelity. The guiding intelligence that executed the picture was as much an assembler as he was a creator. The bonds that hold the figures together are relatively weak.

The picture will not become a picture, a “tableau,” or a pictorial “text,” until the entire picture surface is grasped all at once as a integral unit and the

Anthony van Dyck’s *Rinaldo and Armida* (1629), in contrast to the two-century-older French painting, is homogeneous and semantically dense (see fig. 4).¹¹ No part of it is more significant than any other; everything contributes, just as every word of a poem belongs to the poem as much as any other word. It is artwork all across the surface. The picture is held together not by its frame, but by internal chords established by formal and semantic rhymes.

In his book *The Self-Aware Image*, Victor Stoichita identifies clues within the easel painting of the seventeenth century that reveal even that supposedly most stable of constructs to be a fragile contrivance.¹² Rembrandt’s *Holy Family* (1646) in Kassel, for example, with its painted, illusory frame and curtain, is not a painting but a representation of a painting, a painting embedded in

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quotation marks. Those quotation marks point outwards to a context of domesticity and probably other pictures. Willem van Haecht in his *Collection of Cornelis van der Geest* (1628, Antwerp, Rubens House) represents more than forty paintings in a context of conversation and art historical reflection; the main focus of attention, in the lower left, is a *Madonna and Child* by Quentin Metsys, the founder of the Antwerp school. Individual works find their meaning in larger ensembles, real and virtual.

Stoichita’s seventeenth-century examples, although brilliantly analyzed, are possibly somewhat obvious. In the earlier period, in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, signs of the process of self-adjustment are likely to be hidden from view.

Before the sixteenth century, it is not so clear where the boundaries of the artwork fell.¹³ A Cologne panel with the *Adoration of the Kings* (first quarter of the fifteenth century) is a good example (see fig. 5).¹⁴ It is, in effect, a painted representation of a sculpted Epiphany, with painted statues in the wings. The altarpiece descends from cabinet-like shrines that contained rows of sculpted saints. The small niches below may once have contained relics or semi-precious stones. The figures are flattened into two dimensions, and paradoxically only now begin to move in space and to become aware of one another. The pairs of saints in the side wings, now liberated from their spatial niches, shift position and begin to form overlapping coulisses. They seem dimly aware of the event in the center.

Where is the boundary of the image? Within the fiction, the image is the body of Christ: everyone is looking at him. But from a perspective outside the scene, the group of five resolves into a meta-image, the narrative scene known as the Epiphany or Adoration of the Kings. Is the “work” then essentially the image of an Epiphany, carefully framed and bracketed by gilded carved wood and by the saintly witnesses in the side panels? Or is the entire altarpiece the “work,” in the sense that it is a finely wrought object that strikes the beholder as a whole before the images on it come into focus? The framing carpentry would then be an integral component of the work, as it is not in the case of the Van Dyck. The Cologne altarpiece as it is displayed in the modern museum may appear to be such a meta-meta-image, that is, an image that contains an image of the Adoration of the Magi, which itself involves spectators looking at an image. But perhaps we are misled. The museum encourages us to see the retable as a whole, under the control of a single organizing intelligence, and so to place it in implicit comparison with

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¹³ See David Ganz, “‘Weder eins noch zwei: Jan van Eycks *Madonna in der Kirche* und die Scharnierlogik spätmittelalter Dip-

later and more homogeneous works like the Van Dyck. It may in fact be the case that the englobed image, the Epiphany, does not need the englobing image, the retable, for it is not clear that the larger structure guides or confers meaning on the images nested within it. The frame may simply be a piece of furniture that assembles a small collection of painted renderings of statues, like a display cabinet. The framing carpentry, like the frame around the Van Dyck, would then be less important than the individual figures, and also less important than the surrounding spaces and things, now absent: the altar, other statues, tombs.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the boundaries between work and non-work, inside and outside, sacred and profane were highly unsettled, still being worked out. This proved not an obstacle to creativity but an opportunity, for these paintings are, of course, often brilliantly successful as “works of art,” a category devised in modernity but designed to have retroactive applicability.

There is “hierarchy trouble” in these artifacts. The pictures are created as artworks by the trouble. This trouble has not been recognized, or has been misrecognized, or misnamed. To name the hierarchy trouble is to begin to
grasp the historical differentiations out of which the institution of the artwork emerged in its modern form. Such works as the Detroit triptych and the St. Andrew retable, heterogenous and compartmentalized, are not easily assimilated to the ideal of the singular “image” that governed mainstream production of art between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries. It is a miracle that they survived at all. Most artifacts like them were discarded between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries.

But the same ambiguity of whole and part can structure individual pictures that appear unified. Andrea Mantegna’s *Madonna della Vittoria* (1496) is apparently a paradigm of the integrated work of art, under the spell of an individual artist’s consciousness (see fig. 6). If it did not appear so, it would not hang in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre among the Poussins and the Guido Renis, the great academic tableaus of the seventeenth century. But historically Mantegna’s picture is a condensation of a complex series of violent events, exchanges, and ritual offerings. So too were Poussin’s and Reni’s paintings, the Mantegna might teach us. The fault lines between image and image, inside the image, are perfectly legible once one is alert to the picture’s history. Francesco Gonzaga gave the painting to the church of Sta. Maria della Vittoria in Mantua in 1496 as the fulfillment of a vow undertaken in a moment of need. He had requested and received assistance from the Virgin in battle against the French. Francesco is both outside the picture as its donor and principal beholder, and inside it as a simulated presence in permanent attendance on the Virgin. His armor was both described in the picture and mounted in the chapel near the painting. The church had been built on the site of a house owned by a Jew who was accused of desecrating a painting of the Virgin on the exterior wall, thus provoking the Virgin herself to intervention in local affairs. Mantegna’s painted Virgin is both an image of the Virgin herself, and an image of an image, the destroyed cult image that set the process in motion.

Within three hours of the installation of Francesco and Mantegna’s picture in the church, local worshippers were offering wax effigies of body parts and silver eyes. To what target were their offerings addressed? To the Virgin herself, whose occasional presence in Mantua was marked by Mantegna’s painting? Or to the destroyed, presumably ancient, cult image, whose essence Mantegna’s painting somehow “delivered”? It is striking that the installation of the painting brought forth the offerings, because votive offerings in principle were not bribes but fulfillments of earlier promises. Why did people wait until the modern painting was installed before bringing their gifts to

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15 Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. 1374.
the Virgin?

Time, change, exchanges, fears, and hopes are all coiled up inside this work. The picture appears supremely integrated, but that may be an effect of Mantegna’s personal style, easily recognized today. Its historical beholders saw more than one painting: a true image of the Virgin, an image of the destroyed fresco representing the Virgin, an image of Francesco Gonzaga undertaking his vow, Francesco’s costly gift itself.

In many works of art the process of integration is incomplete. The work is dispersed by typology, parataxis, or nesting. 16 In the artwork of the late medieval and early modern period there is an especially acute tension between unity and plurality. One encounters works whose hierarchy of levels of reality is ambiguous, or which thematize the choice of focal points.

Jan van Eyck’s *Three Marys at Tomb of Christ* (ca. 1425-35) discloses the

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Fig. 7. Jan van Eyck. *Three Marys at the Tomb*, ca. 1433. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen.
entire matrix of artistic production in the fifteenth century (see fig. 7).

The painting, which measures 71.5 x 90 cm., is structured around three kinds of numberedness: replication (many all the same, but ultimately oneness); singularity (only one); and plurality (more than one, less than the multiple). It looks unified, but in fact it is a house of many compartments. This is a hyper-image.

The painting represents an ancient subject: the visit of one or more women to the tomb of Christ on Easter morning. The women planned to prepare the corpse properly for burial; there had been no time on Friday, for night and the Sabbath had fallen too quickly. But the women found no corpse. A version of the story is told in each of the four gospels. Here is Mark 16: 1-8:

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

With the steeply slanting tomb lid and the outstretched hand of the speaking woman, Jan van Eyck, student of art history, cites early medieval depictions of the scene as well as Italian paintings of the previous century, Duccio’s Maestà, for instance, or a work like it. But he reanimates the ancient gestures, reinvesting them with psychology, in order to show the women’s perplexity.

17 Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, inv. no. 2449. The attribution to Jan van Eyck has been accepted by many although not all authorities. Van Eyck to Bruegel, 1400–1550: Dutch and Flemish Painting (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1994) 35–36. An analysis of this panel also plays a role in Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, Anachronic Renaissance (New York: ZONE, 2010) 51-70; see these pages also for bibliographic references on the theme of the afterlife of the Temple, the Holy Sepulchre, and the Dome of the Rock.

18 This concept of the hyper-image might be compared with the “Hyper-Image” proposed by Felix Thürlemann; see “Vom Einzelbild zum hyperimage. Eine neue Herausforderung für die kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik,” in Ada Neschke-Hentschke, ed., Les herméneutiques au seuil du XXe siècle. Évolution et débat actuel (Louvain-la-Neuve: Éditions de l’Institut supérieur de philosophie, 2004) 123–48. Thürlemann’s construct involves the layout of images within architectonic spaces controlled by artists or artistic concerns, whereas my hyper-image is an image that contains half-hidden “links” to further modalities of the image.
Van Eyck replicates the basic structure of the scene but extends it outward into a simulated space and into psychological space. The picture says what it has to say from the gap between the inherited models and the adjustment to the models. It is the gap between two conceptions of sacred art, an art of repetition and an art of difference: on the one hand, a sacred art that derives its authority from a supposed chain of equivalent, mutually substitutable renderings linked at its origin point to an authentic image, or to the event or person itself; and on the other hand, a sacred art that slightly mistrusts earlier pictures and instead leaps straight to truth by a creative performance. Van Eyck wants to enliven the story from within and so get at the meanings encoded in the myth. The women in his picture are not at all frightened, as the text had reported; one of them is debating with the angel.

Van Eyck has brought out the theme of doubt, usually suppressed in Christian pictures although not in the Gospels. The women saw and heard the unbelievable testimony of the mysterious young man, Christ’s double. No one else met this angel. Soon others will see Christ himself. Their testimonies will be ratified by the testimony of the women who had heard the angel’s explanation. The entire religion will rest on this point: who believes in the reality—not the symbolic character—of the Resurrection?

The picture is an allegory for trust in images, for what did Mary Magdalene and the apostles see if not an image of Christ, an apparition? Christ tells Mary Magdalene not to touch him (John 20: 17). What did the women at the tomb see if not an apparition? To believe, one had to believe in apparitions as well as in other people’s testimony about apparitions. Both images, the angel at the tomb and the mysterious gardener or pilgrim of the subsequent days, are doubles for Christ, substitutes. In this episode, Christianity is transformed from an ordinary tomb-based cult into a mystical revealed religion.

The uncertainty in the Gospels about the number of visitors to the tomb would seem to cast a shadow of doubt over the whole affair. For the belated tomb-tenders are variously described as the “Three Marys,” the “Two Marys,” “Magdalene and another Mary,” and “the women.” Meanwhile, Matthew and Mark’s young man in white who explains is, in the accounts of Luke and John, two young men.

The theme of uncertainty about the referential reliability of images, then, is developed across the horizontal axis of the picture, in the encounter between women and angel. The vertical axis, by contrast, figures absolute confidence in traditions of making. In the virtual space of this scene—amplified far beyond the space of its models, the medieval ivories and panel paintings—the painter describes the rocky surroundings of Jerusalem, a landscape
the painter may have seen with his own eyes. The space is deep, and yet it is flattened into a historico-theological diagram by the vertical chord that runs down from the Temple, the centrally-planned structure that dominates the skyline, to the tomb, the nucleus of the great structure raised by the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, the Anastasis or Rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre. The church of the Holy Sepulchre, for Christians, repeated but replaced the Jewish Temple. Along the vertical chord between Temple and tomb runs an argument about making and building: about repetition and substitution as the stabilizers of time, and chains of image-making and building that impose order on history.

The angel’s hand is aligned with the Temple. The hand leads our eyes upwards, and back in time, to the Temple. Solomon built the Temple in 960 BCE but it was reconstructed and replaced many times, most recently by Herod in 37–34 BCE. The iterations of the Temple would finally be cancelled by Christ’s tomb, the new center of belief. The bewilderment of the women at the tomb predicts the confusion of a beholder who comes to this very picture in search of the origin-point of Christian building. For here one finds not a foundation, but a repetition.

The sarcophagus itself predicts the architectural substitution of Church for Temple. For the women do not visit a hollow in the rock, as the text demands, but a cleanly cut rectangular tomb with a lid. The tomb with its moulded edges is already architectural, pointing forward to Constantine’s construction, in 335, of both an edicule over the tomb and above it a lofty dome or rotunda, nested structures which would serve for centuries as the types for an endless web of churches, edicules, reliquaries, and altars.

But the story is even more complicated than this. For van Eyck’s Jewish Temple is not the Temple, which was destroyed once and for all by Emperor Titus in the year 70—no one knows what it really looked like—but rather the Dome of the Rock, the octagonal Muslim shrine built in 691 by the Umayyad caliph, Abd-al-Malik. The Dome of the Rock was constructed on the very location of the Solomonic temple. The Dome with its cylindrical drum (misdescribed by van Eyck as polygonal) and hemispherical cupola looked then much as it does today.

Scripture and the exegetical tradition described the Temple as rectangular. Everyone knew that the Romans had destroyed the Temple. Nevertheless, many medieval visitors to Jerusalem identified the Dome of the Rock with the Jewish Temple. In the twelfth century, when the Crusaders controlled Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock became a destination for Christian pilgrims. There they could visit the site of Christ’s Presentation in the Temple, the Circumcision, the Dispute among the Doctors, and the Scourging of
the Moneylenders. The building simply became the place where these events had happened. The structure was understood, apparently, as something like a reconstruction of the Temple. In fact, the Dome of the Rock imitated Constantine’s church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Van Eyck’s painting gives an impression of fidelity to immemorial traditions. The picture’s initial gesture, its recuperation of an ancient iconography, is one of attentiveness to a pictorial tradition with strong claims to authenticity and antiquity. The picture re-anchors modern painting in half-forgotten traditions.

The historical context for van Eyck’s reactivation of these traditions is the emergence in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries of the mechanized and semi-mechanized replication of images: assembly-line production of panels, casting and molding of statues, images printed with ink on paper. These new technologies were attempts to rationalize the processes of transmission and substitution that held Christian imagery together and kept it anchored to its origins. The production of multiples implied no destabilization of the sacred image. The mechanical replication of the image only extended the referential chains, more reliably than handmade craft could. Van Eyck himself was interested in the claims of transmissional stability made by the eastern icon. He painted images of the Holy Face, the true likeness of Christ, that invoked the Byzantine image-making tradition with its suppression of the creativity of the individual artist. The print, the cast, and the copied icon were major contexts for thinking about the sacred image in these decades.

Van Eyck’s paintings simulated perceptions with hallucinatory effect. This rhetoric of faithful transcription of the real pretended to contribute to the overall project, framed by the Byzantine icons and the new replication technologies, of reliable transmission of the ancient traditions. The paintings’ success in masking their own fabrication process—it is impossible to reverse-engineer a painting by van Eyck—seemed to bring them into alignment with the impersonal transmission systems. In fact, this impressive apparent self-effacement became the very basis for van Eyck’s fame.

Along the vertical axis of the painting, architectural history, perhaps even sacred history, is figured as a chain of replications without foundation. Meanwhile, the singular performance of the painting’s technique is disguised as a new kind of replication. In each case, the replica is in tension with the One. This is not yet the plurality that we are seeking. For the challenge is to see through the “false” plurality of the multiple towards a “more true” plurality that art history and art theory miss.

That plurality we will find on the horizontal axis of the picture. This plu-
rality problematizes the one-to-one or referential basis for the theology of images, which both substitutional building and the replication technologies were designed to reaffirm. It also problematizes the system of witnessing, the martyrology that Christianity is built on, for a system of witnessing militates against a true plurality of images. Witnessing names precisely a compulsion to stabilization and minimization of the drift inherent in mediation.

Along that horizontal axis, left to right, we follow not a reliable chain of repetitions but a path of observations and reports. There is plenty of opportunity along this path for error and creativity.

The artist van Eyck reports on this path of observations. His painting is the meta-observation. He tells us that the women are perplexed by what they hear. They are comparing the angel’s account with the possible rational explanations for the body’s disappearance: a tomb robbery by strangers in search of valuables, or theft of the body by other followers of Christ, either to pre-empt desecration of the tomb by strangers or to stage falsely a Resurrection. The angel is a phantom. It is hard to believe in his reality, let alone the truth of his words. There will be no relic of Christ, the young man says, no corpse to stabilize the stories told about him. The corpse would be the image everyone wants—physical, irrefutable. The only legitimate Christian images were the very first: the corpse on the Cross, the corpse in the lap of the Virgin Mary. Since then we have had nothing but phantoms—unreliable—and painted icons—possibly even more unreliable. The phantom-like angel—the Bible deflects doubts by describing it as a “young man”—tells of a corpse come back to life, an animated image, which must go about convincing people that it is really a body and not just a phantom.

The young man in white is a stand-in for Christ—he holds a standard, like the resurrected Christ—who relays a message about Christ’s whereabouts. He is an “angel,” literally a message. Van Eyck offers the angel as a metaphor for the artwork. From this point on, the work will be the messenger whose function is to stand in for the missing relic of Christ and report on it. The painting is a messenger that points, reports, explains, and predicts. This picture has work to do in time, thus acknowledging the dimension of time as a hazard in a way that the cat’s cradle of repetition figured by the Temple-Tomb-Dome axis did not. The angel figures a withdrawal of the religious image into self-rule, ambiguity, or cryptology. The three women argue with the angel, protesting this withdrawal.

This is the sought-after plurality. The painting may resemble a unified tableau, a pictorial text, of a later period. In reality, it is an assemblage of nested images, not all of them visible: the image of Christ inside the angel’s verbal account, which will be relayed to the world by the account, another image, of
the women; the living image that the resurrected Christ will be; the painted composition itself, an image devised by an artist who has selected his models from a family of historical images. This is the “hierarchy trouble”—the ambiguity of frames—that we identified earlier. The hierarchy of one and many is no longer clearly diagrammed as in a multipaneled retable.

We do not know in fact where this picture ended, where the frame fell. It is possible that it was not an independent panel, as it appears to be today. Some scholars believe that the panel was once flanked by hinged wings. It is also possible that the original panel extended further to the right.\(^1\) There is no barbe, or lip of raised gesso, that would suggest a join with a (lost) frame, thus proving that the present picture is complete. The coat of arms in the lower right corner indicates that the picture was owned by Philippe de Comines, but this was added only some decades after it was painted, probably around 1470. In the lower right corner are the tips of several gold rays that might have emanated from a Resurrected Christ standing off to the right. The spears and the rocks rhyme with those rays. This would seem to be evidence that the picture was cut down and that originally the scene at the tomb shared the picture field, and the fictive space, with a Resurrected Christ.

If the Resurrected Christ did stand off to the right, then this picture belonged to the little understood category of fifteenth-century “simultaneous narratives”: such pictures were painted in the Netherlands by Hans Memling and in Italy by Fra Angelico, Benozzo Gozzoli, Sandro Botticelli, and Piero della Francesca, among others; see, for example, Filippo Lippi’s *Feast of Herod* in the cathedral at Prato (early 1460s) (see fig. 8).\(^2\)

The simultaneous narrative was made possible by linear perspective with its control over pictorial space. But simultaneous narrative undermined the logic of perspective, for perspective implies the unification of time and space. The women share a fictive space-time with the Resurrected Christ, but somehow they are unable to look beyond the pocket of pictorial space they share with the tomb and the angel and see him. Van Eyck constructs an experiential space, then fills it with a counter-experiential narrative.

The fifteenth-century artists who experimented with the simultaneous narrative, against the current of their time, such as Memling and Antoniazzo Romano, were artists with ambivalent relationships to authorship. By adopting—or better still, simulating—an archaic mode of picture-making, they seem to occlude their own will and agency as authors. Yet their simultaneous narratives paradoxically create a strong sense that “someone is there,” that a

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19 See, for example, the image of the Resurrected Christ, with a nimbus of rays, in the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berry (ca. 1415).

manipulator stands outside and above the plurality of images, making decisions, with a clear view of past, present, and future. The simultaneous narrative, as an archaism, recreates the premodern structure of whole and part, of containing framework and contained plurality of images. If perspective “iconized” the complex of images, by knitting them together into a single image, then simultaneous narrative pulled the images apart again.

Simultaneous narratives are ideal examples of hierarchy trouble. The painted narrative in the mid-fifteenth century is in the process of constituting itself as a new unity, whose perspectival condensation of space-time is the very symbol of the text-status of the picture. Semantic homogeneity and density were the criteria of the modern artwork. By allowing scenes that took place in different places in space and time to inhabit a single fictive pocket of space-time, thus entailing impossible duplications of characters, the simultaneous narrative signals its own unwillingness to commit itself to one or the other model of itself, the old or the new. It refuses to say where the frame falls and whether the essential unit is the individual episode—the picture corrals several of them—or the overall picture.

Van Eyck’s painting made the point that images of Christ were all done from memory, not from life; and that in any case an image, even if done from life, reflects only a point of view, a particular angle on the subject. One’s perspective on Christ was everything, and it depended on chance. Few were lucky enough to cross paths with the Resurrected body. Only the angels en-

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joy the non-contingent view of things.

Many pictures in this period thematize the distinction between the multiplicity, indeed infinity, of human viewpoints and the unity of the angelic perspective: the Crucifixion with a crowd, for example. Consider the Crucifixion by the Master of St. Veronica, a Cologne painter of the early fifteenth century, with its hectic ricocheting of gazes, pulsating vectors of awareness, and fracturing of community and unanimity (see fig. 9).22 One man is gratified, another is appalled, another is indifferent. Jews, Romans, soldiers, the idle curious, the secretly moved; there is conversation, debate, divergence, and convergence. The picture marshals all its integrating resources in order to relativize the very multiplicity of opinion that it so brilliantly displays. The picture wants its beholder to recognize but finally overcome the temptation to diverge.

The Assumption of the Virgin, a subject that assumed great prominence

22 Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. no. 11. The painting can be dated after 1416; it was either the center of a triptych or a single panel. Brigitte Corley, Painting and Patronage in Cologne, 1300-1500 (London: Harvey Miller, 2000) 83-87.
in Florence and Siena in the late Trecento, also thematizes the opposition between the plural and the one. The central panel of the Assumption retable by Taddeo di Bartolo in Montepulciano (1401) is a good example, not least because of the remarkable self-portrait of the artist as the apostle Thaddeus (second from right, looking out at us) (see fig. 10).23 The Virgin at her death is transported body and soul into heaven. The apostles below, pondering the empty tomb, are confused and cast about for an explanation. This is the condition of life among men. The angels above are ranged in symmetrical rows and cannot see anything but the truth.

Painting is struggling here to gather together the unruly cascade of generated images that make up experience. In Taddeo di Bartolo’s altarpiece the art of painting—in general, the fabricated or external image—is revealing its own limits. A painting cannot really represent all the different points of view. It can only represent the people having different views on things. In the end, a picture, an artificially closed and stilled entity, will always make the case for unity. From the early Renaissance on it built that case on a fiction of the

integrated consciousness of the beholder. Painting helped create that very fiction by offering its tightly imbricated form as the counterpart to a steady devotional attentiveness. The self who beholds a painting enjoys a clear view on everything: on heaven and on earth, on the other humans with their mistaken perspectives, and even on the angels. The beholder of the painting is the observer of the observers, the meta-observer who confers upon the new painting its integrity and its independence from context.

But if we know where to press, we will feel the picture’s hidden seams and so re-enter, at least in the imagination, its once-collective lives.